

A look at sports journalism in the United Kingdom and United States

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That bit-part information is now being provided with an immediacy never seen before.

Tim Franklin, director of America's National Centre for Sports Journalism, says now is the "golden age of news consumption", and believes, while the audience is now enjoying a wealth of sports news and information on every level, there are dangers with that.

developments in sports reporting, however traditional methods of sports journalism are being sustained and even improved to keep up with competition presented by digital coverage.

The need for traditional sports media to produce consistently high quality work is more important than ever, because competition from online is so fierce.

But there is a healthy, seemingly inexhaustible demand for sports news and information. Sports fans have long looked further than the sports section for information on the teams they support or issues within sport. Now they can virtually get as much news as they want – whenever they want it. [Fry: 2010]

The future of sports journalism may indeed be digital, but it seems there will long be a need for the printed word. Sports journalism is becoming increasingly complementary – there is still a need for all forms of it on a huge variety of platforms. Many sports fans are no longer satisfied with one source of news: they want the blogs, the tweets, the constant updates, but they also want the longer form documentaries and the crafted narratives.

Sports journalism is about reporting, enquiring and explaining sports news [Boyle: 2008] and the hunger for that news is such that there will always be a place for sports journalism.

This paper will examine the ways traditional media are using digital technology to improve audience experience. It will look at the impact digital evolution is having on sports journalism, the changes that have been forced upon many sports departments and the approaches leading media in the United Kingdom and United States are taking to ensure they maintain high quality content.

Given the constant evolution of digital technology and that a clear business model for the digital age is yet to be established, this paper gives a broad overview of the changes in sports media at this time and of an anticipated future revolving around digital coverage, whilst maintaining and improving traditional forms of sports coverage.

It will also look into what leading sports journalism schools and courses are focussing on as we herald a new age of multimedia sports reporting. It will examine the ways sports organisations are taking over their own publicity online and the impact of this trend many are the imp

Of traditional media, it seems print newspapers have been the hardest hit by the digital age.

There is intense competition, a 24/7 news cycle and more ways to present news than ever before.

Hence, the future of print newspapers has been cloudy at best; tainted by the recession, cut backs and job losses.

From 2007 to 2009 roughly 13,500 jobs for fulltime newsroom professionals in the United States disappeared, shrinking newsrooms by 25percent in just three years. [Edmonds & Pew Project for Excellence in Journalism: 2010]

Audit Bureau of Circulation (ABC) figures show that in December 2010 all of the national UK newspaper circulation rates were lower than in December 2009. Six national newspapers saw year-on-year circulation decreases of more than 10percent.

Between 2000 and 2009 cumulative newspaper circulation in the US has decreased by 25.6percent. [Edmonds and Pew Project for Excellence in Journalism: 2010]

Overall, newspapers' audience is growing but there is a clear migration to the web. In December

"The website has become more the place where stories are broken and people have a chance to

While audio and video can work for newspapers that have the staff and resources to put into it, for many other newspapers it is not quite as simple to put innovative visual ideas into practice.

At The Scotsman, video and audio is not a priority, simply because it lacks the resources to be able to do it properly. The paper does carry a small amount of video and podcasts online, but Greenwood says that aspect is only worth doing if it can be done as well as your competitors. Given the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) is a competitor of The Scotsman, it is unlikely its quality would compete. However, Greenwood says, in future, the paper may look to involve itself with a technology provider so it can carry high quality video and audio files.

There appears to be little hard data on newspapers that carry video online, but a quick glimpse at the online sports pages of several major US and UK newspapers suggests it is now a staple of the webpage and will continue to be in future.

Blogging is also becoming an essential part of sports journalism and, in the world of sports, can be particularly insightful.

Blog-centred sports websites are becoming increasingly popular among US audiences.

Sports website Deadspin takes a blog format and provides a mixture of content – at times not even sports-related – that ranges from rumours to breaking national sports news stories. The site attracts 2.3million monthly readers; however many would argue that Deadspin is not sports journalism. It has broken national news stories – including one involving NFL quarterback Brett Favre sending inappropriate texts and photos to a reporter –

The notion of breaking news is one in which print newspapers have excelled in the past but it is also one that is changing due to the digital age.

Breaking news in print format is becoming less common, particularly with sports news. Sports organisations are increasingly breaking their own news online, the social networking world allows rumours to flourish and countless news sites are putting news online virtually minutes after it happens.

Hence, breaking certain types of news is becoming less important for newspapers, particularly when it comes to sports scores and results which can now be accessed on a huge range of platforms, instantaneously. Many newspapers are becoming less concerned with breaking results-based information or player transfer news and are more concerned about breaking investigative news and in-depth stories.

At the New York Times, Jolly says the preference is to be insightful.

"That's not to say we don't try to be first with certain kinds of stories, but we're less interested in being first with a signing of a player or the death of somebody than we are with being first with an important news story that is maybe something we're the only ones that know anyway," he says.

"There are instances where we know we've got information and within four or five hours it's going to be known by other people, so we'll try and be aggressive there, but it is in instances where we are very sure of our information."

It is a similar situation at The Scotsman where Greenwood says the focus is more on the 'why' than

Print sports journalism is changing at a rapid pace, but in many cases it is for the better.

More competition is often leading to better quality and more-researched sports news. Sports editors in the UK and US are confident the printed newspaper will not die out, perhaps even within our lifetimes. While circulation rates are falling, online readership is increasing at a huge rate and newspapers are reaching audiences in their millions.

Sports journalists need to be much more creative and inspired with their copy, as well as updating content throughout the day, working to virtually a never-ending news cycle, and it is leading to more thorough work.

Says Jolly: "It's pretty amazing, for me to think how we've managed to change our practices in such a way that we're now virtually a 24/7 news delivery system and basically the same number of people are managing to produce news around the clock; and not only news, but slide shows, video, audio, reader interactivity and all those kinds of things."

"The thing I've held onto through the difficult economy, the light at the end of the tunnel, is that inform(fo)-AURE

For Roger Mosey, former Director of Sport at BBC who is now responsible for the BBC's London Olympic Games coverage, it is very much a 'both and' situation, where internet can be used as a complementary form of sports news coverage.

"(Online coverage) is critically important, but then so is a 42-inch plasma. People are used to having a range of options – they decide what the platform is," he says.

(), in broad terms, relates to any television content delivered through broadband rather than satellite or traditional aerial. Examples include BBC's iPlayer and various on demand television services offered online. Web-enabled televisions mean viewers can access interactive web content directly through their television sets and television providers can work with online content providers to create services directly for TV. [Chapman: 2010]

Says Mosey: "Ultimately, probably everything will move to the internet. The red button is essentially an addition to linear TV. IPTV will start replacing the current red button."

"What IPTV does is it allows you to put together linear TV with the internet. As opposed to choosing 100 pages of red button text, you can use the internet."

ESPN has aggressively pursued digital developments to the point that it is one of the world's leading sports content providers.

With its online and mobile sports coverage, the business is becoming far more than a US sports network and has a commitment to staying at the forefront of innovation.

More than anything, the numbers paint a telling story:

(Figures from 2010, taken from espnmediazone3.com)

Average minute audience was 77,000

Visitors watched nearly 1.4billion videos – nearly 115million streams per month

Surpassed 1.5million subscribers, with subscribers up 23percent

(rebranded from ESPN360.com)

More than 950 live events were delivered via ESPN Mobile TV, including all 64 Football World Cup matches

ESPN iPad apps also generated more than 750,000 downloads.

For Mosey, it comes back to being “both and”, whereby there is room for the 90 minute football match and the long form documentary, but also the up to the minute news bytes, the blogs, the commentary, opinion, and the tweets.

The digital era is complementing broadcast nicely. Broadcasters are no longer limited by their

Mlb.com is a one stop baseball shop dedicated to providing news and information about Major

Says Gould: " In 2010 fans could access live games on their computers, iPhones, iPads, we had some deals with set top boxes and PlayStation 3, Roku, Boxy ...if the device's technology can handle live streaming we need to be there. That's our charter."

"If they (a player or manager) make a mistake we'll say they made a mistake, but we really don't care what they do at 2am. And most fans don't care. That's not to say a lot of Americans don't care, but fans who go to the ballgames, who buy the tickets, they really don't care what a player does at 2am."

The traffic to the site, along with its subscription rates, suggests the site is presenting credible and newsworthy information that is more than satisfying the fans. At times fans will only want a score and Bowman is keen for mlb.com – rather than a search engine or aggregator site – to be the place fans access it, so its credibility and objectivity with its other information is vital.

MLBAM also acts as a technology provider for several high profile media organisations. The company provides the streaming infrastructure for ESPN's 24 hour digital network espn3.com and CBS's March Madness on Demand.

It also has web development partnerships with regional sports networks, tigerwoods.com and Minor League Baseball where it runs the web operations and streams video and audio for about 160 minor league teams.

MLB is the primary business, but because MLB Advanced Media has built the infrastructure to such a massive scale it makes good business sense to use that to create more revenue. In turn, that new revenue allows MLB to grow the business further and branch out into new technology.

The agreements are viewed as direct partnerships, rather than hold any competitive element, as the editorial and content are separate.

Owning the digital rights to Major League Baseball is clearly a huge advantage for MLBAM and certainly that is crucial to its subscription product.

It also gives mlb.com and its associated sites an air of authenticity Tmi(an aw9b(to TJET EM7es1l.751 0 0 1 72.024r8(m

to see highlights, they want to see hits that are being talked about around the water cooler – and mlb.com allows them to do that.

What also contributes to mlb.com's success is the variety it offers: it's not only a live and on demand baseball game streaming service. It provides up to the minute news and information, statistics, highlights, it even has its own studio to present original shows. You can buy tickets, buy merchandise, check out any team, any player – and get all of this online and via mobile.

Says Bowman: "You have to be more than TV and it has to have more capability than TV, whether it be joining Twitter or posting something on your Facebook wall, or seeing stats or checking out fantasy players – it has to have all of that capability."

And what Gould and Bowman emphasise – and what adds significantly to the success of MLBAM – is that there is a very clear focus on the fan.

If you put the fan first, the rest will follow – and this has evidently been the case for mlb.com. As Bowman says, the fan and revenue work "hand in glove".

"The most important t

Video and audio is also a key for Ramos and one he feels the NCAA can use to its advantage, given its access to college athletes across the country.

The goal across all of the NCAA's digital platforms is to get the organisations' message out and to let people know what they do, without simply relying on the media.

Ramos says the digital era has given minority sports a voice and believes that is one of the biggest advantages of digital coverage. The NCAA's most popular Facebook page is wrestling. Not basketball, not football – because you can get information about them in a lot of places.

"There aren't a lot of places to get wrestling information and it would be very costly to run a wrestling magazine or newspaper, but you can now create a very good website with not a huge investment of resources. That's just one example of how the not-so-popular sports benefits tremendously from online."

The main digital tools the NCAA utilises are:

Websites

It runs several websites, its main sites being ncaa.org and ncaa.com. Potential to add more websites in future

Facebook

New York Times sports editor Tom Jolly says the paper has changed its approach to reporting, which

Many newspapers now have virtually unlimited space online to run stories, but don't have sufficient staff or resources to fill it. So in some cases sports are stepping in, producing their own copy for online-only purposes, but still getting it on a media website.

Social networking is fast becoming part of daily life for millions of people.

Facebook, alone, has more than 500million users and that figure is expected to double, whilst another key site, Twitter, draws in more than 200million people.

Media research companies Arbitron Inc and Edison Research show that more than half of all Americans aged 12 and older use Facebook. Their research also shows that 92percent of Americans have some awareness of Twitter, and 20million Americans have a Twitter account.

These sites are having a huge impact on sports journalists and their work, and that impact brings with it a mixture of outcomes.

Sports departments are adopting social media guidelines, creating social media positions, promoting their brand online and media outlets and sports journalists are, at times, required to have a presence on various social networking sites.

The popularity of social networking is such that sports media professionals need not only to be aware of relevant sites, but using them on a very regular basis.

This brings with it both advantages and disadvantages but, handled correctly, social networking can and does benefit sports journalists.

The most popular social networking sites – Facebook and Twitter – are becoming an increasingly familiar part of the news itself. Stories on sports stars – their love lives, injury updates and even team namings – are often generated through the Twitter accounts of various athletes.

The sites are increasingly acting almost as sources for sports journalists particularly as more sports stars sign up to various social networks. A wide range of sports stars and athletes – from Shane Warne to Lance Armstrong to college athletes – have Twitter accounts, which are usually accessible to anyone and often these athletes are using these sites to communicate – and at times break – their own news.

There is, though, the danger of false accounts and hacking and, as such, traditional journalistic standards of verification are critical.

A classic example of this comes from Washington Post sportswriter and well-known columnist Mike Wise. Under a Twitter account that identified him as a Washington Post columnist, Wise tweeted a fake update to what was an on-going story, reporting that Pittsburgh Steelers' quarterback Ben Roethlisberger had been suspended for five games after allegations of misconduct – although the outcome had actually yet to be decided.

Wise says he wanted to make a point that online media can and do run with stories without verifying them.

Much as he went against all journalistic standards, he was proved right. The tweet was picked up by various media including the Miami Herald, the Baltimore Sun and NBC sports blog ProFootballTalk.

Wise was suspended from the Washington Post for one month.

The Guardian newspaper has about 140,000 followers on Twitter, while its sport section attracts 45,000. The Daily Mail has 15,000; and the Telegraph has 21,000. BBC Sport has just 6600 followers and The Scotsman, under its @scotsmannews account, has 2200 and just 1207 under @scotsmanpaper.

Although sports media is able to reach a large number of people via this digital method, many sports editors feel social networking is yet to fulfil its potential in terms of building a connection with audiences; in particular in gaining their feedback.

The Scotsman digital editor Alan Greenwood says the paper “dips its toes” into the social networking realm at present, with its Twitter channels and Facebook pages, but he would ultimately like to see The Scotsman website becoming more interactive with various social networking sites.

“We want to make sure people interested in social networking are able to do it through our site and create opportunities for people to share their local stories or to engage with people who share the same interests. Then we can build a profile of user habits so we can target stories to them a lot more carefully.”

Jolly agrees social networking sites have unrealised potential, particularly in terms of getting readers to add, not only their feedback, but additional information that could be valuable to stories.

While social networking sites can be good avenues for sourcing stories as well as publishing news bites, there is also an inherent danger of falling victim to lazy journalism: finding a story online and publishing it before vetting or verifying any of the information.

Handled correctly, however, social networking can be an asset to a sports journalist.

The 2012 Olympic Games have been heralded as the 'digital Games'.

And certainly, the London Olympic Games Organising Committee (LOGOC) will have a wealth of digital tools at its disposal as digital technology continues to evolve.

In the years since the summer Olympic Games were last hosted – in Beijing, 2008 – technology has continued to change and LOGOC have had to adapt to that. As such, via digital methods, the London Olympic Games are set to reach an audience in its billions.

Head of New Media for London 2012, Alex Balfour, presented the following figures in a slideshow in 2010, relating to the Winter Olympics in Vancouver that same year.

Vancouver2010.com:

Attracted 291million visits (compared to Beijing in 2008, which attracted 105million)

Had 83million unique visitors (Beijing 2008 had 70million)

Recorded 8.7million visits to its mobile site and 1.25million app downloads

Attracted 1.1million Facebook fans

Last year london2012.com was tracking double the traffic of vancouver2010.com at the same stage - and that's a trend Balfour is very keen to continue.

But, while digital tools abound and continue to develop Balfour says it is crucial that the digital methods LOGOC put most of their resources into are those that can reach the most people.

Much of what Balfour and his team do in terms of new media is set in course even before the bidding process is entered into and, as he puts it, it is not exactly a "hot bed for innovation".

"Because we're a mass event we have to reflect how people use technology," says Balfour.

"Part of our broader vision is that it should be a Games for everyone – we don't wish to exclude people through our use of technology."

In some situations the organising committee is limited in that it must provide solutions that work and that are proven to work for a huge audience. For instance, while at least 95percent of people are expected to purchase their tickets online, the tickets themselves will be tried and tested paper tickets – not electronic or mobile.

Online tools have proved successful to date. Up to 10,000 torch bearers and 70,000 volunteers have largely been recruited online, the online shop sells more product than its offline equivalents, and half a million people receive a regul

Balfour's vision for mobile is to have a browse able version of LOGOC's information for any mobile device, as well as producing apps on several different platforms.

There will be a results-specific app, one relating to general information, an app specifically for spectators which may include results and information, one for the torch relay and possibly some smaller, quirkier and sponsor-related apps. It is likely the apps will be free.

The organising committee's use of mobile and smartphone related communication techniques will, though, be based around the technology that can reach the most people.

"Even the iPhone, its reach is still very small even relative to mobile phone distribution; however its reach is very high so it appears in our access log as the most used device. Its distribution is still five percent. There is talk of 40percent smartphone distribution, or certainly sales, by 2012, but still the majority of phones will not be smartphones," Balfour says.

At the Vancouver Winter Olympics in 2010 about three percent of traffic was across mobile. During London 2012 organisers expect it to be between 10 and 20percent.

As such, Balfour is expecting mobile to play an important role in communicating news and information – not only directly from the organising committee, but also in terms of spectators and the public being able to upload content from venues and share their experiences with friends.

During the Football World Cup in South Africa in 2010 one mobile operator showed that more information was uploaded from stadia than was downloaded, says Balfour, and that is one aspect LOGOC will look to build on: "People want to share their experiences, so we are really trying to make the most of all of those opportunities for people to consume the way they want to consume and to share their experiences."

A huge part of that will be based on social networking.

Social networking – particularly Facebook and Twitter – will be important tools in LOGOC's communications mix in the lead up to and during the Olympic Games.

Those responsible for sports journalism courses face a tough battle. With so many uncertainties surrounding the future of sports journalism, it is increasingly difficult to prepare students for a career in the industry.

Media professionals do agree that the fundamentals of journalism will always be desired by employers within sports media and, as such, they should be at the core of any sports journalism course or degree.

Sports-specific journalism courses are becoming more familiar, and employers are more willing than they have been in the past to hire students straight into sports newsrooms without cutting their teeth in general news first.

In 2008 Indiana University established the National Centre for Sports Journalism. The centre, based in Indianapolis with further campuses within the state, is the only one in America offering a masters diploma in sports journalism.

The course covers a wide variety of issues, given the students should have learnt the fundamentals of journalism in their undergraduate course. It includes:

- Media and society

- Business of sports journalism

- Media coverage of sports (topic will change each semester, most recently has included 'Sex, Scandal and Controversy' looking at a variety of topics including Tiger Woods' affair)

who can work across a multitude of platforms and, as such, courses throughout the UK and US are incorporating this aspect in a practical way.

Franklin, who boasts more than 25 years media experience, says with sports journalism, in particular, multimedia skills are now crucial.

He believes journalism schools across America need to get better at giving students the tools and the opportunities to learn multimedia skills earlier in their careers: "It's going to be critical and is critical already because employers need people who can walk in and do these things."

"With blogs you can be much more conversational than you can with a news story, and a long narrative that might be powerful in Sports Illustrated might not work online necessarily because people won't read longer stories online in some cases. Having the ability to shoot video, edit video,

In the UK, Southampton Solent University offers a three year Bachelor of Arts in Sports Journalism, led by journalist and course leader John May. It is one of about 12 sports-specific journalism courses in the UK.

It, too, mixes academic and theoretical components with a focus on the practical.

May says the web plays a vital role in the course outline and the course is designed specifically to

reporter could simply phone in a story, those days appear long gone. Older journalists simply need to adapt to the digital age, or face becoming redundant in more ways than one.

One aspect Franklin is keen to explore is offering working sports journalists the chance to enhance – even gain – multimedia skills, although he says this is something newspapers in particular are increasingly offering their staff.

“I can see in the not so distant future, having an online course for journalists so you can go to a meeting online or Skype or video conference courses with current sports journalists,” he said.

Courses need to be constantly re-assessed. Feedback from industry is critical to this and will continue to be so as the digital age develops and a clearer future for the industry develops.

It is an exciting time for sports journalists but it is also an uncertain one.

While there is a huge appetite for sports journalism, just how the core news and information will be presented in future is yet to be determined as major media institutions battle to create a sustainable business model for a largely digital future.

As it stands, traditional forms of sports media – print, television and radio – are being sustained and, in many cases, the sports journalism presented on these platforms is improving in both quality and quantity.

For now, the nature of sports journalism is very much complementary. Audiences are accessing sports coverage as well as news and information on an extremely wide variety of platforms and more often than not, they are using more than one platform. Sports media needs to understand the complementary need of many of its audiences, and adapt to that, providing content on whatever device their audiences are on.

What remains unclear, though, is what the dominant device or platform will be for consumers of sports news and information in future. Perhaps tablets and smartphones will become the modern newspaper but that seems a long way off, particularly somewhere like New Zealand where a relatively small population can result in high prices for such devices.

The online presence of sports media is crucial. Sports news websites are subjecting the work of sports journalists to global audiences, at times in their millions, and news is being distributed at a pace never seen before. Sports media in New Zealand needs to maintain their web presence, they need to ensure both the technological and content side of their websites are of extremely high quality and they need to continue to offer new and innovative ways of presenting sports news and information on an as-it-happens basis, without compromising quality of work.

Sports media organisations must stay in touch with technology, and most importantly the devices that can reach a mass audience. For many high profile media institutions, such as ESPN and MLBAM, being first to these devices can result in explosive growth.

As such, New Zealand sports media organisations need to be experimenting with applications for smartphones and tablets while the businesses are still supported by the revenue from more traditional forms of media. They need to get digital presentation right, and ensure they can offer a high quality of news, information, video and audio on a wide variety of platforms so they can adapt quickly as new technology evolves.

It is difficult to present hard and fast recommendations to sports journalists looking to prepare for a digital future, because that digital future is reasonably unclear from a business and revenue standpoint.

But one thing is certain: sports journalists need to be multi-skilled and able to work on a variety of platforms. Newsroom professionals agree the fundamentals of journalism will always be vital to sports journalism regardless of the platform, and those basic skills and standards could ultimately be

what helps traditional sports media and sports journalism survive. However it is, simply, not enough

Now is a hugely exciting time for sports journalists. There are so many opportunities – whether it is

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The future of sports media is in very good hands.

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