

# Close BBC News 24? Can we reinvent rolling news?

[blogs.lse.ac.uk/polis/2009/07/01/close-bbc-news-24-can-we-reinvent-rolling-news/](http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/polis/2009/07/01/close-bbc-news-24-can-we-reinvent-rolling-news/)

2009-7-1

Rolling 24 hour news channels drive the news agenda. They are on permanently in newsrooms, government and business offices. Every country used to have an airline as a symbol of national pride, now they have a news channel.

CNN, BBC World, Sky, BBC News 24, Russia Today, Aljazeera, Al Arabiya, Press TV, and the rest provide a continual commentary on world affairs as they happen. But have they become too cliched and homogenous? [Adam Westbrook](#) suggests that the BBC should shut down News 24 and relaunch it as much more varied and interesting channel for more diverse programming:



*“...how about this: a channel with short live news bulletins twice (or even four times an hour), with more 30 minute news bulletins, and the rest of the time filled with amazing documentaries, and great longer interviews with really interesting people, and some right-on analysis from all those clever correspondents. Hey, you’d have so much space to fill you could commission some riskier pieces from non-British journalists or young journalists. They might work, they might not, but it would be interesting.”*

I think it’s a great idea in principle. At lunch with BBC DG Mark Thompson the other day (no, really) I suggested to him that programmes like Newsnight and News 24 should be going upmarket to differentiate the BBC, while also continuing the more accessible bulletins like the Six O’Clock News.

I have a personal interest because I was a launch producer on News 24 back in 1997 under Tim Orchard. Funnily enough, what Adam describes was akin to the original brief. We were told to ‘think outside the box’ and use the 24 hours to cover everything under the sun. In the months of preparation for launch all sorts of generic programming and special features were suggested and a few even made it to air.



KGM at the BBC

I distinctly remember one sequence where Krishnan Guru-Murthy (now C4News) showed viewers how to put a duvet cover on, live. It was beautifully done but it was neither a ratings success nor terribly important.

I was producer of the evening slot which had an entertainment slot with Liquid News presenter (the late) Christopher Price. Chris was a wonderful presenter but even he struggled to move from an item on Prince to one on the Prince of Wales.

It was a mess. And a boring and expensive mess. It is much harder than it sounds to do what Adam is suggesting on TV and make it work.

Of course, new technologies do help. I remember trying to create a slot where viewers were supposed to send in their own VHS tape reports. Only four people did and they were unusable. That would be a lot easier now with YouTube, as CNN have shown. But even so, CNN have got it right by keeping most of those UGC reports on their website.

By the time it got on air BBC News 24 was much more like Sky News and within a year it was entirely the same. Why? Partly because the BBC wanted to compete with Murdoch’s challenger which was proving a hit in terms of audience but also influence.

But also because the original all-singing all-dancing News 24 was not working. It is much more expensive to create built-programming despite the efficiencies of new media technologies. And where a programme would be cheap enough it will, too often, be incredibly dull or niche. That stuff is probably best left to the Internet and the long tail of online broadcasting.

People turn on news channels for news. Instant news, short news, live news. By all means create different programming but don't waste your time trying to put it on a 24 hour TV news channel.

- Copyright © 2014 London School of Economics and Political Science