



MOSCOW VIEWS

Margarita Simonyan has been heading international TV news channel **Russia Today** since its launch in 2005, and her credentials for the job are impressive. Has reporting from war-torn areas and G8 summits prepared her for the challenge of promoting a Russian TV channel to the West?

Russia has always received a lot of media coverage, but this often lacked depth and “local knowledge”. So initially the idea was that Russia Today, the first English-language news channel broadcasting from Russia, would present a view on events in Russia that’s different from what viewers get through other channels. Soon we realized we can give our viewers more choice by providing a different picture of the world beyond Russia. We have bureaux in London, Paris, Jerusalem, Cairo, Washington, New York and many freelancers around the world. But the world news we present is the news as seen from Moscow, and of course that means Russia, Eastern Europe and Central Asia get special attention. We take pride in having immediate access to many top politicians and the best experts in all these regions. And the channel’s slogan “Proud to be different” reflects our determination to find the stories that rarely make it to TV, or to bring another dimension to

the news that people already know, or think they know.

What are the successes of the first year?

We are the first Russian TV station to launch its own virtual channel on YouTube, featuring RT videos 24 hours a day. We have gained carriage on many platforms - more than 60 cable operators carry Russia Today now. One recent addition is Time Warner which brings RT to New York and part of New Jersey. Additionally, TV viewers all over the world can watch Russia Today by receiving an unencrypted signal directly from more than ten satellites.

What are the key markets?

Key markets for RT's English service are Europe and the US. Recently we launched a large promo campaign, both on the internet and in print, aimed at the European and American audience, and as a result we've noticed growing interest and brand recognition. It's still less than two years since Russia Today was launched but we believe that in a relatively short time the channel has earned the respect of viewers

and fellow journalists the world over for its commitment to independent journalism, and its professional attitude.

How do you measure your audience?

There is a complicated system in place to arrive at figures for the direct and the internet audience. This is based on subscriber figures from cable operators, and an analysis of activity on our website. We constantly monitor the viewer's activity on RT's YouTube channel, as all our major stories always get listed in the contents of the channel, and it helps us get instant feedback from our viewers.

What platforms are part of your delivery strategy?

According to eMarketer research, some 90m users surf the Internet even when watching TV. We are very active in using alternative ways of broadcasting and communicating with the world. We are working on further developing our video channel on YouTube, and we are also considering joining several other internet video sharing services. RT is about to launch a ▶

◀ Margarita Simonyan, Editor in Chief at Russia Today TV



▶ Moscow metro

◀ Russia Today in New York



Launched 10 December 2005

Key personnel Margarita Simonyan (Editor-in-Chief), Deputies: Denis Trunov, Alexey Nikolov, Vladimir Belko

Budget US\$30m

Staff 700+

Potential audience 35m households = 105m viewers

Where available on satellite in the UK, France, The Netherlands, Belgium, Northern Europe, Spain, Poland, South Africa; on over 60 cable platforms; for full list see www.russiatoday.com

completely redesigned corporate website – we believe our designers have managed to implement the best trends of web 2.0 concepts, featuring a diversified yet easy to navigate system of menus and links, feedback and voting mechanisms.

What about TV on mobiles?

Phoning and SMS-messaging are still dominant. As 3G network solutions are not yet supported in Russia, it's too early to talk about promoting real time video on mobile phones. However, the mobile industry is developing rapidly here and I'm sure we'll see all the latest trends implemented in the near future. Russians already use their phones to access the internet and multimedia, read RSS feeds, etc. which proves that when it comes to mobile TV applications the solution will find its users. At present, no TV programming is available on mobile phones but we at Russia Today are definitely planning to do that.

What are the challenges of marketing RT?

Trying to promote a Russian TV channel in the West is indeed a

challenge. Let's face it, many people have a stereotyped and biased attitude towards Russia in general and the Russian media in particular. We face this kind of bias occasionally, mostly from people who have never seen any of our output. Usually all it takes to overcome this prejudice is to ask people to watch RT and make their own judgment. But this is a process that consumes time and money. Most of our journalists and reporters are Russian, and although their English is of a very high standard, using the foreign language presents an additional challenge. Otherwise, we are not different from any international TV channel. The market in global media is becoming very crowded, comparisons between the performances of different stations continue to be made, and we all try our best.

What is the relationship with other INCs?

Overall, I believe it's definitely more about complementing each other than competing. We believe there is actually more interesting news in the world than one channel

can fit in its output. With our in-depth knowledge of certain parts of the globe we have an edge when covering events there, and our colleagues use more and more of our exclusive footage. Other channels will be stronger in other regions. There is occasionally a bit of healthy competition when it comes to stories that are universally recognized as top-liners.

Does RT play a part in Russia's public diplomacy?

We simply do not think in such terms. Russia Today is a media outlet and does not intend to be anything else.

And the outlook for the future?

In the short term, we are launching in Spanish in 2008. In the long term, my team and I would be happy to see RT as one of the world's leading news channels. If we manage along the way to create more interest around the globe in what's going on in Russia, that would be an added bonus.

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Margarita Simonyan, thank you. ■