

CV

NAME

Al Anstey

DATE OF BIRTH

April 1966

CAREER

Al Anstey was born and schooled in London. He holds a degree in psychology. Al started his career as a producer at CBS News in 1990 and in 1992 moved to the start-up of Reuters GMTV as a reporter and news editor. In 1994 he joined APTN based in New Delhi and then Sydney, before taking on the position of Asia Editor. In 1997 he moved to ITN where he rose to Head of Foreign News, also running ITN's American operations for two years after 9/11. Al's involvement with Al Jazeera started in 2005 as a key member of the start-up team of Al Jazeera English. Subsequent roles have been AJE's Director of News and Director of Media Development for Al Jazeera Network. In October 2010 Al was appointed Managing Director of AJE.

MEDIA USE

In the morning listens to a handful of radio stations and logs on to two or three different international news sites. Stays across AJE's output, keeps a close eye on BBC, CNN, and other international news channels, watches Al Jazeera Arabic's output. Throughout the day checks key sites online and on i-Phone when travelling. Looks at national news web sites when stories are happening in specific locations. Weekly news-fix is reading the Economist's iPhone/iPad application. Entertainment: watching decent films, BBC Radio 4 for discussion and comedy

FAVOURITES

Plays squash, keen sailor, skipper, and windsurfer. Learning to paraglide – working towards gliding and pilots licence. Likes good movies, switches bad ones off very quickly



NINE YEARS VIEWING IN A MONTH

When **Al Anstey** talks about **Al Jazeera English** he can rightly do so with a singular passion. He was one of the founders of AJE and a key member of the start-up team – now in his new role as MD he is helping shape the channel's next phase of evolution. With AJE winning a string of recent awards for its outstanding news coverage, we asked Al Anstey: what are you doing right?

The journalism, the content. For me that's the key. We have got a fantastic newsgathering reach, we have bureaux across the globe in strategic locations. That enables us to do what I call 'original journalism' - sharp, field reporting where our journalists are on the ground, eye-witnessing a story.

Add on to that that we are truly international, putting every country in the world on a level playing field covering a story on its merits. And the final thing I'd add is covering the people not just the powerful – we want to know the ramifications and the impact of the decisions being made by the powerful on the people out there in the world.

Put all those points together, what are we doing right? We are building sharp-end journalism, we are building on our comprehensive story-telling and fundamentally we are gaining the trust of our audiences out there. We are delighted to be recognized by AIB, and the other awards we have received, but also we celebrate every new viewer that switches us on and says "that's high quality, that's comprehensive, it's very clear story-telling, and I am being given added-value over and above the story".

What is the "next phase of evolution" that you are leading the channel in?

First and foremost we are looking

“If we have not got the content right, if we are not trusted in that content, then new platforms become irrelevant”

at expanding our bureau network, we're adding on a number of bureaux this year in all regions of the world – I'll just name a couple: South Korea, Paris, Nigeria, North America.

Secondly, we are continuing to refine the product to build our onscreen strength in terms of the journalism but also the look. We need to make sure to recruit people who are real authorities on their story, not just on-air but off-air as well. We are currently available in over 220m households worldwide. We need to build on that and expand traditional distribution – cable and satellite – but add on to that the incredibly fast moving world of new platforms which are ultimately giving our viewers new choices. Figures show that TV watching is still on the rise, people are digesting content in different ways, but it is adding onto traditional distribution. So we must give our viewers our content at a time and place of their choosing.

And then we need to make sure that through our marketing and PR we are reaching out to potential and existing viewers, and highlight what we stand for so we are building our reputation and the brand. In some parts of the world Al Jazeera is not recognised for what it is. And sometimes there are what I call the misconceptions. I am a firm believer, once people switch us on, those misconceptions and sometimes ignorance about what Al Jazeera stands for are dispelled

almost immediately. It's quite a rapid transition to a recognition and the beginnings of trust.

What is your distribution objective?

The fundamental goal is to reach out to new viewers on all platforms, but also to reach out to existing viewers on new platforms, and to reach out to both those audiences at a time and place of their choosing.

Traditional distribution is still a very important area of the market for any broadcaster. We have got some significant areas where we are distributed on cable and satellite, the UK, across much of Africa, across important sections of Asia, across the Middle East region, and we are looking at key markets like North America and India for traditional distribution. We need to look at what the next stage is, whether that be HD or 3D, and to be very smart about keeping up with or ahead of the trends for traditional distribution.

Then also within that area of distribution falls the catch-up TV, the VOD, the incredible presence and watching of our material on YouTube. Then add on the new platforms. We launched the iPhone live streaming app in 2009, and a staggering number of people are watching on the iPhone alone. Add on to that the BlackBerry, the Android, the iPad, all the new tablets that are coming out, some of the game stations are now running ►

live video, these are all potential ways of viewers seeing our content. We need to recognise which platforms are the best for our audiences receiving our content and make sure that we are present on those platforms.

Faced with the challenge of getting onto every platform, how do you formulate a strategy?

We talk to the manufacturers, we are talking to people who are working on the development of their own platforms so that we understand what technologies are out there but it is also important to look at existing trends. When a new platform has been online for a while we need to look at what are the existing trends in the watching of live video on an iPhone for example. How much are people using the iPad or the new tablets to digest content as a whole, how much are they reading the text online as opposed to live streaming. How much are people actually using catch-up TV.

So I think it is a combination of taking a slice of life right now and understanding what's going on in the industry worldwide. There are regional differences because of bandwidth issues, obviously parts of Africa for example are going to have far less potential for live streaming than say parts of Europe or Asia. And not every platform that comes online is going to be a way of our audiences seeing our content in the future. We have got to be questioning and smart in the way we approach a very fast moving part of the industry, so that we are actually across what's happening now, and able to see what the potential is in the months and years to come, so that we are targeting our resource at the right platforms for the future.

Where is all this convergence and mix of platforms heading?

What we are seeing is a proliferation of methods of receiving content. This is not the end of the broadcast industry, this is an enhancement of what is on



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offer to the consumer. The other element which is obviously on the increase is audience engagement with channels – that is something that we need to handle with care but must be absolutely across.

And there is a dialogue going on in the social media space – on Twitter, on Facebook – about what's happening in individual people's worlds, about what is happening out there in the globe, and viewers talking to other viewers about what broadcasters like us are doing. When you get that dialogue going on, then I think that's a very healthy thing.

What would you like to see happen with mobile?

When you look at the sheer number of handsets that exist on earth in each particular market, it's a staggering figure. It's an area that you absolutely cannot ignore. You have got to look at what is the best way of capitalising on the presence of mobile in everyone's lives so that it becomes a proper medium for digesting our content. When you look at mobile live streaming, this is a very good way of taking in content. This particular part of the industry is developing so rapidly at the moment, we have got to study what is the best way of presenting our content to audiences in the mobile space and engage with the handset makers and the telcos so that we are actually achieving our goals.

Which markets are key?

In recent months we have made some very good headway. The Freeview launch in the UK we are very pleased with, we have launched widely across Canada.

We are working on a multi-layered strategy for distribution in the US, that means that we are talking to a number of cable operators in North America but we are also rolling out a PR strategy to make sure that we are building the brand and the reputation at the same time. In December we were granted a downlinking licence to broadcast in India which is a real breakthrough – we have had huge

expressions of interest from cable operators there, and obviously it's an intelligent, outward looking vast market. Australia we are still looking at.

We are widely distributed across much of Africa, obviously across the Middle East. For me with distribution it is a question of prioritising. I think the strategy has got to be 'where are the markets where we feel our content is going to be best received' and 'where are the people that speak English' – and then pushing out into those markets in a strategic way, dovetailing that with the new media strategy as well. We know that we are widely watched and read online, that's a positive for us. In one month, last September, we had nine years of viewing on the iPhone alone, that means minute-by-minute. That's a staggering figure. Those sort of figures are really important to us because we can break down on the new media platforms the demographics, the geographics of our audience and begin to build a wider picture of where we are currently watched and then we can reach out to people as we are doing now with focus groups.

What are the most important issues in international media today?

One of the jobs of any journalist is to get out there and dig up the truth to the extent that any individual or any journalist can. And in a world that is full of spin and propaganda and sometimes lies, whether that be from corporations or individuals or governments, the role of the journalist is ever increasingly important. That's what it's all about. We can talk about new platforms, we can talk about new technologies as much as we want to, if we haven't got the content right, if we are not trusted in that content, then those new platforms become far less relevant if not irrelevant. The quest for the story and the truth is still the biggest day-to-day challenge.

At Anstey, thank you.