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The Sky News Blog - A New Angle In The News?

By Danny Wirken

The Sky News Blog is UK's first blog site dedicated to a daily news show. Since a blog is similar to an on-line diary where the writer's thought is posted, how effective would it be when used in relation to news? Sky News is a 24-hour television show in Europe who has for its main competitor, the BBC News-24.

History of Sky News

Sky News first began broadcasting in February 1989 and has transmitted continuous live news ever since. It quickly gained a reputation for journalistic integrity which gave it the much needed prestige despite operating on a shoe-string budget. It has likewise remained unique in an industry where presenters are rapidly hired and fired. Many of its original presenting team remains with the channel.

Other channels have tried to emulate Sky's standards and methods but were not always successful in doing so. It was the only channel at its league until the launch of the BBC News-24 in November 1997. Sky News filed a complaint with the European Commission which argued that the publicly funded BBC News-24 was unfair and illegal under the European Union Law. However, the commission ruled in favor of BBC stating that the state aid was justified due to the public service remit of BBC.

To be competitive, the Sky Channel launched its Sky News Active which was a 24-hour service providing headlines on demand. Due to its success, the 8-screen video news service was likewise launched which was way ahead of the standard 4-screen. The Sky News Poll was also popular with its new question for each day. It has become common for questions and subjects to change throughout the day depending on news and developments.

Sky News won a 5-year contract to supply news bulletin to the British Terrestrial Channel Five in the year 2005. On the same year, Sky News was relaunched from a brand new studio in West London, replacing the one that has been used for almost 17 years in Isleworth. Along with the transfer came heavy revision of music and on-screen graphics. The station has a very recognizable line like CNN which is read every hour, giving the show name and presenters.

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This renowned news broadcaster also has a forum called the Sky News Panel, which is basically an on-line research group. It lets its members express their opinions on various subjects. It makes use of short surveys which would only take minutes to complete. Some surveys are targeted at specific profiles but may be weighted to the UK population where national opinion is needed.

Anchors in the likes of Eamonn Holmes and James Rubin have been secured while experimenting on new schedule and format. Sky News aims to provide a fast moving, highly-produced program that gives everyone a chance to catch up on all the news that matters. Emphasis is given on pace, pictures and people combined with the best footage of the day and sharp reporting from field correspondents.

The Live at Five on Sky News features dedicated spots for sports, showbiz as well as its own weblog. The blog spot is Sky News' way of taking the time out to hear the reader's views on the news that have caught their attention. A selection of contributions to the blog is read out daily so that real opinions get on the show.

The Sky News Blog

Sky CEO Rupert Murdoch has discovered the wonders of the Internet and has placed particular interest on social media and blogging. His interest brought him a step further when he bought various on-line companies including Intermix and

<http://IGN.com>

. Not one to be left out from the fun, Sky came

out with its first blog in an attempt to connect with its audience. It is widely believed that Sky's acquisition of Tim Levell, the former editor of the BBC Action Network, had a lot to do with this move. In fact, he has provided some of the posts found in the blog.

The blog is personally led by Sky News at 5 anchorman Jeremy Thompson. It thankfully looks and feels like a real blog which cannot be said for many other things that call themselves blogs. This is actually Sky's first attempt at blogging but it seems to have succeeded in avoiding the most obvious pitfalls related to it.

This blog is designed to be identifiable and distinct from the channel's news website offering. Whereas the news website and TV channel delivers news, blogs explain how and why such news are being delivered. This is what is usually referred to as "back channel conversational content". However, since the launch of the blog coincides with the relaunch of Sky News as a whole, discussion on topics not necessarily thought provoking such as the show's new set have been occupying considerable space in the blog. Conversations regarding the process of how editorial decisions are arrived at for example are probable discussion of interest to readers.

Large companies and organizations who have managed to establish web presence need to maintain strong control of their blogs. This would necessitate hosting those blogs within their own domain space. Hosting a blog on a third party might not be able to provide seamless integration with the rest of a

company's website. There are important aspects to be considered such as quality control and availability. A site that goes down or begins to bug-out necessarily affects the individual reputation of companies.

The blogosphere is quite partial to personality led blogs. This is one of the reasons why the Sky News blog works. However, it could benefit from more posts written by Jeremy Thompson.

The blog encourages as many people as possible to take part in the discussion of various topics. The company has adopted a light touch policy which essentially allows for any comments as long as it is not offensive, racist or irrelevant. Participants are further encouraged to be constructive, friendly and informative.

Pre-moderating of comments was done during the experimental stage. This is expected to change as the site develops well. The blog is primarily linked to the Live at 5 shows and not the whole channel thus moderation of comments is done during daytime working hours.

Contributors are requested to provide their names, physical address and e-mail address although these details do not get published on the site. It is just a way for the company to determine the intentions of those people who would like to be a part of their blog. Anonymous postings are not published. Sky News is perceived to have made a very brave move when it plunged head-on towards the blogging world. Whether or not their blog accomplishes something over and beyond the accomplishments of its regular websites would depend on the people handling it and how much they are prepared to meet the changing needs of consumers.

<http://www.theinternetone.net>

Actuary.Net Actuarial News Site Announced

By Claude Penland, ACAS, MAAA

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Actuary.NET is proud to announce the creation of the industry's first global actuarial news source at www.actuary.net. Designed in a daily blog format, it includes public press releases about actuaries who have switched employers or been promoted.

It also provides daily actuarial professional news — these include actuarial exam changes, long-range actuarial society plans and many others. Additionally, there are employment-related discussions and a variety of references to actuaries found throughout the web.

A free actuarial news feed in RSS format is also available on the site.

Actuary.NET is compiled and edited by Claude Penland, ACAS, MAAA. Claude also serves as the webmaster for D.W. Simpson & Company, the largest actuarial recruitment organization in the world.

Information requests about Actuary.NET or actuarial news may be sent to news@actuary.net.

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