

The mobile newsroom: FT evolving for 21stC readers

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2015-11-17

By LSE MSc student **Hanna Morris**

“This is evolution, not revolution.”

“Today everybody is in the content business,” says Lionel Barber, editor of the FT giving the annual Polis journalism lecture at LSE. “But we offer smart journalism with global reach.” Barber had no doubts about the value *Financial Times* offers his readers making clear that readership is on the rise. And what is the cause of this spike? Barber’s conclusion: his team is not just giving people *what* they want, but more importantly, *where* they want it:

“The print-centric newsroom is no more. Today, we think and act digital first. Online is old news, today’s news is the rise of mobile.”

The *Financial Times*, according to Barber, prioritizes content for smartphones, the very devices propped in front of each audience member watching his talk at the LSE.

Clearly, Barber understands his readership’s changing preferences.

The expertise and quality of analysis and reportage is a “gold standard” and “brand” that the *Financial Times* takes very seriously. But, what Barber sees as setting the *Financial Times* apart from both amateur bloggers and established publications is their focus on digital storytelling.

According to Barber, technology is a means for improving storytelling, not replacing journalists or established publications. Big Data and analytics are improving the editorial understanding of readers. And Barber is not shy in his stated optimism for these new digital technologies. Mobile journalism, Barber repeated, is “evolution, not revolution.” The newsroom is on a trajectory for improvement, and smartphones are a catalyst.

Under new ownership by the Japanese media company, Nikkei, the *Financial Times* is signaling its focus on a global, as well as a mobile readership. “Reach” and “connectivity” are the twin drivers of Barber’s optimism. The business-savvy editor repeatedly stressed his confidence in the “brand” of the *Financial Times* and its sustained growth if it explicitly caters to mobile readers across the globe. The success of the *Financial Times* has prompted publications to follow suit with a commitment to not just digital, but mobile storytelling. Clearly, journalists today need to be savvy with data visualization and storytelling for smaller screens. “Networked Journalism” is no longer a “special” skill or asset. It is an essential and required, industry standard.

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