A Word by the Founder
Daoud Kuttab

Six years ago we began a small operation with the aim of providing an effective counter to prevailing state run electronic media. We tried to introduce change in the Jordanian media landscape both in the process and the product. To change the process we created an alternative media outlet that transmitted information outside the traditional controls of government agencies. To do that we used the Internet, satellite broadcasting, audio file exchange and the dependence on the proximity of Palestine to Jordan in order to broadcast locally produced content from nearby Palestine back into Jordan. While our work was legally legal it was bordering the illegal in that we bypassed governmental restrictions that limited broadcasting to the local state run carrier.

For content we also tried to be original. Unlike most media outlets in the Arab world that often escape local problems by focusing on external issues that are not locally controversial, we focused on the local. Even though our reach was global we insisted that our content address local issues. By training newly graduating university students we bypassed another obstacle that faces traditional media in the Arab world; self censorship that has built up after years of governmental control over information. Young people joining us were given primary training and were asked to go out and report. Taking the guidance of King Abdullah II who said that the sky should be the limit for Jordanian media, we encouraged our new journalists not to put artificial restrictions on their journalism.

Professionalism, therefore, was not negotiable. Seeking the truth and reflecting all points of view were drilled to every new comer. The technological breakthroughs in hand-held high quality recording equipment meant that no published story whether posted on the web or broadcast on radio would be permitted unless it had at least one actuality with the aim that these actualities would give the content of the report credibility and authenticity.

We took the issue of journalistic professionalism one step further by introducing a media critique program that reviewed the Jordanian media. *Eye on the media* became an important watchdog on what the local media was doing. In order to make this project effective we developed a set of professional guidelines that were posted on the same web page. These became the standard by which we held our own journalist and the media we were reviewing accountable to. The success of this program allowed us to extend it to monitor media in Palestine, Lebanon and finally Egypt and Syria as well.

Jordan's parliament was another target of our work as we conducted a unique program that monitored their work and dealings. Not only did we report extensively, honestly and holistically on the parliament's deliberations but we provided the public with a rare look at a cross sector of the members of parliament. Ten MPs reflecting different political, geographical, religious and gender segments were chosen for a unique survey. Our parlimetentary *Marsad* collected data on these MPs, including the political platform that they ran and won on, and monitored how they voted in the parliament. The public was therefore equipped to decide whether these MPs lived up to the promises they made in the run up to being elected.

Amman Net's motto "**the voice of the community"** was not lip service. We made special effort to provide the Jordanian community and the residents of Amman with the possibility of having a voice on our site and on the air. We did this by giving our web readers and later our FM radio listeners a chance to let us hear their feedback. In certain programs we actually invited some of our regular callers to come to the studio and co-anchor a program. But this motto was best implemented in our school radio program in which we trained and empowered students from different high schools on the skills of radio programming and then allowed them to prepare, present and produce a weekly show on which they were allowed to say what they wanted without censorship or restrictions.

Six years after our initial launch, AmmanNet has become a source of inspiration for many in the Arab world. To address the many requests for training and technology exchange, we organized workshops in Amman on internet radio using the AmmanNet model. Arab media practitioners from Tunis, Palestine, Lebanon, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Iraq participated in these workshops. As a follow up to the Saudi and Gulf workshops we were asked to help create nine internet radio stations in the Arabian Peninsula. *Khaleejnet.net* has become the new home of these radio stations which we expect will branch out to establish independent radio stations.

All of these would not have happened without the courage of our journalists, the wisdom of our editors and the faith of our funding partners. To all of them we give a special thank you.

About AmmanNet

In the fall of 2000, using the opportunities that the Internet provided, award winning Arab journalist Daoud Kuttab (with a group of independent media practitioners in Amman Jordan) launched in Amman, Jordan the Arab world's first Internet radio. With funding from the Open Society Institute, the mayor of Amman, Nidal Al-Hadid, and the director of UNESCO's Amman office, Martin Hadlow launched the new web-based station on November 15. AmmanNet began its first year under the patronage of UNESCO and the Greater Amman Municipality. AmmanNet began producing audio reports, news bulletins and a variety of programming all of which were posted on the Net. Rebroadcasts of the programs (especially from nearby Palestinian stations) were pursued so as to create a terrestrial home for all the audio content that was being posted on the Internet. Large sectors of Jordanian society would thus have the opportunity to hear and follow radio programming created in their own country but being broadcast with the help of the Internet.

AmmanNet (the Voice of the Community) as its sub heading states has in reality become the voice of the community. AmmanNet has been creating content and broadcasting it on the Internet since 2000 as the first Arab Internet radio station. It began broadcasting terrestrially on 92.4 FM in the Amman metropolitan area in the summer of 2005. According to the license, the content included general programming excluding politics and news. But in September of the same year, it became the first independent radio station to broadcast news

From the news perspective you can hear every hour headline news and twice a day, the full newscasts (at the half hours). We focus almost entirely on local news with a courageous and balanced manner. The 30-minute full newscasts at 1:30 and 6:30 pm provide listeners with an in depth look at the most important local issues. Live interviews with experts and officials are supported by feature reports and the latest reaction of the Jordanian street on the most important events of the day.

Our live broadcasts cover the most important topics of interest to Jordanians; from the session of the Jordanian parliament (we are the first independent radio in the Arab world to broadcast live and unedited gavel-to-gavel coverage) to the most important football games. We provide play by play of matches of Jordan's national team as well the games of the leading clubs. Our live coverage also includes important social, artistic and cultural issues as well as live shows during holidays like Eid al Adha, Eid al Fitr, Christmas and New Year.

AmmanNet provides a panorama of programs starting with the review of the daily press to the morning show *tallet subuh*, sports review, the musical program *sama'i*, *bira'ihat al kahwa* (cultural magazine), *haqqi* (legal awareness), *school radio*, *diary of a refugee*, sports interviews, *marsad barlamani (*parliamentary watch*)*, *eye on the media* and the political program *masaha lerra'i* (space for opinions).

On the entertainment front we produce and broadcast *remix*, a music show that features interviews with leading Jordanian musicians, *cinema zoom* dealing with the big screen and our twice a week quiz show *shu biddi arbah*.

Our Internet coverage www.ammannet.net has made us a leading source of information and interactivity with Jordanians in and outside the country and has raised our standing as the leading Jordanian visited web site according to the international Alexa standings.

AmmanNet, has also become a leading training center with journalists from Jordan and others from Syria, Iraq, Sudan, Egypt, Algeria, Palestine and Lebanon coming to participate in workshops about on-line broadcasting.

In September 2004, AmmanNet carried out a workshop for journalists from Syria, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan and Palestine. The results were fantastic. A web site was created specifically for the project and the participants were able in the short time to write, record, edit and upload their own reports. Part of the recommendations of the participants was that this kind of workshop be repeated because of the huge hunger for the tools that can make online reporting easier especially in countries that have restrictive media laws. Jordanian government spokeswoman Asma Khader and UNESCO officials in Amman attended the graduation of the workshop and were impressed with the results calling for more workshops that enable Arab journalists to use the Net for on line reporting both in text and audio

World Cup on AmmanNet radio

The 2006 FIFA World Cup in Germany had been awaited for by millions of people throughout the world. In Jordan the games drew a big attraction with two Arab countries (Tunisia and Saudi Arabia) as well as favorite countries to Arab soccer fans like Brazil, Germany, Italy and France.

AmmanNet the Arab world's first Internet radio station and winner of the Gold Medal Award as well as the leading FM radio station in the capital Amman decided to buy the radio rights and broadcast the entire world cup live on its radio station along with a series of programs and updated world cup news broadcasts. The absence of any terrestrial TV station carrying the games forced Jordanians to search satellite frequencies to find the games. When they finally found a Turkish and a Swedish broadcast, many put their TV on mute and for their audio play in Arabic, they turned on AmmanNet, thus boosting our radio audience.

Sports fans in Amman have been following their favorite teams on AmmanNet Radio ever since our station has dedicated a daily 15 minute sports program as well and a weekly courageous radio program *Manal and Sports dialogue*. AmmanNet's recent FM broadcasts (since September 2005) have also included live broadcasts of the major local teams as well as the major matches of Jordan's national team.

Summary of AmmanNet Programs

1.   Eye on the Media
A critical look at the media scene in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Egypt and Palestine. Th e trap margorp hcihw is broadcast and distributed to local editors attempts to critique the level of adherence of journalists to media ethics and guidelines. .

2. **Bira'hat al qahwa** (coffee aroma)
A cultural program that keeps an eye on the latest cultural and artistic activities in Amman. It discusses poetry, art exhibits and films shown in the capital. Key literary Jordanians as well as guests are interviewed.

3. **Ru'a Barlamania** (Parliamentary Views)
A weekly program that reflects the latest happenings in the Jordanian parliament and the various opinions about it.

4. **Tallet Subuh** (a morning visit)
A morning all purpose program that discusses issues of concern to the general public through daily field interviews, live interviews, and call ins.

5. **Muthakkarat Laji' (Diary of a refugee)**
    A documentary program that is based on the oral history of Palestinian refugees living in Jordan dealing with their history and current exile.

6. *Nashmiyyat (successful women)*
A program that reflects stories of successful women in Jordan from various fields.

7. **IT in Arabic**
Presents the latest developments in IT technology in a simple way for Arabic speakers. The program introduces new Jordanian web sites and gives prizes to winners in IT contests.

8. **Al Mar'i Wal Masmou'** (audio visual)
    A program reviewing radio and television programs in Jordan and the professionalism of the journalists producing and presenting them.

9. **Haqqi** (my right)
    A legal awareness program servicing the public and giving free advice to the queries of the citizens.

10. **Masaha Hurra** (free space)
    Social and local issues are discussed live on air with experts followed by call ins from the public.

11. **Shurfat Niyabiyah** (parliament interviews)
    We interview members of parliament to talk about issues of interest to the public at large.

12. **Rukn al Kitab** (book corner)
    New books are discussed and reviewed on a regular basis

13. **School radio**
    High school students trained at Ammannet present radio reports about their lives, schools and aspirations. The program includes student diaries and discussions of issues of special interest to them. The programs are produced and presented by students themselves. They decide topics, order of broadcast and

run the entire two hour program. Our job is only to empower them and help them do what they want to do.
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14.   Manal's Sports Interview

A sports program in which our sports reporter Manal interviews important local players, coaches and sports administrators shedding a light at the different sports and the people behind them.

15.   **Shu biddi Arbah** (quiz show)
A quiz program with prizes that includes riddles, songs with gifts given through call ins

16.   Remix
A music program hosting young Jordanian artists that are interviewed in a live broadcast. The program includes listening to some of their works. Top songs are classified based on the voting of listeners through the internet.

AmmanNet knowledge transfer

Based on the request of many to benefit from the experience of AmmanNet, we organized a series of workshops on online broadcasting. The workshops included practical journalistic and online training as well as basic radio training and visits to Ammannet and contributions by AmmanNet director and staff. Each of the trainees left AmmanNet with an open source software that would allow them to set up their own internet radio.

Young journalists from Palestine, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Egypt, Tunisia, Saudi Arabia as well as Yemen and the GCC countries participated in different workshops. To support the GCC and Yemen candidates, we organized a separate project aimed at setting up nine on-line radio stations and helping candidates from these countries develop the content and upload it while we provided them with initial technical support. We hope that within 2007 all these stations which are now using a unified web site www.khaleejnet.net will become independent of us and have their own web sites and their own local content and management.

Other workshops organized by AmmanNet included the following:
- A workshop on human interest reporting for journalists from Lebanon, Palestine, Iraq, Jordan and Kuwait.

- A workshop on covering crimes of war with journalists from Palestine, Lebanon Jordan and Iraq.

Community projects initiated by AmmanNet

*Created, in cooperation with UNESCO, five freedom of express PSAs which were broadcast on most Arab TV stations.

*Organized the Amman leg of two televised town hall meetings for the program *Chat the Planet.*

* Organized a youth video exchange and video conference between Amman and San Francisco High school students which was broadcast on Link TV.

*Established a local transcription service for the weekly press conference of the Spokeswoman of the Jordanian government.

*Organized three election debates in 2003 in Amman dealing with local political issues, social issues, and a debate by women candidates.

*Set up, at the request of UNESCO, a web site dealing with the Iraqi constitution and welcoming open dialogue on line about the various drafts.

* Participated in the 16 day campaign for women's rights in December 2006

AmmanNet in support of independent Arab media

AmmanNet, along with the Washington-based IREX Institute, won a three year competitive grant aimed at improving media in the Arab world. AmmanNet's portion of the grant includes coordinating a yearly fellowship to the US for mid career journalists and supervising the distribution of ten grants to Arab documentary makers totally $150,000 annually. On the first of October 2006, twelve journalists from Palestine, Jordan, Lebanon, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Morocco and Tunisia traveled to Chicago's North Western University for four weeks class based courses to be followed by six weeks of internship in a major US media outlet. Also 5 journalists from Palestine, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon have been chosen to receive grants to produce documentary films on controversial Arab social issues.

AmmanNet wins Gold Medal from Pan Arab Media Awards

AmmanNet, the Arab world's first Internet radio station, won the gold medal at the 2006 Pan Arab Media Awards. The ceremony, in its second year was held at the Hyatt Regency Hotel in Amman, Thursday April 28. The first award ceremony was held in Dubai.

The Beirut registered Award is supported by the Arab League. The award aims to "promote the innovative spirit of web designers to meet professional and international standards, to promote intellectual and production opportunities."
Daoud Kuttab founder of AmmanNet hailed the prize as a recognition by the Arab world that the Net can be a strategic instrument to bypass traditional roadblocks to independent media in general and independent radio in particular.

Future Outlook

As we celebrate our sixth year, we are asked by many, what next? Well to begin with, we plan to continue what we are doing, namely providing a professional and truthful alternative source of information to our people. AmmanNet in its web and FM radio outlets will continue in developing, learning and pushing the limits of free expression.

We hope to also widen our activities both in Jordan and in nearby Arab countries. In Jordan we are looking forward to developing, partnering and at times establishing new radio stations that shares our beliefs and ideas about the independence of media. We will continue to lobby the Jordanian parliament and government to make further reforms in media legislation opening up the waves for more independent radio stations and removing the restrictions, especially the exorbitant fees that are applied to community –based radios.

If our efforts to introduce community radio stations throughout Jordan are successful, we would like to create a network of all these stations with the aim of exchanging content. Of special interest to us then would be the aim of creating a truly independent national news content which could be compiled as a result of input from the different stations and then distributed back to them so that they can, if they wish, have access to national news content or national news bulletins.

Furthermore, we expect to continue in our mission to extend technical and media training help to fellow media practitioners in the Arab world and in any other location where help is needed.

Citizens media is also an area of growth we hope to move into in the coming years. This can be in the form of training and giving air to armature reporters or in producing a blogging program that combines internet blogging with on air blogging that will be read along with reactions to those blogs. The program will also include interviewing bloggers and allowing them to use the airwaves to present their thoughts.

We would also like to continue working on expanding our professional media monitoring project so as to include as many Arab media outlets as possible. We would love to have a chance to produce a program monitoring Arab satellite stations as well as local Jordanian broadcasters. It was from the one time that we focused on reviewing Jordanian radio and TV stations using actualities from these stations that we received a very high volume of listeners and web browsers.

Another dream of ours is to produce a radio news parody. The Arab world is lacking in using comedy as means to critique political actions and news. A sarcastic news program can be a successful instrument of reform by critiquing politicians using comedy.

While for a long time we have avoided using the Internet to deliver video, we feel now that the success of short internet video casting will provide an opportunity to delve in this highly attractive media field. We might start by including some filming, then posting on the internet video reports and ultimately develop into the idea of video webcasting our live radio programs.