

# JIM RUSSELL PRODUCTIONS

*"THE PROGRAM DOCTOR IS IN!"*



## **Our Firm:**

We are launching a new and very much needed consulting firm for clients in the public service audio and video broadcast industry. There are no other consulting firms that specialize with this industry focus and that possesses such deep background experience.

After 37 years of success in leading and developing new programs, Jim Russell, the creator and former Executive Producer of *Marketplace*, has established this firm to support and help others in the industry with issues of market analysis, program creation and improvement, talent search, and business experience and savvy.

## **Our Mission:**

Jim Russell Productions exists to share the creativity and extensive knowledge of Jim Russell and his associates with stations, production houses, and audio/video producers who aspire to create top quality public service programming for the benefit of the listening public.

## **Our Services:**

- **Program Development** - the conception and design of new programs, and the fine-tuning of existing programs. Managing R&D; creation of program plans, timetables and "bible;" staff recruitment and hiring; management of program piloting and evaluation of pilots.

- **Budget Development and Management**: creation and analysis of cost, business model development, appropriateness of scale. Knowledge of what various program types *should* cost and what are reasonable costs per hour of production.
- **Funding**: Analysis of financial sustainability and likelihood of securing funding. Grant writing and guidance on searching for and obtaining corporate underwriting.
- **Market Research** - What do listeners want? Knowledge of the marketplace and how to survey and assess demand. Analysis of audience potential, loyalty of audience for various kinds of programming.
- **Talent Search** - Using our network, identifying needs, finding and recruiting talent that are best suited for the job.
- **Distribution Planning**: negotiation with distributors, assistance in planning carriage campaigns and marketing.
- **Business Experience and Savvy** - Financial and organizational analysis to improve efficiency.

**Jim Russell**, President of Jim Russell Productions.

In 1988, Russell created [\*Marketplace\*](#), the most successful business program on radio or television in the United States. Before that, he played a key early role at National Public Radio, reporting for and ultimately Executive Producing the network's premiere program [\*All Things Considered\*](#) and helping to conceive [\*Morning Edition\*](#). He is the creator of the new program [\*Weekend America\*](#).

In his 3+ decades of broadcast production, Russell has worked with all three public radio networks and has won every major award in broadcasting including the duPont Columbia, the Peabody and a national television Emmy. He is listed in *Who's Who in America*, *Who's Who in Entertainment*, *Who's Who in the West*; and has been profiled in *Broadcasting and Cable Magazine*. [Articles about him](#) have appeared in *The New York Times*, *Chicago Tribune*, *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, and others.

Jim is a well-rounded veteran producer who is a journalist, writer, a talented editor, and a “program doctor” able to diagnose and fix existing programs that need help. He is also skilled in budget development and management, recruiting, and program marketing.

Over the years, Jim's employers have included United Press International, [National Public Radio](#), [Minnesota Public Radio](#), [Twin Cities Public Television](#)

and [American Public Media](#). His clients have included Alaska Public Radio Network, Audible.com, Radio Free Asia, PRI – Public Radio International, the University of South Carolina, Sewanee University, Texas Public Radio, Wisconsin Public Radio, and the Worldspace Satellite Radio Corporation. He was one of the seven executive producers who created public radio’s [Core Values](#) model. “Jim has been at the beginning of many of the national programs that now give identity to public radio,” said Kit Jensen, COO of WVIZ/PBS and 90.3 WCPN ideastream, Cleveland. Jim’s recent activities include working with the staffs of Chicago Public Radio (WBEZ)’s [Sound Opinions](#) and WUNC’s [The Story](#) with Dick Gordon.

## **Our Client-Centered Approach**

Our goal is to put the client first. Our initial visit, always with Jim Russell, is without fee, but includes travel and out-of-pocket expenses. It is to learn the issues so we can prepare a feasibility proposal that is agreeable to the client. Once agreed upon, we operate as a team with the client, valuing the client’s knowledge and experience, and we respond rapidly with findings and recommendations. There is little lost time in startup because of our extensive experience in the industry. We believe in practical but creative solutions. Our fees are reasonable, and sometimes we are retained by clients to work exclusively on a variety of issues.

## **Market Summary:**

The primary market is the public radio industry, composed of more than 650 public radio stations with gross annual budgets in excess of \$700-million dollars (Brody, Weiser, Burns, *Having It All*, November 2004). Despite rumors to the contrary, this is a robust marketplace, especially for the kinds of services planned by Jim Russell Productions.

1. **Public radio stations are investing more and more money creating their own local and regional and even national programming.** In its paper *Local Content Creation*, the Station Resource Group (SRG) said that such programming efforts go beyond satisfying local creative impulses or mission. Increasingly, said SRG, the reasons are strategic. “By producing programming that connects directly with community, the station forges critical ties with the people who listen and give to public stations.” And, said SRG, stations also engage in local programming to create a competitive edge for themselves in a crowded marketplace filled with imported national syndicated product.

But there are at least two challenges posed by this strategy:

- a) **Ability:** Local stations may not have the ability to produce the quality of programming that audiences will listen to. NPR, PRI and APM and major stations like WBUR, WNYC, KQED, and others have set the bar very high. Audiences expect all public radio to be of that quality. There simply is no audience tolerance for a lower quality “local programming.”
  - b) **Tools:** Stations may not have the tools or framework to measure the efficacy of their investments in program production. Unlike almost any other business in America, there are no published “norms” to compare one’s performance to.
2. **Programming Creates Financial Risk:** Creating new programming is risky business. As the report *Having it All* on the financial health of public radio pointed out, “an *increase* in (station) programming expenses was strongly associated with a *decrease* in net revenue” throughout the public radio system. According to the report, more than half of the increased station expenses came from local production expense. In other words, production is costly. When stations embark upon local program production, the stakes are high. They need to get it right. The cost of failure is steep. And, stations do not seem to have developed ways of realistically predicting the breakeven potential of new programs. As audience guru David Giovannoni said recently, “The economics of local programming are brutal, man. ...Local programming is often where most of the programming budget goes and certainly where most of the managerial mind-share is.”
3. **There is a Serious Disconnect Between Producers, Programmers and Audiences:** Finally, as *Mapping Public Radio’s Independent Landscape* reported, there is a major disconnect between producers and station/network programming executives. Each group does not think the other understands the other’s reality. Few people in public radio speak both languages and can translate between these two sides. Programmers often don’t believe that Producers are making shows for real audiences. Producers question Programmers’ commitment to innovation and risk-taking. Many Producers seem to be making art for art’s sake and simply do not program for audiences. At the least, most Producers I know neither understand audiences or the tools that have been developed to measure whether their programs connect with audiences.

**Opportunities:**

There is an opportunity to improve the odds of such investments by making available the resources necessary to lead stations and producers through the process of **new program development and evaluation**. This would be accomplished through

providing to these risk-taking stations and independent producers the services of a very experienced startup Executive Producer. It would be the role of this individual to:

- Review the strategic plans, purposes and goals of the project with station management;
- Help management assess the risks and probability of success;
- Assist the station management in creating a real multiyear business plan for the project with realistic and fully-loaded budgets;
- Involve programmers and audience researchers and thinking in the process, to identify real audience needs, preferences, and potential;
- Help the station establish metrics to monitor the project's success;
- Help producers and programmers refine the program concept;
- Recruit staff and consultants in areas such as technical support needs;
- Create timetables and production plans;
- Liaise with all needed support services such as marketing, new media, underwriting, finance, legal, etc.;
- Lead the production and editorial team;
- Create pilot programs and critique them;
- Write the program bible;
- Design a research plan;
- Collaborate in writing program grant requests and fundraising support materials;
- And, ultimately, help recruit and replace him/herself with a “permanent” producer/executive producer.

These tasks would be accomplished by Jim Russell and, as the workload required, other Associates including veteran successful Executive Producers, recruited and coordinated by him.

In the end, it would be the purpose of the “Program Doctor” to help Producers and Programmers adopt, as the *Mapping* report suggested, a common language – a common way of discussing, developing and vetting new program ideas, considering the risks and establishing “nets” to protect against calamitous failure, and ways to evaluate the results. Such an approach leverages the risk inherent in taking on any difficult new task, and makes the gamble have better odds of a successful outcome.

## **Business Concept and Strategy:**

Jim Russell Productions, known as “[The Program Doctor](#),” engages in three lines of business:

1. **Invention** of new programs, from concept through design, staffing and implementation. New program development and Executive Producing of program startups.
2. **Program Doctoring**: including:
  - Collaboration with national and regional producers to create and implement their new programs;
  - Diagnosis and treatment of existing programs with problems;
3. **Talent Identification** and management of on-air and production talent.

## **Goals and Objectives:**

### Positioning and Philosophy:

Jim Russell Productions is deliberately a small “boutique” company focusing exclusively on Jim’s experience and expertise.

Rather than expand to become a high cost full-service entity, JRP will work with experts in many allied fields, outsourcing work or recommending its [Associates](#) when the workscope is outside of Russell’s expertise. While there are more than two dozen consultants who serve the public radio industry, none has my background or specializes in the creation of startup programming.

Jim Russell Productions will accept a limited number of clients, based upon mutually-perceived alignment of our goals and values. Rate of compensation will be fair and reasonable, and customized to the ability of the client and the nature of the project. Jim Russell’s involvement in projects is passionate, deep and engaged rather than superficial.