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15 minutes' journalistic fame ... from your mobile phone

15 Jul 2005

Steve Ahern

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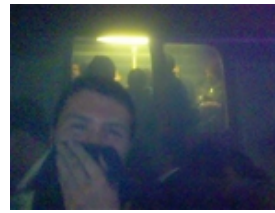
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In 1968, Andy Warhol said: *"In the future, everyone will be world-famous for 15 minutes."* In 2005, mobile media technology has come far enough for **radioinfo** to predict: *"In the future, everyone will be a world wide journalist for 15 minutes."*

The ubiquitousness of audio/visual communications devices and the proliferation of media outlets is putting the means of reporting news in the hands of anyone. The internet has already seen this trend happening on line, and last week the London bombing showed us that it is now beginning to happen on tv.



Where does this leave radio?

Last week, **radioinfo** reported on newsrooms responding to their audiences by either expanding or cutting back. This week we report that 2KY has shut its newsroom. The new trend of citizen filed journalism will continue to change the way broadcasters look at their newsrooms.

Radio was the first interactive broadcast medium. Telephone interviews and talkback programs have long provided a way for reporters and listeners to report into programs about everything from traffic accidents to disasters. The latest technological developments are now allowing other media to catch up.

The addition of audio recorders and cameras into mobile phones, combined with the ability to email audio or vision data files direct from the phone memory to any media outlet that wants them, means that anyone on the scene at a newsworthy event can now become a reporter. For some time phone users have been 'reporting' one to one to their friends using this new technology, but the London bombing has become the historical point where this trend will have been deemed to have moved from point-to-point telephone-like communication, to the point-to-multipoint broadcasting paradigm.

Media education in schools has also played a big part in the birth of this trend. Every primary school child has learnt how to make news stories. Every child knows how to operate a mobile phone. And every child has grown up with a vast experience of media formats and media outlets.

A drawback of this new trend will be the difficulty of verifying sources. An advantage will be the reduction of costs as more unpaid stringers file to media outlets for the reward of becoming famous. Some outlets may choose to pay them for their contributions and some may not.

When a confluence of historical circumstances meant that cassette recorders and community radio both developed in parallel in the 1970s, the means of producing and transmitting radio programs was put in the hands of everyone – allowing them to make programs cheaply and to get them to air with minimum control from the gatekeepers in professional radio organisations.

This trend is happening again at the digital level.

As well as mobile phone reporting, anyone can now produce a complex radio program on their home PC, and then send it to a website or radio station via email or FTP. With the greater sophistication of automation systems, it will also be possible for stations to process and play out these programs filed from elsewhere without anyone being present at the station.

Foreign correspondents have been using this technology for some time, but now anyone has access to it. The incorporation of camera lenses into phones and the continuing compression of video file sizes now sees the same trend happening for television, blog sites, podcasts, wiki encyclopaedias and websites.

The trend for citizen contributions has been evident in tv for years through the trend of Funniest Home Video programs, but it is now spreading into a new program genre – news and current affairs.

Now that the genie is out of the bottle **radioinfo** confidently predicts we will see much more of this type of reporting emerging as a new program form, that once again takes its inspiration from something radio has been pioneering for years.

To keep ahead, radio broadcasters will have to incorporate these new technological trends into their broadcasting, as they have done many times in the history of the radio industry.

Digital radio will present new ways for radio to package listener contributed digital content in its PAD stream, as will websites, blogs and podcasts. If only radio broadcasters can respond quickly enough to beat other media, as radio's competitors once again challenge one of the strengths of the good old wireless.

Steve Ahern 2005