



Television News in the New Millennium

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Preface

A prominent subplot in the first season of the Netflix original series *House of Cards* had the ambitious Millennial Zoe Barnes turn down a promotion to White House correspondent at a fictional newspaper loosely modeled on the *Washington Post*. Instead, she accepts a position at a hot new political blog named *Slugline*. Although she appears to have crossed the digital Rubicon, there is one scene where Zoe is seen perched on a stool, powdering her nose, waiting for the cameras to roll for her *television* stand-up.

In a way, the scene epitomizes the dilemma for news and journalism today. On the one hand, the internet and its social and mobile platforms have dramatically challenged the pre-eminence of television as a news source. On the other hand, even in the *Slugline* era of Zoe Barnes, television has an irresistible allure for bloggers, pundits, and other denizens of the new media age. Media companies in the television news business divest themselves of the medium at their own peril. Even if packaged and delivered differently today than it once was (think Netflix, Amazon, and YouTube), television isn't going away anytime soon. Hence, it will continue to be a place where consumers' appetite for news, information, insight, and opinion is met.

But to be successful, the way that TV news organizations go about doing this job must evolve in response to a transformed world. It is the goal of this white paper—based on fifteen years of primary research among news audiences—to say how.

We endeavor not just to describe the relevant ways in which the world has changed, but to answer two fundamental questions:

1. What does success look like for television news in a world transformed in the multi-media, multi-platform age?

2. What can news consumers tell us about what it means to achieve this success in the second decade of the 21st century?



About City Square

City Square Associates, Inc. is a marketing research and strategic consulting practice that draws on its team members' skills in consumer research, process facilitation, and strategic communication to help businesses and organizations identify, express, and achieve their objectives. Since our founding in 1997, we have conducted hundreds of consumer research studies – both qualitative and quantitative – on behalf of multiple major US news organizations. Our body of work also encompasses entertainment, digital media, advertising, education, and the non-profit sector.

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A World Transformed¹

It has become cliché to say it, but it is nonetheless true that the internet—that system whereby vast quantities of digitized stuff can be distributed and accessed simultaneously—is the most disruptive technology since the printing press. Just as Gutenberg’s fifteenth century invention took the Bible out of the exclusive possession of a monastic elite and put it into the hands of common



folk who could interpret the mysterious texts in the bright light of their own experience, the internet has ripped away journalism from the high priests of old media—newspaper editors and network news anchors—and made it a far more democratic affair.

Indeed, in news audience research today, respondents routinely tell us, not that their interest in news has waned, but they have become distrustful of traditional sources, and the influence that might be exercised by corporate interests or government. At least when it comes to the most important stories, news consumers like having the ability to scan multiple sources—many of them unconventional—to cobble together their own interpretation of events.

But wait, there’s more! The internet alone would be disruptive enough, but the rise of mobile technology on top of it has magnified, intensified, and propelled the disruption in ways many of us never anticipated. In the hey day of the Blackberry (ancient history really), media

and marketing mavens marveled at the ability to stream video to a portable device, but then often reassured themselves with the belief that “no one would prefer to watch a grainy, postage stamp sized video if a big HD screen were available.” They were right, but only to a point: Because for most people, most of the time, that nice HD screen is not available or convenient, which has made the ability to stream to an iPhone or Galaxy or iPad mini (and their beautiful displays) more impactful than many of us had imagined.

And so, consider that staple of television news: the morning news show with its chipper mix of headlines, weather, traffic, lifestyle, and celebrity. While some of that content is still best enjoyed live by television while



dressing for work or working out at the gym, much of it is more easily accessed on a smartphone, which has become for many of us a near constant companion. “I can’t remember when I *didn’t* go to bed with my phone,” said one woman in a recent study. “Why should I wait for the local weather to come on during the morning show,” said another, “when I can just check a weather

television viewing continued to hold a strong place in the morning routine, many respondents reported using their mobile device before even switching on the television, often while they were still in bed and barely awake. By extension, mobile’s greatest impact is probably in morning news viewing, turning the once vital and thriving news program genre into background noise.

Mobile may also be another nail in the coffin of local television, since a lot of what people are accessing on their phones – weather, sports scores, traffic conditions – is what they once sought from local news. Although we know from our research that there is no one place on the internet that succinctly and successfully pulls together local content, consumers are able to apply in the mobile dimension their self-curation behavior cultivated over years of accessing information online. They are avidly downloading subject-specific apps (weather, sports teams, etc.) and creating routines around checking them to get all the information they want quickly, regardless of whether they are in front of a TV or computer at the time. When looked at in this way, the proposition “this is the year of mobile,” often put forth by media planners and technology consultants alike, sounds like the death knell for television news.

But it needn’t be like that. For it is precisely mobile’s intimacy, availability, and portability that make it the bridge between television and the internet, combining the power of the internet (that system wherein vast quantities of digitized stuff can be distributed and accessed simultaneously) with the comfort and ease of television. Though it must be acknowledged that mobile devices can simply be another screen on which to watch television, we would argue that this behavior is not the threat to television news some may view it as. In

fact, making your content available on mobile devices is simply another way to allow your viewers to access your content. And really, even when we watch the news on our phone, we’re still watching TV.

Finally and paradoxically, it may well be the all-important personality factor in television news that will be its saving grace in the face of mobile. Through social networking sites, increasingly accessed via smartphones, users can get that same connection to people and/ or stories that television provides. But mobile cannot, at least not yet, replicate the passive and engaging aspect of sitting down to watch your favorite news program delivered by your favorite talent.

At the same time, television news programs can take advantage of increasingly-important (and very top of mind) second screen behavior. By connecting your television program to your viewer through special content available only through mobile applications, you entice your viewer to remain engaged beyond the broadcast. In this sense, the smartphone or tablet becomes that helper or bridge that keeps the viewer tuned in and not the frightening little device that’s pulling them away.

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¹ For a timeline of milestones in the recent history of technology, television and world events, please refer to the centerfold graphic.

6. Build a mobile bridge

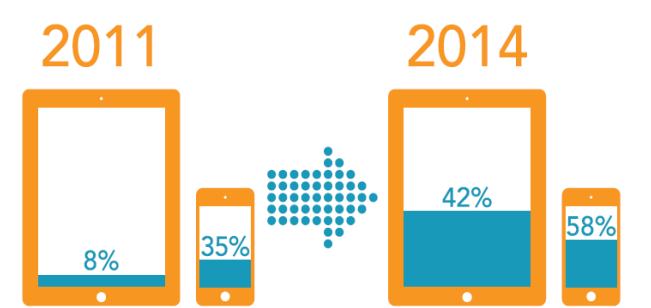
And so we end where we began: Mobile technology has magnified, intensified, and proliferated changes wrought by the internet. But what is it specifically about mobile that makes it such a powerful development?

In January of 2014, the Pew Research Center found that 58% of adults own web-enabled smartphones while 42% report having a tablet computer.¹ And these numbers are only growing – in May 2011 only 35% of adults reported owning a smartphone while the tablet numbers have increased by nearly fivefold in that same time period. This has led to an increasing amount of web traffic coming from mobile devices. So, how can this growing mobile medium be leveraged by television news organizations in a meaningful and beneficial way? A sort of gateway between people and the internet, mobile devices possess three defining characteristics – intimacy, portability and convenience – that make them useful to news consumers and ultimately, to news organizations.

Intimacy – It’s not exactly easy to cuddle up with a PC, but a smartphone and/or tablet has the distinct advantage of delivering the same content one finds on the desktop web to the palm of your hand. As a result, consumers wind up taking them to bed in the evening and waking up next to them in the morning. Flipping on the television and inviting an evening news anchor or morning news personality into your home is certainly an intimate act that connects viewers to the media. But mobile devices take it one step further, actually getting into bed, lying with users on the couch, and staying in their back pocket throughout their day.

Availability – Not only are mobile devices easily

accessible, they also have the distinct advantage of always being on. While PCs and laptops can take time to power up or be located in another room that makes their use inconvenient, mobile devices don’t suffer from such limitations. In fact, so available and ubiquitous are these devices that they actually compete with our families, our friends, and our co-workers when they are with us.



Portability – The ease with which news consumers can now always access, anywhere they want, news content on the web through their mobile devices is staggering - 62% of smartphone users report getting news on their device weekly while 36% do so daily.² Being able to access your phone - and by extension, news – during your commute to work, while lying in bed, while walking from one room to another, makes the mobile device a revelation for the avid news consumer. News is now – quite literally – constantly at your fingertips.

What, then, does this mean for the gradually contracting TV news audience?

In a study that examined the morning lifestyle and media usage habits of news consumers, we found that while

app that tells me the weather for my specific location right now?” Mobile media technology will not destroy television generally, or TV news specifically. But it will transform it significantly, highlighting the utilities and gratifications for which television *per se* is best suited, and diminishing the relative importance of those jobs other media can do better.

But media and technology do not evolve in a vacuum, so when we describe “a world transformed,” we can’t look at the last fifteen years without thinking also about globalism and pluralism, terrorism and war, politics and partisanship. These social and cultural developments have been powered in some measure by the evolutions that have occurred in media technology, but they have also shaped the trends we see in television news.

The United States has always been ambivalent about its relationship to the rest of the world. In the DNA of our national story is a declaration of *independence*, a document that makes plain our separateness as a people.



But as a nation of immigrants, we cannot help but be shaped by what takes place beyond our borders, and it is our ability to find this out instantaneously that has grown exponentially as yesterday’s expensive and complicated communication technology gives way to Skype.

And the globalization of today’s news consumption

goes not just to the topics that interest us, but also to the viewpoints we seek out. In recent years, we have increasingly heard research respondents tell us that they rank international news events high on their list of interests, not for some theoretical reason or—as critics of market research often like to say—because they tend to give socially desirable responses. For most news

Whether we like it or not, the world has come to us.

consumers that is a profoundly practical matter. Whether we like it or not, the world has come to us. When 3000 are killed in a New York terrorist attack orchestrated from a cave in a remote corner of Afghanistan, or when 300 are injured in a Boston bombing that traces its motives to anti-Islamic sentiments in Chechnya, it’s hard to argue that international news is irrelevant.

But the same research subjects who tell us of their increasing interest in “the global village” (Marshall McLuhan’s prescient word for the phenomenon back in 1965!) also tell us that they actively seek out international perspectives even on U.S. news stories. Whether driven by an inherent distrust of political or economic institutions, or simply a curiosity about the world, the fact is that the same appetite which for years drove an American esteem for the BBC news brand now creates the opening for Al Jazeera in America and little known but potentially impactful foreign-based news organizations like CCTV (Chinese Cable TV News). It’s easy to dismiss these kinds of things as niche phenomena, but they would not exist if they were not meeting a need.

Hand in hand with globalization is the stark truth that much of the *content* of international news these days pertains to terrorism and war and the war on terrorism.

¹ Mobile Technology Fact Sheet, Pew Research Internet Project
<http://www.pewinternet.org/fact-sheets/mobile-technology-fact-sheet/>

² The State of the News Media 2013, Pew Research Center
<http://stateofthemediamedia.org/2013/digital-as-mobile-grows-rapidly-the-pressures-on-news-intensify/#mobile>

Over the past ten years, the consumers' felt need to be informed about world developments has never been greater. But, in some respects, this also means that the pleasure of being thus informed has never been more meager. Participants in our news audience research in recent years increasingly report that they find the steady drumbeat of news about armed conflicts around the globe to be exhausting and depressing. If they sometimes tune out, it is not necessarily because they don't care, but because with all they have going on in their own lives, it's sometimes just too much to take.

No doubt, a similar phenomenon was at work during the Vietnam War, when nightly newscasts regularly featured updates on the exact number of dead and wounded on both sides of the conflict. Or maybe during the hostage crisis in Iran, which gave rise to one of the great institutions of television news, Ted Koppel's *Nightline*. But in 1970 and in 1980, even if news consumers had bad news fatigue, what options did they have? Today by contrast, with cable penetration at about 85%² and approximately 74%³ using internet-capable phones and tablets, it's easy to understand why a viewer might tune out.

Similarly, the growing partisanship of American politics over the past ten years, and the polarization of ideologically opposed interest groups, has made it difficult for many viewers to stay engaged when the topic is Washington DC. It is well-documented, for example, that Millennials have a much weaker allegiance to political parties *per se* and a much greater tolerance for the diversity of

opinions and lifestyles about which partisan politicians on both ends of the spectrum tend to bloviate.⁴ Is it any wonder, then, that they have abandoned the banal horse race political reporting of much television news even as their boomer parents and older grandparents gravitate toward politically super-charged cable news channels to get their fix and have their cherished opinions reinforced?

Politics is undeniably central to civic life, and most Millennials would not deny that. But television news coverage of the nation's great political battles has been as exhausting and dispiriting as the drumbeat of

Consumers' felt need to be informed about world developments has never been greater. But the pleasure of being thus informed has never been more meager.

news about armed conflicts around the world. "I know I should be following what's going on in Washington, but they never seem to get anything done and always seem to be tearing each other apart. What's the point?"

² **Industry Data**
<https://www.ncta.com/industry-data>

³ **Smartphone and Tablets: The Heartbeat of Connected Culture, Frank N. Magid Associates**
<http://magid.com/sites/default/files/pdf/20130930MagidMobileStudyPreview.pdf>

⁴ **Millennials in Adulthood, Pew Research Social and Demographic Trends**
<http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2014/03/07/millennials-in-adulthood/>

Precisely because of the way television has transformed itself, there's now room for experimentation.

reach model of traditional network television. Similarly, Current with its lofty goals and renegade formats, is now part of television history, and *The Daily Show*, which in fact calls itself a "fake news program," is on a Comedy Central - not a news channel.

The good news in all of this? Precisely because of the way television has transformed itself, there's now room for experimentation. Pay cable networks that target niche audiences are the perfect venue for a different kind of television news programs, relying not just on the standard anchor-desk-headlines model, but on different iterations of the journalistic model that a select group of consumers say they want: long form, documentary style storytelling on complex, international stories that carry world-wide significance but don't always get their due on the evening news. Simply because some have failed (or are struggling) does not mean these efforts aren't worth the investment. In a television universe that has been transformed by the internet, it is vital that these niche-y networks and new types of news organizations continue to experiment with the story-driven, visually rich programming that takes full advantage of what TV as a medium does best.

But where does that leave the big broadcast networks? In a sense, the very concept of "finding your niche" is antithetical to broadcast television whose DNA is to be a mass reach vehicle. Perhaps this is one of the reasons that, in our new niche-oriented media world, the average audience for network nightly newscasts continues to erode.³ How, in the new millennium, can broadcast news ever adequately serve the multiple and sometimes contradictory interests of fractured and increasingly diverse audiences?

³ **The State of the News Media 2013, Pew Research Center**
<http://stateofthemediamedia.org/2013/overview-5/>

Maybe in this brave new world the answer is that broadcast's niche is not to be a niche, but to be instead a place where a broad swath of the media-using public can find relevant content presented in an accessible way—a place where people come together around the great events of the day rather than fleeing to their own private corners.

Granted, the importance of this function will be more evident at moments of crisis or transition—during periods of civil unrest or international conflict, when there is a change in government or a major social transformation. But in the end, the executive leadership and corporate owners of these non-niche news organizations need to ask themselves whether or not they owe the community at least some public service in exchange for their lucrative access to the airwaves and cable-carried bandwidth.

If the answer to that question is "yes," then the results of experiments that take place on the fringe—from *Vanguard* to *Vice*—can actually be used to help to evolve a venerable institution, saving it from obsolescence without relying on cat videos and celebrity news to seem relevant and engaging. If the answer to that question is "no," then broadcast television news really is in its twilight years.

5. Develop Your Niche

As the HBO series *The Newsroom* made clear, breadth and depth, entertainment and information, integrity and the need to keep ratings high can be, and often are, at odds with each other.



Apart from *60 Minutes*, most of the investigative journalism that can be found on TV occurs on the fringe. PBS is perhaps the best-known source, with consumers often citing *PBS NewsHour*, *Frontline*, *Charlie Rose*, and *Independent Lens* as beacons of journalistic integrity that operate in long form. Programs like *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* have also paved the way for serious news done in a different (in this case, comedic and satirical) way. And, we've found that they too are rewarded for their efforts by being called "journalistic." The newest addition to this hybrid satire/news format, HBO's *Last Week Tonight with John Oliver* has similarly gained both a popular following and critical acclaim (helped in no small part by its viral YouTube clips).¹ There's the defunct

indie, Current TV (having closed shop in August 2013) which offered its *Vanguard* journalism pieces, providing reporting on global issues at whatever length the story dictated. Then there's *Vice* (TV), debuting in the spring of 2013 on HBO and bringing the stories that mainstream organizations aren't covering to their hungry audience in episodes consisting of two, 15-minute segments.²

Shows like *Frontline* on PBS and *Vice* on HBO straddle the line between documentary and news program, producing, albeit for very different networks and very different audiences, shows that venture beyond a traditional television news format. Though programs like these have the potential to attract younger viewers not drawn to traditional network nightly news shows, the truth is that both PBS's offerings and *Vice*'s are—relative to broadcast—comparatively low ratings vehicles operating on a business model miles away from the mass



And yet, sure as the fictional avatar of new media Zoe Barnes sits on her stool, waiting for her stand-up, TV will continue to exercise an outsize influence on news and journalism for the foreseeable future. But simply because TV will always have that broad influence, doesn't mean it doesn't need to evolve. Rather, if TV news is to maintain relevance, it must adapt to this transformed world. To this point, we suggest the following six imperatives:

1. Cultivate your talent
2. Know your day part
3. Curate with care
4. Leverage the visual medium
5. Develop your niche
6. Build a mobile bridge

¹ John Oliver's Complicated Fun Connects for HBO, NY Times
<http://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/17/business/media/john-olivers-complicated-fun-connects-for-hbo.html?smid=nytcore-iphone-share&smprod=nytcore-iphone&r=0>

² Vice Has Many Media Giants Salivating, but Its Terms Will Be Rich, NY Times
<http://www.nytimes.com/2014/06/23/business/media/vice-has-many-media-giants-salivating-but-its-terms-will-be-rich.html>

1. Cultivate your Talent

At one time—and not so long ago—when a researcher asked news consumers who obtained news from multiple sources why they used *television* news specifically, the answer would be, “because it’s up to the minute....I don’t have to wait until tomorrow’s paper to find out what happened. I can hear about it immediately, and sometimes even as it happens.” But now the internet offers that too.

It used to be that news consumers would tell you that television news offers powerful visuals and video to tell its stories. But news video is widely available online too. Indeed, one by one, many of the reasons for which consumers once used television in connection with their news interests are no longer compelling, because other media and platforms offer essentially the same benefits.

So, what’s left for television news that no other medium can offer, or do quite as well? It’s the fact that the stories are told to me by people whose faces I can see, whose voices I can hear, whose personalities I can come to know, persons with whom I can actually develop rapport and relationship.



Once during the Iraq War, while conducting focus groups on the topic of network evening news programs, the mother of a young man deployed in Iraq explained her preference for Brian Williams this way: “Maybe I’m naïve, but I truly believe that Brian cares about my boy.” It’s difficult to imagine anyone deriving a benefit so personal from an online news experience or explaining

*“Maybe I’m naïve,
but I truly believe that
Brian cares about my boy.”*

their preference for one online news sources over another in such deeply emotional terms. Efforts to transfer this personal truth from television to the Web have been notoriously unsuccessful. What does such a thing even look like?

And so, if the personal element is integral to television news, it must be clear that talent development is the top priority of news organizations, right? Developing a deep bench of individuals and cultivating them over time—the way that talent is scouted, vetted, and rewarded in pro sports—must be standard operating procedure, right?

As the oft-lampooned John McLaughlin might say, “WRONG!”

Whenever news audience researchers set out to do talent testing these days, what is most striking is how few names there actually are to work with, and how low familiarity and awareness scores are for all but the very top tier in broadcast news. There are many reasons for this: a lack of investment, dramatic changes in the

viewers’ ability to see for themselves and arrive at their own judgment of what’s unfolding.



Clearly then, if nightly ratings are any indication, the promise of TV journalism is not being fulfilled so much by the partisan hosts of the cable news channels—however entertaining their programming can sometimes be—but by the national news programs whose reporters and even anchors are willing to stand in the midst of an angry crowd in Tahrir Square or travel to West Africa to document the suffering of Ebola victims and explore the spread of the disease fearlessly and first hand. On television more than in any other medium, it becomes clear that journalism is not just about abstract ideals like accuracy, truthfulness, depth, and objectivity. It’s also about emotional characteristics like passion, courage, and empathy that are evidenced every time a TV news crew does the hard work—sometimes at great inconvenience or even risk to themselves—to obtain the highest quality video and narrate a story that not only takes the viewers

into the action, but lets them become part of the narrative.

The enduring appeal of this kind of TV journalism—in spite of the ubiquity of news video online and on mobile platforms—makes sense intuitively. While news consumers can and do scan news headlines continuously and watch video clips throughout the day on news websites and social media feeds, nothing in the digital space replicates for viewers exactly what happens when Richard Engel or Anderson Cooper report from a war zone. When it leverages the visual medium fully, television has an unmatched storytelling power, and great stories are inherently engaging.

4. Leverage the Visual Medium

As we earlier noted, a defining characteristic of our transformed media world is the fact that many of the reasons for which people once flocked to television news are no longer compelling. Other media and platforms offer essentially the same benefits, so at first blush, the visual aspect would seem to be one of the many benefits no longer owned by television news, as news websites and mobile apps now drive countless video views.

But is this really true?

Although it is undeniable that television shares with mobile devices and the Web the status of a visual medium, the visual aspect appears to function in a subtly different way on television than it does on other platforms. Consumers aren't always clear and explicit about what they're deriving from an experience when it's working for them, but a deeper analysis of consumer opinion ultimately yields the insight: What it means to leverage the visual medium specifically in the context of television is integrally—and maybe somewhat surprisingly—connected with news viewers' definitions of journalism and what it means to be journalistic.

We say surprisingly, because “journalistic values” are often contrasted with “entertainment values,” and many assume that television news functions mostly within the sphere of the latter. As the frothy mix of celebrity self-promotion, sensationalistic weather coverage, and cute animal stories—once the stock-in-trade of local TV news and the second half of network morning news shows—gradually infiltrates the network evening newscast, it becomes clear that some in the industry believe that a news program needs to be entertaining to be engaging.

But as we've talked to dozens of news consumers across the country, we have concluded that this belief is not

justified. Multi-platform news consumers associate the same attributes with TV news specifically that they do with journalism generally, regardless of the platform. Whether they're watching CBS Evening News, reading NYTimes.com, or listening to NPR, they're still looking for accuracy, truthfulness, depth, objectivity, and originality. What distinguishes the engaging television newscast from a lengthy article in the *Times* is not the fact that it replaces the journalistic values with something lighter or less demanding, but that it delivers on the journalistic promise through the distinctive and compelling grammar of sight, sound, and motion.

This is why, time and again, we hear respondents in news audience research tell us that they gravitate toward news programs that “take me there” and prefer the news anchors who are willing to “put boots on the ground” to those who stay comfortably seated behind the Lucite

The engaging television newscast...delivers on the journalistic promise through the distinctive and compelling grammar of sight, sound, and motion.

desk. In TV journalism, the video camera becomes the witness, recording and reporting events as they happen; and the anchor or correspondent becomes an intrepid guide and thoughtful interpreter for the viewer, providing context for the scene, but never getting in the way of

Nothing is more important than identifying these diverse, authentic, intelligent, creative, courageous personalities.

once-extensive “farm league” of local television news, and lack of strong viewer loyalty to any one TV news organization. But nothing is probably more significant in the end than a certain homogenization of news talent and an obsession with youth.

A few years ago, while talking with a group of middle-aged women about their perceptions of a set of up-and-comers at the time—Nora O'Donnell, Erin Burnett, and Savannah Guthrie—one of the participants, supported by nods of agreement from her group mates, complained: “It's actually hard to tell all these pretty brunettes apart.” The message seemed to be that television news lacks the diversity and variety of their real world.

Indeed, the somewhat surprising success on *The Today Show* of Meredith Vieira—no generic brunette she!—makes the case. As does the continuing success of Robin Roberts—the one-time basketball player and ESPN reporter—on *Good Morning America*. Sometimes a harder edge, an acerbic wit, a maturity honed through years of hard life experience, and authentic compassion matter more than a pretty face. For television news

organizations, nothing is more important than identifying these diverse, authentic, intelligent, creative, courageous personalities, and then taking the time and giving them



the opportunity to forge a relationship with the audience.

The iconic Jim Lehrer famously used to say that he and his co-anchor Robin McNeill were not in the entertainment business, they were in the business of journalism. But what their point of view misses is the fact that *television* news is by definition a uniquely *personal* form of journalism. Those who continue to work in the business, but feel embarrassed about calling reporters “talent” and resist the idea of a reporter or anchor showing any individuality, empathy, or humor, are doomed to seeing their efforts to reach audiences fail. Indeed, one of the most distinctive and valuable benefits that television can offer today—especially in a marketplace marked by war fatigue and political cynicism—are newswomen and men who are committed, compassionate, courageous, and companionable. What other reason could there be to give them twenty-two minutes of my time each day?



2. Know Your Day Part

In a landscape increasingly dominated by online news consumption there's more to retaining TV news viewers than cultivating talent. And over the past fifteen years, much of our research has pointed to one of these factors very clearly: In order to produce a successful linear TV news program, you have to know your day part. TV viewers want and expect different things from programming during different parts of their day and week, and it is essential to bear those desires and expectations in mind when determining the structure and content of TV news shows.



Morning News. For many news consumers, morning television news viewing is uniquely appealing in a number of ways: TV news can be consumed passively, making it suitable for multi-tasking. It is capable of providing viewers with new information because it is the first time people consume news for the day. It has a visual dimension, and it provides a comforting, personal element.

Passive consumption of television is key in the morning, when time is precious and attention is fragmented. This attribute of television offsets the propensity of morning news consumers toward mobile consumption. True, many consumers sleep with their mobile phones, turning to them first thing in the morning for any news they missed overnight. But this requires time and attention, which are precious in the small window of time between waking up and heading out to start the day. Because TV can be on in the background while preparing for the day, TV news remains a part of the morning routine for many.

Morning shows are often identified by their talent, and attachment to morning news anchors and hosts is

personal. For most, the morning is the most intimate part of the day, so the types of personalities they want to invite into their homes by way of their TVs are very specific; first thing in the morning they want to hear from people they find companionable, pleasant and generally non-invasive. Morning news programs need to cultivate talent that embody these characteristics.

As morning routines change from weekday to weekend, so do morning news viewing habits. We've found that the typical viewer of the Sunday morning political news program is an avid news consumer who uses multiple sources throughout the day to get news. For the most part, these viewers have the capacity to watch more actively, so they can take in more in-depth coverage and more intense dialogue. They look to the Sunday news shows not only to recap the week's news, but also to provide more in-depth coverage on important stories. These programs also tend to be DVR-worthy and streamable because their content is unduplicated elsewhere and, even if not evergreen, can be viewed later in the day or week.

On Sunday mornings, talent remains a key preference driver – just look at the recent struggles of *Meet the Press* to see how difficult it is to get the talent just right. Viewers of these Sunday shows aren't necessarily looking for simply a likeable personality. Instead, they want to see an engaging and tenacious moderator; they want referees who withhold their personal opinions and question all sides of a controversial issue with impartiality and vigor. Sunday news shows are where viewers go to see the most prominent political figures and newsmakers directly and fairly questioned, with no agenda but the truth.

The exception to all this, of course, is *CBS News Sunday*

based on information coming from reliable sources in law enforcement and the Justice Department. If one wanted to make sense of an otherwise chaotic and disturbing day, this classic form of television news coverage was the best way—maybe the only way—to do it.

Ironically if you lived in Boston, since local news programs pre-empted live national coverage, the only way to get this benefit of their curation was to play a live stream of the network broadcasts. So then, for the people who needed the coverage most the only solution was to “watch TV” on an internet-connected device.



Just fifteen years ago, Facebook was merely a glint in Mark Zuckerberg's eye, Twitter didn't exist, and it was

impossible to live stream a network news program to your smartphone. So it's self-evident that TV news can't go about its job the same way today that it did in 1999. But in spite of all the changes—indeed in light of all the changes—the editorial and curatorial function of television news is more important than ever before. So, when TV news delivers a repetitive stream of banal commentary and unsubstantiated speculation, who can blame the viewer for changing the channel or reaching for their tablet? Only by embracing with intelligence and maturity the role of the curator—selecting from many possibilities the most salient topics from the absolute best sources and assembling them in a gallery-like fashion that makes the viewer want to see every last story—can TV news make its distinctive contribution to journalism today.



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3. Curate With Care

Those who claim that the days of TV news are numbered also like to say that, in the age of the Internet, “everyone’s his or her own curator.” And to be sure, convene a group of hardcore news junkies for research, and many will describe elaborate strategies that they have devised for locating, harvesting, and filtering the news and analysis they find online. In a news website usability study we conducted a couple of years ago, one young man demonstrated how, through a combination of topical searches and visits to preferred news websites, he’d scan the web for interesting content. If a story or topic looked at a glance to be worthwhile, he’d keep the tab open for subsequent reading; if it didn’t, he’d close the tab and check out another link. Once he had assembled—in the form of as many as a dozen open browser tabs—all the material for the day that looked promising, he’d go back and read the complete stories, one at a time. He insisted this was his daily ritual.

But how many ordinary news consumers are going through this kind of trouble to get the right mix of topics and viewpoints from the most trustworthy and illuminating news sources every day? Even in the so-called “age of self-curation” and “citizen journalism,” news consumers appreciate it when someone with deep knowledge of the field, ample resources, and sound judgment brings together in one place and artfully assembles the most important and compelling stories of the day, in one concise package. This really is an opportunity for television news to shine.

A case in point. On that memorable day in 2013, when the entire city of Boston and its surrounding suburbs were under “lockdown” and “shelter in place” orders, there wasn’t much to do but follow news coverage of the police pursuit of the Marathon bombing suspect. It was



a great example of crowd-sourced news coverage. While most of the local news reporters were marooned outside police barriers with mobile phones pressed to their ears and very little interesting video to show, many of us were following live Twitter feeds emanating from inside the neighborhoods where police were going door-to-door.

But as the day wore on, it gradually became clear that we weren’t getting a comprehensive or considered account of the situation, for how could one possibly be sure the sources they were using were reliable? What experience or information did any of us possess to distinguish fact from speculation? Where was the curation - where was the seasoned journalist - when we needed them most?

As it turns out, on the day of the manhunt, they were in New York and Washington D.C. at the network news organizations. There on the networks - in place of breathless commentary from inexperienced but attractive local reporters with no news to report but endless Tweets and Facebook posts from people inside the secure perimeter - was calm methodical reporting,

Morning, which more closely resembles its weekday counterparts in its focus on features over hard-hitting news, making it pitch-perfect for a lazy Sunday morning when many folks have nowhere to be and plenty of time to spare.



Early Evening News. After a long day of news consumption on other platforms, people want different things from evening news than they seek out in the morning. In the evening, many viewers still want to get news from programs that are non-sensational, unbiased, concise, and polished. Evening news viewers are typically heavy news consumers overall and follow the news closely. So they’re not looking for easy news consumption in the same way that morning viewers might be. They consider network evening news programs to be the closest thing on television to unbiased journalism, which is what they want from programs in this day part. These viewers want accessible news that everyone can understand, but that is neither dumbed down nor sensationalistic.

Although viewers of network evening news programs are looking for straightforward news, it’s clear that anchor personality and profile are the primary drivers of network news program preferences. Not only is it essential to have the right kinds of stories delivered the right way during network evening news slots, but also to have the right anchor delivering it. They want credible, experienced, and empathetic personalities delivering the serious news they seek at this hour of the day.

It must be acknowledged, however, that many early evening news programs fall in a tricky time slot for an important part of their target audience: the working professional. This group of viewers is perfect for the

nightly news: they’re interested in news, and have been taking in the headlines all day without getting the full story. The challenge is that these working professionals often aren’t home in time to settle in and turn on the news. Early evening news programs have the content and the appeal, but inherently exclude some of their potential viewers because the time slot is just too close to the end of the workday. It will be important going forward to experiment with a variety of strategies for addressing this challenge.



Primetime News. Then there’s a completely different animal: the primetime news magazines where content is king. We’ve found that the people who are viewing primetime news programs have an appetite for factual television that goes beyond the tidbits they get in early evening newscasts to provide greater depth and multiple perspectives on topics they find interesting. They want investigative journalism, not just a series of headlines. They look for these shows to teach them something about which they’ve heard little or nothing. And if a news magazine does include a segment about something recently or currently in the news, it must add something decidedly new to their knowledge or understanding of the story in order to be worth their time.

Of course, not all primetime news magazines are created equal, and fans of the genre appear to fall into one of two camps: those who gravitate toward entertaining crime mysteries like *Dateline* or those who prefer hard-hitting investigative reporting formats like the gold standard *60 Minutes*. Either way, this is the one day part where topic trumps talent and where more than anything else viewers crave a good story well told.

A World Transformed: The Timeline

