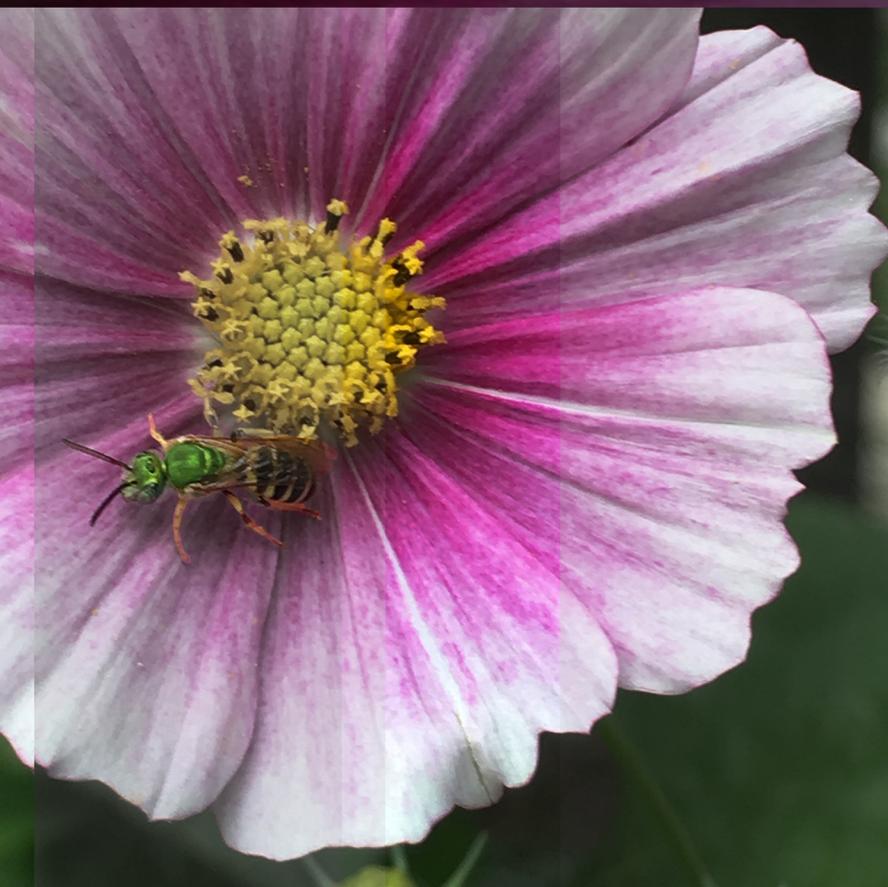


# WORLDVIEW

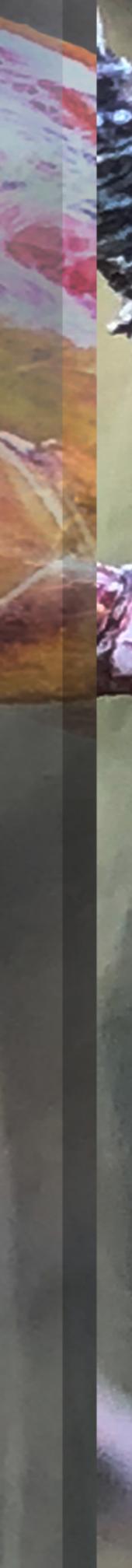
## The Sustainability Issue



- organic-ish agriculture
- food, body, soul
- forests-in-the-city
- solar justice
- by land and sea

May 2018

**WBEZ**  
**CHICAGO**  
podzine



MAY 2018

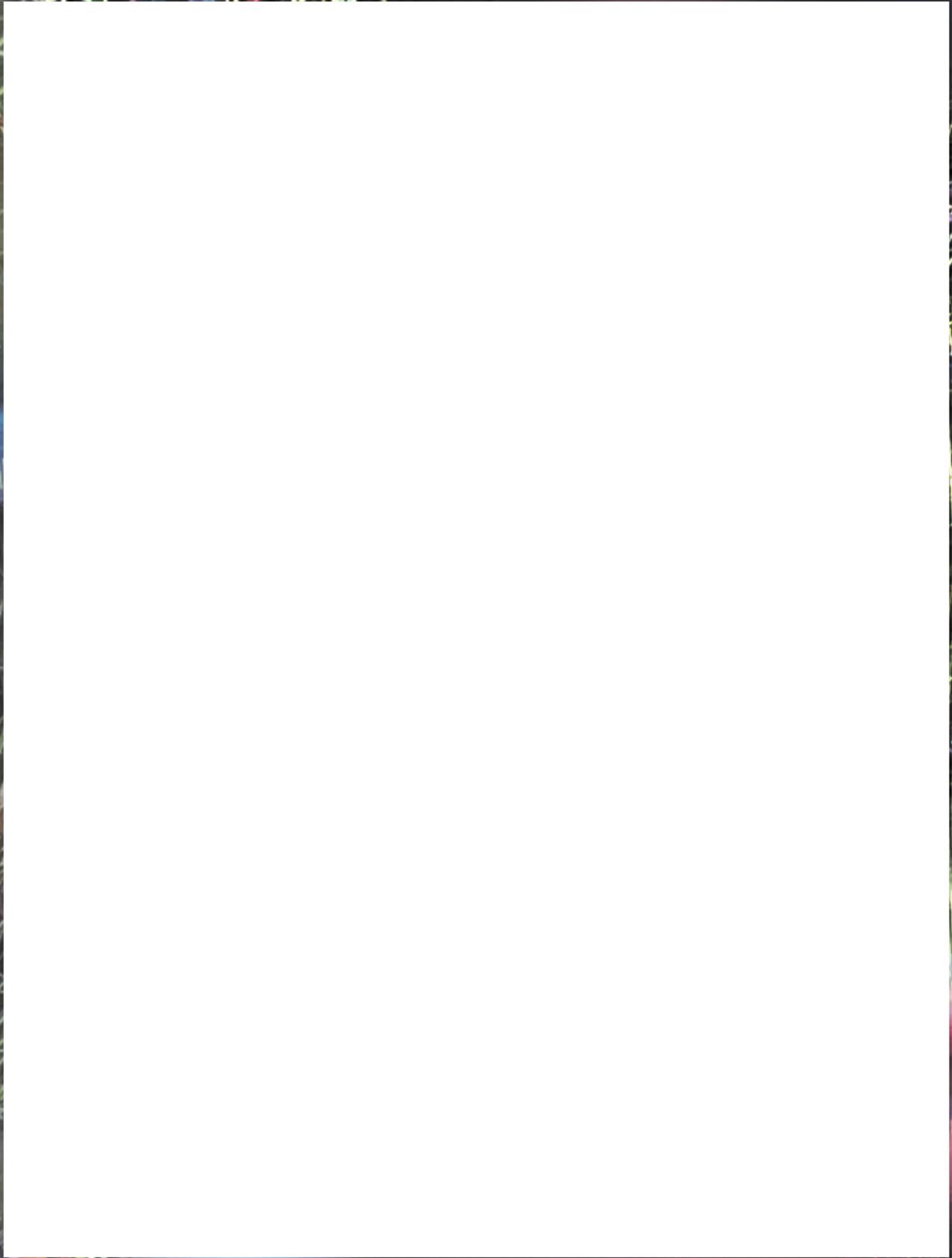
The spark of the idea that eventually became the podzine goes back seven years to a conversation I had with Steve Bynum, senior producer of WBEZ's wonderfully deep and eclectic *Worldview* show. I think I may have been a guest, which is how our paths first crossed. I actually can't remember why I was guest, but do remember being impressed by the fearless curiosity that drove the programming—and blown away to learn that there were years' worth of archives.

I have a history with archives. I once spent months in a large basement room in Northwestern's Fisk Hall—quasi-legally hidden in plain sight under the aegis of an associate dean who also loved archives—sorting through stacks of Chicago Tribunes dating back to the 1870s. From the rag-edition ruins came a large, touring exhibit on the evolution of the modern newspaper, *The Art of the Message*.

The exhibit was just the tip of the newsprint iceberg. News stories are written in the moment. As time goes by they reveal truths of perspective, bias and an obliviousness to what happened next. I sat in that basement reading articles on everything from war readiness to fashion and from political scandals to sports. The only way to understand how the present happened is to read what happened before. I was hooked.

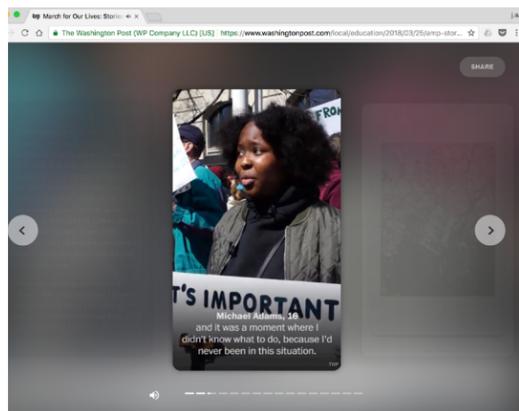
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The TrackerNews project was an aggregator I developed for InSTEDD, a spin-off of Google.org, focused on tech solutions for global health. The beat was defined as broadly as I could make it: health (human, animal, plant, environment), humanitarian response and relevant tech. Stories cycled through the aggregator as suites of 8 to 50 links to scientific papers, news stories, book excerpts and conference videos. I also wrote a companion blog. In addition to developing a



## BACKGROUND

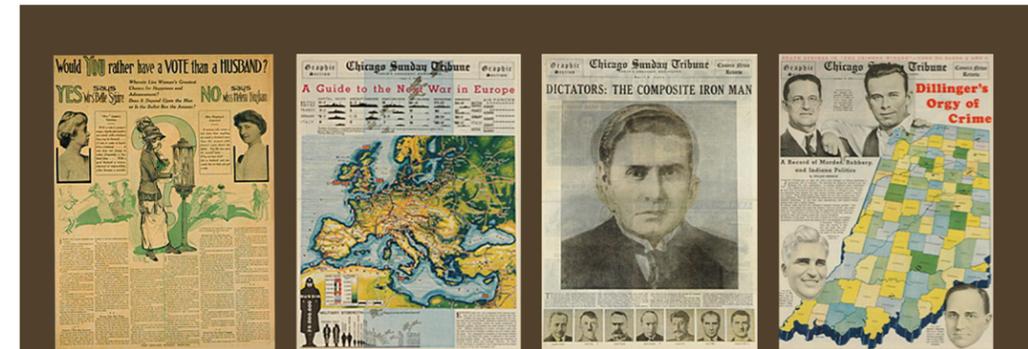
A podzine is exactly what you think it is: a magazine built around podcasts. The idea seems as obvious a “news paper”—especially in our mashed up media landscape where the lines between channels have been all but digitally obliterated. In short order we have come to expect embedded videos and articles laced with hyperlinks. That was just the beginning.



New and often surprising media combinations blip into existence with unnerving regularity. As soon as a technology is viable, its limits are stretched. For example, as part of its coverage of the #MarchForOurLives anti-gun rally in Washington DC, the [Washington Post created an insta-album](#) of smart phone photos and video interviews: the new cinéma vérité.

Innovation hasn't been limited to production. Streaming has completely changed the distribution game, while smartphones and tablets synced to wireless headphones and speakers have profoundly changed the experience. Listeners / viewers / readers are now in charge of the schedule. They can listen, view and read—often in combination—whenever and wherever they want, and also however many times they want. With a few clicks content can be redistributed and shared.

Not since the turn of the last century has there been this much creative spark in the world of media.



Several years ago I curated an exhibit on the evolution of the modern newspaper as a graphic medium. [The Art of the Message](#) was based on a rare, private, rag-edition run of *Chicago Tribunes* from the 1870s through WWII. It was a remarkable time for innovation in everything from paper-making and printing to marketing. The Tribune, which also owned radio station WGN (“World’s Greatest Newspaper”) also published sheet music in the paper, including that toe-tapping show-stopper, *You Have Lots of Time to Read on Sunday!* Sing along with the radio! Play it on the piano at home!

## CONTEXT

Over the last couple of years, podcasts have come into their own. They have become as ubiquitous and de riger as blogs: every media outlet, every company and almost everybody seems to have one. “Subscribe on iTunes!” has joined “Follow on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram!” in the pantheon of cheerfully annoying digital-age requests.

The competition is stiff. According to Apple, iTunes podcast downloads reached 50 billion in March of this year. That's split across more than 18 million episodes of 525,000 active podcasts that in turn are spread across 155 countries and more than 100 languages. That just a single platform.

On the one hand, Wow! An entire industry has sprung up to help produce and distribute podcasts and, of course, to sell ads. Yet the glorious bounty of *more* quickly becomes *less* when there is simply too much content to navigate. There aren't enough hours in the day to listen to it all. There aren't enough days in the year to sift through the ever-expanding haystack. Like Google search, we quickly come to rely on clever algorithms to determine what tiny percentage of the whole would be of most interest, oblivious to any filter bubble bias embedded in the numbers.

**The podzine format puts humans back into the equation.** The roles of editor, producer and curator have blurred just as the lines between the media to which each is associated—print, broadcast and exhibit—have blurred. No matter the title, the job is the same: to select and arrange content in ways that create a greater whole and lead to a deeper understanding. **Context matters.**

## MISSION

Chicago Public Media serves the public interest by creating and delivering diverse, compelling content that informs, inspires, enriches and entertains. Through a broad range of media platforms, we connect diverse audiences in our service area and beyond to one another.

Another blurry line is that between broadcast and podcast. A few years ago it was an easy distinction: Broadcast was content delivered over the airwaves. Podcasts were recorded to be downloaded or streamed. Now every archived broadcast becomes a podcast, while podcasts are often broadcast. Adding to the dizzying mix, print news organizations have recording studios churning out NPR-level content. [In fact some are broadcast on NPR](#).

Identifying an audience—a “service area”—is also in the midst of change. What was once determined by the strength of a station's radio transmitter or the size of its network, with marketing surveys to fine tune, has been completely up-ended by the web. Anyone anywhere can redistribute content at any moment using social media, text and email. In a very real sense, time and space have collapsed.

Into this free-for-all media mashup, the **podzine format provides a structure to frame and combine content in new, meaningful ways for audiences defined by interests rather than geography.** It provides a filter but not a filter bubble—everyone sees the same content. In way that seems almost retro, it allows everyone to be on same page.

Also, while print media use podcasts as sidebars, the podzine reverses the equation. Audio content is the driver. Articles, links, photos, graphics and videos augment the podcasts, **combining to become a resource.**

**The value to the public interest of being able to access archives—interviews with real time insights—cannot be underestimated.** We live in an era riddled and sometimes shaped by fake news, alternative facts and manipulated information (e.g., [the methodical deletion of references to climate change in government reports](#)). The best and perhaps only way to understand the factors that have shaped the present and can also inform the future is to tap into the past. To slightly paraphrase the marvelous [title of a book](#) about newspapers during the American Revolutionary War, before it is history, it is news.

## WBEZ | WORLDVIEW

The podzine format is flexible, adaptable, modular, cheap to distribute and easy, requiring only comparatively minor modifications to existing software. It is a clear value-add for anyone and any organization—media companies, corporations, nonprofits, schools—producing podcasts.

Although the concept is not difficult (for that matter, neither is a podcast—hit record and talk), it is important to set the bar high with well-produced examples.

There are several reasons why I think WBEZ would be a good place to launch podzines:

- **Philosophy:** Public media is a critical pillar for the fourth estate. Its mandate is to serve the public, not private interests. The driver is not the fiction of “fair and balanced,” but like all good journalism facts, truth and curiosity.
- **Location:** WBEZ is my hometown NPR affiliate.
- **Business:** The recent purchase—in partnership with NPR, WNYC Studio and This American Life—of podcast platform Pocket Casts. signals both a commitment to podcasting. It also offers network though which both podzines and best-in-class software tools for creating podzines can be distributed.
- **Archives:** What have been largely stranded assets are the raw material for creating rich, new, relevant content.
- **Newsroom:** There is bench! To make really interesting podzines requires the talents of journalist with expertise across a range of beats.

Likewise, there are a number of reasons why I think WORLDVIEW would make an excellent pioneer podzine.

• **Depth and Breadth | Series Potential:** The range of topics covered regularly on Worldview over the years is truly stunning: Water, China, Climate Change, Culinary Culture, Musical Culture, Immigration, Energy, Global Health, Agriculture—the list goes on and on. Each topic could be a podzine or even multiple podzines. Collectively there is enough material here to create a branded podzine series.

• **Archives:** Having worked on several projects involving archives, I am in awe of the Worldview Archive. This is jackpot gold—interviews with people at the frontlines of everything imaginable, discussing issues and ideas in depth, providing in-the-moment points of view.

• **Local to Global:** Worldview is uniquely positioned to explore a single topic from a variety of perspectives: local, regional, national, global. This speaks to CPM's mission of reaching a "service area" whose boundaries now include all of the above.

• **Partners:** Worldview's network of Chicago-based partners is a unique asset (universities, museums and other cultural institutions, botanic gardens, community organizations, think tanks) Not only can these partners provide content, but also a series ready-made distribution nodes for each podzine.

• **Education:** Worldview is Social Studies writ large. Including a short guide for middle and high school teachers would transform each issue into a valuable supplementary text—an innovative extension of CPM's mission.

## COSTS | FORMATS | SPONSORS | MARKETING

Podzines based on WBEZ programming unlock value from otherwise stranded assets. Broadcast / podcast production costs have already been covered. Also, newsroom capabilities can be leveraged. There are still costs—research, additional content, design, web-hosting, etc.

Podzines can take on several forms and, in fact, a single podzine may be adapted for all of them—the modularity of the assets provide flexibility. The point is presenting information to listener / readers in ways that are most useful to them and also best serve the content.

- Interactive pdf
- Website
- Print (with QR codes)

Interactive pdfs and print magazines are better for contextual layouts. Print is also better suited to the kismet of flip-through discovery.

Since the core content is digital, a robust website is essential, though the exact form that takes requires exploration. Responsive website design—where layouts are determined by how individual assets literally stack up on an small screen—is always a compromise.

Modularity also means that each digital asset has its own url so can also be *dissagregated* from the whole and shared. Each asset, in turn, can be leveraged to promote the branded podzine with via an embedded link added to its code. Marketing can be baked in.

The podzine format offers a variety of ways to credit sponsors, In addition to mentions within individual podcasts, display ads and also native advertising—editorially relevant content produced in collaboration with sponsors—can be developed for interactive pdfs, web and print.

Given the comparatively low costs of digital storage, a podzine’s “shelf life” is theoretically limitless, while its “service area” is one-click global. This opens up all sorts of new marketing strategies.

For example, the *Worldview* podzine could be offered free to any student anywhere on the planet. It would also be free to WBEZ members. Any non-member who didn’t self-identify as a student (“students-at-large” qualify!) would be charged \$40 for an annual subscription. The point isn’t to raise significant revenue from subscriptions, but rather to position *Worldview* / WBEZ as a global brand—one that walks the talk on supporting the public interest writ large through education. We are in an extraordinary media moment where a niche program with significant archival riches can grow its base dramatically.

## NEXT STEPS

Although the basics of a podzine are fairly straightforward, prototyping is required to work out logistics and develop budgets. Among issues to be researched:

- **Digital archives:** How easy, or not, are the *Worldview* | WBEZ files to access and work with? What, if anything, can be improved?

- **Formats:** How much can be modified from off-the-shelf software? What needs to be built from scratch? What are essential, best-in-class features for usability (e.g., playbar bookmarking).

- **Design:** When asked by to reimagine Spotify a couple of years ago, my friend designer Brian Collins set out to change a site that “looked like engineering” to one that “looked like music.” The podzine, a synthesis, is brand new medium. Its look and feel should also be a synthesis, drawing on the past but reimagined in way that inspires innovation.

- **Editorial:** Develop content lists for three or four sample podzines. This includes existing podcasts, re-edits and podzine-specific segments along with articles, linked bibliographies, graphics and videos. Also, identify partner organizations for content collaboration (e.g, CCGA, the Field Museum, universities, etc.) .

- **Sponsors:** Identify potential sponsors.

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