The Future of Journalism

**Papers from a conference organised by
the BBC College of Journalism**

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Preface

This book is the result of a BBC College of Journalism conference held in London at the end of 2008.

The Future of Journalism brought together journalists, editors, academics and commentators – from both inside the BBC and beyond – to debate current issues about journalism that arose in their daily work.

Today, as technology changes the lives of both journalists and their customers, assumptions about what journalism is and how it is practiced are being re-examined. These papers, from speakers at the conference, may help others embrace the new opportunities without abandoning the best of the values and culture that have shaped journalism over many decades.

I would like to thank the contributors, who kindly agreed to revisit their subjects and turn them into these chapters.

Charles Miller
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May 2009

1. The End of Fortress Journalism

By Peter Horrocks

Peter Horrocks was appointed Director of BBC World Service in February 2009. He had been Head of the BBC's Multimedia Newsroom since 2005, and previously the BBC's Head of Current Affairs. Since joining the BBC in October 1981 as a news trainee, he has been the Editor of both Newsnight and Panorama, the BBC's domestic flagship television current affairs programmes. Peter won BAFTA awards in 1997 and 2005 for his editorship of Newsnight and for the documentary series The Power of Nightmares respectively.

Most journalists have grown up with a fortress mindset. They have lived and worked in proud institutions with thick walls. Their daily knightly task has been simple: to battle journalists from other fortresses. But the fortresses are crumbling and courtly jousts with fellow journalists are no longer impressing the crowds. The end of

fortress journalism is deeply unsettling for us and requires a profound change in the mindset and culture of journalism.

Fortress journalism has been wonderful. Powerful, long-established institutions provided the perfect base for strong journalism. The major news organisations could nurture skills, underwrite risk and afford expensive journalism. The competition with other news organisations inspired great journalism and if the journalist got into trouble – legally, physically or with the authorities – the news organisation would protect and support. It has been familiar and comfortable for the journalist.

But that world is rapidly being eroded. The themes are familiar. Economic pressures – whether in the public or private sectors – are making the costs of the fortresses unsustainable. Each week brings news of redundancies and closures. The legacy costs of buildings, printing presses, studios and all the other structural supports of the fortress are proving too costly for the revenues that can now be generated.

Internet-based journalism may be the most significant contributor to this business collapse. But the cultural impact on what the audience wants from journalism is as big a factor as the economics. In the fortress world the consumption of journalism was through clearly defined products and platforms – a TV or radio programme, a magazine or a newspaper. But in the blended world of internet journalism all those products are available within a single platform and mental space. The user can now click and flit between each set of news. Or they can use an aggregator to pull together all the information they require. The reader may never be aware from which fortress (or brand) the information has come.

The consequence of this change in users' consumption has only dimly been understood by the majority of journalists. Most of the major news organisations had the assumption that their news product provided the complete set of news requirements for their users. But in an internet world, users see the total information set available on the web as their 'news universe'. I might like BBC for video news, the Telegraph or Daily Mail for sports results and the New York Times for international news. I can penetrate the barriers of the fortresses with ease.

The ability of audiences to pull together their preferred news is bringing the walls of the fortresses tumbling down. In effect, the users see a single unified news universe and use technology (e.g. Google, Digg etc) to get that content to come together. So if the users require collaborative content, what of the competitively minded news organisation? Clearly competition will still generate originality, enterprise journalism and can help to lower costs. But as a business, each organisation will need to choose very carefully where it has a comparative advantage. If agency news is available, there will be no advantage in creating it yourself. In each specialised area of news, organisations need to assess their unique advantages and reduce effort where they don't have such advantages.

Reducing effort in any journalistic section is anathema to the old fortress mindset. Even more disturbingly, it might also mean co-operating explicitly. If the BBC is best in news video and the Telegraph best in text sports reports, why shouldn't they syndicate that content to each other and save effort? Jeff Jarvis, Professor of Interactive Journalism at the City University of New York, has

coined the neatest way of describing this: "Cover what you do best. Link to the rest."

That linked approach requires a new kind of journalism, the opposite of fortress journalism. It is well described as "networked journalism", a coinage popularised by Charlie Beckett at the LSE/Polis. And it requires organisations to be much better connected, both internally and externally. That kind of networking can be unnatural for the journalist or executive brought up in the fortress mentality. What changes might be required?

It means moving from a culture which is identified by the news unit you are in towards a culture based on audience understanding. So as a journalist don't think of the world as being identified by the programme you work on or the network you provide for. Don't think of the world solely through your paper or magazine. If you are a subject-based journalist, remember that the reader is likely to be consuming your journalism within a much wider frame of reference. They are probably not consuming news through your specialist prism. You'll need to link with specialists in other fields. As a technology journalist, you might get more coming to your story via a link from the entertainment or consumer section than those choosing to read about technology.

News organisations can assist their teams by providing much richer data about how audiences are consuming. And we are helped in this by technological changes. On-demand journalism automatically generates much more specific data about audience usage of stories and story types. Most online sites have real-time systems that provide editors with information on story popularity.

There is a danger that such information systems could

prompt editors to prioritise stories simply according to the numbers. A recent study by Andrew Currah[1] identified a move towards a narrower agenda of sports and celebrity stories in newspapers as being partly caused by an over-concentration on these techniques. The BBC has developed test Beta software that allows the main BBC news front page to be presented according to the order of users' click preferences – i.e. the most popular stories at the top. It creates a news product that is pretty bizarre and one that would not, in the BBC's judgement, be wanted by audiences.

Users still want clear professional editorial judgment. But that judgement can be much better informed by a sophisticated understanding of the data. That is especially important in considering user experience, design and user journeys.

As well as improving internet-based journalism, audience insight is also the foundation of an important cultural shift across platforms. The BBC has in recent years put significant effort into improving the availability of its audience research to staff. BBC television and radio producers have a much greater understanding of their audiences through qualitative data such as the daily internet survey, the Pulse. That provides overnight data on the audience's judgement of the quality of programmes and news items. In 2009 the BBC will be developing further techniques that will allow us, for the first time, to analyse audience consumption alongside demographics. So, if we want to, we might be able to tell which stories were most popular among young audiences, or men,

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[1]   http://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/about/news/item/article/whats-happening-to-our-news.html

or ethnic minorities. We know that there are certain parts of the audience that consume BBC News less than others. Detailed information will enable us to address these audience gaps. However we will always make sure that BBC News' editorial values are our guiding principles and not simply 'chasing audiences'.

Yet the biggest impact of greater use of audience insight is on overall organisational attitudes. Within the BBC, the research for the Creative Future project on journalism and for its re-assessment of the BBC News brand proved conclusively that, for audiences in the UK and internationally, the aspect of the BBC that they most appreciate is 'BBC News'. They value the BBC's individual news programmes, but it is that overall concept that matters most.

The integrity and dominance of the BBC News brand was a powerful driver in the rebranding of BBC News in 2008. But it has also acted as a powerful organisational and cultural driver. BBC News has been re-organised on multimedia lines. Instead of departmental teams gathering each morning in platform-aligned meetings, there is a single conference where all of BBC News comes together to discuss priority stories. Tithe barriers and secrecy within the organisation (our mini-fortresses) have been torn down. Programme plans and running orders that were once hidden are now open. In determining whether a piece of information or content should be held back from another part of BBC News or shared, we apply the test of a notional member of the audience looking at us. In almost all cases that mythical BBC licence payer would want good journalism shared as widely as possible.

It has also prompted major re-organisation. In the past, as various BBC services and programmes were launched, they were often added to the existing organisation without being properly integrated. The structure of BBC News could be imagined as a series of archaeological sedimentary layers, with the attitudes and working practices living on from the initial foundation of that unit. Recent reforms have adopted a holistic and integrated approach to working practices and all the other accretions of the many different journalistic operating models accumulated over the years.

Audience insight has therefore driven cultural and organisational change. It will undoubtedly drive further cultural change as all the resources of BBC journalism, in the UK's nations and regions and across the BBC World Service, are drawn together and leveraged for the benefit of all our audiences.

This further change is likely to have the biggest effect in the BBC's online content creation and distribution. When BBC Online was launched, with great foresight over ten years ago, it was created as an adjunct to, rather than an integral part of, the BBC's broadcasting production base. And BBC Online was not itself integrated. Instead the model that was generally adopted was of each division of the BBC launching separate websites related to their particular programme brands or subject genres. So, for instance, arts content could be produced separately within News, Television and Radio. Information about climate change might sit within a science website, a Radio 4 environmental programme site or the BBC News website. A golden opportunity to create a website and an organisational structure that aligned with audience information needs was missed.

In recent years attempts have been made to create more cross-linking, and technology is now being employed to allow more automatic cross-fertilization. But the BBC website structure is still a better approximation of the organisational diagram than it is a mental map of the BBC's purposes and its audience needs. The only answer to this long-term is a BBC-wide appreciation of overall audience requirements and a ruthless focus on what we do best and what content we can provide, as a coherent proposition, to all our audiences.

What closer integration of content also needs to take into account is the proper balance between an efficient, centralised system and the needs of the BBC to serve a variety of audience needs. In a resource-constrained organisation the temptation will often be to centralise and standardise. BBC journalists typically describe this as a fear about producing bland 'news nuggets' in a news factory. BBC News has currently negotiated this balance by creating systems that ensure that basic BBC news content (e.g. press conferences, speeches, raw material) is gathered and processed as efficiently as possible. The greater efficiency of those systems leaves more resources available for differentiation around that core. Programme makers are able to chase alternative angles, explanations that illuminate the central news and therefore offer variety around it.

Soon some of these ideas about sharing content might be developed externally through partnerships. The internal dilemmas we have faced around journalistic identity, efficiency and the balance between efficiency and plurality will move to the external debate.

THE FUTURE OF JOURNALISM

The UK and international news industry is under threat from structural and cyclical change. The cyclical factor – the recession and its associated advertising downturn – is combining with structural factors such as the fragmentation of the TV market and the splitting of content and advertising on the internet. The effect of this is to imperil expensive newsgathering operations, at both the local and international level.

The question of possible public intervention to sustain journalism has moved centre stage in the UK. Possible remedies include the easing of regulatory constraints on media consolidation, regulatory pressure on new media businesses like Google to encourage them to return more value to content creators, incentives for charitable giving that could subsidise public interest journalism, the creation of public-private partnerships at the local level, and the possible use of direct public subsidy to support journalism.

The BBC has been undertaking a major rethink of its responsibilities in the face of a collapse in the UK and international news market. The BBC's Director General, Mark Thompson, has put forward a number of ideas for the BBC to partner other organisations – potentially sharing content, technology, facilities and resources[2]. The biggest possible change to the BBC's journalism could be in a partnership to underpin the provision of regional news on commercial TV.

For the BBC's regional journalists, the idea of partnering their long-time rivals in ITV regional news initially came as a shock. But

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[2] http://www.bbc.co.uk/thefuture/partnerships.shtml

it may well be the first portent of a much wider sharing by the BBC to support the UK news industry. If other sectors of the news industry decline, the government has said it would consider the BBC offering widespread support – possibly to commercial radio news, network TV news and online operations at local and national level.

Some of this might not be through formal partnerships but by extending and formalising the underpinning of the media sector that the BBC has often supported. For instance, the BBC could share its audience research, its production technologies, its know-how in multimedia journalism, its training capabilities, like the BBC College of Journalism, and its technological expertise in areas such as metadata. Metadata and the effective 'tagging' of all content will be the lifeblood of the new sharing/linking journalism. So it would be appropriate for the BBC to develop that capability, as it is an organisation that should be the embodiment of sharing.

Beyond the sharing of facilities and capabilities, the BBC might also syndicate its content more widely to other websites and other news organisations. But if the BBC just develops partnerships through providing to others it will not be seizing the real two-way opportunity of partnership. To be true to that the BBC will need to consider taking content from its partners. And, online, it will need to be more generous in its inclusion of content from others and linking outwards. The BBC's strong position in on-demand content provision in the UK needs to be accompanied by a corresponding generosity in directing audiences to others who produce great content.

The BBC Trust has asked the BBC to link out more and there

has been some improvement. But the real barrier to achieving progress in this is the fortress mindset. BBC journalists must realise that they have a wider purpose than just to sustain their own programmes and content. They have a wider responsibility to audiences to direct them to the best content, wherever it comes from. Unless we do this we will never deliver the more open approach to content that the new audience requires and which will be the foundation of a modernised trust in the BBC.

Openness and partnership should help to answer the charge that the BBC is economically over-dominant in the news industry. If it can successfully support the rest of the industry, it could be seen as less of a threat. But it could also answer the charge that it is intellectually over-dominant. The BBC has been accused of adopting a "group-think" on some news stories. By having a wider range of voices internally, welcoming in a wider range of contributors and linking out to a greater diversity of news views and sources, the BBC can adopt the permeability and plurality which the modern audience requires.

But moving towards this networked world will be hard for journalists trained in the fortress mindset. For editors and decision makers it requires balancing the interests of their programme or website with a wider view of audiences. It means a far higher level of collaboration with colleagues than has traditionally been the case. It also means 'inheriting' more shared content from elsewhere in the organisation. Editors can no longer commission and publish content exactly to their own specifications. For many, this is profoundly unsettling. And it may go further and entail more external collaboration – for instance, agreeing shared news

coverage with partners who are also competitors and partnering non-media organisations such as NGOs. This will be tough stuff.

But new news journalists will need the flexibility to cope. They will need to network with the audience as much as they do with their colleagues. The audience is becoming a vast but still untapped news source. The most go-ahead journalists are using social networking tools to help find information and interviewees. Responding on blogs and using those to promote a dialogue with informed members of the audience is leading to improved journalism. It can be time-consuming but it can yield real benefits.

So journalists will need changed culture, changed organisation and an improved understanding of the modern tools of journalism – audience insights, blogging, Twitter, multimedia production. It sounds like being pretty challenging. It's certainly more complex than the old fortress world – of riding out to fight the enemy to the death every day. But I suspect that the public may well appreciate a journalism that puts serving their information needs at its heart, rather than one which is about organising the world in the way that journalists prefer.

2. Introducing Multimedia to the Newsroom

By Zoe Smith

Zoe Smith started in journalism at the age of 15 with a weekly column in the Watford Observer. While at university in Glasgow she wrote for The Herald, and she worked at The Financial Times during her studies at City University in London. A haphazard path from the Observer's internship scheme to Rolling Stone Italy, Press Gazette and the Daily Mail online led her to her current position as an online broadcast journalist at ITV News. She also runs networking events for journalists under 30.

As someone who has 'grown up digital', it's hard to comprehend how news organisations could even question the need to make exciting content available on multiple platforms. The figures speak for themselves. Just Google it.

Nearly a quarter of the world's population use the internet. Every year 200 million join the online revolution. According to Google, the internet is the fastest growing communications

medium in history. When the internet went public in 1983 there were 400 servers. Today there are well over 600 million.

If you don't get why you as a journalist, editor, programme or organisation need to invest intelligently in web platforms, you risk being ignored by an ever growing number of young people for whom television is an irrelevant medium. In his book Grown up Digital, inspired by a $4 million private research study into the habits of young people aged between 11 and 30, Don Tapscott reveals that 74 per cent of the UK's 'Net Generation', if forced to chose, would prefer to live without television rather than the internet.

I learnt first hand the importance of recognising the power of online platforms when Press Gazette, the magazine for which I was the broadcast reporter, was threatened with closure. Its illustrious history spanning more than half a century at the heart of Fleet Street was no protection against the inevitable migration to an increasingly online media landscape. At that point in my early 20s, I realised that to sustain a career in journalism it would be in my interest to embrace the potential of online.

ITV News launched its website as part of newly branded ITV.com in summer 2007. For the first six months, in addition to hosting a news feed of stories reflecting the on-air bulletin, ITV News online focused primarily on gathering user-generated content (UGC) commenting on the top news story of the day to complement the on-air programme in a strand called Uploaded.

The extent to which working on the ITV News website is a multiplatform affair is apparent even in its structure. Generic news content is produced by ITN ON – the digital division staffed by

teams of enthusiastic young people who spend shifts spanning 24-hours gathering content and editing video and text. Added value and exclusive content is produced in the ITV newsroom by two web producers and correspondents, reporters and producers alike. The content is then hosted on a channel within the ITV.com network. We're some way from a fully converged operation.

It was only with the relaunch of News at Ten in January 2008 that the two-person team from the digital end of ITN moved into the ITV Newsroom and started producing and commissioning multimedia content. Encouraging journalists and editors to think about more than one platform has not been simple. Being in the same room doesn't automatically mean that people working on different media will be thinking on the same page.

The *modus operandi* of newsgathering and news output within broadcast operations has been honed over many decades. At ITV News, the process of providing content for various outputs has been operational for barely over a year. A great leap forward has been made by including online producers in the daily programming meetings to get an understanding of what stories are being covered and what angles different bulletins are taking. Efficiency is the key to multiplatform journalism – define a workflow that works for your organisation and ruthlessly stick to it.

In the main, most editors and journalists will admit that they are technically challenged. This culture will have to change as multiplatform journalism becomes an issue more of the present and less of the future. Already we've witnessed the growing importance of 'developer days' where news organisations open the doors to the geeks to come up with inspirational new ways to 'give

your content wings'. The BBC already does this very well through Open Source projects and via Backstage, its web-based developers' network. Collaboration is the key to successful journalism in an increasingly connected and shared media space.

On a daily level, programmers and developers or journalists with programming skills should increasingly be an integral part of journalism teams. Charles Arthur, editor of The Guardian's Technology supplement, blogged: "If you're doing one of those courses where they're making you learn shorthand and so on, take some time to learn to code.

"All sorts of fields of journalism – basically, anywhere you're going to have to keep on top of a lot of data that will be updated, regularly or not – will benefit from being able to analyse and dig into that data, and present it in interesting ways." His advice, although aimed at journalism students, is equally relevant for practicing journalists looking to extend their skills.

Be clear what your organisation hopes to achieve through multiplatform journalism. Respect the technology but make it work for you; just because you have shiny new gadgets doesn't mean they're going to be the best medium for telling all stories. It requires time to craft good journalism, so maybe asking your correspondent to send a vlog (video blog) or even a blog from a breaking news event may not be the best use of their time. If you urgently require content for your website, why not use Twitter? It's less time consuming but still enables users to track a moving story, and is also the perfect vehicle for viewers to share their knowledge with journalists in real time.

Adding a multimedia team to the structure of your newsroom

may be more effective than trying to get current staff to work across all platforms. Understand the key strengths of your journalists and grow these. Why make an on-screen talent write a blog if they're not a natural writer and would be better at producing a vlog? Make the most out of your specialists. At ITN correspondents like Lawrence McGinty, who reports on health and science, and Angus Walker, who covers home affairs, often have a wealth of material behind their stories that may not make it into a two-minute 45 seconds report but which will undoubtedly be of interest to viewers online.

However, it's a mistake to focus only on your star reporters; involve cameramen, producers in creating extra content for online platforms. At ITV News we've made great use of willing and able off-screen staff to shoot video blogs, create picture galleries from places as far afield as the Arctic, the Himalayas and the Gaza Strip. Bearing in mind that the internet is a global phenomenon, the brand value that your on-screen talent has in the UK could well be lost in translation to a global web audience. Don't be afraid to encourage and nurture new talent online.

Gone are the days when viewers only expected to hear from reporters and presenters during news bulletins. They want information when it breaks and increasingly demand an insight into what goes on behind the camera. The rise of opinionated journalism has made blogging more acceptable. But it's important to remember that a blog is ultimately a platform, not just a hyper-personal or informal style of writing.

The increasing appeal of these websites lies in the fact that not only do they allow reporters to break stories and pass on

information outside of traditional broadcast or publication deadlines, but they allow viewers to interact with journalists and each other through comments. This enables the platform to be more than a destination; rather it develops into a network where like-minded people will come to interact.

The web is becoming an increasingly social platform – this is about more than buzzwords like 'Web 2.0'. Around one in every six minutes that people spend online is spent in a social network of some type. In January 2009, Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg noted that, with 150 million people around the world actively using Facebook, if the social network were a country it would be the eighth-most populated in the world, just ahead of Japan, Russia and Nigeria.

Yet if you think you've got the internet cracked, you may wish to reconsider. There is no room to rest on your laurels in this constantly evolving medium. In a recent interview with ITV News, Sir Tim Berners Lee – the professor credited with inventing the World Wide Web – said: "Website designers will get better and better at following guidelines about how to make things work on mobile phones. More and more people are going to be using mobile phones and things you put in your pocket, to access the web. That's a really important move."

Back in 2003, ITN ON pioneered video news on mobile in Europe, launching with 3, and became the first UK company to create made-for-mobile news and weather channels. This year, it used its skilled developers to create an application that provides news to the ever increasing iPhone audience. In the two weeks since its launch, the app had 65,000 downloads from the iTunes

App Store, making it the number-one free news app globally. Who ever said the younger generation isn't interested in news? The key is making it available in a format that they want to use.

3. Multimedia Reporting in the Field

By Guy Pelham

Guy Pelham is Live Editor for BBC Newsgathering. He specialises in identifying new ways of reporting live for all BBC network news outlets. He works with technical colleagues in News and across the BBC to help select the right equipment and provide it to journalists on the ground. Previously, he worked as Editor, Special Events for World Newsgathering and as Deputy UK News Editor. He has worked extensively in the field on stories including the Madrid train bombings, the death of Pope John Paul II, the Suffolk murders and the Sheffield floods.

'Oh God, not *another* outlet!' That was the cry from hard-pressed correspondents when bi-media became part of our working lives all those years ago. We heard it again when 5 Live and then News 24 arrived on the scene. This time it's about multimedia – and BBC people out on the ground are asking serious questions about how we'll cope.

Will multimedia mean an increased workload and, if it does,

will the quality of our journalism suffer – especially when budgets are tighter and we can deploy fewer journalists? Can we afford to do it? Can we afford *not* to do it?

One example sums up the multimedia dilemma as aptly as any. My colleague David Shukman went to the remote Pacific island of Midway. The story: how the vast amounts of plastic rubbish floating in the world's oceans was imperilling the fragile ecosystem of this tiny outcrop.

A key part of the story was a shoot on a coral reef. He had only an hour on location, but the list of 'must-dos' was a long one:

- Shots (and underwater shots) of the reef itself and the plastic
- A piece to camera (PTC) for main package for BBC1 outlets
- A different PTC for a half-hour documentary for the News Channel
- A promo for the News Channel, another for BBC America and another for BBC World
- An 'atmos' piece for radio
- A 'rant' for the News Channel (a short show-and-tell piece delivered seamlessly to camera, encapsulating the story), plus a show-and-tell for on-demand
- An 'as live' interview with a wildlife expert dealing with the plastic.

The shopping list from Hell perhaps, but all are different ways of telling the story, and all perfectly respectable in their own right. David was working with a first-class team of shoot-edit Rob Magee and producer Mark Georgiou, and they somehow got

through it all. Even though blokes aren't supposed to be any good at multi-tasking.

But was it too much to ask in the first place? Maybe, but then would they have got the money to finance the trip if they hadn't been able to service all these customers? This was a planned job, with all the competing demands of the various platforms carefully factored in. But what if it had been a breaking story and David's team had been the only BBC people there? How could they have prioritised among the avalanche of demand that would have hit them?

Each programme or platform has a production team that is (rightly) determined to get the best for its output, and they all want a slice of the pie. And now multimedia is added to the list.

News does have a carefully worked out list of priorities which tells journalists where they should focus their first efforts if they are alone on location. But no two stories are alike and no set of rules written at BBC Television Centre can cater for all the different challenges we face.

The enemy of multimedia newsgathering on location is time. Given enough time, we can service everyone. So perhaps the trick is to change the way we work, both in the field and back at Television Centre, to buy ourselves that most valuable commodity.

Making better use of our people might be one way forward. For instance, one major bottleneck on location, for network TV at any rate, is that the technical burden falls on one person – the network shoot-edit. He or she does pretty much the lot. The correspondent's hands are full, reporting the story. So could the producer (generally a journalist) take on some of the technical

roles? Or even file themselves for some outlets? Some now do, with great success; but while many colleagues working in the regions and nations do this already, for network teams, it means new skills and different ways of working.

David Shukman describes how an extra member of the team can act as what the military call a 'force multiplier':

"If the producer not only deals with the endless calls with London but also takes the stills for the web and handles the QuickLink feeds of the edited video, and helps set up kit for the lives via Vpoint, you're suddenly making the shoot-edit's life bearable and enhancing your overall output. Likewise, a producer who can handle all the radio recording, editing, feeding and lives dramatically ups your output. Or one who can edit all the rants and promos and show-and-tells for video-on-demand.

"If multimedia means one thing, it's multi-skilling. Just as I, as the journalist in the team, have to switch between dreaming up and recording a television piece to camera and then writing for the web and then scripting differently for radio, so every other member of the team has to take on roles way beyond their original brief.

"It's challenging and it reveals a lot about people's motivation, but, as money gets tighter and the opportunities for multimedia working expand, it's the only way."

But in these cash-strapped times, the role of producers is under examination as never before. Some say they are a luxury we can't afford, even for network.

So could technology be an answer? Well, maybe. The

technology of newsgathering has been revolutionised in the past five years.

Broadband internet is now available in the world's most remote locations, thanks to ultra-portable, battery-powered BGAN satellite terminals. With a laptop and camera, our journalists can go live for TV and radio, file video and audio, write text, and stay connected to the rest of the BBC. It has transformed our global news coverage.

News teams can use mobile broadband to search for pictures on Jupiter[1], via Davina[2], and pull it onto their laptop for editing, thus saving endless phone calls and frustration. Many network correspondents anchored to a live point now rely on BlackBerrys to keep them across the latest developments.

Network Rural Affairs Correspondent Jeremy Cooke often works with a VSAT vehicle, a small van with a lightweight satellite dish on board which gives him fast broadband via satellite. It means he can feed, or do lives for TV and radio, and work online via his own fast broadband connection ... wherever he may be. "VSAT buys me time, which allows me to do more journalism and better journalism," he says.

But there is a flip-side. There's always a flip-side. The better the kit on location, the higher the risk that our people will be asked to do even more. And if newsdesks don't understand the capabilities – and limitations – of the kit they deploy, then cock-up will follow.

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[1] The BBC's news media server in London

[2] Another BBC media sharing system ('Digital Audio Video Interactive News Archive')

So, maybe in the end technology can't be the complete answer. The journalist will eventually be overwhelmed by the sheer size of the BBC machine. Jeremy Cooke again: "If you are the lone correspondent on the breaking story, things become near impossible. That's when we need the most support and understanding from newsdesks. It's not a question of being unwilling; sometimes it's not do-able."

So does the answer lie back at Television Centre? The omens are not auspicious; there are plenty who say the BBC has never been very good at taking hard decisions on priorities between competing outputs. In better-funded days gone by, maybe we didn't have to. But if we're serious about multiplatform working, we do now.

The task isn't made easier by the fact that the broadcast landscape is changing fast. To take one example: BBC1 bulletins have the big audiences on TV and can usually claim first call on resources and the BBC's big hitters. But their audiences are declining slowly and those of online and on-demand are growing fast. So who should we favour now and in the future? The old certainties that underpinned our decisions on priorities are shifting. Recent developments could make the priority calls easier. Network has a multimedia newsroom, with the key decision-makers from all platforms now alongside each other. Demand is now better coordinated than it has been in the past. The merging of English Regions and News in 2009 has allowed them to pool their resources for a more joined-up newsgathering service.

Will this mean the BBC can now get serious about the demands it makes on teams in the field, so we can do

multiplatform properly, rather than as just a bolt-on when we have the time? The question for the future is how we draw all these strands together – multi-skilling, technology, better co-ordination – to make multimedia an integral part of what we do.

4. Dealing with User-Generated Content: is it Worth it?

By Paul Hambleton

As Executive Producer of Television Newsgathering at the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Paul Hambleton has been thinking about and working with user-generated content (UGC) since 2007. He says he has learnt that it's easy to agree that UGC is worthwhile. But exactly how media professionals should engage with it is a more difficult question.

We were aware of the wave of social networking, and YouTube hysteria; video uploads and citizen journalism. Our job was to try to figure out how the media could get involved. Clearly there was a need and a want from the public to express themselves, and our conventional media practices were not giving them that opportunity.

But where are we now, in 2009? Let's just say we are in the game. Media organisations around the world are developing citizen

journalism sites; they are building three-dimensional web pages with comments and 'your video and audio' opportunities.

We solicit ideas and comments from our radio and television audiences. However, we still struggle to understand the intersection point between our audience, our journalism, and their feedback.

A group of aboriginal leaders from the central Canadian province of Manitoba urge that hate charges be laid against CBC, the Canadian public broadcaster. Why? It's because of some poorly-moderated user-generated comments which escaped into the public domain on our website – in the name of free expression.

It's the kind of stuff that defines that stupidity point in our intersection with our media audience: the point or moment where freewheeling UGC seems to enable and indeed to empower the inanity of the narrow-minded and racist people. Send us your comments, we ask enthusiastically, or be the first to post a comment: these are all calls to arms for our audiences to get involved and take part in the pursuit of noble journalism. In this case, though, written comments attached to a story about a house fire on a native reserve attracted some gems like "Native people do not have the knowledge to look after a house, build them a tepee …" Twenty-five comments in all were deemed to be hateful. The CBC had to apologise. The comments option for that story was closed off. That, of course, didn't stop rival print media from reporting our difficulties.[1]

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[1]

http://www.theglobeandmail.com/servlet/story/RTGAM.20090211.wspeech12/BNStory/National/home

When we ask our audience what our core values should be, they rank those old classics up there at the top: the 'real story', presenting all sides, not taking sides, dealing with issues that affect my daily life, and so forth. A comprehensive poll done by the CBC in 2008 told us so. You have to go right down to the end of the priority line before you will find 'user-generated content' as something that our audience is asking us to facilitate. Yes, it could be that awful phrase that implies some kind of homework assignment; but really what it tells us is that we, the media, have not yet figured out how to make that connection beyond asking for written contributions in the comments sections of our online news pieces. We have this adolescent understanding of our relationship with our audiences that rarely get past a kind of high-school type of environment: here's what we want from you; and here's how you can get involved.

So how do we empower the audience to engage with us without it looking like we just want freebies from them? And how do we engage more motivated contributors, without alienating the natural blog-style participants? How do we raise the level of engagement?

We need clarity of purpose: what exactly would we like from our audiences, and what are we offering them in return? Let's take the 'contract', if you will, with YouTube. It is simplicity itself: people submit material, and other people watch it. It has no value beyond that which is attached to it by the contributor and those who watch it. It is judged by audiences in 'views', and the contributor knows there is nothing else expected.

But people expect more from the media – more than idle

comments from those with time on their hands, or random videos of bad weather or car accidents. Many of those would-be contributors want journalistic standards applied to their work. They would like to be part of the world we work in. It's the revenge of the expert. There is so much unsolicited advice and information out there: we need to help make sense of it for them. There are many who want to take part in that journalism with us. But how do we protect the genuine efforts to engage from the destructive influence of angry bloggers or committed interest groups?

May 2007 was a case in point: a triumphant user-generated proposal to hook up a then social networking sensation called Facebook with the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation and a national youth group called Student Vote, which is mandated to build youth awareness and engagement in politics.

It was an outreach initiative called the Great Canadian Wish List. What is your wish for Canada in the coming years? A tremendous coming together of CBC, the mainstream media outlet, with a street-based students outreach group and the coolest site of social networking.

The CBC set up a Facebook site and Student Vote pushed the concept out to its constituents. In a six-week challenge, we asked our audience to articulate their dream for Canada as we approached the Canadian National holiday of 1 July. We invited people to join and support the wish they liked best, or contribute one of their own that others could support. We built a ranking system that showed our Facebook users the top ten wishes. There were forums and discussion threads for comment.

It was entirely unmediated, or perhaps, more accurately, it

was self-mediated. We thought this was brilliant, but within a week two interest groups begin freeping[2] the site: a group for abortion, going head to head with a group against abortion. They went toe to toe. Our idealistic and motivated contributors lasted but a few minutes in the sea of abortion rhetoric. In the end, the top two wishes for a better Canada were a nation that supports abortion and one that opposes it. Other more genuine ideas wound up buried in the vitriol of the abortion debate. Why? Because without moderation the wisdom of the masses naturally descends to a common denominator that is determined by those with the most time on their hands. Free expression is not terribly compassionate.

Which brings us to that stupidity point once again. When does empowering people to take part become just a blurge of bad taste? As with any change, we need to move slowly but surely.

In Canada, research is telling us that people are increasingly taking in their news on multiple platforms. More than a quarter of regular news consumers are drawing on four platforms: TV, radio, newspapers and online. A third of them use at least three. Clearly our audiences are looking for a new experience with their media, or at the very least they are open to it. Left to their own devices, they are creating their own new experiences.

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[2] From the Ethics Scoreboard website: 'freeping' is *"coordinating efforts to overwhelm online polls with thousands of silly, obscene, irrelevant or politically pointed responses. The name comes from Free Republic, a politically conservative activist website that has a readership especially responsive to poll sabotage requests. Recently Grand Forks, North Dakota City Council candidate Scott McNamee asked his fellow Free Republic visitors to stack an online poll offered by a Grand Forks radio station's website. When his opponent questioned the ethics of the stunt, NcNamee apologised while denying that "freeping" was unethical. After all, stacking polls is a web-world tradition, he argued.* http://www.ethicsscoreboard.com/list/freeping.html

Our research also tells us not to rush headlong into this. We in the media are quick to peddle the newest ideas or technologies, and we forget that our audiences can't or don't want to move that fast. While 96% of the CBC staff felt that internet news consumption would sky rocket, only 59% of our audience felt that way. Newspapers? Seventy-six per cent inside our industry felt the print medium is a dying breed, while our only 26% of our audience felt that way. Don't argue with the customer.

We must continue to offer our audiences safe and creative places to get involved in the news business. Otherwise they will just upload to YouTube. We need to staff our newsrooms accordingly and value that kind of work. Commit to the wisdom of crowds, to that great community of gossip and talk.

A few days after the nasty native comments disaster from the Manitoba site, a commuter plane falls out of the sky, carrying 50 people preparing to land at the airport in Buffalo, New York. Everyone on board is killed, plus one person in the house it crashed into. The chase for stories begins. It's the middle of the night.

The overnight online writer is young and not the most experienced. However, he knows enough to work all possibilities. The US networks are giving him the mainstream news feeds for a basic write-through. Then he goes on Twitter and finds someone who actually witnessed the crash. That person does an interview, contributes his own observations to the website coverage and becomes just another quote in our story. User-generated content

to be proud of.[3]

How do we reassure that writer and that witness that this is what we are looking for: honest and authentic accounts of real life? We need to keep moving. Not too fast, mind you, but just enough to keep ourselves honest too.

So while we keep the comments coming and we solicit your views, and your photos and your videos, that contract or agreement with the audience is still being negotiated – a living document that spells out the details of what they need from us and what we need to do for them.

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[3] http://www.cbc.ca/mobile/text/story_news-world.html?/ept/html/story/2009/02/13/buffalo-witnesses.html

5. Video Games: a New Medium for Journalism

By Philip Trippenbach

Philip Trippenbach studied international development and economics in Canada before starting work as a TV journalist for the CBC in New York. Since then, he has discovered that the many hours he spent playing video games in his childhood were, in fact, preparing him for a brave new world of media development. He now works in Current Affairs Development for the BBC in London, where he develops interactive journalism projects. Philip's work centres on identifying and exploiting the new opportunities for journalism provided by social media and gaming.

Video games are the youngest medium in our civilization. But in the few decades of their existence, they've come further faster than any other medium in history. Video games have become a mainstream medium – in fact, they are poised to become (and may already be) the dominant medium of our society. There are more

gamers than football fans in the UK.[1] Video games outsell both films and music.[2] And despite the current recession, their sales are growing at double-digit rates[3], while other media sales figures are steady, or declining.[4]

It takes time for the full potential of new technologies to be realized. When they were introduced in the early 20th century, both radio and television were dismissed as frivolous entertainments, unsuited to the serious business of journalism. Though some people still perceive video games as little more than gung-ho escapism, like any medium they are capable of great sophistication and intelligence.

The gaming audience is large and diverse. Gamers are ready for factual games that help them understand the world around them. And the interactive nature of video games gives journalists an opportunity to reach audiences in powerful new ways. It is an opportunity not to be missed.

In the last five years, video games have climbed out of their early 'geek' niche. In the UK, one of the most mature gaming

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[1] David Hayward: *Under the Mask: Perspectives on the Gamer* (http://pixel-lab.squarespace.com/talks/2008/6/11/under-the-mask-games-culture.html)

[2] 'Games 'to outsell' music, video' BBC News (http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/technology/7709298.stm)

[3] 'Games will 'eclipse' other media' BBC News (http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/technology/7821612.stm)

[4] Julia Kollewe, 'Games buoy HMV while CD sales sink' *The Guardian* 2 July 2008 (http://www.guardian.co.uk/business/2008/jul/02/hmvgroupbusiness.retail?gusrc=rss&feed=technologyfull)

markets, the average age of a video gamer in 2008 was 33.[5] Over a third (37%) of the UK's population describe themselves as active gamers[6] – and that's across all age categories, including the over-60s. In the 16 to 29 age bracket, the proportion of 'active gamers' rises to 48%.[7] And essentially *everyone* in the under-16 bracket is an active gamer.[8]

What's more, the proportion of gamers in every age bracket is rising with each passing year. Video gaming is not a youth pastime that people abandon as they grow older. Rather, it is something that people pick up as kids and then stick to – just like television and reading.

Indications are that the gaming audience is receptive to factual and journalistic content. There is evidence that gamers as a group are more interested in politics – and more politically active – than non-gamers.[9] Nor are they an isolated sub-population: several studies have shown that gamers tend to be at least as

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[5] Interactive Software Federation of Europe: *Video Gamers in Europe 2008*. (http://www.isfe-eu.org/tzr/scripts/downloader2.php?filename=T003/F0013/8c/79/w7ol0v3qagh qd4ale6vlpnent&mime=application/pdf&originalname=ISFE_Consumer_Rese arch_2008_Report_final.pdf)

[6] Interactive Software Federation of Europe: *Video Gamers in Europe 2008*

[7] Interactive Software Federation of Europe: *Video Gamers in Europe 2008*

[8] BBC Audience Planning: *State of Play II* (Internal publication, 2005)

[9] Amanda Lenhart et al.: *Teens, Video Games and Civics*. (Pew Internet & American Life Project, 2008) (http://www.pewinternet.org/pdfs/PIP_Teens_Games_and_Civics_Report_FIN AL.pdf)

social and outgoing as non-gamers, if not more so.[10] What's more, the gender balance of gamers is close, though men and women do tend to play different games.[11]

Of course the primary reason most people play video games is because they're fun. But many players report that they also find games more stimulating and more thought-provoking than TV or the cinema.[12] BBC audience research indicates that an overwhelming majority of gamers of all ages feel that games can be used for education as well as entertainment.[13]

But can games really convey journalism? Well, games have been used for learning for centuries – modern flight simulators and war games are just the latest high-tech examples. There's nothing like being immersed in a situation to find out what it's all about and gain an intuitive understanding of it. And though games as journalism are in their infancy, there are already several good examples of video games with a journalistic bent.

Insurgency[14] is a simulation of street combat in Baghdad and Basra. The game is a modification of Half-Life 2, a commercially successful first-person shooter game. It was originally created as a volunteer project by veterans of the US armed forces upon their return from combat duty in Iraq. Authenticity and realism were paramount, according to Pablo

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[10] Amanda Lenhart et al.: *Teens, Video Games and Civics*

[11] BBC Audience Planning: *State of Play II* report (2005)

[12] Interactive Software Federation of Europe: *Video Gamers in Europe 2008*

[13] BBC Audience Planning: *State of Play II* report (2005)

[14] http://www.insmod.net/

Dopico, one of the game's makers:

"This is an adult game – it requires a lot of skill, and knowledge of military tactics. It attempts to depict modern military combat accurately. We have many players from the military. They contribute from their experiences, and they consult with us informally on accuracy. People come straight back from Iraq, play the game, and they like the feeling of realism they get. Some of the team members are actually doing military training at the moment … America's Army is the game most played by military people, and we are the second-most played – the military users provide an invaluable feedback, like mailing us and saying 'the AK47 sounds good, but it should actually reload like this ...'"[15]

America's Army[16] is a free game used as a recruiting tool for the US armed forces. Arguably it is advertising or propaganda rather than journalism, but it shares Insurgency's commitment to accuracy and realism. Both of these games are, in a very real sense, interactive records of what it's like to be a soldier on the streets of Baghdad.

Where games really come into their own is as a medium for deep explanatory journalism – especially journalism about complicated systems with many inter-relationships, interacting forces and factions. These can be important situations to understand, such as factional politics on the streets of Baghdad in

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[15] Personal communication with the author

[16] http://www.americasarmy.com/

2005-06, or the complicated realities of the global fight against malaria. This sort of story is very difficult to tell in text, and doubly so in video, as these media require journalists to arrange dynamic relationships and issues into some sort of fixed linear narrative.

Video games allow a different approach. A video game journalist can construct a model of how things work and interact in the situation being described, and allow the audience to explore the model at leisure.[17] The accuracy of this mode of journalism consists of making sure that the model reacts to a user's actions in the same way that it would in reality, generating an authentic experience and applicable understanding.

The successful Sim City series of games is a perfect example of this sort of interactive communication. Though not intended as journalism, these games do have a factual theme and are an example of how a game can be used to increase understanding of a factual subject. Sim City puts players in charge of planning, growing and running a city. Starting from an empty patch of land, players must build the energy grid, plan the transport network, set taxes and provide services. Though the cities that players design are fictional, success in this game requires an internalized understanding of very real concepts such as infrastructure, tax policy, budgeting and zoning practice. This is dry stuff by any account, but the games in this series have sold over 18 million copies, and Sim City players can spend dozens or hundreds of hours on the game.

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[17] Ian Bogost, a professor at the Georgia Institute of Technology, calls this kind of communication 'Procedural Rhetoric' and discusses it further in *Persuasive Games: the Expressive Power of Video Games* (MIT Press, 2007)

Not every topic will be appropriate for treatment in a journalistic video game. Games as journalism are less useful for telling the facts of *what happened* in a given past event. Video, audio and text maintain their respective advantages here, not least because they can be produced very quickly. However, none of these media can match the power of video games to explain the *way things work* in an ongoing situation or issue. This fact, coupled with the relatively long production time most games require, makes video games eminently suited to long-form (i.e. current affairs or documentary) journalism instead of reactive news journalism.[18]

Games can also transmit a particular political or editorial point. A simplified version of the Sim City concept has been published by The Economist in association with the petroleum company Chevron. Energyville[19] gives the player control of a growing city and the task of ensuring its energy supply in the face of shocks, changing technology and environmental pressures. The game's mechanics make this very difficult to achieve without resorting to petroleum – hardly surprising, given the game's principal sponsor. But this game does illustrate the power video games can have to make a rhetorical argument. Other games such as September 12th,[20] Oiligarchy[21] and The McDonalds Game[22]

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[18] Future production tools and methods may shorten this, but at the moment even the simplest in-browser Flash game has a production time of a few days – too slow for the 24-hour news cycle, but entirely adequate for 'magazine'-type journalism on a weekly time-scale or longer.

[19] http://willyoujoinus.com/energyville/

[20] http://www.newsgaming.com/games/index12.htm

[21] http://www.molleindustria.org/en/oiligarchy

also make arguments about current events and are well worth a play.

Video games are a very powerful medium that can achieve an unparalleled level of engagement with the audience. The Sim City example is telling: it is hard to imagine many people spending many hours considering knotty problems of tax policy or residential zoning law (in their leisure time!) in any other medium. Games can achieve this level of engagement because they are fun. This may seem self-evident, but the concept of fun is a critical one for video game journalism, because fun in video games is a very specific kind of enjoyment.

Fun in video games consists of problem-solving. This is the essence of the video game as a medium. Graphics, story, and so on, are secondary features also found in most other media. But video games are unique because they confront the user with a series of challenges set by the game designers. At first the user is a novice, with no idea how to solve the problems being presented. Progress is patchy and random. With repeated attempts, however, the player gains expertise and confidence and is eventually rewarded with the thrill of success. Fun in video games is thus the process of engagement with a problem in the search for a solution. In other words, fun in video games is engagement in an iterative process of skill acquisition through repeated trial and error.[23]

The skills acquired vary from game to game. Insurgency

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[22] http://www.mcvideogame.com/
[23] Raph Koster explores the nature of fun and fundamentals of video game design in his book A Theory of Fun for Game Design (Paraglyph Press, 2005)

trains accurate aim and applied combat tactics. Sim City requires urban planning skills. Other popular games are challenges in geometry (Tetris), hand-eye coordination (Wii Sports), rhythm (Guitar Hero) and football tactics (FIFA Soccer).[24] In all these cases, players experience fictional (though more or less realistic) scenarios. But the skills and situational understanding players gain from facing these game challenges are very real.[25]

This challenge structure is at the heart of games' value to journalism. By setting challenges that are relevant to the subject matter, a journalist can communicate understanding of almost any complex topic. Imagine, for instance, a current affairs project on an ongoing story of topical interest: illegal migration into the European Union. Documentary series, magazine articles and books have all been written about this. But a game on the same topic could cast the player in the role of an African migrant trying to get into the EU. The player would have to deal with all aspects of the journey – tough conditions back home, dealing with corrupt smugglers, eluding border patrols, obtaining black-market work or fake papers once in the EU. This sort of engagement, if properly designed, would be intensely fun and convey a rich understanding of the

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[24] The Wii's hand-eye coordination training is good enough that some hospitals have started using it as a training tool for surgeons. One hospital in the US reports that surgeons who spend an hour a night on the Wii score 48% higher on tool-control performance than those that do not. Paul McNamara, 'Why a Wii could be good for your health' The Guardian, 7 August 2008 (http://www.guardian.co.uk/technology/2008/aug/07/research.games)

[25] Imagine the following thought experiment: take 20 people who have never played football and divide them into two groups of ten. One group is assigned games consoles and plays four hours of FIFA Soccer a day for six months. The other group is a control and is exposed to no football at all, in any medium. Both groups then get one day of on-the-pitch soccer training before facing off in an exhibition match. Which group will prevail?

complex realities of a difficult issue.

At 2pm on Sunday, 16 November 2008, a 15-year-old boy from Halland province in Sweden collapsed in an apparent epileptic fit. He was rushed to hospital, where doctors found him to be dehydrated and exhausted from a prolonged period of extreme concentration. After a brief stay in hospital on an electrolyte drip, he was discharged. The cause of his collapse: Wrath of the Lich King, an expansion of the massively multi-player online game World of Warcraft. The boy had gotten a copy of the game at midnight on the Saturday and gathered with his friends to play it. The experience engrossed them so much that they stayed up, not tiring, forgetting to eat or drink, for over 36 hours of continuous play.[26]

This story was reported in several papers as a lamentable example of what video games can do to people. The boy undoubtedly made some poor choices. But his story illustrates a larger point.

In the video game, journalists have at their disposal a medium so powerful, so engrossing, that people can forget to eat or sleep while using it. Players of World of Warcraft memorize great tomes of arcane knowledge to gain an advantage in the game's invented world. Why should this kind of power be restricted to fiction and fantasy?

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[26] David Brown: 'Boy collapses after playing World of Warcraft for 24 hours straight' The Times, 17 November 2008

(http://technology.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/tech_and_web/article5173755.ece)

Video games are as powerful as television, radio, or even books. It is time we started using them for more than entertainment.

Bibliography and additional reading are available at
http://del.icio.us/trippenbach/FoJ

6. The Audience and News

By Matthew Eltringham

Matthew Eltringham is Assistant Editor, Interactivity, running BBC News' UGC (user-generated content) Hub which manages the thousands of emails and pictures sent to the BBC every day. He set up the Hub in the spring of 2005 as a pilot project, just before the 7 July terror attacks on London. It's now a 24/7 operation providing content for every part of the BBC's news operation. He started in journalism as a reporter in the Exeter district office of the Western Morning News (where among other stories he reported on Exeter City Football Club winning the old Fourth Division title). He joined the BBC in 1993 as a producer for 5 Live. Before setting up the UGC Hub, he was also an output editor on Sir David Frost's Sunday morning show Breakfast with Frost and spent four years in the BBC's Westminster newsroom as news editor and planning editor.

The UGC Hub is a team of 23 journalists based in the BBC's multimedia newsroom in London, working across all three

platforms – television, radio and online.

On an average day we get around 10,000 to 12,000 emails, as well as hundreds of pictures and video clips, sent to us from all over the world.

These emails provide a fantastically rich source of content for all the BBC's news output. Our job is to mine it for the best bits and make the most of them for the BBC's news output.

But that is only part of the job. The material sent directly to us represents the tiniest fraction of the conversations and content online at any one time. So we are increasingly moving the focus of our work into the much wider and wilder world of the web itself.

There are four key aspects to the influence that our direct dialogue with our audience has on our journalism.

First of all, we use the opinions they share with us, mainly through the News website's messageboard, Have Your Say[1].

When the Archbishop of Canterbury gave an interview to the World at One debating the case for the incorporation of some aspects of Sharia law into UK law, we received around 9,000 emails that afternoon that were overwhelmingly critical.

The response included many churchgoers and not a few vicars. The story was already running, but was, for example, only scheduled fifth in The Six O'Clock News running order. We fed into programmes the volume and nature of the response we were receiving. By 6pm the story was leading on every outlet.

The next day all the papers were leading on the story and Lambeth Palace tried to blame the red tops for whipping up opinion

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[1] http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/talking_point/default.stm

against the Archbishop. However, it was clear from the response from our audience the previous afternoon that the papers were in the main following public opinion rather than leading it. Thus, as a result of our relationship with the audience, the BBC was ahead of the game.

But it's not just the opinions of the audience that matter – it's also their experiences.

In 2008, there was a minor uprising on Nauru, an island off Papua New Guinea, which also happens to be the world's smallest republic.

The website reported the story and we asked for a response from our audience. Within four hours we had received several emails, verifiably from the island, telling us all about what had happened. We were then able to add telling detail to the reporting of the story.

The relationship with the audience is not linear: the size and volume of the response does not translate directly into news coverage. In the case of Nauru, the incredible global reach of the BBC meant that our audience was able to share their experience with us, which again allowed us to improve and influence our journalism in a way that almost no other news organisation can.

It's a small example of the invaluable role that the audience plays in our storytelling. That role is more dramatically illustrated by pictures of bomb-damaged buses in central London, or video of burning cars at Glasgow Airport.

The other key area where our relationship with our audience affects our journalism is when they share discovery with us.

The story of the hijacking of the Sirius Star (in 2008) is one

striking example. The story broke on a Monday morning and we immediately asked for a response from the audience. By late afternoon we had the name Peter French – one of the captured Britons – and his role on the tanker, in an email from an impeccable source[2].

By Tuesday afternoon we knew the town where he and his family lived, which Newsgathering colleagues followed up. We had also recorded an interview with a former shipmate who had emailed us confirming further personal details.

But that's not all – we had interviews with Somalians, who had emailed us from Puntland in support of the pirates.

And we had emails from a number of sailors from around the world who had either just returned from the area or who had themselves been kidnapped. Most of these gave interviews across TV, radio and online.

We've extended our remit by appointing an interactive reporter to follow up stories and leads suggested to us by the audience.

One email forced a change in government policy when Newsnight followed it up and reported that foreign workers at Heathrow's Terminal 5 don't have to undergo a criminal records check.

Finally, we have started mining the collective knowledge of the audience – using interactive mapping to display the results of our consultations. Early on in the credit crunch story, we asked the audience what immediate difference the cut in VAT would make to

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[2] http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/7737969.stm

them[3]. The answer was a resounding 'no difference'.

For a few years, high-profile commentators like the BBCs Richard Sambrook, Director of BBC Global News, have been arguing that mainstream media 'don't own the news any more'.

A couple of years ago that might have seemed like a bit of geeky scaremongering. But if you look at what went on during the US elections, for example, it's a prophecy that is coming true.

Citizen journalism organisations like the Sayfie Review[4] reported live on Qik[5] – a video streaming website – from polling stations across Florida. The standards of broadcasting were mixed – but they got their facts right and provided an incredible source of local information for anyone who logged in.

Elsewhere, the Uptake[6], another US-based citizen journalism organisation, is mobilising people – offering a platform, training and on occasion money for 'ordinary people' to report on stories as they see them.

Just two examples of the growing stature of citizen journalists that we cannot afford to ignore.

As a result, the UGC Hub has been focusing on joining up with social media and social networks across the web as much as it has been working on the content coming in directly to the BBC.

There's Twitter of course – now a well established and hugely valuable source of comment and content. We first

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[3] http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/talking_point/7746165.stm

[4] http://www.sayfiereview.com/

[5] http://qik.com/

[6] http://theuptake.org/

discovered the value of the micro-blogging site during the Tibet uprising of March 2008, when we used it to find an eyewitness in Lhasa. Since then it's become *de rigeur* to use Twitter in any breaking news environment.

It first came to mainstream attention during the Mumbai terror attacks in November 2008. But it was when a picture of a plane crash-landing in the Hudson River in January 2009 was posted to Twitter within five minutes of the event that it became headline news in its own right[7].

There is also Facebook, Flickr and all the other social networks that allow us to connect with people across the world. That sometimes means starting conversations ourselves, as well as monitoring what is being said.

We reported the Burma uprising of autumn 2007 through an equal mixture of content coming in directly to us and content we found on the Burmese blogs and social networks.

And we have joined Seesmic, Qik and 12 Seconds – video chatrooms that have growing global communities which have all provided us with great video contributions.

The focus for us is the audience. Sometimes, because we're the BBC, they'll come to us; more often we'll have to go to them.

But wherever it is, we have to listen because there is always someone, somewhere with something to tell us.

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[7] http://twitpic.com/135x

7. Delivering Multiplatform Journalism to the Mainstream

By Derren Lawford

Derren Lawford joined the BBC in 2000 as a tri-media Senior Broadcast Journalist for Radio 1 Newsbeat, making radio packages, writing features for the website and reporting for BBC Three. Since then, he has worked as a documentary maker and presenter for Radio 1 and 1Xtra, before moving into TV production and development.

My first foray into the world of multiplatform with the BBC Current Affairs department came about through my work on Born Survivors, a newly-commissioned strand on BBC Three that I had helped to develop. It aimed to tell extraordinary stories of young people surviving whatever life throws at them.

The series consisted of four one-hour documentaries which explored serious and significant issues for young people – teen pregnancy, self-harm, young carers and children who grew up in severe poverty.

I knew that these subjects would be of interest to the audience long after the transmission on television. I also knew that the very people we wanted to engage with in these films might not even watch the channel. That's why I wanted to provide a space for our audience to shape the debate and share their views online.

So each full-length film was re-cut and repackaged as a three-minute self-contained narrative called a 'minisode', and then premiered online ahead of the television broadcast[1]. Each one attempted to reflect the key issue at the heart of each film in a way that would work online. That's why I changed the style slightly: wherever possible, only the young contributors' voices are heard, and the music and fonts were tweaked to better suit a short video.

The minisodes – which we called Kizzy: Mum at 14; Cut up Kids; Looking After Mum; and Growing up Skint – were also embedded into the BBC Three website via YouTube, a first for the channel, predating the now widespread use of embedded video players across bbc.co.uk.

I then sought out the only other BBC platform with an audience which would readily connect with the themes explored in the Born Survivors minisodes – Radio 1's The Surgery. The late-night weekly phone-in show addresses issues that matter to young people, the same issues that arose in our Born Survivors minisodes.

On 9 December 2007, the weekend before the Born Survivors season started, The Surgery's host, Kelly Osbourne, played an excerpt from Kizzy: Mum at 14, talked about the issue

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[1] http://www.bbc.co.uk/bornsurvivors/minisodes/series1_cutup.shtml

on air and directed listeners to the website, where they could click on a link to view all the minisodes. The BBC Three website then provided a reciprocal link on the Born Survivors page to The Surgery's website, specifically its advice pages, which have a confidential phone number people can ring.

Then on the days the programmes aired, the BBC News website ran features based on the characters and streamed the Kizzy minisode, too.

To extend our online reach even further, I also researched the best places to 'seed' these minisodes on non-BBC websites. Why? Because we wanted to help our potential audience to find the minisodes, especially if they wouldn't naturally gravitate to the BBC. Once found, we wanted them to be shared among our audience and 'broadcast' by them. That's why we uploaded all the minisodes ahead of the terrestrial transmission to YouTube, Bebo, Facebook blogs and messageboards, and made them embeddable, too.

In the case of Cut up Kids, we also targeted websites connected to the issue raised in the film, namely self-harm. We wanted both to create an online community around the season and tap into existing communities.

So I contacted LifeSigns and Recover Your Life (which has over 20,000 members online). They are two of the best-supported websites for self-harmers, acting as gateways to this world for harmers and their friends and families. Both sites agreed to back the Born Survivors season and the Cut up Kids minisode on their websites, blogs, as well as their Facebook and MySpace pages. This lent the self-harm film an implicit credibility.

So what happened next? Well, the articles on the four films on BBC News online recorded a total of 879,617 page impressions. The Kizzy minisode was watched just over 33,000 times via the News website.

On YouTube, the minisodes have been watched 65,956 times and counting. They sparked a discussion among the YouTube audience about the issues at their heart – which continues today.

The following comment was posted on YouTube more than 12 months after the Cut up Kids minisode appeared online in 2007:

"I was gonna be a part of this but then helped by advertising it around. And I have Sky+ and its be on there ever since. I won't delete it because it helps me when I'm really low. This was probably one of the best documentaries on self-harm I've ever watched because for once they understood it properly."

In the case of Cut up Kids, there was an intense flurry of views posted on Recover Your Life ahead of television transmission. Three different self-harmers pointed to the minisodes via three different routes:

"Just looked on the internet for when it's on. not found it yet but found this which is a bit out of the documentary I think...[just warn you though, could be triggering]
http://www.bebo.com/Profile.jsp?Memb...d=5073712 340"

"There is the beggining of it on youtube.....type in cut up kids - born

survivors - bbc3 it should come up...*there is visable scars*"

"Sorry if this has already been posted...
http://www.bbc.co.uk/bbcthree/progra...s/cut_up.shtml"

One of the contributors in the film also got involved in the debate:

"Hey, I'm Beth (from the documentary). I really think that no one should judge it, or have any strict opinion before watching it…"

The Recover Your Life users also counted down to the television transmission before posting immediate reviews:

"It's different to what i was expecting but it's a nice change they could of made it poorly and caused people to trigger i suppose Channel 4 would of done something like that

Not triggered.... which is rare for a doc about self harm seemed pretty well made to me..."

The Cut up Kids film, minisode and multiplatform impact were recognized last year with a Young People's Media award at the Mental Health Media Awards.

But that wasn't the only multiplatform success from the season.

Kizzy: Mum at 14 has pulled in a cumulative television audience of over 5 million and viewing figures have increased over time, because the audience discussed the issues and posted television listings on the sites we targeted. The third repeat on

BBC Three was watched by approximately 300,000 more people than the original broadcast. Two days before it was shown, this was posted underneath the Kizzy: Mum at 14 minisode on YouTube:

"If anyone has not seen this programme in full yet it is due for a replay on BBC THREE this Monday 21st January 2008 at 9pm"

If anyone doubted that putting BBC material on external websites can actually raise audiences on BBC channels, that surely is pretty solid evidence. The latest repeat was on BBC1 and was watched by 2.2 million people. It was also flagged up ahead of transmission by a YouTube posting.

The audience, and especially fellow young single mums, were so moved by Kizzy's story that they set up two different tribute pages on the social networking site Bebo which have been viewed over 40,000 times.

When the Born Survivors season was recommissioned, the challenge was to be even more ambitious with the multiplatform offering and deliver truly 'co-created content', allowing young people to tell us what they think a Born Survivor is.

Working closely with the Media Trust, we sought to enable young people whose extraordinary stories are rarely heard to make short films representing what the audience cares about. We wanted these films to empower young people to drive the debate and help define 'current affairs' for this generation.

Although inspired by and complementing a second series of films for television transmission, these short films would exist

online independently of the BBC Three programmes. Like the minisodes, these co-created films would also be embeddable, providing the audience with a real sense of ownership.

The Media Trust has close ties to hundreds of grassroots organisations that enable young people to make their own media – whether television, drama, animation, photography or websites. For this pioneering project, it agreed to find some of the most disadvantaged young people across the country who would be interested in making short films about their lives. The only criterion we stipulated was that the film should address the theme of being a 'born survivor' and be no longer than five minutes. The final films covered subjects such as living with an illness, homelessness, living in care and being a young refugee.

Each of the nine young filmmakers worked with a BBC mentor, one of whom was Tom Marchbanks:

"I spent a couple of weekends over the summer with my mentee, a 16-year-old boy on a one-way ticket to prison or hospital. He certainly had issues, but also amazing vision and creativity. The best part for me was becoming friends, colleagues almost, and seeing his initial suspicion of me replaced with interest and excitement for the project. The worst part was his time-keeping. The whole idea of taking skills out into the community while making front-line multiplatform content is one that the BBC should angle towards. Altogether, a hugely enjoyable and rewarding piece of work, where I learnt just as much as my mentee. I'd do it again a hundred times."

The BBC Three series and the online series of co-created films were both marshalled by Series Producer Sarah Waldron:

"Finding the balance between young people feeling free to create their own content and it fulfilling the BBC guidelines was challenging. The sheer scale of producing a number of short pieces of media with different teams and subject matters meant the project was extremely labour-intensive if judged per minute. They all needed to go through the same rigorous checks and compliance issues as broadcast films."

The combined output had two executive producers to make sure that all content – irrespective of platform – fully complied with the BBC's editorial guidelines. Executive Producer Samantha Anstiss signed off all terrestrial content and Martin Wilson, Head of Multiplatform and Development, oversaw all multiplatform content, including the creation of a new Born Survivors website that housed the original minisodes, the co-created films and minisodes for Born Survivors II[2]. Martin Wilson said:

"Our primary concern in making Current Affairs BBC Three documentaries is the welfare of the young, vulnerable people we often feature. We have a great deal of experience in understanding and minimising the potential damage that television will have. We are less clear about the impact that featuring them on other platforms will have, particularly around messageboards, how the

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[2] http://www.bbc.co.uk/bornsurvivors/

material will be used and how long-lasting the impact will be. And I think that does concern us all."

The co-created films were also posted on YouTube and broadcast on Charge, the Media Trust's multiplatform site dedicated to young people whose voices are not often heard in the media. Along with its website, Charge exists as a three-hour strand on the Community Channel.

BBC Three's new Born Survivors website has only been live a few weeks but is already breaking records, with 70,000 weekly unique users, the most for a BBC Three site ever.

The fact that Born Survivors II represented the first time that the BBC Current Affairs department had developed, commissioned and produced the television and multiplatform offerings of a project in tandem was key to its subsequent success. From the outset, Channel Controller Danny Cohen, Current Affairs Commissioner Clive Edwards, Multiplatform Commissioner Nick Cohen and BBC Three's Multiplatform Channel Editor, Jo Twist, were all closely involved in shaping the proposition.

This was probably the biggest single insight that drove my next role. Following on from my work on BBC Three, I took over the Panorama website[3] as part of a new position on the programme, Multiplatform Editor. The key challenge was how to use the lessons of Born Survivors to provide a multiplatform offering for a more mainstream and traditional BBC programme.

The Panorama website is a central destination for the

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[3] http://news.bbc.co.uk/panorama/hi/default.stm

audience once the programme finishes. A key part of my job was relaunching and redesigning the site, but I also needed to create a team to fulfil my multiplatform ambitions for a strand that is on almost every week of the year and has been on our screens since 1953.

My team is embedded within the main Panorama production team, so there's a constant flow of information and content both ways. I recruited people with a variety of skills including writing, picture editing, self-shooting, desk top editing, web encoding, production assistance, blogging and archive research.

To ensure that multiplatform thinking and practice is central to Panorama, I liaise closely with the Editor, Sandy Smith, and Deputy Editors Frank Simmonds, Ingrid Kelly and Tom Giles, from the commissioning process right through to the production.

So much work goes into a Panorama film, and the website is the perfect platform to showcase the best of it online. For Britain's Terror Heartland, there were blog posts from Deputy Editor Tom Giles, with reporter Jane Corbin providing extra context, while an extended interview with Pakistan's Interior Minister, Rehman Malik, gave an extra perspective. Jane also wrote a feature on the programme for the BBC News website and introduced it online in a short video[4].

The website now has more to read, watch, comment on and contribute to. Viewers coming to it for the first time should find enough features, picture galleries, short videos, full-length films

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[4]

http://news.bbc.co.uk/panorama/hi/front_page/newsid_7783000/7783602.stm

and blog posts to encourage return visits.

Thanks to the BBC's Political Editor Nick Robinson and Business Editor Robert Peston, blogging has become an integral part of journalistic discourse in the UK. I was keen for Panorama's journalism to play a significant part online, too.

Via our new blog, online archive specialist Eamonn Walsh now thematically links Panorama programmes from the present to the past, giving classic clips a fresh airing[5] and allowing viewers to chat online about previous editions, often from many years ago. Deputy Editor Tom Giles has also entered the blogosphere, inspired by the online coverage of the US election. And reporters Jane Corbin, Raphael Rowe and John Sweeney have all been given a platform to blog about the programmes they make and the wider issues that arise from them. The audience themselves join and drive the various debates on our blogs or their own, too.

Given the appetite for video online[6], whether it's short clips or full programmes, one of the biggest challenges was to make a website dedicated to a television programme have a more televisual feel. To that end, we are fully integrated with the BBC iPlayer and online programmes pages. When viewers come to the

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[5]

http://news.bbc.co.uk/panorama/hi/front_page/newsid_7928000/7928826.stm

[6] According to Ofcom's latest report on the communications industry (http://www.ofcom.org.uk/media/news/2008/08/nr_20080814), 26% of those aged 15 to 24 claim to use the internet for 'watching TV programmes', up 16% on the year before. Some 51% used the web for 'watching video clips/webcasts', up by the same amount. But the report also noted an increase across all the age ranges for audio-visual content online, and that the fastest growing online community is actually the oldest (although it is still in the minority).

website they should find it simple to catch up on the latest programme – which can now be watched online for a full 12 months after it is broadcast.

For short-form video, there is a prominent embedded video player on the front page. This has key moments from a current programme or a reporter's take on the film they have made. Below it is a new section called Panorama Video Extras, a mixture of extra exclusive programme footage, original material made by my multiplatform team, re-versioned snippets from the programme, classic clips – and the odd minisode, too.

One thing I felt was lacking on the old website was a permanent and prominent space for the reporters. For all their investigative and award-winning endeavours, there didn't seem to be enough information about them online. So we've created a new section called The Team and completely revamped their pages with new pictures, text and a series of special videos to give a better idea of what makes the likes of Paul Kenyon, Vivian White and Peter Taylor want to be Panorama reporters today.

After seeing the impact that the Born Survivors seasons could have on platforms outside the BBC, I was determined that Panorama should have a presence in the appropriate places, too. So there are now Panorama updates posted to the micro-blogging site Twitter, our archive on the ultimate bookmarking site, Delicious, and some key moments from our films on YouTube[7].

The latter raises particular editorial challenges. The

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[7] http://www.youtube.com/profile?user=BBC&view=videos&query=panorama

comments posted are moderated by YouTube, not the BBC, so contributors need to appreciate the significance of being online in perpetuity. If a posted comment is extremely offensive we can get it removed, and have done in the past. But it's also important to note that these sites are self-moderating. Often other users will admonish comments they deem offensive.

If video material is illegally uploaded, this can be removed too – for example, if there are serious editorial concerns about the age of the contributors featured, or an excerpt from a film is being deliberately used out of context. And of course, in purely legal terms, any illegal uploading is a breach of copyright. Whenever we have requested material to be removed in the past, this has been done within 24 to 48 hours.

We do have control over the metadata. Keywords that are used to describe and find content online are essential, but we need to ensure that, when using descriptive shortcuts and shorthand, we don't inadvertently defame. For example, for a film like Daylight Robbery, which was about billions of dollars stolen, lost or unaccounted for in Iraq, you would avoid using keywords such as 'corrupt Cheney' or 'Bush crook'.

One of the biggest cultural changes for television production teams is the notion of exclusivity. There are fears that by releasing key material, in whatever form, from our programmes ahead of transmission, we could reduce the audience for the full television version.

These fears can only be dispelled by example. Thankfully, in the short time I have been at Panorama, we have already had a few successes, most notably Primark: on the Rack, as well as

What Happened to Baby P?.

The Primark film was on YouTube, BBC News online and BBC Thread, the BBC's ethical fashion website, before transmission. It was watched over 20,000 times. More than 230,000 people read an article about it on BBC News online, too. Yet 4.3 million viewers tuned in to BBC1 on the Monday, making it one of the biggest Panoramas of 2008. Afterwards, an additional 57,000 people caught it on iPlayer.

It was a similar story with What Happened to Baby P?. The production team gave my team some footage to cut for the web only that wouldn't make it into the television programme[8]. One hundred thousand people watched it that week on the News website; 500,000 read our news article; and 3.9 million viewers tuned in to BBC1. Despite blanket coverage the week before the programme, 67,000 watched it on the iPlayer, too.

My conclusion? Multiplatform initiatives in current affairs programming can offer the audience strong journalistic content here, there and everywhere.

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[8] http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/panorama/7732125.stm

8. Death of the Story

By Kevin Marsh

Kevin Marsh became Editor of the BBC College of Journalism in April 2006. Before that, he was Editor of BBC Radio 4's Today programme. He joined the BBC as a news trainee in 1978 and worked in Belfast and Birmingham before joining The World at One. After a short spell at ITN, he re-joined the BBC as Deputy Editor of The World at One, before becoming Editor of PM and The World at One. In 1998, he developed and launched Broadcasting House – the first new news programme on Radio 4 for a decade. He is a Visiting Fellow at Bournemouth University Media School, a Fellow of the Royal Society for the Arts and Commerce and an alumnus of the Cambridge Programme for Business and the Environment. He has been a participant and panellist at four World Economic Forums in Davos and lectures regularly on the media to international audiences.

The story is dead.

The basic unit of currency that nearly all of journalism has

traded in since it began is finished.

And it's dead because of three big things we've all seen happening, but that we've been reluctant to put together to come to the inevitable conclusion - that the story is dead.

It's obvious why we're reluctant to come to this conclusion: the story is at the centre of everything that we do.

What's the first question we always ask? 'Is it a good story?' The language we use about our journalism comes back to the story.

'Get the story.' 'Tell the story.' 'It's a lead story.' The thing we tell young journalists to focus on above all else: 'Be a good storyteller.' 'Use the touching detail of the story to tell a bigger truth about the world.'

The story has become everything that we do. It lies behind all our rites and rituals. The things we think make journalism. Scoops, deadlines, headlines; accuracy, impartiality, public interest – they all lean on the fundamental assumption that we do our business in stories.

So what are the three big things that have killed it?

First: journalists have extended 'the story' way beyond what it was once useful for. It's a great way of learning some things about the world – but it's rubbish for many other forms of public communication.

In spite of that, we have stretched 'the story' as a format and sub-genre further than it could ever really go. And we did that to create the whole idea of journalism and journalists as a trade and a tribe apart. We did it to define ourselves. Only journalists could spot stories; only journalists could find the top line that could

compete for the attention of mass audiences.

Second: 'the story' – extended in this way – has become the root of the mistrust in journalism.

Our audiences have rumbled the weaknesses of 'the story', even if we haven't. And while some of them still find journalism based on 'the story' capable of getting their attention ... they know 'the story' as often as not tells them nothing 'true' about the world.

They know that on some subjects – crime; youth; leadership; the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan; the thing George Bush used to call 'The War on Terror'; most aspects of politics – 'the story' may well reinforce their prejudices but does nothing to give them the kind of information they need to be active citizens.

Third: the web has taught our former audiences that neither one nor two above needs to be true.

'Journalism' and 'the news' – founded, as I say, almost entirely on 'the story' – is not a fixed point in the universe. It's not a force of nature. It doesn't have to be how we journalists have made it.

The web has unbundled the bundle we used to sell audiences as a paper or a bulletin; it's erased the distinction we journalists used to make between 'news' – what we said it was – and information, stuff, the whole of the rest of the world.

The web is enabling our former audiences to come to their news in *their* ways at *their* times. Our old image of gripping them with *our* 'stories' is no more.

The story is dead.

Since I floated this idea about a year ago on my blog

Storycurve[1], other writers, teachers and academics in the world of journalism have come – independently – to a similar view.

Jeff Jarvis, on his blog Buzzmachine[2], wrote about what he called the end of the 'article' ... but his reasoning was similar to mine.

Paul Bradshaw[3], one of the most respected online journalism teachers in the UK, tells me he's been teaching the death of the story for years.

And Mindy McAdams, one of online journalism's big thinkers, wrote last year about the idea of journalists as 'curators' of information[4] – a role in which their idea of 'the story' has no place.

What's also clear is that some big news organisations – including us here in the BBC – are starting to organise ourselves in ways that assume 'the story' is dead – without actually articulating it.

Ask yourself this: what's more important to the biggest force in news today, the news aggregators like Google News? Is it the way in which information is finely honed and shaped into journalistically approved 'stories'? Or is it the way one piece of information – because inside the big Google News barrel, it's not news any more, at least, not as we know it – from whatever source can be linked to another?

The story is dead.

Let me clear, though, exactly what I'm talking about here.

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[1] http://storycurve.blogspot.com/
[2] http://www.buzzmachine.com/

[3] http://onlinejournalismblog.com/

[4] http://mindymcadams.com/tojou/2008/curation-and-journalists-as-curators/

When I talk about 'the story' I mean something quite specific … capital 'T' capital 'S' – 'The Story'.

I'm not predicting the death of storytelling, narrative as a human activity, as a linguistic and cognitive form.

E.M. Forster was right, back in the 1920s, when he talked about storytelling as one of the first human, communal activities, as the first way we found to tell each other something useful about the world outside the experience of our listeners.

He conjures up an imaginary scene where what he calls 'shockheads' sit around listening to storytellers[5]. And he imagines three possible outcomes to this kind of early newscasting – outcomes that should have worried journalists much more than they ever did: either the 'shockheads' stay entranced and awake; get bored and fall asleep; or get so bored they kill the storyteller.

We like narrative because the conscious part of our brains works in a linear way: we can take in first one thing, then another, then another – what Forster called 'story'.

And we can put them together to find causes and effects: because of this, this happened and that resulted in this – what Forster called 'plot'. It is an immensely useful and attractive way of communicating.

So, no, I'm not predicting the death of narrative.

What I am saying is dead is the capital 'T' capital 'S' story – the journalistic creation that grew out of narrative and accounts of

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[5] http://74.125.77.132/search?q=cache:H_A91attHm8J:ncertbooks.prashanthell ina.com/class_11.English.WovenWords/Essay-06%2520(The%2520story).pdf+shock-heads+E.M.Forster&cd=10&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=uk

the world.

'The story' is the carefully burnished unit that's been exclusively our province as journalists for as long as newspapers and news broadcasts they've existed.

'The story' is actually a very formal thing. We've created rules for it – so that we can teach those rules.

The bible of journalism education is the book Reporting for the Media[6]. It's the course book in many US journalism schools. Most British schools and colleges – if they don't encourage their students to pay $80 for it – borrow its ideas.

Here's what it says about 'the story' – which it divides into the 'lead' (what we'd call the 'top line') and the 'body'.

What's the rule for 'the lead'? Well, among other things: emphasise the magnitude and stress the unusual.

Well, yeah – I can hear you thinking – what's the problem with that? We don't need a book to tell us that's how you start your story. It's obvious.

And there are the rules for the 'body' of the story, too. Some of you may have come across the 'inverted pyramid'. The '5Ws' (who, what, where, when, why) at the top narrowing through the detail, context, background. Here's another shape for a news story, favoured by the Wall Street Journal: the hourglass style. And so on.

Now, whether you've learnt how to tell a story from a journalism school, a book or a senior colleague, you will have

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[6]

http://www.oup.com/us/catalog/he/subject/Communication/Journalism/NewsWritingReporting/?view=usa&ci=9780195337433

developed some sense of the rules of a 'good story'.

They seem intuitive. They seem obvious. And I suspect you rarely question them.

And they're good rules – for capturing attention, for defining what we do, for excluding the great unwashed from our tribe.

But they can be absolutely terrible rules if we use them exclusively to tell each other about the world.

And this is exactly what we have done – we've over-extended 'the story' to be the default unit of journalistic currency. Our audiences have realised this. And that's one reason why they've killed 'the story'.

As a basic idea, using narrative to tell other people what you've found out about the world is completely intuitive. And once there was no other way.

In the early days, whenever they were – Herodotus, if you're of a classical frame of mind, the 16th century if you're more of a modernist – people went out into the world, found things out and reported back.

What could be simpler? We kid ourselves that that's all we're doing now. As I'll explain later, we're not.

But it was the narrative, the partial account – 'this is what I have seen', 'this is what I know' – and our acceptance of it on its own terms – limitations and all – that enabled journalism to happen in the first place.

We accept that journalism – unlike a court case, a tribunal, a Royal Commission or a public inquiry – is about partial accounts. Journalism isn't about the whole truth, the totality, of anything.

Sure, if you add all of journalism's stories together on a

particular topic you may – may – come close to some kind of comprehensive understanding. Though there's no guarantee of that. (A thought you might want to hold onto.)

But if we didn't accept journalism as a series of 'stories' – fractured, partial accounts – we wouldn't even get past base one of journalism's most important function: addressing the information asymmetry between people and power.

We accept the proposition that journalism will have to spanner the truth out of power bit by bit. And that it can and should put together a complex truth bit by bit. And find the facts that will fuel our public deliberations bit by bit.

If you look at journalism's great achievements, that's exactly how it happened. Russell in Crimea, the My Lai massacres, Thalidomide, Watergate, Iraq's weapons of mass destruction.

The great achievements of journalism came about because a small number of dedicated, driven, skilled people went out on our behalf to find out as much as they could, and brought back to us what they'd found when they found it.

Actually, this image of the journalist is so institutionally accepted that it's gaining more and more protection from the law. The so-called Reynolds defence, further developed in the Jameel v Wall Street Journal[7] and McLagan judgements[8], protects assiduous and diligent journalists who come in good faith to a conclusion on the facts they've unearthed – even if that conclusion turns out, in the end, to be untrue.

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[7] http://www.swanturton.com/ebulletins/archive/JKCReynoldsDefence.aspx

[8] http://www.pressgazette.co.uk/story.asp?storyCode=39085&sectioncode=1

So what's the problem? The problem is that not all journalism is quite like Russell and Hersh and Evans and the Insight team.

And not all of journalism's public good can be fulfilled with 'the story'.

Yet that is the job journalists have come to expect 'the story' to do – if we still believe journalism fulfils any public good – and not everyone does: my friend Professor Adrian Monck at City University argues that journalists are simply storytellers. End.

Well, maybe that's a view most of our audiences have come to as well.

'The story' – stretched, pulled, extended every which way – has created the whole complex we call journalism.

And we're now so used to the pre-eminence of 'the story', and to all the things we and it have created, that we find it hard to imagine the world any other way.

It's hard to imagine that 'the story' is dead.

Think about what we've created with 'the story':

– The deadline.

In the world of 'the story', news is when we journalists say it is. In the *very* old world, it was when we got the paper to them or when the bulletin began. 'The story' defined the deadline and the deadline defined 'the story'. 'The story' was what we could unearth, verify, render impartial by the deadline. The deadline set the point at which work in progress became 'the story'. Yet deadlines were never more than a function of train timetables or space on the spectrum and in the schedules. No room there for evolving truths.

DEATH OF THE STORY

– The headline.

The life cycle of the story depends on what we call 'legs' – whether it's still worth our attention or whether it can be left alone to slide back into the morass of 'stuff'. The paradox of the search for the 'new top line' – when we think a 'story' still has legs, but we're damned if we know what the new top line is.

– Relativism.

Relativism knocks a 'story' that still 'has legs' out of the paper or the bulletin, simply because another 'story' is newer or has stronger 'legs'.

So 'the story' isn't just about narrative. It isn't just about going out finding out. It isn't just the preferred way we journalists have of describing the world. It's the basis of what we do and who we are. It's ideal for the business that journalism became.

To be a business, journalism needs a mass audience. To get a mass audience, journalism needs to persuade people in that audience that they really are interested in things they thought they didn't care about.

The problem is, audiences never were masses. But with no alternative to the papers, radio and TV, they satisfyingly behaved as if they were.

We measured them, prodded them, questioned them – to find more and better ways to make them behave like a single

undifferentiated mass.

Then they discovered it didn't have to be like that. And the more that our former audiences found they *did* have an alternative, the more dominated we became by 'the story'.

Think back for a moment to those rites and rituals of journalism: deadlines and headlines; legs and top lines; the structures of 'stories' and those of our journalistic lives.

What on earth is a deadline now? We think we're used to the idea that there's no such thing as a deadline on the web and on live and continuous news. But we tend to think that means no deadlines within a news cycle; we still cling to news cycles.

Our former audiences don't. Each and every one of our former audiences has their own news cycle. If it's new to them, it's new. We don't know how long a tail the web has – it hasn't been around long enough yet. But it's long – and as long as stuff is there, it's new to someone.

And that idea of 'the story', perfectly honed and burnished just in time to meet the deadline? It's axiomatic that on the web nothing is ever finished; it's just the latest version.

So what's the purpose now of the headline, the top line? Proximity is the watchword on the web – if it's close to me, I'll take an interest. If it's not, who cares? I don't need to.

And yet the deadline, the search for new legs, a new top line – reckless competition for attention – is more evident in journalism now than it has ever been – partly out of panic at and competition for departing audiences who've lost patience with 'the story'.

It was that panic that took Express newspapers down its fatal McCann route … over 100 libellous articles for which the

newspaper group has paid dearly. And it persuaded the Evening Standard to run entirely unfounded rumour and gossip about the Duke of Edinburgh – a 'story' for which it acknowledged it had no evidence.

And – just the other day – it's about a story that appeared in the Sun:

"I was disappointed when I heard that Mr Peter Doherty, a fine upstanding member of his local community, was meeting BBC bosses on Tuesday for a job interview."

According to the Sun, Peter Doherty was to write a new drama for the BBC.

So what did the BBC say about the story? Two things. One, it's not true. And, two, the BBC told the Sun journalist it wasn't true before 'the story' went into the paper.

You know the depressing thing? When you tell that to non-journalists, they just shrug and say 'What do you expect?

Or this (from Ben Goldacre): it's the way in which the Daily Mail, in the UK and in Ireland, has written 'stories' about cervical cancer jabs.

In the English edition we read: "The serious health concerns about the cervical cancer jab"; "Alert over jab for girls as two die following cervical cancer vaccination"; "Twelve-year-old girl paralysed 'after being given cervical cancer jab'"; "How safe is the cervical cancer jab? Five teenagers reveal their alarming stories".

But in Ireland, these are the stories: "Join the Irish Daily Mail's cervical cancer vaccination campaign today"; "Europe will

shame FF into providing Ireland's life-saving cervical cancer jabs";
"Ditching cancer vaccine is a big step back, says expert"; "Health
campaigners in Ireland take fight for cancer jabs to Washington";
"Cervical cancer vaccine for Ireland's girls: online poll slams
decision to pull funding".

They even have a graphic, with the Daily Mail logo, like
something from a parallel universe – it reads: "Daily Mail
Campaign: Roll out the vaccine now!"

So we have the same paper approaching the same
information in two mutually exclusive ways; in the UK it's to attack
any government healthcare decision – particularly one that has
anything to do with sexual health – by portraying it as medically
dangerous.

In Ireland, it's to attack any government healthcare decision
that can be portrayed as penny-pinching.

It's an environment that is so taken for granted that Damian
McBride and Derek Draper knew it was worth seeking to serve up
rumours that would find their way into mainstream journalism. They
knew some part of mainstream journalism would, in the end, run
their smears – either because the journalist didn't care they weren't
true, or because they thought someone else might run them.

It's an extension of the insight that governed the infamous
triumvirate of Mandelson, Campbell and Gould and their
subversion of the press back in 1994. When a politician can tell a
newspaper – as Peter Mandelson did in 1997 – that it's his job 'to
create the truth'[9] – and political journalists connive in that creation,

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[9] http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/1997/aug/09/labour.mandelson

all in pursuit of apparent 'stories', then you know the game is up.

It's no great surprise that three times as many of us will trust a complete stranger in the street as will trust a journalist. And their stories.

They've rumbled us.

And they've rumbled the weird world 'the story' creates: where the search for the word 'sorry' trumps the search for what really happened and what it really means; where a leader can only take responsibility by resigning, never by understanding what went wrong and putting it right; and where every perceived wrong has to generate 'an inquiry' and – hopefully – compensation.

The more I find out about how our former audiences are getting their news now that they don't have to rely on us journalists, the more convinced I become that our invention, 'the story', and all that goes with it is dead.

One obvious piece of evidence: we know that the vast majority of those in our former audiences just don't read our stories in the way we write them. Nor do they view our video 'stories' in the way we cut and script them. Jakob Nielsen has done a range of eye-tracking studies since the 1990s[10], repeated by researchers at the Poynter Institute[11], to find out how people actually read the stories journalists write.

The answer is not very closely and not very much of them. More than three quarters never get beyond the first paragraph. And of those that do, more than two thirds don't read – they scan

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[10] http://www.useit.com/eyetracking/

[11] http://eyetrack.poynter.org/

the beginning of each line. Almost none make it to that final, resounding, rhetorical final paragraph.

And we know from sites like YouTube that people want to see the thing, the event. 'Let me see the fire engine run over the cat.' They don't want the build up, the clever edit, the piece to camera. 'Just show me.'

We were talking the other day to groups of audience members about our reporting of the recession. But if you drill down into some of the responses they gave, you can see an emerging pattern of usage that doesn't care much for our idea of 'the story'.

Here's a typical response:

"Some feel that to fully understand stories they need to cross-reference with other channels, and for more encyclopaedic explanation on technical terms they use online sources like Wikipedia and Google."

In the old journalistic world, we controlled the context and background – the cross references, if you like. As we led people down that inverted pyramid. Now, you're more likely to find people like this respondent:

"I watch the TV and I'm on my laptop at the same time."

So there's your former audience, watching your carefully crafted story. When they hit something they want to know more about, off they go to construct their own context, history, background.

You think you've written and crafted a story. They think you've tipped them with an alert.

There's more like this:

"I use online because I can get more detail."

"I need more context and understanding and use online for that."

You thought you were writing a carefully crafted story. They thought you were offering them a news alert so they could go off to assemble their own context and background.

It's even worse than that. 'The story' was always a component in that bundle we called a newspaper or a bulletin. Search engines and news aggregators have ripped that bundle apart.

It's striking now when you talk to the under-25s how they see Google News or something similar as their news provider. They value and respect the BBC when they're linked to it – but they often see it as a second link after Google.

There's also a growing tendency amongst the young to take the ubiquity of information on the web for granted and assume that news will find them. They're not sitting around waiting to have their passions excited by 'the stories' of us journalists.

In that competition for mass attention, fewer and fewer want to play. So what does this all mean for journalists – particularly publicly funded, publicly accountable journalists?

Well, the first thing is to realise that the story should be rolled back to where it's useful. Narrative is still a great format or genre

for foreign, war and investigative reporting. We all still need people who go out there, find things out and come back to tell us what they've found – the Jeremy Bowens, Allan Littles, James Reynolds, John Wares and Peter Taylors of this world: people who work with their audiences, level with their audiences – 'Look, this isn't the totality of truth; I'm calling this as I see it. Impartially, accurately … but as I see it.'

But narrative has proved lousy and untrustworthy for almost everything else. We need to think about what audiences are telling us about how they want to be alerted to, and helped find their way through, 'everything else'.

But *if* we accept the death of the story, it's fantastically liberating – *if* we can stop hankering after that historical oddity, that anachronistic creation of journalists for journalists.

For instance, we can start to get used to the idea of the alert as an end in itself. Though our job doesn't end there, it's certainly where our audiences want it to start.

We can learn not to wait until we've got 'the story' before we tell them anything. Not to impose *our* deadlines on them. Or only to give them an alert when *we* think it's serious enough.

We need to understand the importance of 'intelligencing' the news – and the difference between that and the old 'story'. We need to use expertise – not prejudice or world view – to help our audiences find starting points to navigate their way around what's important to them.

The BBC Business Editor Robert Peston, constantly scans

the horizon in his blog[12] – including the horizons that are largely hidden from view – to spot the significant, offer alerts to capture the significant, to pass it on, to move on.

We can never again afford the condemnation of our trade that was the Credit Crunch – probably the biggest economic disaster ever; which we failed to tell or explain. Because when all the elements were moving into place, it wasn't a 'story'.

We need to get used to the idea that in gathering links and associations between information, multiplying information is more important than filtering it, paring it down, or reducing and selecting to make it fit 'our' story. We need to get used to the idea that nothing is ever 'the final version'.

We need to forget about deadlines – and the idea that a 'story' has ever run out of 'legs'. It's always new for someone. Everything always has legs for someone. Forget mass audiences; think masses of individuals.

We need to rethink our cycles of information: we're not bad at 'pre'; we are absolutely lousy at 'post'. We need to look at timelines that link events and information; graphics that make sense of big patterns over time. Tools that mine the data out there; not 'stories' that pretend only one bit of data matters.

We need to understand that platforms are mutual and interlinked – not exclusive. It's as important to us that someone in our audience gets an alert from TV and radio and navigates around it online as it is that they stick with our 30-minute bulletin.

Then how do we interconnect one platform with another? We need to understand that news is multi-layered. We need to

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[12] http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/thereporters/robertpeston/

understand our responsibilities in curating and looking after our audiences' content.

'The story' is dead. Get over it.

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