

Annual Report of the Media Co-operative 2013-2014

This document gives updates on some of the Dominion Newspaper Co-operative (the Media Co-op) highlights of 2013-2014.

Not only are we a multi-stakeholder co-operative, owned by our reader, contributor and editor members, we are also one of Canada's dynamic spaces for innovative coverage and critical analysis of government policy, corporate misbehaving and social movements across the country.

The web presence of the Media Co-op has been growing by leaps and bounds: we went from 164,500 visits to mediacoop.ca in 2009-2010 to 1.7 million visits in 2013-2014. Since mediacoop.ca went online, we've had a total of 4.8 million visits, and we should hit five million by around January 2015. We have more and more contributors reporting on a variety of topics often underrepresented in the mainstream media.

In 2013-2014, the Media Co-op continued to act as a platform for covering alternative issues that don't often get their fair share of coverage in the mainstream media. Through it, contributors are able report on different topics using a variety of methods. The Media Co-op is a national network that includes four locals in Halifax, Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver. Below is a description of the Media Co-op's accomplishments and challenges for 2013-2014.

Own your media, run your media, and read on!

.:The Network:.

/Montreal

Cette année fut difficile pour la Coop média de Montréal. Nous avons assisté à une baisse du niveau d'implication et de la quantité de membres actifs/actives.

Nous avons à cette fin engagé une personne pour s'occuper de coordination locale et de réseautage, Christian Labrecque. Cette personne a coordonné principalement une campagne d'affichage et de publicité autour de la Coop média de Montréal ainsi que de réseautage principalement en milieu étudiant, mais aussi dans divers milieux sociaux. Cette personne a organisé et tenu différentes présentations sur la Coop média de Montréal. Cette personne a principalement travaillé en milieux francophones, car notre Coop est très peu connue chez les francophones et que ceux-ci/celles-ci représentent la majorité linguistique dans ce qui est appelé le "Québec".

Une de nos membres (que nous remercions), Kim Dockstader, a aussi réalisé une image explicative du fonctionnement de la Coop média pour rendre l'usage de notre site beaucoup plus aisé pour ceux et celles qui veulent y publier et ainsi encourager d'autres à l'utiliser.

Nous avons été malheureusement plusieurs à nous être aperçu que des difficultés techniques empêchaient les gens à publier sur le site. Dans ce cadre, il devenait vain de vouloir les amener à publier, à devenir membres actifs/actives, de les convaincre d'investir dans la Coop... Sans un fonctionnement fluide du site Internet, c'est la Coop média en général dont le travail devient difficile. Dans ce cadre, nous avons eu beaucoup de problèmes de communication et surtout de capacité de nous réunir avec l'administrateur technique. Certains de ces problèmes ont été réglé, mais cela a paralysé une bonne partie de notre travail.

Peu importe d'ailleurs les problèmes éprouvés de part et d'autre dans la relation entre différents membres de la Coop et l'administrateur technique, il est à considérer que le soutien technique ne peut pas reposer sur la responsabilité d'une seule personne. Cela est un fardeau et lui accorde aussi trop de pouvoir.

Concernant toujours les différents problèmes techniques. notre site que nous voulons bilingue ne l'est toujours pas complètement. Arij Riahi (que nous remercions également), notre représentante au Conseil d'administration de la Coop national, a poursuivi le travail de traduction amorcé par d'autres personnes. La traduction de

l'infrastructure du site n'est par contre toujours pas terminée et pour nous cela devrait être une priorité.

La traduction intégrale du site sera aussi une précieuse réalisation qui nous aidera à recruter de nouveaux/nouvelles membres chez les francophones autant pour la publication de contenu, le financement que l'organisation interne, recrutement qui est absolument nécessaire au futur de la Coop média de Montréal. À ce titre, il nous semble essentiel que la Coop au niveau national s'ouvre également davantage aux francophones pour s'assurer d'une plus grande participation autant au Québec que dans le reste du Canada.

Nous remercions toutes celles et tous ceux qui participent à différents niveaux à l'existence de cette Coop. Nous remercions aussi plus particulièrement pour son aide précieuse notre ancien coordonnateur national, Tim McSorley, et Dru Oja Jay pour son implication toute aussi précieuse dans le soutien technique.

/Toronto

The TMC created over 200 articles on protest, social movements and stories in the public interest. We covered the passing of activist Arlene Pitts, and former TMC journalist Ali Mustafa who died while reporting on the war in Syria. Our in-depth and investigative coverage also increased this year, highlighted by amazing work on criticisms of unions, Labour day coverage, changes to the legal aid clinic system, an in-depth video series on city councillors and the struggles of several First Nations communities including Six Nations, Grassy Narrows and Aamjiwnaang.

Our year was also characterized by great projects and journalistic work. In addition to the dozens of journalists who posted to the TMC, we were able to make great gains in our social media profile with a solid Facebook and Twitter presence. We held a new members meeting attracting significant interest.

The TMC had a strong presence at the People's Social forum, bottom-lining most of the live updates, administering the Alt Media Centre, creating and distributing a copy of our broadsheet *The Spoke* and joining two panels on alt media.

Administratively, the TMC was also able to hire two summer students via the Canada Summer Jobs program as well as getting a more solid, child-friendly space through collaboration with another local co-op (Harvest Noon) in Toronto. We were joined by two new editors and collaborated with other media outlets including *Briarpatch* and BASICS.

/Vancouver

The VMC hosted a community supper last October, where we heard from four local anti-gentrification activists. In the spring, Tyson Leonard interned with us as part of his graduation requirements for a journalism diploma at Loyalist (Belleville). Already an avid reader of *The Dominion*, he dove into an investigation of Vancouver's anti-gentrification movement(s) and produced four interview features and a final article which you can find on the VMC site.

We have also created a stipended outreach and communications position, responsible for sending out a monthly newsletter using MadMimi and doing a variety of outreach at events. We printed hundreds of dollars worth of stickers and we are trying to recruit minions to put them up for us. We also tabled at the Victoria Anarchist Bookfair and distributed back copies of *The Dominion*.

As September rolled around we've seen a modest upsurge in featured content posted to the website. Although our meetings are cozy (aka very small) we are looking forward to continuing to be a place for stories that aren't being told in this rapidly neoliberalizing city (Ivan Drury's latest piece in *Briarpatch* is apt!).

/Halifax

This has been a year of growth for the HMC. Our readership continued to grow, reaching 885,000 page views (from 263,000 in 2012-2013), as did our content. We featured 502 stories over this period, well over one new story per day, and 150 more featured stories than the previous year. We followed important issues such as the Elsipogtog fracking developments, the Loretta Saunders case and the nurses strike, which all contributed to increasing our readership.

Similarly, our presence increased on social media. We got 300 new likes on Facebook and 800 new followers on Twitter. We continue to distribute 800 copies a month of *The Tide*, our free print issue of the best online stories from our website.

On the administrative level, the Halifax chapter is currently in the process of

incorporating as a non-profit co-op in order to facilitate things like Job Creation Program grants and also for clearer financial accountability. We also continue our Monday night contributors meetings.

Editor Erica Butler won the National Radio Award in Special Programming and Podcasts for our *The Tide* podcast.

/WG (working groups)

In addition to the four locals mentioned above, there are keen Media Co-op journalists who continue organizing and reporting in Ottawa, Sudbury, Saskatchewan, London, Calgary and many other cities across the country. While working groups are regularly active, some reporting increases around events that members consider of high importance. Currently we have an active working group in Sudbury. We are excited for what the future holds!

What is a working group? Anyone can start a working group, which consists of having a section of the Co-op web site that people can add posts to. Working groups then can work their way to having their own website, and eventually becoming a full-fledged local. A policy outlining clear steps for setting up a local is currently in draft stages; for more information, get in touch with the board or the editorial collective.

/The Dominion

This has been a mixed year for *The Dominion*. Since our last AGM in October 2013, we printed four issues of the magazine, down from our usual six. The reduction in printing came following the decision by the board and the editorial staff to put the magazine on hold following the resignation of the majority of our editorial staff. It was a difficult decision to take, but was made in order to take the time to fully address the concerns that led to staff departures.

The four issues we published, though, reflected the strengths and diversity of the organization. Cover stories ranged from an in-depth feature story from Miles Howe on the anti-fracking protests that rocked New Brunswick, Sandra Cuffe's investigation of secret uranium deals in the Prairies and revelations from Nicolas Quiazua and Laurent

Bastien Corbeil of McGill University's unspoken ties to military contractors.

The Dominion continues to be one outlet where Media Co-op contributors can be compensated for their efforts. The artwork on the magazine cover is paid, as well as two news stories and the regular investigative feature. Local content continued to be highlighted as well, with local editorial collectives producing at least two pieces for each issue of the magazine.

We printed between 1050 and 1200 copies of each issue, reaching thousands of readers. We printed full-color covers and between 24 and 28 pages in each issue. We continued to work with ALLCAPS Design, who magnificently laid out each issue. KataSoho Imprimeries & Designs printed the magazine at their shop in Montreal.

A line-up of editors, fact checkers and copy editors have ensured our articles continue to meet a high journalistic standard.

.:Membership:.

/membership drives

Membership drives are usually held in the month of May to recruit more members and fundraise for the Co-op. However, due to the lack of availability of board and staff members, there was no membership drive for this year.

/editorial staff

The Media Co-op staff currently includes Tim McSorley, as administrator, Roddy Doucet, our membership coordinator and Heather Hall, our bookkeeper. Staff carry out the day-to day operations of the Media Co-op, including the maintenance of the website, administrative and financial tasks, follow-up with membership and fundraising, producing *The Dominion* and everything in between. The editorial collective works through consensus to make decisions and assign tasks.

This year witnessed many changes in editorial staff. Dawn Paley stepped back from the editorial collective in order to focus on other projects, including finishing her upcoming book, *Drug War Capitalism* (out December 2, 2014!). Tim McSorley left as national

co-ordinator at the end of April, but returned on a contractual basis at the end of July to work on administrative tasks. Vancouver editor Nat Marshik and Halifax editor Miles Howe both left the Co-op in the summer. Their hard work and commitment to *The Dominion* and the national network helped us reach new heights in our coverage while they were on the editorial collective, and we want to thank them for their great work. Luckily for the Co-op, both have continued on working with their local collectives!

Jessica Charest, our bookkeeper, resigned after three years of working with the Co-op. Another big thank you to Jessica for helping us through some hard financial times. In February, we welcomed Heather Hall as our new bookkeeper.

This severe turnover in staff seriously limited the ability of the organization to publish *The Dominion*, which has been put on hold since May. Staff have continued to work on promoting content through the website, ensuring the administration of the Co-op is carried out and corresponding with the membership. They have also participated in the visioning and re-structuring process taken on by the board over the summer.

After using the summer months to take stock, though, the Co-op is on the path to re-invigorating the editorial collective. Arielle Friedman will be joining the Media Co-op as a part-time administrator as of October 29, 2014 on a six-month contract, replacing Tim McSorley. And the Media Co-op has entered into a partnership with the Media Action Research Group at Lakehead University to fund a part-time editor based in Toronto who will be hired in the near future. The board will also be proposing a new staff structure at this year's AGM.

/volunteers

Throughout the year, it would be impossible for the Media Co-op to operate if it weren't for the hard work of volunteers. Each local co-operative is supported by dedicated volunteer collectives who are the lifeblood of the organisation. Thank you to the dozens of people who believe in the Media Co-op and our mandate; without you, none of this would be possible.

At the national level, we've also been lucky to have crucial roles filled by volunteers. In particular:

Ashley Fortier has ensured that each issue of *The Dominion* is meticulously copy-edited and proofread as our copy editing co-ordinator. Working with a team of more than

half a dozen other volunteer copy editors, she has helped make sure that our copy shines.

The creation of editor-at-large positions, with 10 volunteer editors answering our call, led to an increase in our editing capacity at *The Dominion* and brought in new, invaluable perspectives.

Finally, our team of volunteer fact checkers have combed through every stat, name and number we include in *Dominion* articles, making sure no corners were cut and no titles were mis-worded. Dawn Paley served as fact checking co-ordinator this past year, helping to grow the collective.

Thank you again to all our volunteers for their hard work, energy, intelligence and dedication.

/board of directors

Our current board of directors is composed of nine positions in total, two of whom were elected at the last AGM. Board members meet on a regular basis via conference call once per month. Board calls include discussion of crucial issues such as finances, staffing and policies that facilitate the board's work and improve its relationship with readers, contributors and locals.

For most of last year our board was comprised of Maryann Abbs (Vancouver Local Member), Miles Howe (Halifax Local Member), Arij Riahi (Montreal Local Member), Darryl Richardson (Toronto Local Member), Sharmeen Khan (Reader Member), Crystel Hajjar (Contributor Member), Tim McSorley (Editor Member), Dru Oja Jay (Editor Member), and Dawn Paley (Editor Member).

Part way through the year, Arij Riahi, Miles Howe and Dawn Paley resigned from the board, leaving the seats to be filled at this AGM. Roddy Doucet stepped in as an interim editor member over the summer; his term comes to an end at this AGM. Tim McSorley, Dru Oja Jay, Sharmeen Khan and Darryl Richardson's terms have all come to an end; Tim and Sharmeen have decided not to run again.

The board continues to have four active subcommittees:

- Staff Committee: works on hiring, contracts and staff relations, including developing an internal review and conflict resolution process and instituting

anti-oppression practices.

- Finance Committee: looks over budgets, tracks income and expenses and assists with fundraising efforts.
- Organizational Development: focuses on the relationship between the board and members, and ensures the Media Co-op is meeting its legal requirements.
- Board committee: works on fostering board relations, developing a guiding binder and addressing issues within the board.

For a large part of this past year, the board has focused on developing a restructuring of the national staff and operations of *The Dominion* to work more within our means.

.:New at the Media Co-op:.

/redesign

This year was one of big restructuring for the Media Co-op. As the Media Co-op enters into its second decade of existence (we celebrated our 10-year anniversary in 2013), a few issues arose. Low pay, the remote working environment and the pressure to constantly seek financial resources finally took their toll on staff and board members. A few resignations led the board to reconsider how the Co-op operates, in addition to putting on hold the production of *The Dominion*. In June, a caretaker committee was formed to survey members of the Co-op and, based on the answers collected, develop a proposal that includes an alternative for operations. This proposal is currently being discussed by the board.

/paying for online content

It was suggested at the last AGM that the Media Co-op considers paying for video, audio, maps and other online content. This suggestion was considered by the board who proposed to readjust the production budget to allow payment for video, audio and other content that cannot be printed in the magazine. However, as the board decided to put the production of *The Dominion* on hold, the proposal was also halted. This proposal will be discussed by the new board as soon as the production of *The Dominion* is resumed.

/resources

In addition to providing a platform for journalists to report on underrepresented issues, the Media Co-op encourages and supports new users. Over the years, members of the Co-op have worked on developing various guides that include tips on how to get involved and best practices for contributors and editors. In addition to helping new users, these guides are our attempt to capture institutional memory and ensure the availability of knowledge and resources.

The Media Co-op guides series currently includes:

- A history of the Media Co-op
- An in-depth writers guide
- An editor-at-large guide
- Updates to our copy-editing style guide
- A guide for photographers

If you'd like to propose a topic, or help write a how-to guide, get in touch: [info \[at\] mediacoop.ca](mailto:info@mediacoop.ca).

Here's looking forward to another news-packed year at the Media Co-op!