

# Why the digital revolution in media newsrooms has reset the world of public relations



Bell Pottinger Group

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People today get their news from a variety of sources during any given day – an insight which has driven a multi-media revolution at the BBC and other new organisations.

Peter Horrocks, the new Director of Global News at the BBC, was the man who managed the revolution at the BBC – transforming 21 different news platforms into one of the biggest multimedia newsrooms in the world.

At a recent Bell Pottinger Group briefing event, he talked about the changes this revolution has brought on news gathering at the BBC – and the profound implications for communications professionals.

Audiences around the world have changed, radically, the way they consume news. Many use a combination of radio, TV, online new sites and social media platforms to find out what is going on. In response, the BBC has transformed its whole approach to news gathering and news delivery.

Prior to the transformation the BBC Newsroom operated through separate, discrete newsrooms across TV and Radio, News 24, Online and BBC World and not only were they separate but rarely did they collaborate on stories. Indeed within each newsroom there was a running order of stories and often these were not even shared between journalists in the same newsroom.





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The competition was also very different then, ITN was the key competitor, whereas now there is a growing set of mediums from broadcast to on line newspaper sites, mobile news, other on line deliveries such as Google News and social media including Facebook and YouTube. This list will continue to grow and is driven by the younger audiences approach to news consumption where they are into rapid browsing and a far greater reliance on social networking and word of mouth as their news source.

These audience trends are reflected in the statistics: TV still has the lion’s share at 69% but is declining, BBC Radio News has 52% and is static but the two growth areas are online at 12% and Mobile at 2%.

So how did BBC News transform itself across its 21 news platforms to become one of the biggest multimedia newsrooms in the world, delivering 24/7 news services, with 120 hours of output daily and 500 daily web pages?

It involved radical and highly disruptive change requiring investment as well as some pain with staff reductions. Essentially the Corporation changed:

- The physical space which was rebuilt to bring all channels together
- Complete restructuring of both the editorial and newsroom teams
- New visual branding across all news services

Newsgathering is now the hub with the Newsroom and programming around it. All staff who worked in the different areas, including online are now all working together within this structure. There is now a senior editorial team leader for TV News, TV Bulletins, Breakfast TV , Radio and Online and to ensure that multimedia is now integral to all of these, the role of the Multimedia Editor rotates between these 5 heads of departments.

Internal communications has been key in the transformation and delivery of change and BBC staff has had to:

- Understand the audience in terms of the reality of the statistics but also their behaviour
- Share both in terms of content and information – very much the heart of the transformation
- Understand how important it is to keep things simple which leads to greater efficiency
- Be flexible in approach and get out of the silo mindset



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The impact of all this change on BBC News and their understanding of all their audiences are substantial. Taking a multimedia approach means that news is highly networked, very much real time and stories move on at an amazing pace - what happened in a week in a newsroom now happens in a day.

Within the BBC Newsroom there is hour by hour monitoring of top stories, analysis of the interaction and commentary from the audiences. Now newsrooms have to be very connected and very fast and the approach to how stories are reported has to be adapted to the different medium:

- On mobile channels it needs to be simpler and shorter
- TV has to deliver visual impact
- Radio is more thoughtful and conceptual
- Online stories can go deeper but have to grab attention - average time spent on a site is two to three seconds.

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Journalists have also changed in how they gather their news and develop their stories. The interaction and engagement journalists get from online and forums and also the power of blogging cannot be underestimated in terms of real time feedback and how it helps drive content of news stories for them. They use all of these to:

- See what is important within a story to the audience
- What questions the audiences want answered

So in the course of the day it allows them to think of the direction the story should be going in and to gather additional news developments and commentary from both audiences and their own sources to build and develop it.

What these changes mean for communication professionals is the need to:

- understand the speed that newsrooms are working under
- appreciate the journalist's hunger for news
- be able to adapt and be flexible to the changing news space
- understand that newsrooms will be engaging with their audiences as the story progresses so they should also be monitoring this

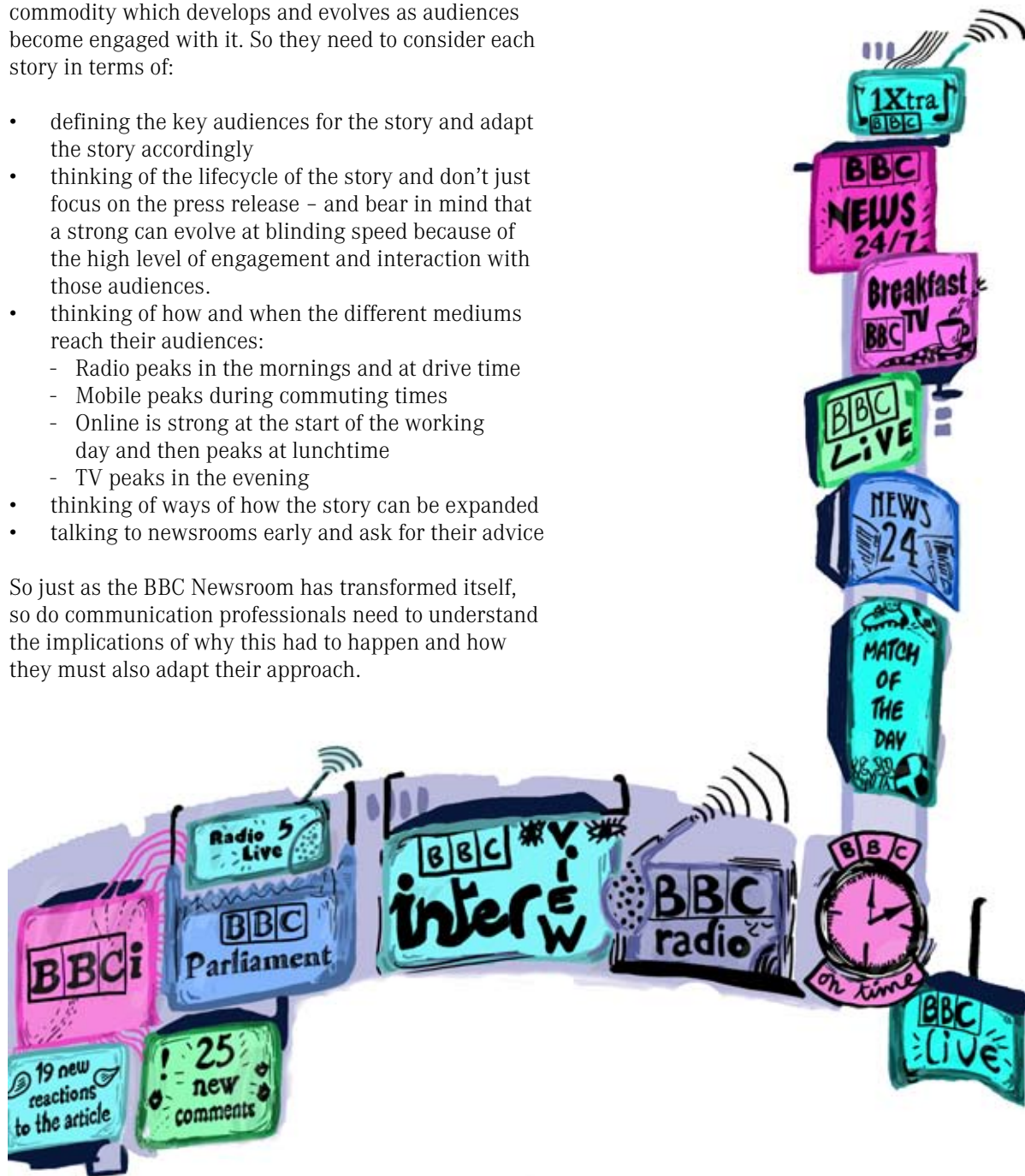


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Newsrooms are now all about real time reporting and communication professionals need to understand that audiences receive their news in a multiplicity of ways and in some respects news has become a commodity which develops and evolves as audiences become engaged with it. So they need to consider each story in terms of:

- defining the key audiences for the story and adapt the story accordingly
- thinking of the lifecycle of the story and don't just focus on the press release – and bear in mind that a strong can evolve at blinding speed because of the high level of engagement and interaction with those audiences.
- thinking of how and when the different mediums reach their audiences:
  - Radio peaks in the mornings and at drive time
  - Mobile peaks during commuting times
  - Online is strong at the start of the working day and then peaks at lunchtime
  - TV peaks in the evening
- thinking of ways of how the story can be expanded
- talking to newsrooms early and ask for their advice

So just as the BBC Newsroom has transformed itself, so do communication professionals need to understand the implications of why this had to happen and how they must also adapt their approach.



## Bell Pottinger Group

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