# Media & Entertainment: Strategy Consulting Projects Summer 2021

**Update: 3.31.21**

**Course: B8685-1**

**Days & Dates: M/W mostly; instead of Memorial Day, will meet the Friday\* in advance**

**A Term (May 10 to June 17)**

**Start Time: 12:05 PM, End Time: 1:45 PM**

**Credits: 1.5**

**ONLINE class, zoom credentials**

[**https://gsb-columbia-edu.zoom.us/j/94993737800?pwd=SzhGTXNwNC9GN0wzU1gyaHVlK3ZUdz09**](https://gsb-columbia-edu.zoom.us/j/94993737800?pwd=SzhGTXNwNC9GN0wzU1gyaHVlK3ZUdz09)

**Meeting ID: 949 9373 7800**

**Password: 327344**

**Adjunct Associate Professor Ava Seave**

Phone: 212 222 0025 (office off campus/messages) or 917 279 6270 (mobile)

Office hours: By appointment

Email: as2486@columbia.edu

**General Course Description**

Very helpful, but in no way a requirement: One media course and/or one strategy course and/or professional experience at a media company.

In “Media & Entertainment: Strategy Consulting Projects,” the concepts and theories introduced in previous media and strategy courses will be applied in a practical way to problems brought to the class as projects from real companies and their managers.

The ultimate goal of this class is for students to have team experience in helping companies recognize and solve strategic media problems.

Among the techniques the students will work on

* Industry mapping
* SCP: Structure/Conduct/Performance analysis
* Market sizing
* Defining the goals of a project
* Defining and understanding scope
* Value propositions and Value curves
* Mapping Business Systems
* Introduction to Business Canvas and Minimal viable product

The half-semester course will introduce techniques to perform strategy consulting for media companies and teach students how to apply these techniques to real projects from real companies. In the seventh week, the teams will present their findings to the sponsoring companies.

To master these skills, each week students will be given specific tools to work through each concept and will to apply these concepts in several ways:

* to current situations of well-known companies and industries
* to a case about an evolving media SaaS company and to a case about a French media company
* to the company project they have been assigned to

Each team will do brief presentations in 11 out of the 12 classes. The teams will have an opportunity to work in a break out room for a portion of each class.

The class is limited to 28 students. There will be four teams of seven members each. Team work, and active participation in each and every class will be required.  Check in meetings (zoom or by phone) with sponsor companies are required each week. Collaboration is expected and encouraged throughout the course.

The class may be assigned some readings throughout the class which will be applicable to certain problems we will be discussing.

**Which companies?**

* [dot.LA](https://dot.la/) -- a news and events company with a mission of shining a light on the innovation in the L.A. startup and tech community (project brief below)
* [The New Republic](https://newrepublic.com/) – politically progressive opinion web site and print magazine (project brief below)
* [Apartment Therapy](https://www.apartmenttherapy.com/) -- a home and decor site (project brief below)
* [Music and The Brain (Building for the Arts)](https://bfany.org/music-brain/)  – brings music literacy and classroom keyboard instruction to under-resourced students (project brief below)

**Before the class begins**

* Pre class reading: Introduction and Chapters 1, 2 and 3 of The Curse of the Mogul: What’s Wrong with the World’s Leading Media Companies (Knee, Greenwald, Seave; Penguin 2009.)
* Submit your resume on Canvas where requested
* Submit the survey for your project preferences
* Read and confirm agreement for the class NDA

**Additional Reading assigned after start of term – there may be more.**

* *French News Start-up L'Opinion:  Swimming Upstream in Uncertain Times (Parts A and B)*
* Spotlight on Cumulative Advantage, pages 1-13 (HBR)
	+ Customer Loyalty is Overrated by A.J. Lafley et al
	+ Counterpoint: Old Habits Die Hard but they do die by McGrath
* The Dangers of Categorical Thinking (HBR)
* The Most Underrated Skills in Management (MIT Sloan Review)
* The Dangers of Categorical Thinking (HBR)

**Classroom expectations**

* **Attendance at the first two classes is mandatory, with companies visiting the classroom on Class 2**
* **Attendance to all classes is strongly encouraged, and is expected**
* Except for the first two classes, each class will consist of presentation to the professor (and one other team) of the week’s assignment, team work time and lecture/discussion of the next week’s assignment.

**Class Project Assignments**

* Students will be assigned projects by the professor based as much as possible on student preferences.
* Project assignment mechanics:
	+ Before class begins, I will send a detailed description of the class projects, students can prioritize your preferences, and I will try to honor them as much as possible.
	+ Once assigned to a team, if a student would like to try to switch to another team, he/she has 24 hours to convince someone on the desired team to switch. However, no one is required to switch.
	+ Only contact me after the switch is made to let me know. Do not involve me in any kind of discussion or negotiation.
* The presentation to the company will consist of a presentation deck plus any back up analysis and research that is appropriate

**Grades and how you get them**

Grades will be based on

* the quality of the work for the client,
* class participation during the full class and in breakout sessions,
* weekly completion of assignments that will be presented to the prof in breakout sessions,
* revision of these assignments if requested
* and the final presentation (group, type A) to your company’s executives in the seventh/exam week.
* The deliverable for the presentation will consist of a presentation deck plus any back up analysis and research that is appropriate.
* You will also be given a short quiz at the end of the semester (multiple choice) to test your retention of major principles discussed.

**Class Dates**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Class #** | **Day** | **Date** |
| Class 1 MANDATORY | **Monday** | **10-May** |
| Class 2 MANDATORY | **Wednesday** | **12-May** |
| Class 3 | **Monday** | **17-May** |
| Class 4 | **Wednesday** | **19-May** |
| Class 5 | **Monday** | **24-May** |
| Class 6 | **Wednesday** | **26-May** |
| Class 7 | **Friday\*** | **28-May** |
| Class 8 | **Wednesday** | **2-Jun** |
| Class 9 | **Monday** | **7-Jun** |
| Class 10 | **Wednesday** | **9-Jun** |
| Class 11 | **Monday** | **14-Jun** |
| Class 12 | **Wednesday** | **16-Jun** |
| *Presentation for the companies should be scheduled June 17 to June 24* |

**dot.LA**

<https://dot.la/>

**dot.LA’s founders believe that the media property -- an events and digital news organization covering the startup and tech scene – could work beyond Los Angeles. They are interested in identifying other cities where a similar media property can play an essential role in creating a more vibrant tech and startup hub. What are two other markets that the founders should consider?**

About dot.LA

dot.LA was founded in 2020, with a $4 million round of [seed](https://www.crunchbase.com/organization/dot-la) financing. “dot.LA is a digital newsroom covering L.A.'s startup and tech community. dot.LA’s mission is to celebrate and empower the Los Angeles startup and tech community, fueling innovation around the world.”

(From the website)

[*From Spencer Rascoff, Co-Founder*](https://dot.la/st/about) “I found that L.A. has all the ingredients necessary for a vibrant tech and startup ecosystem: angel investors, early- and late-stage VCs, private equity, unicorns, big exits, public companies, and great universities. ….The tech and startup scene in L.A. is geographically spread out (from Venice and Santa Monica to the west, to downtown L.A. and Silver Lake to the east; from the north San Fernando Valley to El Segundo to the South), and is spread across so many industries (aerospace, gaming, ecommerce, AdTech, FoodTech, media, and more). Because of its breadth and diversity, no one seemed to have a good handle on the size and scope of the overall LA tech scene. There was no town crier to unify the community and to shine a light on it. In short, the missing ingredient was journalism.

“That's where dot.LA comes in. We are a news and events company with a mission of shining a light on the innovation in the L.A. startup and tech community….dot.LA will be here to chronicle it all. Our newsroom is already staffed with 7 incredible reporters from places like The Wall Street Journal, the Associated Press, the Los Angeles Times and NPR. With more reporters dedicated to covering Los Angeles startups and entrepreneurship than any other news outlet, dot.LA's reporting team will tell the stories of great L.A. startups and tech companies.

“I hope dot.LA can play another important role as we enter this new decade. At this moment, L.A. has a distinct advantage. We can go into this decade with our eyes wide open, and we can make intentional decisions about our values. We can create a shared culture that will see us through and beyond that explosive growth. We can learn from the other start-ups hubs that came before us, and ensure we don't make the same mistakes. We can -- and should -- prioritize diversity, equity and inclusion at the beginning of our growth, when it can become ingrained into how we run our businesses…. L.A. is hungry for dot.LA.”

The Project:

dot.LA’s founders believe that the media property -- an events and digital news organization covering the startup and tech scene – could work beyond Los Angeles. They are interested in identifying other cities where a similar media property can play an essential role in creating a more vibrant tech and startup hub. What are two other markets that the founders should consider? In fact, the founders of dot.LA were inspired by Geekwire in Seattle and TechCrunch in the Bay Area. They consider these media properties “fantastic sources of journalism and essential parts of their communities.”

To start the project, students will do a literature search/desk research to uncover studies, consumer or trade articles or other data or rankings about regions or cities which are seeing a lot of start-up activity technology, media or science. They will develop a list of about 8 geographic regions that are emerging tech hubs. With the help of dot.LA, they will identify 20 to 30 factors that might be relevant to the success of dot.X, and assemble a dataset for the selected cities. These factors may include such things as presence and size of universities, demographics, types and numbers of start ups and tech companies, etc. They will also look at media properties (that might now or had previously existed) covering the business and tech scene, even as a part of broader geographical coverage, for each of these towns and do a mini-competitive analysis of the media for each area

The students will put together a generalized Business Canvas summary of media and events companies (using dot.LA, GeekWire and TechCrunch) to understand and define what will be the business dynamics for a success?

Comparing the Business Canvas insights with the 8 cities’ data points, the students will recommend their top two suggestions for expansion to new cities.

The deliverables at the end of the project are

* A slide presentation which will include
	+ Summaries of the data set and the team’s logic in how they analyzed it
		- “Scoring” of about 8 potential geographies for vibrancy of tech and demographics
	+ Competitive analyses of the media for the 8 geographies
		- “Scoring” of the capability of the current media properties to be in competition with a new dot.X
	+ Final recommendations
* Back up material:
	+ An excel sheet/workbook and/or word doc with supporting data from the competitive and market analysis
	+ A word doc summarizing the literature search/desk research that includes title, publication, date and link.

**The New Republic**

<https://newrepublic.com/>

**The New Republic, a storied politically liberal media property, has gone through numerous changes -- ownership, platform and editorial staff -- over the last ten years. At this juncture, TNR wants (1) to understand the size of the potential market of readers going forward and (2) to articulate a consolidated and consistent value proposition that is true for its readers and users, no matter how they access the stories and content.**

About The New Republic (From the website)

“The New Republic was founded in 1914 as an intellectual call to arms for public-minded intellectuals advocating liberal reform in a new industrial age. Now, two decades into a new century, TNR remains, if anything, more committed than ever to its first principles—and most of all, to the need to rethink outworn assumptions and political superstitions as radically changing conditions demand.

“Cofounder Herbert Croly declared that TNR was an “experiment”—and today we rededicate that experiment, and our magazine’s legacy, to the urgent challenges of reclaiming the democratic faith amid dangerous, deranging new upheavals in our common world.

TNR is a subscription publication with a paywall and advertising. A subscriber can pay $20 for a digital only access; adding the 10 times per year print is priced at $30 annually. In addition, the subscription package includes over 100 years of TNR articles, the New Republic app and a daily newsletter.

Audience stats:

*Digital Audience information*

6.4 million Average Pageviews

2.1 million Average Uniques

1.4 minutes Session Time

2.8 Average sessions

*Google Analytics, December 2020 Six Month Average*

*Social Footprint*

161,000 FB followers

175, 000 Twitter followers

*Facebook, Twitter, January 2020*

*Print Audience*

61,000 per issue

92% rated TNR Very Good/Excellent

108 minutes is average time reading an issue

53% read 4 out of 4 issues

*CDS 12/20; Reader Survey 10/20*

The Project:

The New Republic, a storied politically liberal media property, has gone through numerous changes -- ownership, platform and editorial staff -- over the last ten years. At this juncture, TNR would like the student team to delve into research and analysis to help them (1) to understand the size of the potential market of readers going forward and (2) to articulate a consolidated and consistent value proposition that is true for its readers and users, no matter how they access the stories and content.

**A Market Analysis Phase**

This phase will be taking a deeper look at the landscape of the liberal/progressive news organizations in the U.S. —understanding how they are positioned politically, their audience sizes and demographics, their platforms and news products and their business models. TNR is interested in seeing if the students can form some hypotheses about how they might size the audience and use that logic to drive some educated thoughts about what the market potential is. For instance, recently they looked at all Democrats who voted and then at the progressive/liberal end of those voters to speculate how many potential readers there might be in the U.S. If possible, determine how they may have changed in the last few years. This will be completed with a combination of desk research of the media property themselves and industry trades and “expert” interviews as available.

TNR will provide a list of market players and a few experts to interview; the students can supplement these lists if appropriate/needed. TNR will also make available to students any internal research they have compiled about direct and indirect competition.

At the end this phase, we’ll want to have a strong analysis of the industry landscape that answers the following questions:

* What’s the overall market size today?
* And what are the sizes of the “pieces”? (vis a vis such measures as Uniques, Pageviews, time spent, circulation, followers, etc.
* TNR demographics print and web
* Size and usage of platforms:
	+ - Social (Twitter, Facebook and Instagram)
		- Website
		- Newsletters
		- Print
		- App
		- Podcast
		- Events
* Did the size of the audience for progressive/liberal media change during the Trump administration? Is there any indication what the next year might hold?
* Which properties/platforms seem to be growing? Which properties/platforms seem to be shrinking? What new ones are developing?
* What are the important emerging trends/factors, e.g., modifications of business models, new product development, etc.?
* Note: Competitive set: The Atlantic, The Nation, Mother Jones, The New Yorker

**Value proposition phase**

The students will formulate with TNR a draft value proposition, using the NABC method (which is one of the tools taught by Professor Seave.) To “pressure test” if this is accurate, the students will conduct in-depth-interviews (IDIs) of 10 to15 readers of various demographics and their reading habits for TNR.

The students will find the readers for the IDI by designing a very short closed-end question qualifying survey (which will be fielded through TNR website and newsletters) which will have some basic value prop validation, but it will mostly serve to find volunteers for a 10 question I.D.I -- to delve deeper and more illustratively into how the readers feel about TNR’s value to them.

**Final deliverables:**

* A slide presentation which will include
	+ Competitive analysis and market analysis and outlook
	+ Value prop
		- Original rough draft of the Value proposition (and the logic behind it)
		- Summarized information of the screener survey
		- Summarized information from the “themes” of the qualitative research
		- How the value proposition might be revised or further tested based on the research
* Back up material:
	+ An excel sheet/workbook or word doc with supporting data from the competitive and market analysis
	+ Word doc with cleaned up write ups of IDIs

**Apartment Therapy Media**

Main Content Sites

<https://www.apartmenttherapy.com/>

<https://www.thekitchn.com/>

<https://www.cubbyathome.com/>

**There is an evolution underway in e-commerce that pits publishers who are expanding in the e-commerce space, such as Apartment Therapy, against pure e-comm players. Which publishers have been most successful at expanding into e-commerce? And should the path forward be for Apartment Therapy’s recent vintage furniture commerce business, Bazaar?**

**About Apartment Therapy Media**

Founded in 2001 and developed into a media company in 2005, Apartment Therapy Media helps people make their homes more organized, healthy and beautiful by connecting them to a wealth of resources, ideas and community through its brands, Apartment Therapy and Kitchn.

Apartment Therapy is the leading independent home site, designed to inspire anyone to live a happy life at home. Launched by interior designer Maxwell Ryan (nicknamed "the apartment therapist") as a weekly newsletter for clients, Apartment Therapy grew to become a top source for design inspiration, real-life solutions and an inside look at how people live. Apartment Therapy is a Webby-award winning brand attracting a monthly global audience of 12MM with content spanning across house tours, home projects, organizing & cleaning, real estate, wellness and home buying.

Helmed by award-winning Editor in Chief Faith Durand, Kitchn is created by a nationally distributed staff of home cooks, reaching a mass audience with a personal voice. Covering the 360-degree food cycle, Kitchn guides women as they plan, shop and cook to support busy, fulfilling lives. Kitchn lives across multiple platforms, reaching a monthly global audience of 25MM.

As a privately owned, founder and CEO led, company, we do not need to cater to the demands of public shareholders or PE/VC investors. Nearly all of our competitors in home and food categories (in Comscore) are the result of traffic rollups resulting from acquisition strategies (PE driven) or network rollups.

**The Apartment Therapy Business**

Historically, Apartment Therapy has relied on display advertising as its primary revenue source. The company has sought to diversify by expanding aggressively into custom/native content, e-commerce, licensing, video, and experiential. Over the past several years, the company has grown meaningfully across all categories. E-Commerce has seen some of the most significant growth and has roughly doubled in scale over the past year.

Currently, the company has 115 employees. 13% of 2020 revenue came from commerce.

**About the project**

The lines between shopping and media have become increasingly blurred as e-comm startups take advantage of low barriers to entry, while established media companies seek to monetize their sizable audiences beyond display advertising.

Apartment Therapy Media has been expanding its e-commerce capabilities and has seen strong growth in revenue. Currently on-site commerce (not including Bazaar) is limited to affiliate transactions, where we collect an 8-10% commission on products sold on other sites. To scale this business, we have invested in building proprietary technology platforms to better manage, track, and optimize product information. We have also built a dedicated e-commerce content team responsible for sourcing products and creating content related to those products.

In ~2017, ApartmentTherapy acquired a site called KRRB.com which was relaunched in 2019 as [Bazaar](https://marketplace.apartmenttherapy.com/). The site is intended to sell vintage furniture and home décor but this is not moderated. It has about 150k page views per month but no revenue as the transactions are carried out outside of the platform, directly between buyer and seller. Organic search results are the primary source of traffic for the site. Bazaar is a 2-sided marketplace, meaning sellers opt into our platform, then sell their products through it.

**Part 1: Competitive Analysis**

Take a look at publishers who also have meaningful e-comm presences (e.g. buzzfeed, food52), pure e-comm companies (e.g. chairish, 1stdibs, houzz) as well as upstarts (e.g. [aptdeco, pamono, kaiyo, modloft](https://www.aptdeco.com/)) -- a list of sites will be provided to the project team. There is an evolution underway in e-commerce that pits publishers who are expanding in the e-commerce space, such as Apartment Therapy, against pure e-comm players.

Which publishers have been most successful at expanding into e-commerce?

Evaluate and compare the brand positioning, selling proposition, and transactional capabilities.

* What is the role of product curation in driving sales?
* How are brands positioned within their sites?
* What is driving their success?

Evaluate the process of finding and purchasing furniture. How should AT should be positioned relative to competitors and where are the gaps?

**Part 2: Charting the path forward**

* What path would you recommend for Bazaar?
* Should we be a 2-sided marketplace, or source and sell directly to consumers?
* Should we sell both vintage and new products?
* How big can this business grow? How can we use the fact that we are a publisher as a competitive advantage as compared to a pure e-comm player?
* How should commerce be positioned relative to content?
* Propose a unique selling proposition – why should people buy these products from us?

**Sites**

**Main Content Sites**

<https://www.apartmenttherapy.com/>

<https://www.thekitchn.com/>

<https://www.cubbyathome.com/>

**E-Comm Marketplace for Vintage Furnishings**

<https://marketplace.apartmenttherapy.com/>

**Advertising / Market Positioning**

<https://advertising.apartmenttherapy.com/>

**Music and the Brain (from Building for the Arts)**

[www.musicandthebrain.org](http://www.musicandthebrain.org/)

**Music and the Brain is primarily funded by its non-profit parent,** [**Building for the Arts**](http://www.bfany.org)**; institutional funding from NYC’s Department of Cultural Affairs and several foundations; and, in a few instances, program revenue from schools that pay partner fees to engage in the program. But this has become hard to sustain for a variety of reasons, including availability of school funds, high demand from financially challenged schools, and the COVID-19-mandated shutdown of Building for the Arts’ primary direct source of funds, Theatre Row. Theatre Row is a complex of theaters for off and off-off Broadway theater companies, and not programmatically related directly to MATB. In order to sustainably continue growing the program’s impact, BFANY is seeking to find and then build out an individual donor base exclusively for MATB.**

About Music and the Brain (From the organization)

“[Music and the Brain](http://www.musicandthebrain.org) brings a music literacy curriculum, whole-class keyboard instruction, and ongoing professional development to schools in under-resourced communities. We empower music educators and ensure equity for all learners, helping students build skills to succeed academically and in life.”

“Now in 320+ schools nationwide, we have a strong presence in our hub cities—NYC (140 schools), Philadelphia, PA (30 schools); Miami, FL (62 schools); New Orleans, LA; Ferguson, MO; and Nashville, TN—with additional schools in nine other states. Our highly scalable program has trained more than 500 teachers who, in turn, have taught more than 450,000 students, helping them build cognitive, social-emotional, and fine motor skills to succeed academically and in life. Aligned with National Association for Music Education standards, Music and the Brain is dedicated to serving low-income communities—approximately 90% of our partner schools are Title I, and all these schools receive the benefits of the program free of charge.”

“Music and the Brain All Access – a brand-new hybrid learning platform – will ensure that students continue making progress throughout COVID and beyond. Music literacy instruction outside the classroom, until this point, has been limited to students fortunate enough to pay for private lessons. Now, with the aid of a tablet or laptop and Music and the Brain All Access’ state of the art virtual keyboard, we will allow many students to play an instrument at home for the very first time—facilitating progress even while they cannot be in school. Even after school resumes onsite full-time, teachers will be able to assign piano/keyboard homework, with students playing and directly submitting their recordings via Music and the Brain All Access.”



Music and the Brain is primarily funded by its non-profit parent, Building for the Arts; institutional funding from NYC’s Department of Cultural Affairs and several foundations; and, in a few instances, program revenue from schools that pay partner fees to engage in the program. But this has become hard to sustain for a variety of reasons, including availability of school funds, high demand from financially challenged schools, and the COVID-19-mandated shutdown of Building for the Arts’ primary direct source of funds, Theatre Row. Theatre Row is a complex of theaters for off and off-off Broadway theater companies, and not programmatically related directly to MATB. In order to sustainably continue growing the program’s impact, BFANY is seeking to find and then build out an individual donor base exclusively for MATB.

To explain this in more detail, the direct beneficiaries of MATB are the music teachers to whom the organization provides keyboards, curriculum materials, and professional development. And the indirect -- though most important beneficiaries-- are their students (generally, pre-K through 8th grade). Neither of those groups, though, has the potential to give. Other performing arts organizations (e.g., theater companies or symphonies with an education department tied to their productions) do in fact have a direct tie between their audiences (potential donors) and their educational initiatives. There's no direct tie between Building for the Arts primary direct source of funds - Theatre Row’s performing arts companies and their audiences – with the teachers/students MATB serves.

The student team will construct an environmental scan of nonprofits in the arts and education spaces (and beyond) that may be models for building an individual donor base for MATB. Key for finding appropriate nonprofits will be to identify organizations that have robust individual donor bases that don’t necessarily interact with the beneficiaries. Social service organizations, environmental groups, and even animal welfare orgs seem to fit.

The team will do desk research and work with the BFANY executives to come up with a list of 7 to 10 such organizations as well as a list of experts to interview, which might include PR professionals, consultants in the area and Executive Directors of nonprofits who have built individual donor bases. BFANY will also make available to students any internal research they have compiled earlier and help with introductions with non-competing orgs that have overlap, e.g., nonprofits in Science Education, Learning and Attention Issues, with whom they have shared information about impact in social-emotional learning or academic skills, as examples.

The students will answer these questions about the environmental scan set of nonprofits:

* What percentage of funds are from individual donors, from foundations and from earned income?
* What are the methods that individual donors are solicited?
* How do these organizations find new individual donors? And what do they say is the most effective way (e.g., social media, pr, corporate partnerships, influencers, direct response, etc.)
* Do these organizations do cross promotions with other groups to find or share donors?

The final deliverables will first be a data set and overall themes from the environmental scan and from that a report about what can be applied/tested with MATB. They are especially interested in learning how and where to most effectively find the individual donors, how to retain them and a broad idea of how much MATB might bring in.