

The Exeter Bomb: an explosion of online news

 blogs.lse.ac.uk/polis/2008/05/23/the-exeter-bomb-an-explosion-of-online-news/

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Gary Andrews has written a brilliant analysis of how the bizarre [bombing](#) incident in the West Country city of Exeter was covered online. It shows how in a relatively provincial centre the Internet now provides a multitude of different news sources.

It is an odd case that appears to be a freakish one-off rather than a terrorist outrage. No-one died. But in the minutes and hours after it happened, Gary Naylor describes how the Internet led the coverage in his home-town:

“The tool that really proved it’s worth, though, was Twitter. Not only was this the first place I heard about the story itself, but there were rich pickings, with a quick search within Twitter for ‘Exeter’ bringing several users Tweeting about their experiences, as well as a couple of interesting blog posts.”

Go to Gary’s [article](#) for all the links to the sites he used but what struck me was his journalistic nous to find the right information online at an unexpected place:

the first place I looked was the best. Exeter City’s fan forum, [Exeweb](#), has a very strong Exeter-based community and, to my mind, it was inevitable that somebody would start a [thread about it](#). Many of the posters worked nearby the city centre, and some were close to the main scene – the thread actually turned out to be the best way to follow the news, with any unsubstantiated rumours quickly quashed and the news hitting Exeweb before anywhere else, even Twitter.

According to Gary, the local newspaper, [The Express and Echo](#) also did a good online job:

regular half hour updates, and [a gallery](#) that was uploaded pretty quickly and continually added to. [The video that was posted later](#) tied all the ends together nicely and was one of the most informative pieces available anywhere on the web all day

But it is interesting that the paper held back a lot of content for the wood-pulp version that will appear the next day. Says Gary:

It’s easy to understand why they do this – to maximise print sales – but is a very Web 1.0 way of doing things and with no sharing buttons, it’s very frustrating to ‘do’ anything with the articles. It’s still possible to hold back the really good stuff for the paper while filling the the essentials in a good, non-bitty article online as it breaks. If they could open up and make all their articles available on the day, it would help web goodwill towards them no end.

I agree whole-heartedly with Gary’s conclusion about how all journalists have to exploit this technology. And how all news organisations have to make sure that they back the journalists to go online where the readers are:

What this also shows, is that any traditional media that ignores these social media tools and neglects the user experience throughout breaking news, risks losing them elsewhere, possibly for good. After all, if there up to date information on forums and blogs that's seemingly no less reliable than the mainstream media, why bother? But if the paper or radio in question starts bringing together these tools on their website – ah, now that's a different story.

Thanks to [Adrian Monck](#) for pointing towards Gary's article.

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