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The danger with
24-hour news is that it
becomes a rolling
service of rumour and
speculation

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PHOTOGRAPH: LARRY W. SMITH

Covering the scenes of devastation and evacuation has tested local journalists' skills and resources to the limit

The story they always feared

Journalists on the Times-Picayune, the New Orleans city newspaper, have defied the destruction to cover the biggest story of their lives. By **Duncan Campbell**

On a corner of Magazine Street in New Orleans, amidst the wreckage and the spray-painted warnings to looters, a newspaper vending machine remained intact. The now out-of-date paper it was offering for sale carried the ominous headline "KATRINA TAKES AIM." The subeditor who wrote that headline for the Times-Picayune was right. Katrina was indeed taking aim and before that edition could sell out it had hit the city and left, in its wake, the paper's printing presses under water and its staff scattered far and

wide. Remarkably, the paper resurfaced almost immediately, initially in its online form, and it now produces a 16-page publication. Its presses may have been swamped and its staff of 260 more than halved to around 120 by displacement and evacuation but the Times-Picayune has emerged as one of the great survival stories of the hurricane.

Last week, the paper made waves itself with an editorial in the form of a personal message to President Bush telling him to sack the entire leadership of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (Fema), particularly Michael Brown, the man Bush appointed as its head. "We're angry, Mr

President, and we'll be angry long after our beloved city and surrounding parishes have been pumped dry. Our people deserved rescuing. Many who could have been were not. That's to our government's shame." The scathing editorial was quoted throughout the American media as the voice of an angry and dismayed New Orleans. The piece was a classic example of robust American journalism.

Earlier, out-of-town reporters covering the story had found the series of prescient articles that the Times-Picayune ran three years ago which predicted that just such a storm could do the damage it did. Above the masthead of their current slimline

"hurricane edition" is a reminder of that series in a strapline that reads "Katrina: the story we've always feared."

It has been a strange time for Jim Amoss, the editor, who has suddenly found his paper the focus for the attention of the world's media. "I've been dumbfounded by it," says Amoss, a native of the city who has edited the paper for 15 years and worked for it for twice that time. He says that usually when a newspaper attracts the attention of the rest of the media, it is because it has embarked on "some grand journalistic feat but we sort of stumbled into this". The leader article that

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Dispatches

Cinema

An unbelievable Tale of tabloid hell

From *The Great Escape* to *Gladiator*, cinema's relationship with authenticity is notoriously strained. The first of just two remarkable things about *Rag Tale*, a new British film set at a fictional London tabloid, is that it leaves Hollywood's most heinous historical travesties looking like masterclasses in verisimilitude.

The deputy editor is desperate for bylines, when in reality red-top deputies rarely write anything. And for some reason, "splashes" can appear inside the paper as well as on the front page.

These, and all the other inaccuracies, would be forgivable if the film was any good. Sadly, it is so bad that I am about to give away the ending. Eddy the editor is lustily servicing his deputy, who happens to be the proprietor's wife. What he does not know is that she is after his job. What she does not know is that her husband is actually her father.

At just over two hours long, there is rather too much room here. In fact, in the hands of a half-decent subeditor, the script would be reduced to about half a page. Indeed, if the director/producer Mary McGuckian had not addressed real-life hacks at last week's London launch, the question of how it was made would have left me utterly scuppered.

Luckily, McGuckian was quick to distance herself from the writer tag that still appears on the film's credits, and stressed that the project had been an "improvisational collaboration" with the actors. Initially, this appeared to be a modest sharing of the credit, but within minutes of the film beginning it looked like desperate deflection of blame, for the second remarkable thing about *Rag Tale* is that it boasts a very impressive cast. Rupert Graves, Simon Callow and John Sessions are outranked only by Hollywood exile Jennifer Jason Leigh and veteran villain Malcolm McDowell.

This renders *Rag Tale* briefly interesting. It portrays journalists viewed through the eyes of actors and, boy, do they hate us! Like thespians, journalists are often drunk and sometimes dishonest. Unlike thespians, however, they are rarely dumb. Here, the clever actors give themselves a few clever lines and the rest, especially Eddy (Graves), spout rubbish.

My suspicion that the entire mess had been concocted without anyone



Journalists on a British tabloid as imagined by actors in new film *Rag Tale*

involved speaking to a genuine journalist was confirmed by the absence of free booze at the post-premiere party. Needless to say, I made my excuses and left.
James O'Brien, presenter, LBC 97.3 and former Daily Express showbusiness editor

Classic sitcom

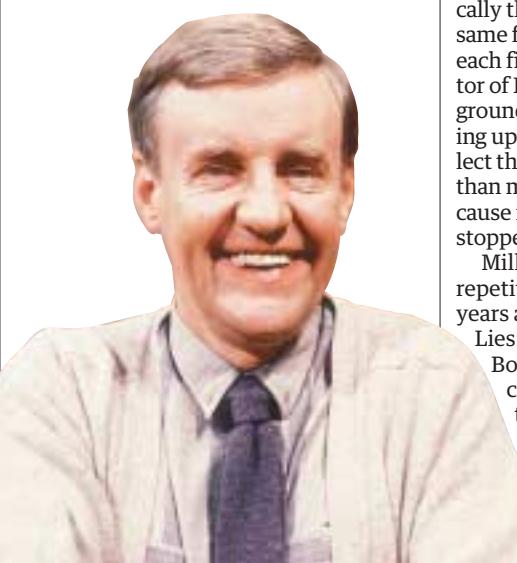
Ever increasing respect

A 1980s sitcom about a suburban middle-aged couple and their suave hairdresser neighbour sounds like an unlikely inspiration for Ricky Gervais.

The creator of *The Office* and *Extras* has described *Ever Decreasing Circles* as one of the great forgotten TV comedies. "It was so sweet, melancholic and honest," he told the Media Guardian Edinburgh International TV Festival.

"It was very flattering because Gervais is such a brilliant man," says Richard Briers (pictured), star of the BBC1 sitcom that ran for five years from 1984. Written by John Esmonde and Bob Larbey, who propelled Briers to fame a decade earlier in *The Good Life*, it told the story of busybody Martin Bryce - played by Briers - whose world is turned upside down by the arrival of his worldly

"Ricky Gervais has described Richard Briers as 'the greatest living British sitcom actor'"



wise neighbour. "Martin had one skin less than he ought to have done and took immediate offence at everything," remembers Briers. "He was an extraordinary character, and Bob Larbey said I was the only actor charming enough to get away with it."

The two shows have more in common than the setup suggests. Like Gervais's David Brent, Brice was a socially inept middle manager (*Mole Valley Valves* to Brent's *Wernham Hogg*) out of place with the rigours of the modern world. But while *The Office* was about, well, the office, *Ever Decreasing Circles* focused on the breakdown of traditional social groups. Like *The Office*, it was funny and sad in equal measure.

"Martin was like a mild David Brent," recalls Briers. "We all knew an irritating little man who wanted to manage everything. It was a very recognisable type. But we were a cosy, escapist show. Gervais's stuff is hysterically funny but almost too close for comfort."

Gervais has described Briers as "the greatest living British sitcom actor". So has he been asked to appear in *Extras*? "My daughter said it would be wonderful," laughs Briers. "But Madonna is the last person on their list so I am probably quite a long way down it." Ricky, it's over to you. **John Plunkett**

Publishing

A film magazine less ordinary

"If you line up most film magazines side by side you'll see that, really, they're basically the same magazine - same covers, same features, even the same marks for each film review," says Danny Miller, editor of Little White Lies - a new, underground film quarterly. "When I was growing up, I loved magazines so much I'd collect them. The only thing I loved more than magazines was film. Gradually, because film magazines were so boring, I stopped buying magazines altogether."

Miller's answer to the problem of repetitive publishing came to him eight years ago. He conceived Little White Lies with his schoolfriend Matthew Bochenksi when aged 17 and they carried the dream with them through university and into their first jobs at skate and snowboard magazine Adrenalin. When the independent publishers behind Adrenalin collapsed last No-



George A Romero's *Land of the Dead*

ember, he put together the first issue of Little White Lies with Bochenksi and various friends writing about film "in the same way you talk about it in the pub".

"If you're talking about a film you don't endlessly discuss camera angles or try to imagine what it would have been like visiting the set," he argues. "You use the film as a springboard to talk about all sorts of stuff. That's our philosophy. Each issue of Little White Lies is themed on a film, but then our writers are at liberty to come up with stuff on whatever the film inspires in them."

Thus, the third issue takes George A Romero's *Land Of The Dead* as a theme to riff on rock stars who should be dead and voodoo practitioners in London, while the next issue - on King Kong - runs features on great fights in nature and the Donkey Kong videogame.

Since launching the magazine, Miller has got his old job at Adrenalin back after a new publisher was found for the title. He's kept going with Lies, however, and is developing the kind of solid, paid-for business plan that recent launches such as Stool Pigeon and Good For Nothing have proclaimed impossible. Little White Lies is sold in Borders, Virgin and Fopp stores as well as independent clothing and music stores. With a cover price of £2.75, it is currently shifting a modest 10,000 copies, but that accounts for almost 80% of the print run.

"Obviously we don't expect the likes of Empire and Total Film to have even heard of us," Miller admits. "They sell 200,000, we sell less than a tenth of that. But we don't have their tired formula, we don't cull our news section from the internet and we don't just choose the same films as everyone else to run with. That's all we want to do - provide somewhere for people who are really passionate about film to go."

Stephen Armstrong

» The story they always feared

demanded the heads of Fema, which has been quoted all over the world, was not typical of the paper's style. "It was an unusually strong editorial. We don't normally frame an editorial to the president of the United States. Both in substance and in tone, it departed from its conventions."

The paper's circulation of 240,000 has, along with the city it serves, taken a big hit. Amoss and his team are printing 60,000 copies which are snapped up in Baton Rouge, the state capital, where one of their new temporary offices has been, and wherever newsagents are reopening. It sells for 50 cents, an indication of the inflation that has taken place since it was founded in 1837 and took its name partly from the Spanish coin, the picayune, which in those days was worth a quarter of a dollar. William Faulkner is one of its past contributors as is William Sidney Porter who wrote under the name O Henry.

"CLEAR OUT OR ELSE" was the headline on the front of the paper last Thursday as the mayor of New Orleans, Ray Nagin, told the remaining 10,000 or so of his citizens that the time had come for them to leave their homes. What that

means for the paper is that most of its readers will be dispersed across the state and beyond, with some being evacuated as far away as Salt Lake City and Detroit.

Everyone on the paper is too busy bringing the editions out to guess how long it will be before they are back in the city. They have been helped out by many other media organisations and given a temporary home in nearby Houma, by that city's local paper, the Courier, for which Amoss is full of praise. Some of their suburban bureaux are already reopening and a team from the paper has inspected their offices and presses and found the damage not as bad as was feared. But for the time being, there is only one story in town.

"Everybody is covering the story in some form or another," says Jim Amoss, "whether it's the money or the sports aspect" (here the main issue is what will happen to the Superdome stadium, which acted as a somewhat edgy refuge, and what will happen to the New Orleans Saints who play there.) The paper's website, nola.com, run by Jon Donley, has also become a necessary part of the story,



Refugees from Hurricane Katrina read newspapers outside the New Orleans Superdome

able as it is to bring out the news without presses or vending machines.

Running a paper from different locations is "completely disorientating. It means reinventing ourselves hour by hour," says Amoss who has worked on all of the big stories over the years from Ku Klux Klan grand wizard David Duke running for governor of Louisiana to that prediction of the storm to come. "This dwarfs them all," he says.

The reporters from the paper are understandably slightly frazzled but helpful to their foreign counterparts. They are having to catalogue some hellish and poignant tales, from Fats Domino being

escorted to safety to the angry reactions of those who do not want to leave the city.

As for those prophetic papers in abandoned vending machines, they may not last too long. Some of the National Guardsmen patrolling the city centre were looking out for them as souvenirs.

One of the latest front pages carries a photo of a Black Hawk helicopter in a housing development flooded by the storm as a resident paddles a boat to safety. Now the paper itself has navigated its way into the pages of the history of American journalism.

Jeff Jarvis, page 6

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"We're angry, Mr President, and we'll be angry long after our beloved city and surrounding parishes have been pumped dry"

MediaGuardian

Small screen talent is shouting to be heard

If John Birt can not find the 'raw author's voice' in contemporary British television drama, just what on earth is he watching?

Tony Marchant

In all the furore about John Birt's MacTaggart lecture in Edinburgh, little mention was made of what he had to say about TV drama. That was until Melvyn Bragg weighed in last week, calling the former BBC director general a "beached grande" and suggesting he hadn't seen enough television recently.

So what got Bragg so exercised? A close reading of Birt's speech reveals the answer. "British television drama is perfectly professional," Birt had told Edinburgh. "Of course we need intelligent whodunits and escapist melodramas. But today's drama practitioners ought to rent a great skip and throw away the stereotypes and the formulae." He went on to say that "to understand the pain and joy of the inner self," you had to go to the cinema. There, you would find the "raw author's voice" in films such as Paul Haggis's *Crash*, Alexander Payne's *Sideways* and Thomas Vinterberg's *Festen*. All were "fresh, captivating and unsterotypical," Birt said.

It was a bit like hearing a farmer blam-

'When writers find themselves beholden to ratings they may as well be making *Rosemary and Thyme*'
Tony Marchant

ing chickens for not being free range, after he had built the little cages.

Even though I've been a bit of a doom monger myself about TV drama, when it comes to a comparison with British film, there's no contest. And while the films Birt cites are all excellent, he only came up with three. Last year on TV in Britain we had, among others, *Shameless*, a riotously energetic and tender series about working-class lives; *Bodies*, a scalpel-sharp exposure of NHS culture; *Conviction*, a brave and compelling reinvention of the cop genre; and *Outlaws*, an excoriating guide to the criminal justice system. All were outstandingly original and most significantly of all, they were all authored series.

As Birt should know, everyone in British TV is obsessed with what's happening in American TV series, not cinema. US dramas come from a particular worldview. Writers are given executive producer status and real clout, and are at the heart of the production. Most enviable of all is the glorious patronage that allows an American writer's vision and ambition to be sustained for up to 26 weeks, season after season. This kind of support is mostly only available on HBO, but British writers have begun to seek and expect the same kind of investment in their work, too.

Shameless and the others were admirable examples of what may be a new evolution in British TV drama. The writer's



Shameless, the series about an extended working-class family in Manchester written by Paul Abbott, author also of *Clocking Off*, *State of Play* and *Linda Green*, has been a huge critical and popular success for Channel 4

voice, only formerly heard with any real force in single drama and serials, is now coming loud and clear in series too. However, such writers are finding themselves beholden to the ratings for their show's continued existence. They may as well be making *Rosemary and Thyme*. And when broadcasters start applying the same criteria to both kinds of shows, then we lose remarkable work such as *Buried* (which was as good as *Oz*) and *Outlaws*. What starts to look like a really exciting development in TV drama - the authored series - is treated shoddily, moved around in the schedules and finally abandoned. What's wrong with having an outstanding and original returning drama with an audience of 2-3 million? If we are happy to live with such modest figures for challenging one-offs and serials, why can the same faith not be kept for series with the same sensibility? Bad series with good ratings get recom-

mended, good ones with modest viewing figures don't. Remember *North Square*?

Writers don't want for ambition, they just need courageous broadcasters. They don't want to find themselves at the mercy of bad-faith commissioning decisions. It is a particularly convenient kind of myopia that enables Birt to snipe at writers as if the structures in which they work had no impact.

In the continued absence of single drama, surely the most realistic way to nurture the voices of new writers is to put them to work on the best series, rather than commissioning them to write "perfectly professionally" for the soaps.

In Birt's view of the TV dramalandscape he seems not to have spotted works by Andrew Davies, Russell T Davies, Paul Abbott, Jimmy McGovern, Abi Morgan and Stephen Poliakoff. Was William Ivory's *A Thing Called Love* stereotypical? Where

were the formulae in *Dirty Filthy Love*? Was *Sex Traffic* not contemporary enough? Does he think *Our Friends in the North*, *GBH* and *Holding On* belong in a skip?

There is an ambition, driven by writers, to give drama series the same "state of the nation" resonance as singles and serials; there is a commitment to make as much impact as possible. I am even trying to write such a series myself. (In the meantime, I am about to start filming a three-part drama about the moral and ethical conflicts of the fertility industry.)

Dramatists don't need to be told to "break free" as if they were the victims of their own timid imaginations. They need freedom from the timidity of broadcasters.

John Birt really should stay in more.

Tony Marchant is the author of, among others, *Holding On*, *Passer By*, *Never Never* and *Kid in the Corner*

Spooky coincidences

Spooks, the pacy MI5 thriller that has helped re-establish the BBC's reputation for contemporary drama, tonight returns in explosive, and potentially controversial, style. The fourth series opens with a two-part special based around a terrorist attack on London's transport network, which originally went into production last November.

Inevitably, the subject matter caused consternation after life imitated art on July 7. Although the fictional terrorists in question are not religious extremists, the similarities were sufficient to cause head of drama Jane Tranter and new BBC1 controller Peter Fincham to agonise over whether to drop the episodes.

But executive producer Jane Featherstone, also managing director of production company Kudos, said that their decision showed the extent to which a drama holds a mirror up to society.

"We reach an audience that doesn't watch *Newsnight* or *Panorama*. It's not lecturing in any way and it's told through characters that are as flawed as we are and it will spark debate," she says.

Later episodes in the series will examine the threat posed by the far right in the current climate and issues around ID cards and freedom of speech through the introduction of Juliet Shaw, the national security coordinator, played by Anna Chancellor.

With its tendency to kill off major characters at brutally regular intervals, *Spooks* does not have to rely on a star. And with a team of writers and directors and regular guest appearances, such as Martine McCutcheon in this series, it is an ensemble piece.

"It's about loyalty to a brand," says Featherstone, adding its success is also down to the way it mixes the personal with the political. In the first episode of the new series, the characters are gathered at the funeral of their former colleague Danny when they hear about the bombs.

The scepticism of many of the best writers had been overcome, says Featherstone: "You can come in and write a play for us that reaches millions. The time of the two-part is still here but we need to shift the balance towards authored series."

Featherstone argues that *Spooks*, and its sibling *Hustle*, have proved that a British team of writers can make intelligent dramas that are equal to US fare in scale. "It's not as though we don't have the talent," she says. "The biggest influence [on *Spooks*] has been on the pace and ambition of the storytelling. We are able to tell big scale stories that are quite personal and don't alienate the audience." With a fifth series already in production, she predicts it will continue. And *Spooks* has followed the US lead in another sense, she says: "We're not afraid to use people who can act but also look good. It's nothing to be ashamed of."

Owen Gibson



Steve Hewlett
Media FAQ

Do we really need Freesat?

To judge by the coverage of last week's announcement by the BBC and ITV of their new alliance to develop and promote a satellite equivalent to Freeview - the answer is yes. In the medium term, we are told, Freesat will enable the 25% of households currently unable to receive Freeview (digital terrestrial television) to go digital as the analogue signal is phased out region by region. In the longer term Freesat is envisaged as a permanent fixture offering consumers a competitor to Sky and pay-TV in the satellite domain.

However when looked at more closely, little is quite as it seems. It is not

at all clear that in the long term the consumer interest will be well-served by the launch of Freesat. For a start the number of homes unable to receive Freeview will reduce sharply as switchover progresses. As the analogue signal is switched off region by region, so the power of the digital signal can be increased thus embracing more homes. So significant is this that experts estimate the number of households unable to receive digital terrestrial television by the time switchover is complete to be as low as 2%.

So the idea that Freesat is necessary in the longer term to ensure near universal availability of BBC (or ITV) services would seem at best overstated - especially given that Sky already offers a free satellite service.

It is difficult to avoid the suspicion that what the BBC is really keen to do is to continue the policy it adopted with Freeview - the corporation specified technical standards based around "dumb" boxes, so-called because they cannot be upgraded to pay-TV services. If enough viewers have "dumb" boxes, then the argument for testing subscription as a way of supplementing the licence fee for BBC services dies at birth. Whatever the arguments against subscription funding for the BBC, to use public cash and its privileged position to intervene in this way must at least be questionable.

ITV's involvement in this project seems to make little commercial sense - ITV is already universally available and will remain so - and there is no indication of the company gearing up to spend significant amounts of money on it. But on the principle that anything Sky wouldn't like must be worth doing - and in the cause of a well-timed announcement to give cover to a mediocre set of results - it was probably worth a shot. Although judging by the share price, it doesn't appear to have worked.

And for the government? Well, if Freesat provokes Sky into putting more effort into marketing its own free satellite service, that would be no bad thing in smoothing the course of digital switchover.

How did Sky get the cricket?
Just as cricket rediscovered its place, after years in the wilderness, as a premier sport and source of national pride it is to disappear from terrestrial TV screens. Leaving aside the sentiments (and yes there is one in

my house) of those for whom this is a matter of great rejoicing, how did it happen and whose fault is it?

Channel 4 has been attacked for failing to step up to the plate, when in truth they have merely responded to commercial reality. It might look like a monkey in the middle of the most exciting and closely fought Test series of recent times, with a new poster boy in the form of Freddie Flintoff (pictured right) but spool forward to a wet July Thursday in the middle of a series against Pakistan.

The BBC has been criticised for failing to do its public duty by not bidding seriously for the rights. In the short term, given the other sports the corporation has taken on since losing cricket, that is an unfair charge. Although in the long term we should expect to see the BBC and cricket reunited.

And Sky has been denounced for stealing the crown jewels, confining Test cricket to the status of exclusive minority interest. Of all the brick-bats flying around this is possibly the most



unfair. In many ways Sky has saved the bacon of the real villain of the piece - the England and Wales Cricket Board - and has 5 million households on its books who take its sports package. Once it became clear that C4 was unlikely to bid at the same level as before, Sky was prevailed upon to help out. Not unnaturally, Sky demanded exclusivity and while the ECB might have lucked out given the success of this Ashes series none of that looked likely when the deal was done.

In reality the ECB has traded the exposure and long-term brand-building opportunities of terrestrial TV for money. The tragedy is that, as anyone who knows cricket will acknowledge, most of it will go into shoring up the hugely expensive county infrastructure rather than into developing the game for the future. Had cricket tackled its underlying structural problems earlier it could now be having its cake and eating it.

Does size matter?

It depends on whether your Berliner is a newspaper or a doughnut.

Have you got a burning question for Media Guardian's agony uncle? Email Steve at media faq@guardian.co.uk

MediaGuardian

Opinion

Digital switchover is going ahead, but at what cost?

Emily Bell



The thing about reformatting a newspaper - picking up a topical theme - is that it is done entirely with the reader in mind rather than just as an amusement for a news organisation. In other words, you shrink your paper because you are pretty sure people will like it, and more people will like it than in its larger format.

Now that isn't to say that everyone will be wildly enthusiastic about it - some might prefer an even smaller paper with better colour and a staple or two. Others might regret the loss of a format they were very used to, and might feel they have had change thrust on them. However, everyone has a choice.

Imagine then, the same thing happening to your TV service, except it is facilitated because it is deemed better for you rather than because you might like it. In fact don't even imagine it, because it is going to happen. Or, if you are one of the 475 households in Ferry-side or Llanstefan in Wales, it already has.

This week, at the Cambridge biennial Royal Television Society conference, we expect Tessa Jowell to announce more details of the plan to switch off analogue TV signals between 2008 and 2012. This will be a familiar path for Jowell, who has already secured the 2012 Olympics for London. Hosting the Olympics can be financially ruinous, and the citizens of the host city might grumble that they were not asked whether they wished to pay, but the grumbling is buried under commemorative T-shirts and collective bonhomie.

Similarly, the switch from analogue to digital TV will be expensive for the 40% of non-digital households in the UK. The cost of the Welsh trial was £1m, admittedly in an area with a disproportionately high number of elderly and disabled users.

There is little point in debating the merit of the analogue-to-digital switchover, even though there are a considerable number of people who think it will be expensive, pointless, and aggravate the "digital divide". The debate has been largely closed down by the fact it is a fait accompli, and one suspects it will be narrowed even further when the BBC receives a licence fee settlement, which gives it some responsibility for enthusing us about the conversion.

The fact is that in the Welsh test area more than 80% of users were very enthusiastic, not least because previously they could only receive four terrestrial channels - of which one was S4C. Their enthusiasm, however, could also be traced to the fact that the equipment was free, as was help with upgrading their aerials - and a surprisingly high 45% needed some attention. An entertaining passage from the DCMS report on the trial highlights the fact that switchover "exposes the inadequacies of the aerial and connectivity infrastructure in most houses". In other words that brown wire between your TV and wall - the one the dog chews and the children play with - is probably too crummy to be able to carry the new digital signals.

The DCMS has indicated that general financial help will not be available, but it is imperative that elderly and disabled people are subsidised financially and supported technically.

What needs to be revealed is a breakdown of the cost of the project. An expert analyst in this area lamented to me last week that lodging questions under the Freedom of Information Act had not helped. The DTI apparently said it had lost the cigarette packet on which it had made its first calculations, and the DCMS claimed that to release such information might be prejudicial to the economy (!). We might have no choice in this matter, and we might find that our descendants are profoundly grateful that their coaxial cables were all renewed in 2008, but the real value of digital TV can only be assessed if we know what it costs.

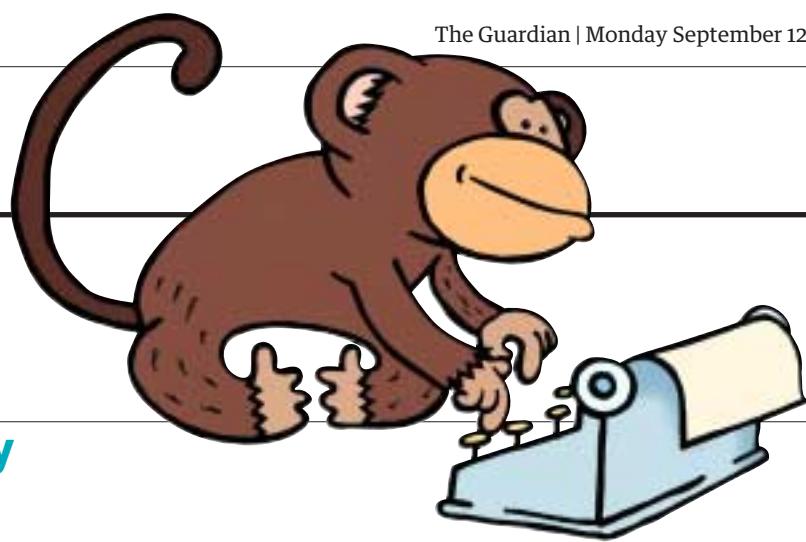
That brown wire between your TV and wall - the one the dog chews and the children play with - is probably too crummy to carry the new digital signals

Media Monkey's Diary

Could Andrew Jaspan, former editor of Glasgow's Sunday Herald, and briefly of this parish, be making a premature return to these shores from Melbourne, where he went last year to edit broadsheet paper the Age? Rumours are rife that Ron Walker, the new chairman of Age owner Fairfax, has been courting a top-rating talk radio host for his job. Jaspan has done himself no favours by making changes that have not proved popular with readers and staff. Meanwhile, Fairfax's other flagship title, the Sydney Morning Herald, continues its search for a new editor.

Liz Jones's marriage, claims the Daily Mail's gigantic introduction to its serialisation of her diary, was torn apart by her "histrionics, sexual frustration and queen-sized insecurity" - the antithesis of the stable, mature women at whom Paul Dacre's excitable organ is aimed. So it is odd that Jones - evasively described in the same super-standfirst as "former editor of Marie Claire" - has a key role at the Mail's London sister title, the Evening Standard: the alleged neurotic prima donna is its star interviewer. Perhaps Dacre should have a word with the Standard's editor-in-chief, Paul Dacre.

Monkey knows a thing or two about redesigns, so has great sympathy with colleagues at Times 2 (sorry, times2). On the Friday before the first live edition, no proofs were



returned to the subs from designer Neville Brody until after 4pm. "Brody had gone to lunch and nobody wanted to bother him, despite all the typography problems the great man's redesign had thrown up. Not least among which is that word counts for most pieces in the new times2 are about half what they were, although nobody bothered to tell any of the writers," says our disgruntled mole. Plus, did anyone notice the self-referential touch in the definite-article-driven opening spread, where Brody inserted a nod to his greatest claim-to-fame by naming one of the irritating little features the Face? Sorry, "theface".

Poking fun at media studies is a bit like shooting fish in a barrel, but Monkey can't pass up the opportunity presented by Rebecca Feasey, a lecturer in media communications at Bath Spa University. Delegates at a conference on "celebrity culture", which starts at the University of Paisley today, will hear her deliver a paper entitled Reading Heat: the Meanings and Pleasure of Star Fashion and Celebrity Gossip. The paper suggests that fulfilling women's desire to be the first to know, Heat magazine picks up on the concept of "cultural capital" developed by French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, as well as contributing to feminine discourse. Her own post-feminist reading of Heat argued that it could be read as "an empowering media text that validates feminine meanings

and competences for the reader". She hopes to conduct further research, which will involve discussing the magazine with other young women - and perhaps a few men. Other papers at the conference, which continues until Wednesday, will look at a "womanist" interpretation of Sex and the City, Boris Johnson's persona, and David Beckham's "meaning". Feasey says: "I can see people outside the media field thinking this is trivial or superficial but myself, and certainly the students, understand that this is part of their everyday life." She is careful to be modest about her findings: "I'm not pretending this is rocket science." Monkey feels no further comment is necessary.

Despite nursing a sling for the arm she broke falling off a horse, Madonna joined Apple chief Steve Jobs by satellite from London last week for the launch of the iPod Nano and the Motorola ROKR "iPhone". She has agreed for the first time to allow iTunes to sell her songs and albums online. "I got sick of not being able to download my own music," she quipped. Jobs asked if she had an iPod. "I have several. But every time I get one you bring out a new one the next week." Madonna also joked that her new album was called Revenge of the Broken Arm. (It is actually Confessions on a Dancefloor, out in November.)

You can catch up with Monkey every day at MediaGuardian.co.uk

Letters

It's analogue or nothing in the east of East Anglia

Steve Ackerman (The real power over digital switchover, September 5) writes "Listeners are the ones who will decide if buying a digital radio is an attractive enough proposition".

I would love to buy a digital radio and listen digitally, but when I inquire I am told that digital radio is not available in the east of East Anglia yet, so many BBC radio programmes advertise their availability on digital radio. The industry needs to make sure that all parts of the country can receive digital radio before worrying about when it is to switch off the analogue signal or we shall end up with no radio service at all.

Perhaps Steve Ackerman will lead the campaign to make digital radio available to all.

Alan Morris, Great Yarmouth

Humphrys? Harrumph!

John Humphrys is doing a great job. As a loyal BBC listener, he has my full support and I feel that he is right to question politicians, be they Labour or Tory. The consequences of lies are too important to be ignored. Well done, John, you are doing a great job. Do not allow yourself to be intimidated.

Robert Grandcourt, Brussels

The last I heard, John Humphrys was not the leader of the opposition. If he wants to "take on" the government,



Digital wake-up, but not for everyone

then he should stand for election, otherwise he should stick to presenting the news.

Donald Hickerson, Toronto

The director general of the BBC, Mark Thompson, in his rebuke of John Humphrys should take heed of Malvolio's words from Twelfth Night: "My masters, are you mad? Or what are you? Have ye no wit, manners, nor honesty?" Philip Hudson, Blackpool

John Humphrys states the obvious and the BBC nursemaids rush to protect our ears. Boring, predictable, pathetic. Pete Landells, Launceston

Standard fare

Doug Johnson must have his reasons for his gibe at Barbara Follett (Letters, September 5) but he has used dud ammunition. Yesterday I found the London Evening Standard in four Stevenage newsagents, one probably the most well-known retailer of newspapers (among other things) in the country.

Nor is this so remarkable. Many residents of Old and New Stevenage are ex-Londoners who might be expected to retain an interest in their native city's activities. Sussex friends tell me you can buy the paper in Brighton where, I imagine, similar considerations apply.

People in Stevenage read all sorts of things including - I'm afraid - the Daily Mail. I suspect Mrs Follett knows this well and was making a little joke, something I would not wish to discourage.

Eric Saltford, Stevenage

Media tarts Birch



the guardian

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Interview Helen Boaden

Have I got news for you

One year into her post, the BBC's director of news and current affairs talks to Matt Wells about the future of News 24, the appointment of political editor Nick Robinson - and how she loves a great scoop

PHOTOGRAPH: DAN CUNNINGHAM



Lessons learned from the BBC's tsunami coverage have helped Helen Boaden's news operation to produce a quick response and assured location reports from the floods in New Orleans

tis not very often you can say that the head of the biggest broadcast news outfit in the world has led you up the stairs to her office by the hand, giggling and exchanging anecdotes. But do not be beguiled by Helen Boaden's touchy-feely exterior, for it is a general rule that heads of big broadcast news organisations do not generally get where they are today by being touchy-feely all of the time.

And in the first year in the job as director of news at the BBC, Boaden's thick skin has been tested to the limit. Handed what some would describe as the poisoned chalice of putting back together an organisation battered by one of the worst rows with government in its 80-year history, Boaden has also had to fend off the usual array of criticisms that seem to dog all holders of her office: that BBC News is too cautious or too bold; that News 24 is a hopeless excuse for a rolling news network; that BBC journalists never break any stories; and that Panorama/Today/Newsnight are pale shadows of their former selves. All of that, and steer the organisation through the testing period of covering two global-scale natural disasters abroad and one big terrorist attack at home, and the challenges posed by the increased demands of and resources available to the ordinary viewer and listener - the rise of the "citizen journalist".

It has to be said that the verdict on her tenure so far is mixed. Rank-and-file journalists felt the corporation's response to the tsunami at the end of December was slow, and that it was outgunned by Sky and the lesser-resourced ITV. Boaden was stung by the criticism, which she felt was unfair. Since then ITV has ridden high on its scoops in the aftermath of the London bombings, particularly its exclusive on the bungled shooting of Jean Charles de Menezes, described by Chris Shaw, in charge of news at rival Five, as probably the best story in the 50-year history of ITN.

But the early verdict on the BBC's coverage of the floods in New Orleans is that it has been exemplary, with lessons learned from the tsunami bringing a quick response to the scale of the disaster and assured location reports from the region.

Boaden says she has a clear idea of what

"News 24 is now beating Sky consistently in terms of reach and that shows there are a lot of people out there who want reliability"

she expects from BBC news, especially its rolling news service. "I think News 24 is about being first, right and reliable. The danger with 24-hour news is that it becomes a rolling service of rumour and speculation and that is absolutely not what we want for News 24." The corporation's special status as a publicly-funded broadcaster, she says, means it cannot stick its neck out in the way that rivals can and do. "Because it's the BBC you want it to be first but you want it to be right. We are careful; I don't think we're cautious. The public expects us to be careful with facts because - cliché upon cliché - facts really are sacred, especially at a time when news is increasingly led by opinion and because of the vast expansion by a lot of speculation."

Beating Sky

Her vision was clear in the output around the time of the London bombings. Sky took an early punt on terrorism, emboldened by a witness report of the bus explosion by one of its producers. But without independent corroboration, the BBC stuck with the reports of a power surge on the London underground for most of the morning on July 7 - and Boaden says it was right to do so. "There was a moment where that was what the story was. And we continued to go with that until we had verifiable evidence. Some of our competitors talked immediately of 90 dead. They talked about three bus bombs. That was off a range of various wire services and it was complete speculation and we wouldn't go with that. We would be careful - we would try to check things out."

Boaden says her vision is supported by News 24 viewers, who are turning to the channel in greater numbers than Sky - mostly because of the success of Freeview and the older, more conservative audience this brings. "News 24 is now beating Sky consistently in terms of reach and that shows there are a lot of people out there who want reliability. They can get speculation everywhere."

This is the point at which Nick Pollard, the head of Sky News, will probably throw the newspaper across the newsroom (or be tempted to put his fist through the computer screen, depending on how he is reading this article): Sky fiercely disputes that it is wrong any more than anyone

else, and even goes so far as to produce research that shows this. But Boaden is a clever competitor, and knows that to build up the brand, you have to knock the opposition, particularly in the places where it is perceived to be weak. Especially as Sky News is about to come out with a long-awaited (and somewhat delayed) multimillion-pound relaunch.

But reading between Boaden's lines, it is clear that News 24 is not yet the product she wants it to be: "I think it's starting to be an incredibly powerful service," she says. "It's more confident, it looks better, the audience is connecting to it, you always want all your services to continue to improve and I think the future is News 24's." Work very much in progress, it seems.

And work that has fallen into the hands of Peter Horrocks, who has been promoted from the current affairs unit to run News 24 as head of all BBC TV news. He has a reputation as an energetic populist and it will be his job to sort out the service once and for all. "The appointment of Horrocks is fantastic news," says one senior BBC correspondent. "He's got bags of balls and he's not a yes man."

Meanwhile Boaden is grappling with the bigger-picture issues such as the whole citizen journalism thing - or "user-generated content", as the BBC calls it internally. She recalls a meeting, soon after she took charge, when the implications of the new phenomenon were discussed. It was thought, she says, that the tipping point would come in two or three years' time; in fact, it has already arrived. "It began with Boscombe when all the good footage came from people using their own equipment. The tsunami added to that. And with the London bombs we had an extraordinary response, initially unsolicited, with people ringing in, sending emails and sending pictures from their cameras."

But she is cautious about being too enthusiastic about the benefits: "I think we are in the honeymoon period for all of this because there are going to be come issues of veracity, and there may be a moment where rights issues suddenly loom, where people begin to feel that this material that they've created is something to make money from." Boaden points to the Daily Mirror fake Iraq abuse pictures as an example of why all news organisations must be wary

of unsolicited pictures. Another issue that plagues BBC directors of news and current affairs is the scheduling of Panorama. She believes, however, that the debate is over, and that 10.15pm on Sunday is the least worst option, a slot protected from the competitive peak-time battleground. There will, however, continue to be plenty of Panorama specials in peak time; more money is going into Real Story, which is building a name for itself as a more populist current affairs strand; and there will be a new investigative unit in Manchester.

The fiercest criticism faced by Boaden recently was an excoriating attack in the Guardian by Polly Toynbee, who was furious that Newsnight's Martha Kearney had been passed over for the political editor's job for ITV's Nick Robinson. There have been suggestions that Boaden favoured Kearney: "There was debate and in the end it was an entirely unanimous decision," Boaden says, adding that Robinson would be "superb" at the job.

Sense of humour

There have also been suggestions that Robinson did not apply for the position. This is the only time in the interview that Boaden falters. "Nobody... [pause]... did he apply for it?... He did apply for it..." Eventually, after prompting from the PR minder, she says: "Nick did apply for the job and we obviously had to protect him as we protected a range of people who came from interviews because all of them have other jobs. It was absolutely not a fix." Funny to use the word "fix" in answer to a question that had not suggested it.

Back on sure ground, Boaden says that Robinson was appointed in part because of his story-getting abilities. "He's good with words, he's good with images and he's got a sense of humour. He'll engage the public and he gets scoops, and that's something I'm rather keen on," she says. At last, perhaps those damaging remarks by Mark Byford, acting up as director general after the resignation of Greg Dyke, when he said the BBC wasn't in the business of exclusives here, there and everywhere, can be laid to rest. There it is in black and white: BBC News boss "keen on scoops".

All Boaden needs now is for her journalists to get a few of them, and she'll be laughing. Even more than she does already.

Curriculum Vitae

Age 49

Education BA in English, University of Sussex, degree in radio journalism, London College of Printing. Honorary doctorates from Sussex and University of East Anglia

Career

1979 radio journalist, WBAI, New York
1983 news producer, BBC Radio Leeds
1991 editor, File on 4 1995 Presenter of Woman's Hour 1997 head of business programmes 1998 head of current affairs 2000 controller, Radio 4
2002 also controller, BBC 7 2004 director, BBC news and current affairs



Jeff Jarvis
New media

In less than a day, Hurricane Katrina rendered worthless the printing presses and broadcast towers that made big media big. And that will change news forever. The New Orleans Times-Picayune found itself with no presses, trucks or newsstands and, as the waters rose, no office or staff. Two of the city's TV stations lost their studios and transmitters. And they all lost their audience.

So New Orleans' biggest media outlets were forced to flee to the internet, where they did incredible jobs reporting this overwhelming story to anyone online anywhere. Traffic to the Times-Picayune's sister site, nola.com (which I launched and until recently oversaw as president of its corporate parent), multiplied fivefold. The paper's publisher, Ashton Phelps, called the internet a lifeline. Editor Jim Amoss called the blogs they used to publish news "absolutely essential". Trust me: before Katrina, this is not how American newspaper editors talked about the web and weblogs. But after Katrina, they will.

A month ago, in my first column for Media Guardian, I suggested, brazenly, how newsrooms ought to change in the internet age. In New Orleans, I've watched those changes come overnight. Journalists no longer waited for their next edition to tell their stories. To get the news out, they relied on humble weblog tools. Meanwhile, from out-of-town studios, the TV stations broadcast to the web at WWLTV.com and WDSU.com and they, too, used weblogs, forums and other tools to gather and share news. This served the New Orleans diaspora who could get online. It also gave us the unique local perspective on the unfolding tragedy. Usually, of course, we see the big story varnished and polished by national papers and international networks. But with Katrina, local journalists, survivors themselves, exposed their raw nerves and anger. The Times-Picayune's online reports have been blunt and demanding.

We soon saw that same anger overflow from the national press as they shared horrifying scenes of disorder and pressed officials for explanations and action. This prompted political comic Bill Maher to rejoice "we got our press back", and Washington Post critic Howard Kurtz to proclaim "journalism seems to have recovered its reason for being". True. But it would take a blind, administration-toady fool (and we have a few) not to get angry at the injustice, inequity and incompetence of this situation.

I have seen something else new in the US news media during Katrina: a touch of humility, an admission that news doesn't come from the mountaintop anymore. CNN anchor Aaron Brown asked one night whether we yet knew the size of this story. He didn't get an answer but didn't need to, for his question was the answer.

The media have been catching up on every angle: we are only beginning to address the deep and profound racial nature of the story. Reporters standing knee-deep in the muck of destruction have taken to slapping around their happy-talk hosts to get them to hear just how bad things are. The ethics of rebuilding a city where lives can be so quickly lost are only now being examined and it will take years to investigate the failures of government.

But journalism's rediscovered courage and newly discovered fallibility are, I will contend, less profound changes than the one brought on by the flooding of presses and the toppling of towers. For at that moment, news was freed from the shackles of media. Now he who controls distribution no longer controls news. And news is no longer shaped by the pipe that carries it. That is what Katrina did to the news.

Rex Hammock, a magazine publisher and fellow blogger at Rexblog.com, wrote that the Times-Picayune and nola.com deserve a Pulitzer for their news blogs. I second that. It doesn't matter whether the work came rolling off a press or a blog: it is journalism of the highest calibre and greatest service. The Pulitzer committee would serve journalism well by separating the content from the container, the medium from the message, and recognising great reporting wherever and however and from whomever it comes, with or without a press.

Jeff Jarvis is a media consultant who blogs at BuzzMachine.com

The funeral of Waleed Khaled, a soundman shot dead in Iraq. His cameraman Haider Kadhem (below) was injured in the same attack



Reporters at risk

Journalists believe recent deaths and injuries among their number based in Iraq show US troops are getting out of control

Rory Carroll Baghdad

It was a routine assignment that, like too many in Iraq, went wrong. Tipped off that police had clashed with gunmen in western Baghdad, the Reuters news agency dispatched Haider Kadhem, a cameraman, and Waleed Khaled, a soundman, to the scene. As their car headed down Ghazaliya bridge American troops opened fire, hitting Khaled in the face and the chest, killing him instantly and spattering blood over the US military and Reuters press cards clipped to his shirt.

By the time relatives and colleagues arrived American armoured vehicles had sealed off the street and Kadhem, slightly wounded from fragments, was under arrest. Having found nothing suspicious the troops allowed the car to be towed away and handed relatives a body bag. One soldier told them not to look too closely at the corpse. "Don't bother. It's not worth it." Other soldiers standing a few feet away joked among themselves.

For Reuters and many other foreign media organisations in Baghdad the August 28 shooting was further evidence that American troops are out of control. Since the 2003 invasion US forces have killed at least 18 media workers in incidents for which no one has been charged or punished. "Whitewashes. There have been no satisfactory investigations that we know of," said Rodney Pinder, director of the International News Safety Institute (INSI), a Brussels-based advocacy group.

Angry and frustrated, several radio and television networks, agencies and newspapers, including the Guardian, met last week to chart a joint response to the crisis. The gathering agreed to form a foreign correspondents' association and to jointly lobby the US military and state department.

More journalists have been killed in Iraq in two years than during the 20 years of conflict in Vietnam, according to Reporters Without Borders. It counted 66 dead in Iraq compared to 63 in Vietnam and 49 in the former Yugoslavia between 1991 and 1995. INSI estimates the Iraq toll at 81 while the New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists reckons 74.

Insurgents killed most and with few exceptions, such as the Italian Enzo Baldoni, the victims were Iraqis. Foreign journalists, based in fortified hotels or compounds, can move discreetly around the capital and accompany coalition troops on missions but they routinely rely on Iraqi colleagues for on-the-ground reporting. Increasingly US forces pose the graver threat.

"It is becoming impossible for us in good conscience to send out reporters to gather information because we don't

know what will happen to them," says Richard Engel, a correspondent for the US television network NBC. If something goes wrong, he says, "we don't know what procedures if any exist to follow up."

The International Federation of Journalists accused the US military of "incompetence, reckless soldiering, and cynical disregard" for journalists' lives. The Committee to Protect Journalists said there appeared to be official "indifference" to reporters' deaths.

In addition to shooting them, US forces have a habit of detaining journalists without charge. Weeks can pass before a bureau is able to confirm that an employee has been arrested, possibly injured, and held incommunicado in Abu Ghraib or another prison. A driver for the Guardian, accredited with the US authorities, was held without explanation for five days.

At stake is not only the existence of independent media, says Alastair Macdonald, Reuters' Baghdad bureau chief, but the credibility of US claims to be fostering democracy. "The American ambassador recently called us the fourth estate, a pillar of the democracy, but we're not being allowed to do our job here."

Driving fast

When the US military detains employees media organisations try to sort it out privately, going through regular channels, appealing to the relevant major or colonel, until it dawns that this does not work.

Asked at a recent press conference if there was a special policy for journalists, a handful of the 10,000 US-held detainees, Major General Rick Lynch, a US military spokesman, was blunt: "That's a no. What we've got to do is look at the individual that was indeed detained and what was he doing, regardless of what his profession is."

Many correspondents say the fundamental problem is that US forces do not recognise the media's right to work in Iraq. Almost every single Iraqi stringer in Mosul, a volatile northern city, has been arrested, including a freelance cameraman for CBS who was shot in April and has been detained since without charge.

Investigations into shootings are con-

ducted by an officer from the unit which opened fire. Invariably shooters are exonerated and victims deemed at least partly culpable. Waleed Khaled's case was typical. A three-day investigation concluded the 35-year-old Reuters soundman was driving fast, stopped, immediately reversed and that he or Haider Kadhem, the cameraman, leaned out with what appeared to be a weapon. "Our soldiers on the scene, using established rules of engagement and all the training received, decided that it was appropriate to engage that particular car." In other words the popular, jokey newsroom presence, the husband of a pregnant wife, the father of a four-year-old girl, brought it on himself. His colleague Kadhem, 24, was released without charge after three days of questioning about "inconsistencies" in his story.

US military spokesmen often cite "strong evidence" that an arrested Iraqi was an insurgent who used his work as cover. Despite astonishing allegations - including the shooting down of a helicopter by three journalists - no proof has emerged publicly. Hardly a surprise given that the legal process is secret and reports are not published. A smear or not, hinting at evidence can intimidate an employer less than 100% sure about a stringer's background. "They make you ask yourself if you really want to bat for this guy," says one bureau chief.

Such tactics contrast with the military's warm embrace of those who "embed", a well-oiled, largely transparent system which allows journalists to attach themselves limpet-like to troops. Everything is on the record and what you file, though monitored once published or broadcast, is uncensored. The openness and access (not to mention the food) tends to be better than the more controlled British version.

There is no consensus on why there is such hostility to independent media. Some think it reflects the clumsiness of an army wrestling with a complicated guerrilla campaign. Insurgent cameramen do accompany gunmen and film attacks which end up on the internet. When a television crew arrives during or immediately after a fight troops often suspect the crew knew in advance. An urban myth, say the networks, but a dangerous one when even an established name like CNN is branded the Communist News Network. There is scant evidence that US troops deliberately target the press, unlike Israeli soldiers in the West Bank and Gaza. But commanders who view Iraq as an information war have an interest in blocking images they deem damaging.

In a rare cracking of the opaque military Phillip Robertson, a reporter for the online magazine Salon.com, found the sniper who shot his friend Yasser Salihee, an Iraqi employee of the Knight-Ridder newspaper group. Salihee died instantly when a bullet entered his right eye as he drove towards a checkpoint in Baghdad in June. Named only as Joe, the sniper said his unit was braced for a suicide bomber and that the car appeared suspicious. Joe was troubled by the feeling that his victim was not an insurgent. "I really hope he was a bad guy. Do you know anything about him?"



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Peter Wilby
'New Labour is a tightly corseted suburban party and almost everybody connected with it keeps the curtains tightly drawn lest the neighbours catch them running wild with ideas'
Page 8

MediaGuardian

On the press Kim Fletcher

How to thrive, not just survive

So a gorgeous new look for the Guardian and a busy autumn ahead as half of Fleet Street tries on new clothes. Look out for a revamped Mail on Sunday, see how the Independent on Sunday takes to tabloid format and discover what the editor of the Sunday Telegraph (to whom I happen to be married) means when she promises that "something lovely" will happen to her paper. There is more to come from the Daily Telegraph, the Standard is ready to go upmarket again and the Times... well, I don't know if you have seen the new look T2, but the type faces and point sizes are so eccentric they took a newspaper designer I know back to his student newspaper days: "I know we used to whack up the point size to fill the space when pieces came in short, but we didn't expect anyone to say it was good."

You may think the swagger of these changes reflects an underlying confidence. In fact there's gloom around much of the business. We're not facing the death of newspapers - that has been postponed so many times that we know it will never come - but short-term fears about advertising are becoming long-term fears, while irrepressible internet and phone companies are forcing newspaper managements to ask the question they hoped to leave for the next generation: what are newspapers for?

The fight for advertising revenue is beginning to depress everyone. When a team of us showed off the Telegraph Group to would-be buyers last year, when I was editorial director, we imagined we were near the end of the advertising recession. So, presumably, did the venture capitalist and other bidders who pushed the price up to £665m. But more than a year on, national papers are still bumping around the bottom of the trough, cheered only by the possibility that rivals are doing even worse.

Advertising revenue used to be cyclical: you drew in your horns and waited for the money to come back. What's different this time is that it might not be coming back. Are jobs adverts going to the internet for good? Suddenly advertising is a strategic issue, which is why Lord Rothermere at Daily Mail General Trust and Sly Bailey at Trinity Mirror are rushing to buy up recruitment sites.

Strategy is difficult for newspapers. For management, there are so many practical problems every day - print



Dummy copies of the Guardian in its new Berliner format roll off the presses in east London

problems, legal problems, distribution problems - that the visualisation of an intangible future imposes an unwelcome further burden. For journalists, strategy is much less interesting than day-to-day excitements. At the Independent last week they worried about columnist Bruce Anderson's views on the black residents of New Orleans. At the Sun they want to know when Kelvin MacKenzie will start as a columnist. For Mail journalists the only story was the paper's number four Jon Steafel. What had Paul Dacre promised him to make him spurn the vacant Daily Telegraph deputy editorship? Joint deputy editor at the Mail, that's what, with a shuffle of desks that saw the Mail on Sunday deputy Rod Gilchrist say goodbye.

The traditional problems and human dramas of papers are so much easier to deal with. You roll up your sleeves and get on with them. Many in newspapers were delighted when the dotcom boom imploded. They were happy because new media people were insufferable young people who threatened to be-

come rich. They were relieved because the collapse of the medium validated their refusal to get involved in it. Now the internet is back. Rupert Murdoch says he is keen, so it must be. Some are even wondering whether they misjudged the Guardian Media Group's resolute, early investment in the internet, though they still wonder how the group will obtain its return. The short-term profit/long-term investment equation is hard to resolve, because, for all the worries about the future, old newspaper businesses have continued to make money, which leaves managers of

"Nationals are still bumping along the bottom of the trough, cheered only by the possibility that rivals are doing worse"

profitable national titles disinclined to take advice from one that lost £48m last year on the Guardian and Observer.

But how do you turn a big rather than a tiny profit from all those digital possibilities? First, be reassured by the huge appetite for information and entertainment. It's not that people don't want what newspapers do, it's just that they are not sure they want to buy newspapers to get it. Second, work out what you have that is unique. The horrid internet word is "content", which sites used as though it could be ordered by the bucketful to fill spaces on the web. Content is king, said the first round of internet entrepreneurs, while spreading it across so many sites that it lost any regal quality it had ever possessed.

But the internet-scanning, iPod-wearing mobile phone users we are all becoming are bored if everything reads or sounds the same. Newspapers have some of the cleverest, funniest creative talents in the country. They have to find ways beyond the printed page of taking their work to new audiences.

It's the early bird that catches the herd

There is an unexpected bounce and colour about City AM, the free financial paper that launched in London last week. But who is going to read it? When I came out of Bank station, I was handed three different free magazines, none of them City AM. Fortunately I found a discarded copy on an office doorstep. Over at Canary Wharf a platoon of City AM distributors forced papers on unenthusiastic office workers emerging from the underground.

But why do you want a free paper when you have already arrived at the office and are about to start work? The genius of the free Metro lay in the deal with London Underground that got the paper into the hands of commuters at the point they wanted something to read - the start of their journey. By the time office workers get their hands on City AM they have other things to think about.



The front page of City AM

I-Spy some new young readers

Ever since it became clear that Rupert Bear and I-Spy weren't always going to do it for the Express and the Mail, newspapers have fretted about getting children to read papers. Young people just aren't interested. So how do we account for the success of the Newspaper Educational Trust, a London charity that has primary and secondary school children producing their own front pages by the end of a busy day? The trust, backed by West Ferry Printers, the Guardian, the Telegraph and several businesses, celebrates its 10th birthday this week. More than 11,000 children have spent a day there. Many will have become newspaper readers.

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My media Mary Kalemkerian

Newspapers

The Guardian and the Observer. I especially like the Guardian's media pages. The Saturday Guardian keeps me going all weekend, and I like the little Guide very much. I dip into the Telegraph, especially for the radio reviews by Gillian [Reynolds]. When in Scotland I read the Sunday Post, with embarrassment. It's so cosy; it reminds me of my childhood. I would never dream of buying it in England. I'm from the Scottish borders and my mum, who's 88, still sends me the Border Telegraph which I read for the local gossip.

Magazines

I like the New Statesman - it keeps me politically abreast of things. And, I have to say, you can't beat the Radio Times; it's got the fullest listings and super articles. I wouldn't miss it, even if I didn't work for the BBC.

Books

Oh God, I'm always so backward in books. I read books on holiday. I like Alexander McCall Smith, who wrote The No 1 Ladies' Detective Agency. His books are quirky, and they're a good, short read. I don't go in for great tomes.

TV

Because I'm a radio person, I'm interested in programmes that have transferred from radio to telly. The two I'm enjoying at the moment are The Mighty Boosh on BBC3 and Absolute Power with

Stephen Fry, which was a radio series from a long time ago. I also like House, it's a great vehicle for Hugh Laurie. And Lost is interesting on Channel 4.

Radio

Obviously I steep myself in the classics. My all-time favourite is Round the Horne. In the morning it's between John Humphrys, and the comedians and classic comedy on BBC7. I like the 6.30pm Radio 4 comedy. My favourite is The Now Show, and I like The Bearded

Mary Kalemkerian is head of programmes at BBC7, the digital radio station. Her favourite comedy is The Now Show



Ladies, and Hudson and Peppermint. I sometimes dip into OneWord, they've got that very good book programme with Paul Blezard, Between the Lines.

Ads

I don't like car ads, they're a complete turn-off. No, ads do not really work for me.

New media

I really like blogs. Richard Herring's daily blog about the Edinburgh Festival was good. Because I'm involved in comedy and drama, I dip into chortle.co.uk to get an update on what's going on and bbc.co.uk/dna/h2g2/because I quite like my sci-fi; it gives you all the Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy stuff plus spin-offs.

Interview by Katie Shimmon



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Given mobile's saturation of the UK's population and the advancement in this technology, it is no surprise that brands are switching their attention to the medium as a highly effective new marketing tool.

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GU22



MediaGuardian

Will the new Burchills and Bakers please stand up



David Hepworth
Magazines

BBC4's recent documentary, *Inky Fingers*, about the glory years of the NME, was a particular treat for connoisseurs of the humbug that magazine journalists talk when somebody points a camera at them. A bunch of prominent writers who got their start in NME's pages, ranging from Charles Shaar Murray through Danny Baker to Andrew Collins, were asked why they had been so keen to work for the paper. Their avowed motivations ranged from the preposterous - wanting to use The Man's money to subvert society - to the missionary - hoping to spread the word about Good Music.

Nobody was prepared to confess the real reason - in the 70s working for the NME could bring you all the attention your heart could hold. The money was rubbish but the kudos was beyond price. This didn't extend to everyone, of course, and the fame didn't go far beyond the boundaries of planet rock, but a few drank deep of the heady wine of something approaching fame, a fame they still enjoy.

Julie Burchill, Nick Kent, Tony Parsons, Charles Shaar Murray, Danny Baker and Paul Morley are just a few who were hired by the NME because they had opinions and expressed them colourfully. They were Star Writers. Their celebrity could get them to the top of a guest list, bag any amount of promotional swag and even result in them occasionally being asked for their autographs. Were they sufficiently lacking in scruple, they could probably have taken advantage of the fact that there were people out there sufficiently impressed by their bylines to extend them the base currency of fame, sexual favours.

Unless I'm missing something, this doesn't go on much any more. The NME was the last magazine to make that many



Publishers no longer employ many writers because a lot of them no longer publish many words



people famous. Hardly anywhere in magazines do you find that febrile sense of a subculture creating its own stars such as once applied in computer games or motorbike magazines. The columnists who originally made their names in magazines - Jeremy Clarkson, Julie Burchill, Miranda Sawyer and others - are promoted to daily papers where they are pelted with real money. Consequently, when it comes to the annual awards ceremonies, many magazine publishers have difficulty finding names to nominate in the writer categories because they no longer employ many. The writer of the year for the past two years at the Periodical Publishers' Association awards has been AA Gill, more closely associated with newspapers.

Publishers no longer employ many writers because a lot of them no longer publish many words. Instead they execute formats. The people who get the attention are the editors, particularly those such as Boris Johnson, Jo Elvin and Mark Frith who can represent their titles on TV. This is fair enough. Editors are the ones who make the money, lose the sleep and get moved on to special projects when the curve flattens. But that's no reason for this increasingly process-driven medium to have lost its nerve when it comes to finding personality, opinion and tone of voice. There could be a new generation of star writers springing up and I've missed them. It could be they're keeping their heads down, anonymously executing the template and subverting their voices to the greater personality of the title. Then maybe they go home and vent their true feelings via, say, their own blog.

It's particularly odd that magazines are so reluctant to develop their own stars because they set such store by celebrity achieved elsewhere. Witness the radio DJs, TV presenters, reality TV "housemates" and defrocked MPs who have been signed up by magazines to write a column or tell us the secrets of the stars only to be quietly uninstalled a few weeks later when it becomes plain that they have nothing to say and if they did they certainly wouldn't tell the readers.

I'm sure research would have said that the readers of the 70s NME had no interest in the writers' opinions. But I can still sit here, close my eyes and inaccurately quote Charlie Murray's line about judging a guitar solo by how fast it is played being like judging a novel by how quickly it was typed; Julie Burchill's comment about nothing making the young heart run free like a favourite song coming unbidden over the radio; and Danny Baker describing Johnny Rotten as having seen more sex than a policeman's torch. It would be encouraging to think that some hip young gunslingers were tapping out prose of that quality in some magazine today. If they are, let me know.

David Hepworth is editorial director of Development Hell Ltd.
email: davidhepworth.com

Oppenheim - John Downes Memorial Awards

The Oppenheim - John Downes Memorial Trust will be making awards in December 2005 to deserving artists of any kind whether writers, painters, sculptors, musicians, dancers and craftsmen who are unable to pursue their vocation by reason of their poverty. Awards are restricted to persons who are natural born British subjects, of parents both of whom are British subjects (Section 34 of the Race Relations Act applies) and applicants must be over 30 years of age.

Application forms may be obtained from the Trustees, The Oppenheim - John Downes Memorial Trust (Ref: HCF) c/o 50 Broadway, Westminster, London SW1H 0BL.
email: teresacampion@bdb-law.co.uk

Completed application forms must be returned by 15 October 2005.



Creative futures

Find out how artists are helping teachers inject creativity into the curriculum in a special supplement, free inside tomorrow's Education Guardian

the guardian



Creative Partnerships

Who gave Humphrys most attention last week?
Find out which national paper covered the BBC row in greatest detail. See opposite

Wilby says Tony Blair's New Labour ideals were 'no basis for an ideas-driven weekly magazine'



Statesman-like regrets

The former editor of the New Statesman explains how over-eclectic commissioning, a lack of humorous writers and the left's identity crisis affected his tenure

Peter Wilby

I edited the New Statesman from 1998 to 2005. I was the longest-serving occupant of that chair since Kingsley Martin, to whose record 29 years I never aspired. Martin took the view that "an editor's paper should be his mistress" and, like him, I "ate, drank and slept" with the New Statesman. Was it all worth it? Did I reverse the long-term decline of the NS and end the general consensus, which had existed almost since Martin's retirement in 1959, that its best days were behind it?

Not, I fear, if the circulation figures were any guide. The day I took over, the NS was selling 22,500 copies, having exceeded 25,000 during the dawn of New Labour in 1997 and again in the aftermath of 9/11. I scarcely improved on the circulation that I inherited. It was a meagre reward for my years of effort, even though I could claim to have played a significant role in turning a substantial financial loss into a healthy operating profit and, unlike a number of editors, avoided both alcoholism and mental breakdown. The New Statesman's future is more secure now than it has been for many years, making that "Staggers" nickname redundant. But according to the goals I set myself I failed.

Where did I go wrong? First, a little history. Kingsley Martin's New Statesman was essentially a paper of the middle-classes - "knowing, knowledgeable and somewhat superior", as Alan Watkins later described it. It was the house journal, not so much of the Labour party in general, but of what have been called the Hampstead intellectuals. It was anti-colonialist, anti-hanging and anti-censorship. It was oppositional by instinct, even when Labour was in power.

Until 1978, when Anthony Howard departed, the nature of the paper scarcely changed. But his successor, Bruce Page, thought the NS represented an outdated, Oxbridge-based English elitism. Instead of being a journal of laconic comment, he thought, it should make waves through ground-breaking investigations. Over the next 20 years, the NS passed through a succession of editors, all of whom had quite distinct visions of its role. My immediate predecessor, Ian Hargreaves, put the paper at the forefront of the New Labour project. If you wanted to find the

third way, the NS was the place to look.

His vision, like Page's, had something to be said for it. The old Hampstead intellectual was extinct, not least because so many of the things that had moved him were no longer issues. But after Howard, no editor lasted long enough, or was supported by a big enough marketing spend, to create a fresh idea in readers' minds as to what the NS was about. The two main weekly magazines of the right, meanwhile, were developing a clear identity.

The Economist became the international business executive's magazine, the bible of globalisation and the free market. The Spectator became the fogey's magazine, more playful than the Economist and less enamoured of something as new-fangled as globalisation.

If Hargreaves aspired to a leftwing Economist, I aspired to a leftwing Spectator. The New Statesman, I thought, had acquired a reputation for dull writing and earnestness. It needed better prose, more mischief, wit and humour. It should be a treat, a magazine people wanted to read rather than one they felt they ought to read. It also, I believed, needed to move sharply to the left, distancing itself from New Labour while staying mainstream. Without excluding dissenting voices, the NS should be as unashamedly leftwing as the Spectator was rightwing.

There were several problems with my vision, or at least with the way I implemented it. First, I had no marketing budget to establish a new identity. The owner, Geoffrey Robinson MP, invested heavily after he took control in 1996. Now, quite reasonably, he expected it to cut its

"We frequently enlisted writers who read amusingly elsewhere but seemed to believe a heavier tone was necessary in the NS"



operating losses, if not to break even. Lacking the marketing wherewithal, I needed to ensure the NS's identity was unequivocally stated through its content. I now think I was too eclectic, commissioning writers from John Pilger, who regards Tony Blair as a war criminal, through Anthony Giddens, guru of the third way, to Simon Heffer, the Thatcherite jihadist.

The second problem was to find sufficient humour and wit on the left. This is not to suggest that amusing leftwingers don't exist. Nick Cohen, Paul Routledge, Mark Thomas and Suzanne Moore, for example, all wrote witty and well for the NS. But such writers were not plentiful and we frequently enlisted others who read amusingly elsewhere but seemed to believe a heavier tone was necessary.

Perhaps the most important problem was that the identity crisis of the NS was bound up with the identity crisis of the left itself. Whatever the failings of the Conservative party, the right remains confident and aggressive. New Labour's mission, by contrast, was to reject many of the left's traditions and start afresh, adopting much of the Thatcher agenda and reinterpreting it to achieve centre-left goals.

For many Labour activists, starved of success and power for so long, this was enough to restore their enthusiasm. But it was no basis for an ideas-driven weekly magazine. New Labour welcomed ideas only within very tight boundaries, most of them technocratic rather than inspirational. New Labour is a tightly-corseted, suburban party, and almost everybody connected with it - in academia as well as in Westminster - keeps the curtains tightly drawn lest the neighbours catch them running wild with ideas.

If I failed to overcome these difficulties, I blame nobody but myself. Staff, contributors and readers bear no responsibility for an editor's shortcomings, still less the government. If there was a lack of ferment, it was partly my job to create it. My goal was to make the New Statesman a witty, readable, confident and groundbreaking paper of the left. I believe I partially succeeded in those aims. I did not succeed as much as I had hoped - or did not succeed in convincing enough readers of my achievement - because I was swimming against the tide, and I was not, as it proved, a strong enough swimmer. I wish my successor better luck.

Peter Wilby now writes a media column for the New Statesman. A longer version of this article is in British Journalism Review, Vol 16 No 3, from SAGE Publications, 1 Oliver's Yard, 55 City Road, London EC1Y 1SP. Subscription hotline: 020-7324 8703. subscriptions@sagepub.co.uk

MediaGuardian

Go figure Newspaper ABCs

It is Year Zero for sales of the nationals

Roy Greenslade

It is like the calm before the storm. The latest set of circulation figures show that the year-long trends at the quality end of the daily market have continued as before. In August, the Times went on rising while the Daily Telegraph and the Guardian fell and the Independent slipped again.

But you are reading this column in a newspaper that could well change the whole picture within a couple of weeks. The Guardian hopes that its new format will reverse the sales decline that began when its two rivals, the Times and the Independent, changed from broadsheet to tabloid shape.

Now the Guardian is offering a format that it believes will be more reader-friendly along with a changed editorial concept that challenges both the newspaper approach pioneered by the Indy and the busy, crunched-down style adopted by the Times.

Even so, with the Guardian relaunch today, the August 2005 sales statistics will become an important benchmark in the coming months and years, a newspaper equivalent of Year Zero. Every analysis will refer to the state of play just before this paper's publication.

So let us look as calmly as we can at the current situation while we sit in the eye of the storm. The Times has undoubtedly prospered since November last year when it began publishing only in compact form, though not as dramatically as might be believed. Then it sold 640,000 and, as the chart shows, it has just achieved 642,160.

To set that in context, though, making similar comparisons with its rivals over the same period, the losses for the Guardian, Telegraph and Indy have been 27,000, 17,000 and 7,000 respectively.

The Times remains cock-a-hoop about its full-price sales being greater than those of the Telegraph, but there is much justice in the Telegraph's contention that having more than 300,000 buyers signed up to long-term contracts, even if they do pay a discounted price, is

National newspaper circulation

	August 2005	August 2004	% change	August 2005 (inc. bulks)	March - August 05	March - August 04	% change
Dailies							
Sun	3,361,204	3,363,612	-0.07	3,361,306	3,276,961	3,355,592	-2.34
Daily Mirror	1,769,771	1,821,206	-2.82	1,769,771	1,746,569	1,851,799	-5.68
Daily Star	893,601	919,279	-2.79	893,601	865,121	903,781	-4.28
Daily Record	473,293	498,078	-4.98	474,186	466,150	493,083	-5.46
Daily Mail	2,278,937	2,310,532	-1.37	2,384,943	2,275,677	2,311,196	-1.54
Daily Express	876,563	893,566	-1.90	876,563	857,412	885,941	-3.22
Daily Telegraph	854,510	874,471	-2.28	904,660	860,201	874,716	-1.66
Times	642,160	607,963	5.62	680,214	642,791	613,095	4.84
FT	382,005	380,539	0.39	413,882	392,484	406,850	-3.53
Guardian	324,790	338,323	-4.00	341,698	337,520	352,368	-4.21
Independent	219,797	227,681	-3.46	255,906	223,974	227,844	-1.70
Sundays							
News Of The World	3,759,343	3,746,579	0.34	3,759,443	3,664,128	3,780,454	-3.08
Sunday Mirror	1,558,367	1,659,072	-6.07	1,558,367	1,527,792	1,577,418	-3.15
People	945,803	1,021,399	-7.40	945,803	942,481	1,020,875	-7.68
Sunday Mail	567,094	596,808	-4.98	567,704	557,341	589,690	-5.49
Daily Star Sunday	434,863	509,268	-14.61	434,863	439,116	507,661	-13.50
Mail on Sunday	2,190,962	2,266,852	-3.35	2,272,476	2,211,897	2,279,989	-2.99
Sunday Express	919,583	977,324	-5.91	919,583	887,617	909,971	-2.46
Sunday Times	1,342,574	1,309,331	2.54	1,357,916	1,338,137	1,331,164	0.52
Sunday Telegraph	631,190	676,457	-6.69	669,747	646,739	671,288	-3.66
Observer	397,197	402,982	-1.44	425,737	412,538	418,147	-1.34
Independent on Sunday	166,132	183,834	-9.63	202,248	170,608	177,776	-4.03

All figures exclude bulks unless stated. Source: ABC

potentially more valuable. Indeed, the Times has almost 100,000 cheap-rate subscribers too.

The tit-for-tat public relations battle between the pair tends to divert attention from the relentless downward trend that is afflicting all newspapers. But they are in a far better position than the Independent. Its revolutionary adoption of the compact shape appeared to have reversed its fortunes. Now, though, it is struggling once again, selling more than 3% fewer copies than a year ago, despite a boost from reintroducing Bridget Jones.

If anything, the situation is worse for its Sunday stablemate. The Independent on Sunday sold just 166,000 copies in

August, a historic low, and its own switch to compact will have to compete with the Observer's relaunch in the Berliner shape early in the new year. Both titles will be hoping to eat further into the soft underbelly of the Sunday Telegraph, which suffered yet another sales blow last month.

"The Independent is struggling once again, despite a boost from reintroducing Bridget Jones"

It is now the worst performer at the serious end of the market.

At the other end, the Daily Star is well down on a year ago – but its rivals appear to be on the verge of stopping the rot. Their sales show some signs of stabilising, with both the Sun and Daily Mirror doing better than for many months. Meanwhile, the Daily Mail and Daily Express are striving to reach a circulation plateau as they face up to competition from the red-tops below and the Times above.

Things are not looking good for the Sunday red-tops, though. The News of the World is holding up, but all its rivals are suffering badly. Sex does not appear to be selling as well as it used to.

Zeitgeist Top 10 ads

- 1 The Magical World of Roald Dahl (170 spots)
- 2 Motorola Razr V3 (129) (pictured)
- 3 Powergen (125)
- 4 Tops Tiles (113)
- 5 Learn Direct (106)
- 6 Flora Pro-Activ (97)
- 7 Asda (91)
- 8 Kellogg's (90)
- 9 LG U8180 3G mobile phone (89)
- 10 Inland Revenue (88)



With The Magical World of Roald Dahl partwork at No 1, and sightings of a Marvel character's partwork outside the top 10, this is a faintly peculiar spread of ads for ITV's autumn. Tops Tiles and partworks are in the "buy cheap and stack high" school of advertising, and partworks tend to buy one spot every hour – which is why they're so annoying. Mobile phone companies tend to be all over satellite like a rash, in search of young viewers – youth is not one of ITV's strengths. All of this

points to one thing: ITV is selling its autumn airtime at a lower rate than even last year. "TV, and ITV, is better value than its ever been," says Neil Johnston, head of TV at OMD UK. "That's why you're finding companies coming on air that don't usually spend the kind of money it takes to be on ITV in the autumn." Good news for the advertisers, of course, but how cheerful can ITV's shareholders be?

Stephen Armstrong

Top 10 advertising brands on ITV1 by spots, seven days to September 8. Source: www.thomson-intermedia.com

1

billion dollars -
NewsCorp's recent
internet spend

60

The percentage
rise in ITV's
profits

3.5

The percentage
fall in ITV's
ad revenue

1/3

The proportion
of young people who
don't use TV sets
to watch TV

42

Richie Benaud's
years as a
commentator

Performance review

Two new celebrity reality shows began in non-earnest last week – Totally Scott-Lee on MTV and US import Kept, on VH1. (If you're looking for actual music on these channels, you might want to pack a lunch, but that's another article altogether). Kept is familiar stuff – The Apprentice meets The Graduate, in which 12 himbos compete to become Jerry Hall's "kept man".

Totally Scott-Lee, on the other hand, probes new levels of Schadenfreude. It's



Lisa Scott-Lee, centre, with co-stars

hinged on the fact that Lisa – who seems sweetly affable but short of the talent to back up her ambition – will trundle along like an old banger, backfiring as she goes.

It's an eight-part gallop through the life of the former Steps star and seeming P45-made-flesh as she attempts to fashion a solo career.

Adding an element of 24-style clock-ticking is the fact that she is pledging to abandon her recording career altogether if she fails to penetrate the top 10. The last episode will be broadcast live, as Lisa finds out her chart position. Ask any Smash Hits reader and they'll tell you the only way she'll reach the No 1 spot is if she's disguised as Franz Ferdinand.

Few things have been as brilliantly cynical as Totally Scott-Lee. On the one hand, you could see this as the next step towards a dystopian future. But more than likely, it is an unmissable combination of excitement, trepidation and pure mortification – television's equivalent of viewing your mobile's "Sent" items after a night out.

Gary Ryan

Column inches John Humphrys

Words devoted to the row about the Today presenter's after-dinner speech - to Sept 8

Daily Mail	5,737
Times	5,516
Daily Telegraph	3,412
Guardian	2,598
Independent	1,666
Observer	1,453
Mail on Sunday	669
Sunday Times	480
Independent on Sunday	235



creative showcase

Best interactive campaign of the month

A great idea well executed on a digital level, as well as technically, and is an example of the digital medium being the clear choice to lead a campaign. The other great credit to the campaign is the utility of the website, which is a virtual reality space where visitors can interact with the campaign. The idea behind the campaign was to provide supporters of the Make Poverty History campaign who were unable to make it to the G8 rally with a way of joining the protest online. Supporters visiting the website are encouraged to sign up to the online petition calling for world leaders to make poverty history.

Chris Clarke, online judge commented, "The agency collaboration is remarkable in several ways, it's a

AGENCY REPUBLIC TAKES G8 RALLY ONLINE

BY CLAIRE WILSON

An innovative campaign also includes video footage, a banner sitting in the centre of the screen playing with a pop-up box which reads: "We have played our part, now it's time for you to play yours". The site features a variety of interactive elements including a virtual G8 summit, a video of the G8 leaders, a live feed of the G8 summit, and a live blog of the summit. The website also features a range of different ways for users to interact with the campaign, including a virtual reality space where visitors can interact with the campaign.



This month's winner is...

Agency: Agency Republic
Client: Make Poverty History

And the runners-up are...

Agency: Agency.com
Client: John Lewis Direct
Agency: Tribal DDB
Client: Golf Plus

>>www.creativeshowcase.net

MediaGuardian

Clashing bumper ads are a waste of airtime



Tess Alps
Advertising

I've now lost it with Lost. Seduced by stunning programme advertising, I'd been watching it since episode one. There have been many factors - absurdly glamorous cast, preposterous story, designer wounds that refuse to go brown and scabby - but the 118 118.com sponsorship credits topped the list. I am not alone in hating these, but there are many people I respect who like them. The admirers cite their humour, the variety of executions and the way they integrate themselves into the programme using drama. The haters (just me?) cite their humour and the way they integrate themselves using drama. The variety I like.

These credits use the 118 118 twin runners - one of the most successful advertising and branding icons of recent years, created by WCRS - in comic sketches, parodying dramatic scenarios in Lost (pictured below) specifically, and in TV drama generically. In short, they take the piss out of it.

Sponsorship remains one of the most acceptable and positively viewed methods a brand can use to make connection with a consumer. From logos on sports shirts to branded events, people understand sponsorship is a commercial activity but they still attribute a degree of altruism to the sponsor. They believe they benefit from a sponsor's investment and they can decode the implicit brand message in the association. In such instances of sponsorship, the brand logo is the only reference possible, apart from maybe a simple strapline, though advertisers can amplify their partnership through other activity. Most forms of media sponsorship offer the potential to deliver an extended message for the brand sponsor, and few can resist.

TV sponsorship is moving up the advertising food chain. It is relatively immune to the fast-forwarding that occurs in PVR homes and the regulations surrounding the creative work have been further relaxed recently. The temptation now is to push break bumpers as close to being a TV ad as possible. This misses

the point entirely. Why confine your message to 15 or 10 seconds, when, if you use the allotted time to communicate the association between brand and programme in a compelling way, you will be remembered through the following 30 minutes, or even two hours of TV? The more a brand grabs all the credit time to talk about itself exclusively, the more it undermines the association it was seeking to build.

Creative agencies, which used to turn their noses up at making TV sponsorship credits, are now very keen. Production budgets have consequently increased and quite right too. Production values need to match those of the programme. Clemmow Hornby Inge's work for Talk-Talk on this year's Big Brother tie-up was exemplary; exquisite and engaging, it never outstayed its welcome, which is no mean feat when dedicated viewers were seeing perhaps 20 bumpers every day for two and a half months.

It's challenging enough to get sponsorship creativity right for entertainment, lifestyle or factual genres. But 118 118.com has taken on the hardest creative nut, TV drama. Drama demands an even higher level of sensitivity. Drama (including narrative comedy) evokes some of the strongest emotional involvement from viewers. It has story arcs and characters. If a sponsor tries to interweave another narrative into this thread at every break, the result is invariably gruesome.

Don't try and beat the programme at its own game. The same is true for comedy; it's rarely a good idea to think you can make sponsor credits that are as funny as Frasier or The Simpsons (though if you can, quit advertising immediately and get on a plane to LA).

118 118.com compounds that mistake with the mismatch of "comic" credits on a drama that takes itself very seriously indeed. Very Brechtian. God knows, I'd appreciate the odd smile during Lost. But this sponsor makes the onerous task of suspending my disbelief impossible. I suspect that these were developed in isolation, as an ad would be, and never viewed in the context in which viewers would experience them. Sponsorship should be symbiotic. When one organism attaches itself to another, at the expense of the host, that's parasitic.

Tess Alps is chairman of PHD Group UK



66
Drama demands a high level of sensitivity.
Don't try and beat the programme at its own game
99

How to save commercial TV

ITV faces unprecedented competition in its 50th year. Legalising product placement would help, says one leading creative

Peter Bazalgette

The Germans have the right word for product placement: *schleichwerbung*. In fact, the producers of an ARD soap opera have recently been stood down while their involvement in a product-placement scandal is investigated. Such payments do, indeed, amount to a bung because the practice is illegal in Europe. But surely it is time to reform this antiquated system.

Fifty years ago commercial television came to Britain. The first advert showed a tube of Colgate toothpaste captured in a block of ice. The political reaction was equally frosty. The Labour opposition pledged to close this ghastly new ITV channel as soon as they returned to power. That same channel is now, half a century on, confronting a different threat. The commercials that have sustained it face an uncertain future. Later this week, the Royal Television Society will be debating the looming crisis at its convention in Cambridge. And next month a report will be delivered to the Ofcom board that is expected to outline how our tough regulations could be relaxed.

It is one of the great clichés of our industry that the personal video recorder (PVR) will kill off spot advertising. A new generation of technophile self-schedulers, timeshifting their viewing, will fast forward through all those glossy commercials honed by Soho's finest. Like all clichés it is true. But no one knows precisely when. Only 8% of US households have a PVR at the moment. Will this grow to 23% (PricewaterhouseCoopers) or 40% (Accenture) by 2009? In Britain, Sky+ is in fewer than a million homes. Even when penetration of PVRs reaches the halfway mark, perhaps within six or seven years, it will only be denting rather than destroying spot advertising. But in the end this technology will allow us to avoid ads.

Advertising revenues still pay for more than one third of programmes. Viewers would be very sorry if this shift in television's tectonic plates deprived them of The X Factor or Coronation Street. How can commercially funded content be preserved? The answer is simple. Allow advertisers to get closer to programmes.

The principle behind advertising regulation has always been separation. So corrupting were these commercial messages that they had to be prevented from contaminating the programmes. Sponsors' messages had to be clearly delineated from programme titles, while product placement - that was the work of the devil. This was all part of a regime which made television far more heavily regulated than any other medium. We now need to make a bonfire of these regula-



James Bond's Aston Martin is a classic example of product placement

tions and institute a new regime based on transparency not separation. Without this, commercial television will eventually become as extinct as the horsedrawn omnibus or the Betamax tape.

Advertisers must be allowed to migrate out of the commercial breaks towards the programmes. As sponsors they should be allowed to integrate their brands into title and credit sequences. And product placement should be legalised - but broadcasters should have to reveal all commercial deals in the credits.

Sponsorship rules demand a separation of the brand message and the programme titles. This leads to advertising agencies creating independent sequences that either bear no relation to the programme or that heavy-handedly allude to it. My particular bête noir is Leerdammer Cheese and its awful sponsorship bumpers for Midsomer Murders. Integration of the sequence would come as a great relief. Then PVR addicts, leaping like salmon across the commercial breaks, would still pick up the commercial message as the programme begins. But what if they also tried to vault the title sequence? That's where product placement comes in.

It was Stephen Carter, Ofcom's chief executive, who observed how peculiar it was

"Viewers would be very sorry if the shift in television's tectonic plates deprived them of The X Factor or Coronation Street"

that you could watch a James Bond film on ITV, stuffed with product-placed Aston Martins, and then watch a chaste ITV drama where no such skulduggery was allowed. At the MediaGuardian Edinburgh International Television Festival, Andy Duncan, chief executive of Channel 4, expressed reservations about product placement. But Andy, let the viewers decide. Make it transparent and if viewers feel a product has over-influenced a plot or script they will cease watching.

Should sponsorship and product placement be allowed in all genres? If it is done transparently the public can decide. Stewart Purvis, the former head of ITN, who is chairing this week's RTS session, believes even sponsored news would be justified if it was the price of keeping it on ITV.

Some of those connected umbilically to spot advertising (commercial broadcasters, media buyers, ad agencies) oppose its reform. They remind me of the proverbial frog in the pan of water. As long as it heats up gradually the frog doesn't realise it needs to get out. The PVR is raising the industry's temperature, but so slowly it is easy to ignore.

The US is leading the way. One of my own company's shows for ABC, Extreme Makeover: Home Edition, has a range of product placement deals. They are well known and cause no anxiety among viewers. And Endemol gets to share in the revenue, a point that independent producers in the UK should contemplate. For too long television advertising has been a stitch-up between broadcasters and advertisers. Reform will not only preserve funding for programmes, it will also share out the benefits more equitably.

Peter Bazalgette is chairman of Endemol UK

Media law

Beach proves stony ground for ad ban

Dan Tench

The advert seemed tempting. Under a picture of a family strolling along a beach beneath the fortress of Kyrenia, it declared "pure Mediterranean - a sanctuary of unspoilt beauty". But the ad, seen on London buses last November, caused controversy as it was issued by the Northern Cyprus Tourism Centre and promoted holidays in Northern Cyprus. After a complaint from the London Assembly, Transport for London (TfL) banned the ad as it was "likely to cause widespread offence".

The centre took the case to the high court, where Mr Justice Newman said the ban was unlawful as it was irrational and breached the centre's freedom of expression under article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights. Article 10 has long been used to protect journalism and artistic free speech, but this is the first time it has been used successfully in a domestic court to overturn restrictions on expression in a commercial context.

On top of the provisions of general law, such as defamation and trade-mark infringement, those advertising in this country must comply with the British Code of Advertising, as administered by the

Advertising Standards Authority, for print advertising, and the various codes for advertising on radio or TV. Like TfL, some of those carrying ads impose further restrictions and, in some areas, such as medicines, there are specific statutory requirements. Until now, advertisers have had little legal ammunition when adverts were limited or banned.

When the poster for Northern Cyprus appeared, Brian Coleman, chairman of the London Assembly, wrote to TfL stating that Northern Cyprus was not recognised by any government other than that of Turkey which had "illegally occupied the territory for the past 30 years". He asked that the advert be withdrawn from public transport. Ken Livingstone, the Mayor of London, had previously issued directions that "advertisements should not be approved for . . . TfL vehicles if they . . . are likely to cause widespread or serious offence". This February, TfL banned ads from the centre (and it seemed all ads for holidays in Northern Cyprus) on the ground that they would cause such offence.

So the centre sued TfL, arguing that the ban was irrational and contrary to the centre's right to freedom of expression under article 10. Article 10 requires not only that any restriction on freedom of expression

be justified as being necessary to protect one of several specified factors such as national security, the safety of the public or the rights and reputation of others, but that it must meet some pressing social need and be proportionate.

The judge was not satisfied that the prohibition could be justified. He noted that TfL had proceeded on the basis that Turkey itself was in occupation of Northern Cyprus even though this was a controversial interpretation of the situation. Moreover, TfL has failed to establish any pressing social need for the ban, previous advertising for the centre had gone ahead without any apparent complaint, and was disproportionate since it banned all ads for Northern Cyprus regardless of how sensitively they had been prepared.

It is true that this case rather turned on its own facts and it does not suggest that any prohibition on advertising or other forms of commercial speech will be overturned by the courts. However, in light of the decision, any advertiser restricted in its advertising may wish to take the body imposing the restriction to task if the ban seems unjustified.

Dan Tench is the head of public law and a media partner at Olswang

Head of Communications
Circa 45,000
Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Fire Authority

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How do you make a fire that didn't happen the top story?

A prevention message is much more difficult to sell - yet that's the challenge you face in this role. We've been rated as 'Good' in our CPA but need you to help us improve further. By focusing on prevention and community safety we believe we can make Cambridgeshire a safer place to live. We need a Head of Communications to help us get our messages across both to the public and our staff.

As well as leading external and internal communications, you will also support the public involvement process, manage public consultation and the Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service brand. You will also control and manage the development of our website and intranet.

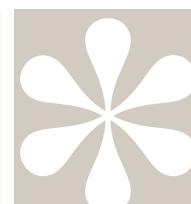
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