

Polis – Trust the BBC...

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A trip back to the BBC newsroom means I bump in to a few old colleagues spitting with rage about the way that their bosses have handled the recent ‘trust’ stories at the BBC. Public confidence has [plummeted](#) according to a recent survey which showed 59% of people trust the corporation less after the scandals over premium phone lines and documentaries about the Queen. Some commentators have implied that there is a systematic problem at the BBC and elsewhere in broadcasting: producers are too young, a lack of training, money chasing commissioners, low budgets and Mrs Thatcher have all been blamed. The BBC response was to go in to self-flagellating panic mode. No senior managers are sacked but everyone else has to be re-trained so they understand what a ‘lie’ is. The sound of feet being shot is still reverberating around BBC Television Centre and White City. Yes mistakes were made, and the BBC should look to its laurels. But it is largely a management, not staff issue. It is the top brass who set standards and enforce the ethics of any business not the producers. We’ll be looking at the whole “trust in TV” issue at a special [POLIS](#) debate on September 25th.

But the reason for my trip back in memory lane to the BBC was to see the future of broadcasting. And it looks very healthy when you stand at the centre of the BBC User Generation Content Hub. Just a handful of journalists are revolutionising the way that the BBC interacts with its audience. And what interested me is the way that the user generated content is now informing their journalism. As News Interactive’s Assistant Editor Matthew Eltringham explained, they are not compromising a fraction on their standards, nor are they surrendering BBC control of the process. Some net radicals will criticise them for that. But they are opening up vast possibilities for the public to be part of broadcasting and adding great value to the BBC’s journalistic operation.

It all started with the Asian Tsunami back in December 2004 with emails and photos being sent in by people who witnessed the disaster. More recently BBC news has used UGC in its bulletins about the Virginia Tech shootings, the Heathrow and Glasgow attempted bombings and the recent floods. It is much more than people commenting. The Hub gathers the information and verifies it through the normal journalistic practice of phoning and fact-checking. This produces witnesses but also new stories. The story about faulty petrol last year emerged through the UGC hub, for example. Today’s story about ex-armed forces personnel suffering mental illness was being supplemented by some stirring testimony gathered through the [Have Your Say](#) portal. Some of that might give Defence Correspondent Paul Wood new leads. Amazingly, this filtering and referring work is done by a team of about five on *Have your Say* and another ten on the UGC hub, generally. In the vastness of the BBC integrated newsroom they are a pocket of powerful potential and testimony to why we should still trust the BBC.

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