

In tutto il mondo le persone ricordano i maggiori eventi legandoli al luogo dove si trovano

NEWS OR ENTERTAINMENT

Depending on your point of view, television is either a means for educating, informing and entertaining the public or it's a versatile electronic bill-board installed in the homes of every consumer of goods and services. For those broadcasters whose business depends on advertising, their primary concern is maximising the size of the audience.

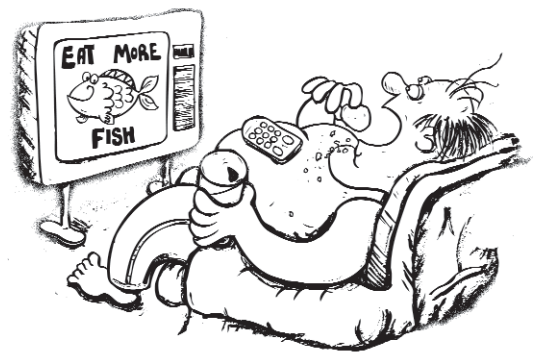
The bargain between advertiser and broadcaster is quite simple: the advertiser wishes to present his message to as large a slice of his chosen market as possible and is prepared to pay for it; the broadcaster has to make or buy programming guaranteed to attract and hold that same slice of population. The new media are grabbing more and more of the advertising budgets, but the TV industry is evolving rapidly to meet the challenges, through corporate consolidations, mass-appeal programming formats and the release of their huge back catalogues via DVD and downloads.

Some well-known broadcasters have based their businesses solely on news; others broadcast as much or as little news as the markets demand. What they all have in common is a need to deliver profits to their shareholders and therefore to produce their programming as efficiently and cost-effectively as possible.

Digital, non-linear workflows were perceived as the key to achieving these goals – and they are – but simply replacing linear with non-linear and analogue with digital isn't enough.

Many non-linear technologies have increased the technical efficiency of news production – by eliminating the classic access and sharing limitations of videotape – but they have often failed to improve the overall cost-effectiveness of the organisation. In many cases this has been because the new technology was seen as a solution to some old problems – which it is – but not as an opportunity for broadcasters to re-think their entire production strategy. The potential was there to streamline an operation, to make it faster and more flexible – while simultaneously removing costs.

Any live broadcasting is difficult and stressful: news, with its unpredictability and immediacy is worse than most. News professionals need some constants in their lives: procedures, workflows and technologies which they can trust to deliver, on-time, always. None of them like the idea of having these trusted friends removed, particularly if it means learning new skills and taking on unfamiliar tasks. But the strongest resistance may come from those who don't actually use the equipment at all.



BRAND IMAGE

As consumers, we have to be able to trust the suppliers of products. This is just as true of news providers as it is for food manufacturers or airlines. The culture of Marketing has grown around the need for businesses to construct an image of themselves, a brand, and then present and constantly re-inforce that brand in the mind of the consumer. Brand-awareness builds trust and trust builds business.

News readers are story-tellers; if we're to believe the stories we must trust the person telling them. It's easy to see why, in the 20th century, so many news broadcasters constructed their brand image around personalities. It's a well-known fact that the top personalities in television news achieve celebrity status in many parts of the world and may be recognised in the street more than senior politicians. On the face of it, no bad thing; it means the station has a clearly identifiable face and image.

But there's a flip-side too: like the courts of medieval European Kings, these personalities can build a culture of deference and support around them. There's a reluctance to change what's perceived to be a stable and successful structure in case the King doesn't like it. In earlier centuries, Kings often took extreme and irreversible action against courtiers who upset them.



How do you make any technology or workflow changes at all under a regime like this? Typically, by proving the benefits beyond all reasonable doubt, by planning an escape route should the worst happen and by setting up a pre-arranged human sacrifice to accept all the blame. This is not a management culture recognised as the secret of success in modern business! Little wonder that some major broadcasters have already started to roll back the 'personality cult'. Instead of paying escalating salaries to attract and retain their superstars, some are deliberately letting them drift away. In the same way that our image of an airline is based on our experiences, the logos and colours on the check-in desks and the employees' uniforms – so is the branding of a television station. We respect the image of the organisation as a whole, not just the person in front of us.

CHANGE MANAGEMENT

Whether they're personality-led or not, those broadcasters who have made their businesses more successful are typically those who've embraced the need for change. They've recognised the opportunity to look at the tasks associated with making television news and allocate them to the people best suited to carrying them out. Digital technology has presented the opportunity to do this but it's taken wise and bold management to make it happen.

If the old-style newscasters were the Kings of television, then the videotape editors were the Barons who protected them. Their skill and speed made the seemingly impossible happen; the Kings were happy, of course, revelling in their glory, but their accountants were not.

Some of the first digital systems tried to solve the classic sharing problems of tape, by connecting the new NLEs to a central storage system. They certainly made the Barons' lives a little easier, and made the Kings smile too, but the business didn't see a real benefit. There's a lot of editing required to make a live television news show – but most of it is surprisingly simple. This is where the story starts to get more interesting.



News broadcasting depends on gathering as much information as possible – in the forms of text, pictures and sound – processing it into digestible form and then playing it out. News professionals aim to do this as quickly, accurately and reliably as possible: News businesses have to do it as cost effectively and as profitably as possible.

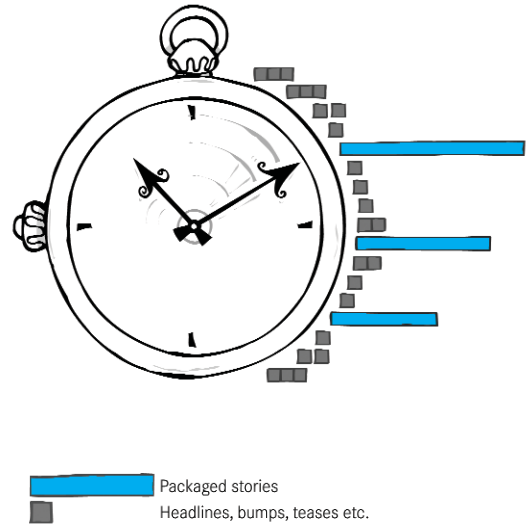
Before making any organisational, changes it's essential to understand the status quo. How can you make improvements if you don't understand your present workflow? How can you manufacture your products more efficiently if you don't understand where the raw materials come from and how they fit together? A long, hard look is required.

There's more than one way to analyse the manufacturing process of any product: start with the raw materials, follow them down the production line and see what happens to them – or, look at the finished product and trace it back to its component parts. In TV news, the former approach often throws up a need for a shared storage platform to allow a group of editors to share some common storage. It's only when you start from the screen and work backwards that you come to a different conclusion: A shared content store, yes, but with manipulation tools aimed at different tasks of graduated complexity. After all, why shouldn't the basic tasks of news video production be handled by journalists and producers?

OUTPUT ANALYSIS

Next time you watch a news show on television, try to write down what you're actually seeing. It probably goes something like this:

- Generic title sequence – mix of animated graphics, stock images underlaid with some music.
- Arresting images – usually 3-5 seconds long – to illustrate the headlines and grab attention.
- Stills or short animations keyed or otherwise displayed behind the news reader.
- Maybe another sequence of short 'headline' shots.
- The top story – probably an edited package, traditionally finished moments earlier.
- Possibly a live 'interview' with the correspondent or interviewee relating to the story.
- Back to news reader, backed by graphic.
- Another edited package.
- One or more short 'tease' shots to persuade us to stay through the commercial break.
- A short, prepared animation, possibly overlaid with some well-chosen shots from today's stories.
- Commercial break.
- Special report. Highly production-value insight into major story or issue.
- Weather and traffic reports
- Etc etc



A simplified view of a news broadcast, of course, but the basic ingredients are all there. Before embarking on a major technology implementation it's essential to understand the present infrastructure and how it has evolved to deliver this output. It's wise to survey the underlying workflows for a period of time. News is about responding to the peaks and troughs; the expected and the unexpected. However, the typical picture is of relatively few complex editing tasks – and a much larger number of simple shot selections and very basic assembly jobs, where the content is entirely dictated by editorial.

The number of people and the amount of equipment required to complete these tasks in 'traditional' workflows can be quite startling. It's not uncommon for long-experienced editors, working in complex facilities, to be editing single shots onto striped tapes.

OBVIOUS CONCLUSIONS:

- It would be great if everyone could see and edit content as soon as it arrives.
- It would be great if everyone could access the same content at the same time.
- It would be great if finished edits could be aired moments after they're finished.
- Metadata is just as important as the content itself. We have to know what it is, where it is and whether we can use it.
- We have to deal with content delivered from any source, in any standard or file format.

LESS OBVIOUS CONCLUSIONS:

- A lot of the content that hits the screen is simply shot selections pulled out of the source footage. The decisions are editorial-based and could be handled by a journalist or producer.
- Most news stories are light in effects – basic story-telling needs only basic editing. A simple, effective and rapid editor is required.
- It would be great if graphics and editing shared the same storage. Even better if simple graphics could be made on a simple workstation according to a pre-designed template.
- If the craft editors and designers are freed from producing the very basic items, they can concentrate on adding value to special reports, designing better templates, updating the on-screen branding etc.
- If the people who write the headlines, intros, traffic reports, recaps, teases, etc etc selected the shots themselves, we wouldn't need as many editors.
- Today's new journalists expect to edit. Editing pictures and sound is as much a part of the process as writing script. Let's give them an editor they can learn to use easily, which allows them to tell their stories, their way.
- Businesses require content to be re-purposed across multiple output platforms: linear broadcasting (TV and Radio), websites, DVB-H, IPTV and so on. It has to be easy to do this.

CONCLUSION

It's almost impossible to realise the full benefits of digital, non-linear workflows without some bold management backing. Senior managers are responsible to their shareholders to manage the business effectively, maintain the quality of the product and deliver a healthy return on investment.

The change process is likely to require some tough, unpopular decisions and some powerful, vested interests may have to be curtailed. Those at the top must recognise this and ensure that the operational managers are properly briefed, empowered and supported throughout. The most successful transitions have been in those businesses where everyone is fully signed-up and wants to make the change.

Every assumption about today's workflows and job delineations has to be challenged. The desktop editor is a logical migration for a TV journalist now, in the same way as the electronic word processor and computer newsroom systems were 25 years ago.



There's a lot of 'noise' in the digital newsroom market. It's easy to be seduced by ideas of fantastic functionality and features which go far beyond what's actually required. Complex features and interfaces increase the cost of implementation: more training, more support and more risk. They can actually spoil the product too – who hasn't seen a news story where the video is stuffed with superfluous fades, wipes and other effects, inserted simply because the desktop editor could?

There's no replacement for a good story well told. Whether today's news junkie is listening to FM radio (or DAB), watching TV or downloading podcasts, it's the essence of the story that's important to them. In a crowded news market, the winners are those who can deliver fast, reliable and engaging content to the platform of choice – with the lowest cost overhead. Isn't that what we were promised?