

Media (and other) storms

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Today is a great day to be discussing the future of broadcasting. I have joined hundreds of media folk gathered at a [conference](#) to work out where their business is going. An economic storm is blowing through the broadcasting business and a rather more real one is blowing outside. At one point we were cut off by trees falling on the tracks from Oxford to London. Apart from the inclement weather in Oxford, Channel 4 was facing an icy blast of protest over the alleged racism on [Big Brother](#). Camera crews surrounded the conference venue as one reality show intruded upon the virtual world within. Of course, when Channel 4 boss Andy Duncan spoke to the media conference he was, in fact, more than happy with the publicity that the row had brought to the flagging reality TV show. And he wasn't the only broadcast boss on the defensive.

There were a lot of mainstream media executives defending their operations in the face of the new media challenge. [Tess Alp](#) for example, whose job it is now to defend ITV to advertisers, pointed out that even in multi-platform households 85% of people still turn to live broadcast TV for their media consumption. It was left to the big regulator, Ed Richards from [Ofcom](#) to warn that the pace of change is actually rather fast with digital switch-off due in 2012. But whatever the truth about the overall economics of convergence and digital media, there was one thing that everyone seemed to admit and that is that public service broadcasting and especially news and current affairs is the Cinderella of the media convergence fairytale. Unfortunately, no-one has yet worked out how she can get to the ball. I didn't hear anything from anyone – either private or public sector, new or old media – who gave a convincing scenario that sustained quality journalism beyond, say, 2020. My old employers Channel 4 have made a great case for their journalism this year by boosting *Dispatches* and some continued expansion at Channel 4 News. But it's no coincidence that they have done this in the period that Ofcom conducts its review in to their future. Will they be willing and able to keep up the good work much longer? Andy Duncan seems to hope and expect that Ed Richard's team will come up with a clever way of replacing the terrestrial spectrum subsidy with something else. I hope they do, but it won't be as easy as renewing the BBC licence fee. Indeed, even Tess Alp admitted in questions that what worries her is the future of news and current affairs. I suppose POLIS will just have to think of something...

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