

TOM MICHAEL

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Founder & General Manager

Marfa Public Radio (KRTS) & West Texas Public Radio (KXWT) 2005-present

- Founded, constructed, and operated Marfa Public Radio as a first-service public radio station in Far West Texas, broadcasting to a 15,000 square-mile area that was largely unserved by terrestrial radio of any kind.
- Successfully fundraised in a rural community in order to create a new community licensee with an annual budget surplus. Grew station's income at a strong pace over past 5 years (2011: 33%; 2012: 22%; 2013: 26%, 2014: 5%)
- With a small staff, transformed Marfa Public Radio into a major cultural institution in the region and helped position it as strong online brand to attract out-of-area membership.
- Led the expansion to a new market, creating West Texas Public Radio (KXWT) in 2012 to serve the cities of Odessa and Midland, three hours to the northeast. Launched a successful campaign to take over an ailing university licensee, expand the signal strength four times, conduct a complete programming overhaul, strike strategic partnerships, and begin fundraising.
- Helped build and launch a news department that in 2015 won 8 regional Murrow Awards. Created a daily public affairs program, joined the Fronteras Desk regional LJC, and became a regular contributor to statewide programs, through Texas Standard and other partnerships.
- Partnered with many area organizations to create unique programming, youth media initiatives, community events, and generally serve as a touchstone for regional non-profits. Successfully mentored interns and former staff to find careers in public media.
- Built repeaters in Alpine TX (KRTP) and Marathon TX (KDKY), with a third one to come.
- Wrote, won, and managed grants from CPB and many other funders. For CPB, participated in CSG Review Panel (2012-13) and Future of Public Media retreat (2015).

Freelance Career

2001-2005

- As an editor and writer, contributed to: *Time Out Chicago* (weekly radio columnist), *Annals of American History*, Mobil Travel Guides, *The World Encyclopedia of Political Systems*, *Chicago Tribune*, *Chicago Magazine*, and Crystal Research Associates (financial analysis)
- Assisted Livingston Associates on public media grants and job searches.

Producer, Editor & Writer, Britannica.com & Encyclopædia Britannica 1992-2001

- Served as an editor for one of the longest-running publications in the English language.
- Managed cross-platform teams of technologists, editors, designers, and marketers, to create CDs and websites for Britannica.com, helping to launch the first encyclopedia on the Internet.

Education

May 1991

- Loyola University of Chicago, B.A., English and History, Graduated Cum Laude.



1. What attributes and contributions would you bring to the PRPD Board of Directors?

I would be honored to serve the PRPD as a Board Member. I represent a rural station network. I founded and manage Marfa Public Radio, creating “sole-service” radio where there was none before. The larger stations in our system do amazing work that pull us into the future, but the majority of our stations are small. I understand the programming challenges we face. Oftentimes, these challenges are man-made and not based on resources. Any station can be a cauldron of creativity. Some fascinating ideas are bubbling up at the fringes. As General Manager of small shop, I wear many hats. In my role as Program Director, I’ve launched and produced a daily talk show, a weekly history program, a weekly science program, a youth media program, and a variety of music programs. I’ve built a small and committed team that has an entrepreneurial zeal. When we’ve failed, we’ve moved on; but we’re always trying new approaches. Like you all, I seek to know my listeners better. I want to inform them and delight them. From my experience in building an audience from scratch, I feel I can contribute to the PRPD mission. Thank you for considering my candidacy for the PRPD Board of Directors.

2. What are the most important issues facing public media professionals today in serving and developing audience?

Public media is all about service. How do we best serve our listeners? What makes us different than other media? Why should people listen to our news reports, to our music, to our variety shows? Last year I was chosen to participate in “The Future of Public Media” board retreat, hosted by CPB in Boston, and we grappled with these very questions. We must stay relevant to a shifting audience, and we must keep up with demographic changes. We must continue to stress our localism. Individually, we must break out of our comfort zones and adopt best practices. We know our listeners are scattered on a variety of digital platforms, but we haven’t all found a way to make our own digital strategies pay off. At Marfa Public Radio, our digital strategy hasn’t just been important, but critical. Why? I can’t fund my station with local listeners. We serve a relatively small number of people, so we need to be attractive to people from outside our region. As a result, about half of our members live elsewhere. Surprisingly, the way to achieve this is to be even more local. We all need to reflect our regions the best as we can. And, in this way, we become more indispensable to listeners, near and far.

Kind regards,

Tom Michael
General Manager
Marfa Public Radio