

# Think Audio Networking, not Radio: debating networked journalism

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One of the things I pointed out in my book [SuperMedia](#) a couple of years ago was how some 'Old' media will actually thrive in the Internet Age: radio is a great example. But that doesn't mean that radio journalists – especially those in the public sector – aren't under threat.

There were some fascinating debates at [EBU's Radio News conference](#), especially because it brought together a whole range of European and American media folk.

First, the good news. There were loads of great examples of how radio suits an age of multi-tasking, multi-platform, mobile, instant, citizen-generated news. Smartphones turn citizens into radio reporters. Audiences are good for a medium which has always been interactive (think phone-ins).



A good example is Italian journalist's [Fillippo Solibello's radio show, Caterpillar](#), which has has 1 million daily listeners and uses the full range of interactivity and crowd-sourcing. He describes it as a News Utility Vehicle (like SUV geddit?).

It's a great example to follow – although other delegates at the conference talked about the familiar obstacles of technology, restrictive practices, conservative newsroom cultures etc that are hampering networked journalism in radio newsrooms.

But the real threat is external. With convergence comes competition and conflict. Newspapers are angry at subsidised radio stations going online and creating vast amounts of text and visuals as well as audio.

One representative of european newspapers who bravely ventured into this broadcasting gathering called for some form of limit on how much text broadcasters use on their websites.

This is bonkers. Firstly, it assumes that you can carve up the Internet cake. Secondly, it misunderstands how news has changed. Thirdly, it pretends that the newspaper business model problems are about the competition from broadcast, not the fundamental shift in advertising and public attention.

Another familiar debate theme was around quality. While some radio journalists welcome the mix with the public, other see it as a threat to standards. Again, I think this argument is often badly framed.

Yes, there are falsehoods online. There are in mainstream media, too. Yes, the citizen journalist has personal bias, so do most professional news outlets. Yes, some online journalists forget to get away from the screen and report the real world, but surely old technologies trapped hacks in a way that digital devices don't?

And let's not be snooty about citizen journalism or bloggers or user generated content. Yes sometimes the pictures are fuzzy and the audio isn't balanced. But here is a quick random list of some of its virtues:

1. There is more of them to produce more of it
2. Much of it is actually better
3. Much is produced by people with MORE expertise
4. Much of it is much more 'real' than the MSM idea of news
5. It's more diverse because the public is more diverse than journalists

6. And it's cheap if not free (most times)

The real issue about quality is who decides what is quality? [As I have written elsewhere](#), the old definition was one that we mainstream hacks came up with to preserve our world-view and our editorial monopoly. Now we have to take into account other standards such as relevance, transparency and authentication.

In the end, it's not either/or. If you believe in 'journalistic' standards then the superfluity of information online provides you with an opportunity to attract audiences who desperately want news brands they can trust.

### **The New News Agency**

One way of re-thinking the news brand is the idea of the journalist as curator. I have already written about how that term doesn't quite work. But here in Geneva Mark Little [@marklittlenews](#) used that term in an interesting context. He's trying to create a new kind of news agency, [Storyful.com](#), that aggregates citizen journalism.



This is, of course, what news agencies have always done but without the citizen bit. They take bits of raw data from all over the place – often supplied by stringers or correspondents or direct from other organisations. They then make it easily accessible for news organisations.

As our [Polis report on networked journalism](#) showed, all news organisations are now trying to tap into this source of material. Mark's project effectively does this scraping – with editorial judgement – for them.

### **An Eruption of Networked Journalism**

In the final session it was made clear by speakers such as Michael Good of RTE that mainstream media can't cope with big complex crisis stories such as the volcanic ash story: 'the public wanted more than radio programmes could give'

RTE responded by using social media connected to their coverage to fill the gaps and to tell the micro as well as the macro story. To provide context as well as drama, information as well as narrative. As Michael put it, it showed how social media has to be at the heart of the newsroom.

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