



European Broadcasting Union | Seminar



Week of the News

TRT, Antalya, Turkey, 30 June – 1 July

Report

EBU International Training





Summary Report

based on the minutes of the seminar, the powerpoint presentations and the concluding comments from Tom McGuire at the end of the seminar.

Introduction and context

Take a step back and spend two days away from the daily hustle and bustle of your newsroom to reflect upon your work, how to be more creative, how to indulge your audience into new approaches to the news.

If you wanted to give a metaphorical look on your work, it might translate into this: on a train journey across new lands, the journalist is the driver, and the audience are the passengers. The engine is the technology and equipment. The landscape reflects the content and resources. Each train station you stop at is a distribution channel/platform.

Now what's the best, quickest, most comfortable and satisfying way to get your passengers to their destination, whatever the train station they decide to get off at?

Planning the journey is key to a successful result:

- Scripting, editing: be inspired by the audience but also by your colleagues.
- Know your audience: give them what they should and want to know. The audience likes emotions, adapt the delivery of your content accordingly.
- A news journey is serious, entertaining, business.
- Linking the distribution platforms: Communicate across platforms, share information. The format and content will depend on the platform you are planning to distribute on.

But remember, a train without passengers doesn't run further, it has no more reason to exist!

As a current affairs journalist or editor, be clear in your objectives: In 25 words you should be able to describe your programme like a mission statement, otherwise it becomes fluffy and the audience gets confused.



How to meet the challenge of new sources on new platforms with new audiences?

Tom McGuire, RTE, Ireland

The case of the national late night news programme from RTE Radio, Ireland.

Objective:

To produce an interactive news programme which will attract and hold a new audience at a different time than usual.

Market research and positioning:

In Ireland there is no morning TV because there is no market for it. Therefore there is no big challenge for the morning radio programmes. But the battle is fierce in radio against evening TV programmes. We have to know the audience better, find out how to embark the audience on a late night radio programme. We also needed to build new audiences.

Choose and link the distribution platforms:

The programme will be available on radio, webcast, podcast, internet.

We need to know which platforms to use, for distribution and for promotion:

- Radio is very exciting and very changeable. DAB Digital Radio will change a lot in improving the access to the programme you want (pick up signals on ipods and mobile phone). It is also cheaper technology nowadays. RTE has stopped the medium wave which cost 1 million euros.
- TV: cross promotion between TV, radio and on -line. TV remains a powerful medium for promotion.
- Webcast and Podcast. Big potential. Eg, requests for downloads and streams of BBC programmes is growing at more than 20% on a month-to-month basis.
- Cell phones and social networks: excellent for improving audience interactivity. It definitely is the fastest way for the audience to interact. People are responding, talking and texting to each other. The broadcaster can talk to its audience through text messages. Other examples of Social networks interactions:
 - *My space* launched a radio programme in which they get rid of their presenters if people/listeners do not like them.
 - Some broadcasters, among which NOS, put their shows on *youtube* and it works.

Is the broadcaster becoming a service provider?

What about the interest of the topic?

All the stories must have a special treatment.

At ORF, ratings drop when we speak about the middle east. Same pictures, same way of reporting. There is a need to renew formats. How could we exploit the different platforms to renew the stories?

Where in the schedule:

At RTE we look at the schedule 6 weeks in advance and 6 months in advance. Most of the time, we journalists do not know the schedule. But it is important to decide on the regularity, and which moment of the week, and time of the evening (week day, weekend, monthly, weekly).

Duration: we should not think that a long programme automatically means better. Over 1 hour is too long. Some of the better programmes are often short. This is why the downloads and social networks work.



The team:

Editor – should be a driver, an encourager.

Presenter – the broadcaster has the chance of developing new talents, the rush of the day has gone, they are prepared to see or hear more. They are prepared to listen and evaluate the presenter. Try new voices.

Reporters – the presenters also can search their own material. It does not have to be the old way

Sources:

- Traditional, linear: newsroom, staff, freelance – old faithful way of getting information
- Independent media: print, feed, web. Use opinion polls carefully.
- Blogs: Allowing some of the presenters/reporters to write a blog may be a good thing, it gives more space for the programme on-air if there is only 5 minutes available and it will bring more people to the programme. Presenters love to hear themselves talk, and it consumes air-time sometimes unnecessarily.
- You may want to put a link from your programme to the blog but always keep the Editorial control of your programme.

The bottom line is: check your sources: at RTE there has been criticism on investigative journalism . There is now a group of investigative, young people to check the sources.

Keeping and developing the audience attention

- invite the audience in / interactivity: when allowing the audience to phone into live shows, it might be better to use a delay button. Managing a massive vox pop programme, people call in, they are tagged green orange and red, and the presenter or reporter calls them back. As a PSB, content that goes on-air must be controlled, no illegal, racist content.
- For the coverage of football for example: the audience can send sms and can contribute to the commentary.
- Challenge the audience figures you receive, you have young and old audience. Constantly try to get closer to your target.

PSB are credible and reliable: people believe them. The day people stop believing them, will be the end. Has the importance of news been minimized?

Specialist content:

- Use court reporters, reenactment with 2 actors .
- Our news are too serious, a little bit of satire can be good.
- If you have non professional contacts, you have to build up trust.
- Convert correspondence to content.
- If a presenter wants to give his opinion, ask him to write a blog.

Programme

- Title: will people remember in 5 years time?
- Be patient with the programme. The programme needs to make mistakes. Be prepared to change, review and adapt if needed. Always look at better stories for experience.
- Challenge the treatment of items,
- Monitor the competition and competing programmes / platforms, see how they are changing and how this affect you.
- Sound: it gives value to your news, enhances quality. Microphones are for sound what the lens is for a camera.



Citizen-based reporting

Henrik Hansen, DR, Denmark

DR experienced a fall in the ratings because people felt the news were too abstract, too far away from their daily lives.

An example of citizen-based reporting, with the help of DR on the format and presentation: *The Challenge*. See slide 3 (interviews done by ordinary people with politicians about the elections and future government). Another format to be explored along the same lines could have been to have the public's opinion on the politicians in the government, instead of interviewing the candidates to the government themselves.

The particularity of citizen-reporting is a larger amount of emotions being exposed/exploited. But there is nothing wrong to speak about the emotions and more private issues such as the pensions of people.

DR should encourage the people to be closer to the newsroom, so that the news reporters can be inspired by the citizens.

Today, newsrooms are also being inspired (and sometimes influenced) by the amount of information found on the internet: Self-made Citizen-based news on the web, blogs, social networks, etc.

What consequence does this have on the newsrooms?

- the internet is a great reservoir of ideas
- people can communicate all the time, at any time.
- enables to get closer to the people with their own stories, by including citizen journalism and websites such as *ohmynews*.
- the internet hosts a lot of uncontrolled content – biased, personal or uninformed opinions are mixed (or even sometimes mistaken) with factual information
- it proves that broadcasters no longer dominate the content and dissemination of news, they are losing power of the media, there is no more protective fence in the newsroom

Newsroom journalists feel the hype of the internet platform, and have to react. The TV and radio news audience is declining. There is a need to change the habits, and journalists to step down from their pedestal.

From a strictly news content point of view, citizen journalism does not have a lot of value. If we evaluate the interest and proximity, it has a lot of influence and value.



Practical case of Citizen-based reporting project at DR:
"Reducing accidents on the roads"

General Journalistic Goals of Our Citizen Based Project

1. We want to *renew and re-vitalize the traditional conflict oriented news reporting* pointing out problems without helping the citizens understanding what causes the problems and without showing the possibilities of action
2. We want to *democratize* our undemocratic one way communicating media, who are talking to the citizens instead of talking *with* them.

Specific Goals of the Citizen Based Project

1. We must constructively *inspire the citizens*
2. We must ensure *cohesion between problem-oriented, solution-oriented and interactive journalism*
3. For each problem we point out, we must find sources who can point out *possible solutions* or at least tell us how other people have tried to solve the problems
4. We must present *more ordinary people in our coverage* and actively use the experience of these people in our news
5. We must inspire the citizens to actively *act themselves* to solve the problems
6. We want the project to generate hard *news-stories* for our media



What Did We Do?

- Created a *unique website*, "Safer on the roads": The link between the three different participating media in the project and a forum of interactivity, open debate and local communities sharing experiences, knowledge and ideas of how to increase safety on the roads by local initiatives
- We set up an *alternative commission on accidents* in the roads with 10 ordinary citizens.
 - *Their goal*: Suggest untraditional solutions to bring down the number of accidents in the roads.
 - *Our method*: Announcing for citizens interested in traffic problems through our media and on the web. More than 200 applied.
 - *The process*: Our commission held six meetings under guidance of a moderator and presented ten solutions for the minister of traffic at a big hearing

Happenings With Newsvalue And 'Good Story Potential'

- Do you think the cars go too fast in your town or local area; Write to us and describe the problem. If your problem seems severe the police will put up an *electronic speed control* to spy on the cars
- *Turn in gross violaters* of the traffic laws and the speed limit
- *Do you save time* by going faster than the speed limit: Two cars drove 50 kilometers from one city to another. One car followed the speed regulations, the other car drove as fast as it could and broke deliberately the law (accepted by the police). The illegal driver won by four minutes.



But we still need professional journalists more than ever (fair, balanced, serious, reliable, investigative, understandable news):

- to make those stories that are important but not directly relevant to the audience (international news, investigative reporting, etc.).
- to take the lead, not follow (the results of change are immediately visible in the media: For each programme, you should have satisfying audience, ratings. If too low ratings, no programme. A train without passengers does not carry on),
- to be good storytellers

Practical case of professional journalism getting closer to the audience:
Meet the Danes project

Meet the Danes

- In search of the voice of the Danish voters we sent two reporters with a DV camera out on the roads for three weeks with a tiny caravan.



- The idea: Let the reporters hitchhike through the country and get picked up by random citizens who want to give them and their caravan a ride. Then ask the citizen, what he or she thinks should be the single most important issue of the election campaign and conduct an interview on the spot on this issue.



- The reporters must get off at the destination of the driver and continue hitchhiking through the country from there.
- At the end of their tour the two reporters must write a list of the top issues of the citizens they meet out in the country and hand it over to the prime minister and the leading opposition candidate.



News and platforms

Siegfried Bracke, VRT, Belgium

About using different platforms:

- NOS: we linked to social networks and we made a story. A gay who could not go out, put a TV programme on Youtube.
- ORF: there is the danger of making the same news in the same way on the different platforms. Repetition is not good.
- VRT: People stay on each internet page 45 seconds. Internet users are superficial.
- SR: the content of our radio goes on the web.
- A reporter is a professional on content, and he/she does one week on radio for morning shows and evenings on TV. The specific media require specific skills. They need to have huge trainings.
- HRT: we have two programmes, one serious and one broader programme with more news. We attract a totally different public.

Adapting to change - The case of VRT:

12 years ago, VRT was in a very bad situation, experiencing a dramatic declining audience. There was a big switch, a change of culture.

Instead of what the journalists and newsroom professionals want to show, they have to listen to what the audience says and wants. For example, VRT will not make a programme on the European elections. VRT will focus on the regional parliament elections. People are not interested in the European Elections. VRT took the decision not to make a programme that would not interest the audience even if it was considered important and relevant in politics.

Finding the right balance between what the audience should know (relevance) and what the audience likes to know (wants to hear, see), is key to the success of the news business.

News is about serious business as well as entertainment.

The audience has to be surprised.

Journalists *can* also take themselves too seriously.

On which platform to distribute? Specificities of each platform:

- The internet is entertaining and generates volume. There is no difference between PSB and commercial.
- Radio is everywhere, fast, credible and interactive. Makes the imagination of people work, as there is no image.
- TV is a compelling media, attractive, visual and has impact on masses

General results and comments from the exercise:

- Results of an opinion poll about working hours: radio is not fit for listing and discussing numbers. Concentrate on only 1 question - The only figure for radio would be the first question on family for example. A way of illustrating the opinion poll without discussing detailed numbers would be for example to go on the first commuter train, and the last train and ask people about their working hours.
As media experts, we have to explain a lot. Why, for example, people have to work harder.
- The heroin addicts story: "why did they not get any help, social care", "whose responsibility is it", etc. Place questions on Internet for comments.



on radio: for example, talk about the last days of the couple, interview train drivers: other train drivers may have had the same experience.

On the internet: one journalist said that it was the only solution.
On radio it was completely different: the story of despair.

- Amy Winehouse story: for the VRT, it is not considered tabloid, Amy is very popular, she gave a concert for Mandela birthday. A suggestion: to do a story with her parents, use internet for links to Youtube.
- Macedonian journalist story: on internet, perhaps give excerpts of articles he wrote,
On Radio: make it a play, analogy to an Agatha Christie story.
- Irish referendum story:
Make items with a simple base line. Combining too much elements is dangerous, it makes soup.
On internet, there is space for more creative writing: a Horoscope for the treaty
Show Cartoons
Radio: we found Belgian people in Ireland, interviewed them.

Key base line: We should think out of the box.

Beware of the trap of making the same news in the same way put different platforms. Repurposing is easy, it is also lazy. Success is making the difference.



Sound and news

Stephen Erickson, USA

Sound is very important for the stories, and on TV it's often neglected.

You have to hear the tears, you have to hear natural sound.

It is not often that sound makes a special role.

All sorts of sound - added music, atmosphere as a transition, silence, etc. - is an added value.

A careful and judicious use of sound can change your work.

And the voices: Educate the voices who tell the stories.

Too often we encounter experiences such as this: a show on international affairs is being broadcast, 40 minutes without sound bite, without voice over. Too much text, too monotonous.

Do you remember a particular story that stroke you?

Examples:

- Chinese people: earthquakes. Amateur footage.
- Radio clip on Mississippi.
- Sydney Pollack film: describes the movies where the Narration was stronger than the sound..

Sound and narration work together, text and sound work together. Describing and/or recording the atmosphere. Sometimes we are in difficult conditions of recording for sound.

Process when making the programme

- Look and listen
- Plan the journey
- Use the technology as a tool: Microphones are our lenses
- Be inspired by the audience and by each other
- communicate (use/exploit the Social and emotional sides)
- What they should get, do not separate



Digital evidence: Story telling in broadcasting and on the Web

Eric May, USA/Germany

TV and Web have different audience, different market behavior, different functionalities.
It is important to know how to share resources, source and information when creating news stories for different platforms.

Exercise: To write a news story under tight deadlines, with limited resources and information:

- The 2 teams (web and TV) share and analyse all information for credibility; prioritize and choose best elements
- share/ negotiate use of limited resource (one work station)

TV is more polished; Web is "very latest" and rougher and has tighter deadlines

Outcomes:

- Communicate
- Share
- Different platform, different angle
- Don't neglect investigative skills – tight deadlines often keeps journalists from searching and checking the sources

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