



IBP Futures Group: THE DIGITAL DISRUPTORS

11 May 2015

Digital media is transforming the relationship between journalists and their audience. Pushing beyond the recreation of print content online, our panel of digital journalists discussed the new possibilities that are opening up.

Chaired by Claer Barrett of the Financial Times and hosted by Edelman, the event explored what established publications can learn from digital natives who are creating and interacting with new online communities in the built environment.

This document is a collection of annotated notes from the evening, summarising the key points made by each panellist as well as their answers to questions from the audience.

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Nicola Harrison

Content Editor, Retail Week

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Retail Week is the leading authority on retailing in the UK, providing industry news, insightful analysis, comments and key data. Nicola is responsible for any piece of content (news, analysis, and video) online, in the magazine and across the app.

Three years ago we didn't really have a specific online strategy. Now we do. It seems to be working, but still, quite a large proportion of our readers don't visit us online.

We still have the magazine and will do for the foreseeable future. It's not going anywhere until that balance dramatically shifts and everyone is on RetailWeek.com, then we might consider the part the magazine plays in the future.

Our new strategy has led to heaps more content online. 70% of the content Retail Week produces is online only. The vast majority of what we do now won't fit in the mag. That's because of space and that there's now video to consider.

We're certainly writing specifically for online rather than writing for the mag and putting things online.

The 'working' day

We now research our day. So we used to put our news out at about 10:30am each morning. We then shifted to 9am and that's still not early

enough because retail bosses like to get up really early. They can be on their way to their first meeting between 6am and 7am and our newsletter is going out at 9am. We feel like we're missing a massive window of opportunity. Very soon we're going to shift it another hour and a half earlier to 7:30am.

It's quite a big cultural change for the news desk. We've also combined news and features. I shouldn't even call it news anymore. We have a content team. We don't think people think about reading news or features, they're just reading something that they're interested in.

Mobile, infographics and video

We're approaching our news process differently to how we used to. We used to get data from a local data company and then we might write a story about it.

Now we want to take the data and turn it into infographics, which people can absorb much more easily online and critically it's much better on mobile. We have quite a lot of emphasis on mobile at the moment because we think that's where it's all going.

In terms of mobile, infographics and video, one story sums it up for me. A year or so ago one of our readers said he really cherished getting Retail Week on a Friday. We asked, "What about online? Don't you go on the website? We're doing all this great stuff." He was like, "No, I'm not interested. I've not got time".

A year later, we asked him again and now he's raving about all the video we're doing. He's

watching on his mobile. He's basically skipped the desktop. He's gone from magazine to mobile and he doesn't interact with us at all on desktop. I think video is really good on mobile and for short, punchy stories. Long form stuff we're not so sure about yet, but it's probably more suited to tablets than mobile.

Social

All the articles we publish are tweeted automatically, mainly because of the volume. We're looking at that now because we want Retail Week to inject a bit more personality into its Twitter feed. We are also looking at the journalists taking it on themselves a bit more.

If you're writing a story, as a journalist, you often get asked to put a rough headline on it because

it just helps the headline writer if they can know what the writer thinks is the most important thing. That goes again for the tweet, which is probably around the same number of characters.

We find that tweets do better when they've got pictures in. Using interesting quotes, rather than just broadcasting a headline also works well. If you can pull out a quote from within the article and then tag the link on the end and then say something amusing or interesting, then we find that it usually helps.



2.

Mark Wilding

Editor, The Dalstonist

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The Dalstonist is the leading source of news and lifestyle information for people in Hackney. It focuses on the independent creative community in the borough with the latest news about local culture, music and nightlife

The idea is to have a local news service aimed at 18-35 year olds. I guess you could call it a good news publication; we don't tend to do hard news or cover crime.

A lot of the most popular stories we write are found through the methods you'd use as a property journalist, by going through the weekly list of planning applications as anyone opening a bar or a restaurant, has to put in a licensing or planning application. A number of times they call up and they say, "How did you know about this?" We know because no one else is spending their day trolling through Hackney Council's planning database. You can find a lot of good stories that way.

We're not a digital first and print second operation. They're really very separate things. What goes on the website doesn't go into the magazine. What goes in the magazine does go online eventually but it's nowhere near the most popular things that we write about online.

Online the really popular news stories tend to be four or five paragraphs in length. You knock them out quickly and post daily, two or three quick stories a day. The magazine provides the space for longer-form stories. They may be more like 1,500

words. Very different things but I think we play to the strengths of both formats.

Social:

Facebook is about 12,000-12,500 strong and growing. Twitter is about 10,000. Twitter has proved a little bit harder. Across all networks, it's about 25,000. It's really important. We've grown it organically since the start and it's basically where all our traffic comes from.

Facebook is by far the biggest source of traffic. The stories that really take off are the ones that people share on their Facebook feeds. There is a downside in that when Facebook changes its algorithm definition, it can mess around which stories it prioritises and that can have a real impact on our traffic levels.

I think it's good to have flexibility in your approach to each story as you do it, using the form that you think works for whatever the subject is. If it warrants 1,500 words, we'll do it in the magazine and we'll publish a feature. We might also do a Q&A if it's a news story that warrants digging a bit deeper. Sometimes people do want a bit more information about it and those Q&A formats I think work quite well online.

I think it's a case of looking at the amount of labour that's involved in producing a piece and adapting it to how people want to digest it. We found that a weekly roundup gave a much more appropriate reward for the amount of time it took, rather than doing daily ones. Being able to see the click-through rates each article gets means that you can test out different ways of doing things and see what works and mix it up. I think you should be prepared to mix things up as often as you feel like.



Paul Norman

News Editor, CoStar Group

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CoStar Group is an online commercial property news service covering all sectors of the UK property market.

At CoStar, we don't have any actual print products. It's been quite liberating. I had some ideas about how I thought it would work and it's evolved from there. With online, you can see immediately who's reading what. As soon as our bulletin starts going out, we can start adjusting quickly to what our audience is interested in.

Depth, Speed and Timing

We discovered that people wanted a lot of depth in the online story. They didn't want to wait until the weekend or whenever to get that. They wanted to come to a story that explored content in some detail.

The other thing they wanted was if there was a big story, they wanted that interview with whoever was breaking the news that day rather than have to wait. We knew if we could get a hold of the right person and get it done by 3pm that day; a lot of people would go for it and want to see that.

The daily email is around about 3pm. It's a very conscious decision to do it then... EGI's goes out at 4pm. Property Week's was going out at about 1pm. We felt to place ourselves in the middle of the two obvious competitors was a good move but would also give us a little more time to capture the real story.

Not that much design work has gone into the homepage itself. It's gone into the email and how it looks. It's just three stories at the top. They're the best three. You get the paragraph. Full access to it is about half of our subscriber base who are paying now.

You can update it by the time the bulletin goes out at 3pm. We'd have done a breaking news flash in the morning and then we'd manage to speak to someone by the afternoon. That can lift it again when it goes out at the top of the bulletin.

Getting the story

I think with most journalists in the industry, something happens, a trend, a light bulb goes off in your head and you sit down in your Monday meeting and you go: "There are a hell of a lot of shopping centres coming to market. What's that all about?" Let's try to add it all up, talk to a few people. What we found was it probably was happening in all the newsrooms at exactly the same time, so let's do it on a Monday.

Roundup stories, like "The Great £4 Billion City Selloff", went absolutely bananas and we had people coming back into it and back into it and using it as research for what's going on in the market. That was a surprise. I think that those kind of more cumulatively put together pieces with lots of information were actually really well received.

Using news to make an impact

CoStar was free for a long time but there were key target audiences in the banking industry and the investment community that weren't necessarily

aware of the other products that CoStar had to offer. The news helped to put the name into people's minds and then about a year ago, we placed it into the overall suite package as a value product that you now have to pay for to get full access.

It's been surprising how many people have come on board. Some have said, "Well, actually, one of the main reasons we want to buy it now is the news and we're very happy to have the data as well".

It's the combination of seeing the news and the data linking together that works really well. When you can read a story, click through on the building into all the granular data it adds value. I like to think everything we write is right but the data is the final version. I think we, on the site, provide a lot of the information that you need as well that you wouldn't find there, like who the under bidders were. So, you can go, "Right, okay, I'm selling the building next door. Who should I go and sell it to?"

Devolution of the newsroom

Our remit is the news, it has to be something that has happened that day or is going to happen that week. We'll do lots of firsts, we will do lots and lots of stories in a day and we'll priori-

tise them. We've got readers who if they've done a deal and it's relatively interesting, there's no reason not to do the piece just because it's not a mega news story. Online, you can include quite a lot of information that would never see the light of day in a magazine without work.

In each of our regional data offices we now have someone who has a news remit. A certain percentage of their week is follow up news stories in Birmingham, Manchester, Scotland. There are over ten people doing it and there are a number of benefits to that. The main one is that there is someone within the data collection side of things thinking like a journalist. That's extremely important if you want to have someone spotting outliers. It also makes the conversation that they're having with people as they're compiling data more interesting.

Social

We don't really use Facebook. We use Twitter. I use Twitter all the time to find out what's going on. At CoStar we use it to promote the best stories to get them out there. It's a bit like a cat marking down its territory with Twitter. We get out there first and say, "We were there first." But really, the main way people engage with us, it has to be said, is by email.





Amanda Baillieu

Founder, Archiboo.com and Editor at Large
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Archiboo.com helps architects become more creative in how they run and grow their practices through shared new thinking and new connections.

The easiest way to explain Archiboo is that it's TED Talks for architects with very good coffee. Its talks for architects in the morning, 8am to 9:30am. I also run The Architect Pitch, where architects get to pitch in front of clients for three minutes and then they get feedback from the clients on the panel.

The idea is to give architects access to the kinds of people that they don't often speak to because they're so busy designing buildings and being architects. Technologists, journalists, communicators, they always want to speak to different kinds of clients. The difference, I suppose, between what I do and, say, the New London Architecture, is that apart from being very quick and in the mornings and quite cheap to come to, the videos are all uploaded to the web.

Audience

I wanted to have all the talks on the website to create an archive of ideas that anybody anywhere in the world can listen to and watch.

You can go into Vimeo and see where your au-

dience is coming from and it's quite interesting that you've got people watching them in countries where you wouldn't think they'd be interested. In Kazakhstan they apparently are. We have 25 watchers. That's an eye-opener for me, I never expected that.

The great thing about all this transparency is the ability to know whose reading you, what does well, what videos do well and what bit of content does well. If you send out newsletters as I do, you can see your click-throughs, your open rates.

Social

Archiboo has about 1,300 Twitter followers. It can be difficult if you're starting a brand from scratch and you have significant personal profile in the industry to expect that you're going to get that with the brand as well.

People always prefer to communicate with you as the person rather than as 'Archiboo'. They know it's me, but it's different. I think that goes for all of Twitter. On Twitter, you're much better being a person.



5.

Audience Questions

You've talked about the challenge of making longer form features work online. How is everyone trying to do that? Do people engage with it?

Mark: The answer is no from our perspective. The long-form stuff doesn't really work online. Luckily, both formats support each other. If we didn't have the print mag, there's no way that we'd invest the time in writing a long-form feature.

From my point of view, I've just accepted the two formats lend themselves to different types of articles. We treat them quite separately.

I think if you follow The New Yorker on Facebook, you are following it because you know they do great long journalism. I think most of our social media subscribers come to it because they're used to the short, punchy news stories and they pick up the magazine because they want something to sit and read when they're in the pub or a bar. They come to the two formats with different ideas of what they're going to get.

Claer: I think that it can work. My experience at the FT shows that it can. We have a features club that submit really good examples of long-form journalism, which we all try and read every month and meet up to discuss.

There was an excellent one last month, which was a New Yorker Magazine piece that one of their correspondents, a long time correspondent in Egypt, had written about the logistics of the rubbish collection system in Cairo, which is all

really strictly controlled and you have different people who collect different things. It's not like a municipal waste system, there's no bin company to come and do it. It's all individuals. It was almost like reading a novel and I read the whole thing on my phone.

Loads and loads of other people said it was such a compelling narrative. They didn't have pictures or bullet points or anything. It was just a really, really good story. It was massively shared and read because people really liked it. I wouldn't ever buy The New Yorker Magazine but I now I follow them on Facebook and I look for other similar things.

Nicola: We're experimenting with all this type of stuff at the moment. We've invested in a slightly different system in order to do this. Our larger pieces have video in it and images, graphs and infographics. It's not really designed to read all in one go but designed for the users experience on mobile.

One that works quite well was on the back of Mike Coupe being sentenced. It was a brilliant story. Two years in jail and he was sentenced in Egypt. So, we decided on that day to go with "Seven Disastrous Forays into Overseas Retail." It went crazy. People loved it. Each section was really short but it was long-form. So, I think if you package it in certain ways, it's doable.

When you get a first-time visitor, what tactics are working well on getting them to become a repeat visitor. Maybe you're going for the email subscription or maybe another page view?

Paul: We're positively welcoming, arms embraced, please come on board. We're very fortunate



that we started off with a sizable base of people who were subscribing because of the data product. It's just built from there.

Claer: A lot of newspapers especially think all of the resource should be directed at the homepage; how it's presented? Have we got the right stories prominent enough? In actual fact the number of readers using the homepage as a front door to get on to a website is declining by the hour.

Nicola: It's a really good point you bring up, because in our business retention rate, keeping people on board, is as important if not more important than new customers at the moment. That's the figure we're trying to work on.

Mark: For us, it's about flagging all the amazing stuff we do online that they perhaps don't know about and making sure that they know we're the number one place to go. We do that through emails, daily, maybe more than daily if it suits but without antagonising them too much by flooding their inbox. We speak with customer groups to find out what they like about it, what they don't. It's really important to keep those new readers coming back.

I've been focusing on newsletter sign-up. At the end of every story we try to put a link to a newsletter sign-up to really drive that. I think we don't have the volume of stories that warrant sending a daily one, but a weekly one, when you present your subscribers with all the great content you've put up that week, can get really good engagement. So, actually just going straight to your readers and not relying on another medium that may decide not to show your subscribers the content, has worked really well.

Where do you see the world of your magazines going?

Nicola: That's a big question. 60% of our subscriber base engages with us digitally at least once a month. That leaves 40% of our subscriber base that read the magazine, come to our events, but doesn't go online. That's quite a big chunk of people.

There's huge pressure on Retail Week for its apps to look really slick, for the online to be amazing because our readers are leaders in e-commerce and online and sexy apps, such as ASOS and Amazon. Yet, 40% only read the magazine.

We'll keep going with the magazine but it's changing. Three years ago, we'd have this wow blockbuster front page every week that we were famous for; today you get it and five minutes later it's online and the front page becomes more analytical. We still have a newsy front page, but who knows?

How much opportunity is there for outsiders to contribute video and do you take submissions?

Nicola: We commission the vast majority. We've just hired our first video journalist to do that. He's brilliant. He's only been with us about a month or two. We do accept third-party videos but they can't be PR-y at all and they have to be interesting.

Retailers have got a bit more savvy about it now as well. They'll post video clips of the Chief Exec being interviewed or just talking to the camera. We'll get the link off the retailer if they don't mind us having it and that's really good content for us. We do accept third-party contributions

but we're doing a lot more on our own.

Claer: It's interesting how the really big companies are saying, "Well, why should I go on CNBC and be interviewed by a potentially hostile interviewer when I can do this video clip and explain it and people can just take it on their websites?" We often listen to the "Today" programme, the big interview at 8:10am because that will typically generate a news story for the FT first thing in the morning if it's a bit quiet and there's not much else going on. That's why the BBC sticks to that time of doing it, because they know that they can have their programme referenced in lots and lots of online stories. Often it will take the BBC themselves about two hours before they get their online story about the "Today" programme interview up online.

There was an article recently about how journalists are using Twitter a lot more to get their content going out and the PRs weren't really on the same wavelength. I was wondering if you've found that Twitter was the new channel as opposed to email that you go now to find new stories? Have you used #JournoRequest?

Claer: Not me personally. I have a problem with Twitter in the sense that if I don't follow you and you @mention me in a tweet, I won't get any kind of alert on my phone that I've got an @mention, whereas somebody who I am following and I follow back, if they @mention me then I get an alert. Often I'll have a journalist who will do that and I won't see it for a week because I won't realise that there's actually a message there waiting for me.

The way I use it, it's kind of a monitoring system of what's breaking rather than what might be a good scoop to do future reporting.

Nicola: I completely agree, actually. I've been in the same situation when PRs have tried to alert me to some story and I've just not seen it for some reason. It probably is, better in terms

of press releases, to just pick up the phone, to be honest. I miss emails as well. I get thousands in a week. So, it's tricky. I'd suggest picking up the phone. Some people are better on Twitter though, like my editor if you tweeted him, he'd probably pick it up faster.

Claer: I've never used the #journorequest. I suppose I might if I was looking for a case study or something. There are instances when you can use Twitter for crowdsourcing news stories but I would echo what Nicola said about email as w <http://www.ibp.org.uk/> ell. We just get so many emails.

We were talking about journalists being able to sell your story in a tweet. If you're a PR person, I think the challenge is being able to sell your story in a subject heading. We'll just see the subject line. If you make it too long, we can't see the end of it. That's the other thing. Sometimes people send these essays in the subject line. You can only see the first ten words and it gets chopped off.

Mark: I think that's right. There's nothing worse than opening an email, starting to read it and just thinking, "I don't know what this is." So, if you know that you've got to sell it in a sentence, you're immediately looking at it thinking, "What is that sentence going to be?" And if someone has put it in the subject heading, it's going to be opened.

Amanda: I think Twitter is a fantastic tool for journalists. But I think as more and more people now tweet your feed becomes clogged up and you just run through them so quickly that unless, you've got a picture or a fantastic headline that grabs your attention you can miss it.

I would never post the headline of a story that I've written or something where I was trying to get attention from the copy. I'd always rewrite it for Twitter. I think that with Twitter, you can use it any old way but if you really want to get people's attention, you have to really think about what you're doing and personalise it.



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