

FREE VIDEO AND MORE

Margarita Simonyan has been Editor-in-chief of Russia's international TV news channel RT since its launch in 2005. The channel has had many 'firsts' - it was the first Russian 24/7 English-language news channel which brings the Russian view on global news, and the first Russian TV station to launch its own virtual channel on YouTube. And this year RT marks two important anniversaries

A lot has happened recently, a lot of good things for RT. We are moving forward and reaching many goals that we set ourselves. In 2009, we launched a unique project - our online video agency Freevideo. As a result of the global economic crisis, many TV channels had to shut down their bureaux in Moscow. Nevertheless, events in Russia still need to be covered. Major outlets ran into problems when they had no video for coverage of important events.

We created a special site freevideo.rt.com, where every day we upload video clips of broadcast quality - this can be clips from press conferences, reports, interviews. You can view the script and the shotlist for each video online. Initially we only provided the script in English, but now information is available in Spanish and Arabic, as well as French and German.

We are trying to increase the number of languages on offer to make the video agency Freevideo more accessible. In order to download video in broadcast quality you just need to register on the site. This gives you full access to topical videos as well as archive

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material. Over 1500 users have registered since the launch which gives us confirmation that this is a much-needed resource. Among the major users are all the leading international TV channels and news agencies, as well as regional channels from over 85 countries worldwide. We have received a lot of feedback from TV channels in different parts of the world - they tell us Freevideo is a very valuable resource.

RT Spanish launched in December '09 - how have the first six months been?

Yes, the launch of our Spanish channel had been planned for a long time and was a major step for RT. We began broadcasting on December 28th last year, and RT Spanish has been available to millions of viewers in Europe as well as North and South America. We produce a completely different kind of news, radically different from the mainstream.

The channel is working on expanding broadcasting into other Spanish-speaking regions. I am sure that Latin America will love us, and if they let us into the cable networks in the States, then the Spanish speaking population there will have access via this platform too.

The channel's internet site actualidad.rt.com is a fully-fledged

multimedia resource - the button 'En vivo' provides access to RT live broadcasts with on air quality. It's great news for us that RT Spanish was nominated for the Broadcast Digital Awards 2010 in the Best Channel Launch category. We have no doubt that the Spanish channel will find its audience and be just as popular as our English and Arabic projects.

Any new audience figures?

According to recent data provided by market research company Nielsen, in countries like Syria, Lebanon, Kuwait, UAE, Jordan, Egypt and Saudi Arabia the audience of RT in Arabic for our Rusiya Al-Yaum channel is over 5m people - the Nielsen survey asked viewers which channels they had watched in the previous 30 days.

The findings show that in these countries Rusiya Al-Yaum is watched more than the leading European channels in Arabic - Deutsche Welle, France 24, and the Chinese CCTV Arabic - combined.

What impact does RT's English channel have?

The English channel is also rapidly gaining viewers. Last year we were able to increase significantly the number of networks where RT broadcasts. So when we began broadcasting in Canadian networks

Bell TV, Rogers Cable, Shaw Cable and Shaw Direct in December 2009, we added over 18m potential viewers. RT has also expanded in Asia, joining Airtel Digital TV (India), DD Direct plus (India), SingTel (Singapore), and StarHub (Singapore), which amounts to 100m viewers in India and 2.6m in Singapore.

We put a great deal of emphasis on increasing the number of hotels where RT can be viewed. We achieved a real break-through in this area - in one year we multiplied the number of hotels by 23. In the USA our channel can be viewed in major hotel chains, such as Marriott, Crowne Plaza, Hyatt, Hilton, Sheraton and many other four and five star hotels.

We have also increased our programme offering in major US cities - RT is now available not only in Washington, DC, and New York, but also in Los Angeles and San Diego. In January we opened our own studio complex in Washington, DC. This comprises two separate studios and was built in four months - a record time for such a large-scale project. We broadcast from this studio six hours every day - in prime time, from 4 pm till 10 pm ET.

What's happening online?

As you know, we were the first Russian TV station to launch its own virtual channel on YouTube and in the last six months we have achieved a real breakthrough on YouTube. Increasingly, people go online for information, not just entertainment content. And we want to provide this content to the Internet audience.

Right now the total number of views on the RT YouTube page is over 130m, and the numbers are growing rapidly day by day. In the last six months our channel has been the most viewed international news channel on YouTube, several times. This of course is very useful indirect feedback on how popular RT is with viewers in general. It also shows that viewers are looking beyond mainstream news and looking for other, alternative

stories. They want to see a different perspective on what is happening - and they find that on RT.

What is RT doing with mobile?

Of course, we pay a lot of attention to mobile platforms to make RT content more available to viewers. We already have a free RT application for the iPhone so users can watch us. We are currently working on applications for other major mobile platforms which should be available soon.

What is happening in Russian media generally?

The landscape of Russian TV is developing rapidly. More and more channels are moving forward with new technology. For example, four years ago there was no news channel broadcasting 24/7 in Russian. Today there is Vesti24 - they have an online presence, mobile broadcasting for iPhone and make use of all the other technologies modern channels use.

What's the outlook for RT?

This year we are marking some significant dates. In May we celebrated the third anniversary of the launch of RT's Arabic channel Rusiya Al-Yaum, and at the end of 2010 we will celebrate five years of RT English. When we review our progress and look at our growth so far, I feel that's quite an achievement. In a very short period of time these channels have found their viewers and their place in international broadcasting networks.

Our plans for the future? To make RT content more available to viewers. And first of all, to expand distribution, especially in Latin America and in the US. Since July we've been broadcasting 24/7 on FreeView in the UK, so we are very happy with our presence there - it makes us available to almost 90% of households. And of course we are working on making all three of our channels available on any mobile phone that people use to get video content on.

Margarita Simonyan, thank you.

