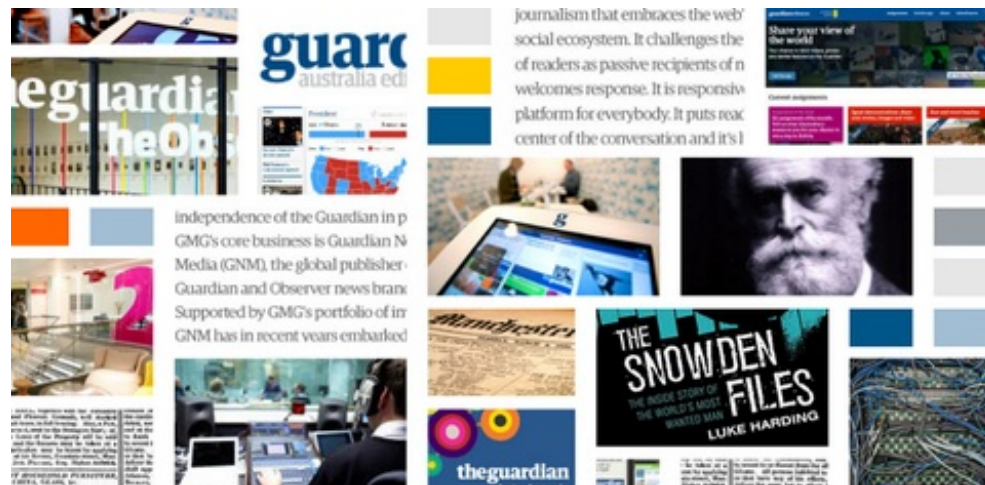


The Guardian as an open, digital and global newspaper (guest blog)

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Polis Intern John Ray reports on the latest [Polis Media Agenda Talk](#) featuring Andrew Miller, CEO of the Guardian Media Group. Read the [full text here](#)



Andrew Miller's technological panacea is "open", the Swiss Army knife of new media solutions. He uses the term as a core value, a type of dialogue, a form of journalism, a content creation strategy, an ethical practice, a digitally distinct value, and a business strategy.

And yes, "open", at its core, incorporates all of these elements, but it's really been used (almost exclusively by the Guardian) to encapsulate the dual processes of transparency and network journalism. Open Journalism accepts the idea that, according to Guardian Editor Alan Rusbridger, "journalists cannot provide an accurate account of the world unless they enlist others." And that they must provide credit to these individuals and build an on-going dialogue between information and editor.

What was interesting about Miller's speech, however, was how he incorporated these communitarian ideas into a market-based business model. But can "best practices" (corporate efficiency) coincide with the development of an effective public space?

The two have traditionally been considered incompatible. Berkeley professor Wendy Brown described the idea of "best practices" as a discourse that looks to economize and "benchmark" sectors. This is done in the name of efficient processes, rather than best results. "Best practices" turns the attention to practice, rather than purpose.

The open model of journalism makes the case that "best practices" don't always need to come at the expense of purpose. In fact, they can aid purpose and support your values. The open model is certainly designed with economics in mind: You can crowd source many of the operations you would have had to pay for in the past and get a willing population to help you create the news. As Miller repeatedly hammered home: "it's the content, stupid!"

Miller said that The Guardian's focus is on providing the best possible product to the consumer when and how they want to read it. This philosophy seems simple to implement, but, is actually much more difficult in practice, especially in newsrooms accustomed to a traditional style of journalism. "Open" in journalism is digital, transparent, easy to access, cross platform, print, text, audio, visual, and user-friendly. That means working quite differently.

Many massive publications have still not yet fully plunged into the icy water of the digital age. It's a big investment

and digital and traditional news are often hard to merge. Merely posting links is not enough to start a dialogue with the consumer and engender participation. Miller suggested that it was the fact that the Guardian took an early bet on a commitment to a “digital first” editorial scheme in which stories were not held for print readers that has positioned them so well in this ‘all-access’ era.

Miller opposes paywalls for a similar reason. He sees the erection of boundaries in a digital era as a short-term solution, with long-term consequences. The Guardian has been eating away at the market share of all these companies who hide their content, rather than disseminate it across the world. According to Miller, “content is like a plant, it needs light and oxygen to grow”.

So has The Guardian found a way of reconciling “best practices” and best product? Perhaps it is this: Best practices, as a digital media platform, are providing the best content. Everything else is getting that content out as fast as possible, on as many platforms as possible, and as far as possible.

Turning a profit for profit’s sake is not a long-term business strategy in the “open” era. Consumer trust, dialogue, acquisition, and loyalty are the communications market commodities. By embracing the idea of “open” and putting content production and distribution before all else, the Guardian has transitioned from a niche newspaper to a global media leader.

This article by Polis intern, John Ray.

Polis Media Agenda Talks are every Tuesday at 5pm and are free and open to the public – [details here](#)

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