ROGER EBERT

January 19, 2012

Dear fellow alum,

As we begin 2012, Illini Media Company faces grave financial uncertainty. As a former editor-in-chief of The Daily Illini, and a (fired) disc jockey of WPGU, please consider my urgent request.

After 140 years, it is possible The Daily Illini could cease publication. This would break the hearts of many of us.

Several factors have contributed to Illini Media's plight, including many of the challenges facing media across the country. In recent years, revenues from print sales have declined steadily and radio sales for WPGU have been flat. Illini Media's financial reserves were depleted in 2006 to complete construction of the new building in Campustown. While housing all the media units in a central on-campus location was a great idea, the recession soon took hold and Illini Media now faces myriad financial challenges. Mortgage payments are delinquent and approximately \$250,000 in back payments are owed to *The News-Gazette* for printing *The Daily Illini*. Understandably, *The News-Gazette* is not in a position to extend credit much longer. Multiple attempts to access Illini Media's approximate \$2M in equity in order to relieve payables have been denied by its lending institution.

In September, Illini Media's newly-appointed publisher began to implement a new and aggressive business plan that, according to Illini Media's board of directors and their lending institution, would put them on solid footing by late 2012. But their short-term need to pay *The News-Gazette* and other vendors (such as AP) is urgent.

You are among the alumni we feel may have the capacity and the willingness to help us. Your investment would help put this institution on solid ground as it moves forward to implement a new, sustainable business model.

Several strategic steps have been taken that ensure that your money will be put to good use:

- Illini Media has acquired a UIUC department tenant to rent excess space on its fourth floor.
- A letter of preliminary interest has been signed by a potential first floor long-term tenant.
- Plans are underway to relocate WPGU to the third floor, allowing all student-led media units to operate more efficiently and collegially on two floors.
- There have been aggressive budget cuts, including consolidation and restructuring of senior (paid) staffing roles.
- Sales areas have been restructured and commission incentives have been redesigned to be commensurate with performance.
- A fundraising campaign has been launched to engage thousands of Illini Media alumni. My letter is part of that.

Foundations and other private sources are being cultivated, new profit centers are being explored and new revenue-sharing models have been created. Illini Media has plans in place to address the transference of print to electronic media, but they desperately need funds to provide up-to-date technology resources. Given that their core readers, UIUC students, are inclined to read the DI on their smart phones and other digital devices, Illini Media is uniquely positioned as a student-run company to excel in the new world of electronic distribution of news and entertainment.

For over 100 years, Illini Media has been providing outstanding professional development for aspiring media professionals. Each year, the majority of their approximately 300 students are placed in jobs at many of the top media companies and related businesses throughout the nation. Many, including myself, would say that they owe their careers at least in part to their experience at Illini Media. It's now time to give back.

I encourage you to contact Lil Levant, publisher and general manager, at 217-337-8310 or levant@illinimedia.com to discuss any of this in more detail and hopefully arrange a financial contribution. Thanks for considering my request.

Best regards,

Roger Ebert