

An inconvenient truth

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I was off to one media giant this afternoon to talk about a media minnow. Can Al Gore's [Current TV](#) ever rival the big boys like CNN or Channel 4? The question CNN presenter Fionnuala Sweeney actually put to me was "is User Generated Content the future of TV?" Well, yes it is part of the future for sure, which is why everyone from Reuters to the BBC is getting their audiences to become content producers. It sure is a lot cheaper than paying professionals. Current TV is a cable and online video platform that uses about 30% UGC and it pays (not much) for it. It also has *Preditors* who filter out what comes in, along with interactive voting by the Current TV web community. So it is really a mix of old and new media. It is a neat site with some very well-made films on it. However, there is a lot of this out there. Thanks to some fantastic editing software and cheap filming technology anyone can be a cameraperson/director. Apart from Youtube there is Channel 4's [FourDocs](#) site. This not only puts your film online but offers the chance of getting it broadcast on their terrestrial channel too. Fourdocs also offers rushes and guidance on how to make films, which is clever.

Current TV is a welcome addition to the market but I don't think that it is going to shake the foundations of broadcasting, certainly not in the area that I care about, which is journalism. Most of the content is pretty laid back and personal, some of it is barely disguised adverts and what issues are raised are usually treated in quite a naive and one-sided way. That doesn't mean there isn't a lot of interesting material that wouldn't otherwise see the light of day. And the joy of online video is that, up to a point, it can offer an almost infinite amount of material without worrying about how many people watch each piece. Unlike scheduled telly you can just click on the next film until you find one that interests you. However, that does mean that Current TV will remain somewhat down the [Long Tail](#). It is what Big Media does with UGC that will really dictate the future of news and current affairs.

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