

BBC WORLD SERVICE GETS INTO TV

Richard Sambrook, Director BBC Global News, is responsible for programmes in 33 languages reaching 240m people. Standing out in an ever more crowded marketplace is a challenge, he says

Almost every month, a new global competitor appears on the scene. Recently, France, Iran, the Arab world, Italy and Russia have all opened up new international broadcasting operations, resulting in an explosion in competition to provide news with differing judgements and differing editorial priorities. This presents the BBC with a massive challenge; how to stand out and be easily identifiable in an ever more crowded, constantly developing, marketplace.

In March 2006, independent public opinion research organisation GlobeScan carried out a series of questions on 'trust and the media'. It polled over 10,000 people in 10 countries. The BBC rated higher than any other organisation when it came to 'trusting global media brands'.

People get their news in different ways in different parts of the world. In areas of Africa and the Far East, where people are more likely to have cell phones than computers, mobiles are the preferred distribution platform. And more and more people are using the internet and bbc.com or bbcArabic.com rather than radio to access their news.

TV DOMINATES MID-EAST

TV is the dominant medium in the Middle East with more than 300 cable and satellite channels available across the region. The BBC is joining them; launching BBC Arabic TV, part of a multi-platform Arabic offer across television, radio and online. Dozens of new staff have been recruited, and a new multi-media centre has been created at Broadcasting House in Central London. The BBC's brand is strong in the Middle East. In repeated surveys in some 20 major cities 85% said they would watch BBC Arabic TV.

Everything broadcast by the

BBC is now effectively global. During the outcry in September 2005 about cartoons in a Danish newspaper that depicted Mohammed in an allegedly blasphemous way, there were riots in Pakistan over rumours that *Newsnight*, our domestic late night current Affairs programme, was going to show the cartoons in full. It wasn't, but the story was out there spread around the world by email and mobile phone. *Newsnight* is only available in the UK, so the riots were about something that didn't happen on a channel that wouldn't even be seen in Pakistan. It's an example of how cultural sensitivities cross national and broadcast boundaries.

FREE MEDIA POSE THREAT

In today's complex world, the BBC strives to achieve impartiality by representing as full and diverse a range of views as possible. These have to be weighted according to who or how many, or how authoritative a view they represent. The BBC is dedicated to building trust between countries, cultures and communities. Transparency, accountability and independence are central to fulfilling that purpose. Former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan described the BBC's international news services as "probably Britain's greatest gift to the world," because of the impact of its journalism.

To those who oppose the building of open and peaceful societies, free media pose a dangerous threat – precisely because of their potential to empower by increasing understanding and inspiring free debate. That has led to attacks on BBC programmes and the people who make them. Our services in China and Iran are effectively blocked. Not because they are anti Chinese or anti-Muslim but because they are simply seeking to make high quality impartial news available to people who want it. In Burma, as news of the military

BBC Arabic TV Launching in early 2008, the BBC Arabic TV news and information channel will make BBC World Service the first media organisation to have a strong tri-media offer in news, current affairs and information for Arabic-speaking audiences in the region and around the world. It will initially broadcast 12 hours a day and be freely available via satellite or cable. The annual operating cost is £19m.

BBC Persian TV The new BBC World Service TV news and information service in Farsi for Iran is expected to launch early in 2008. Based in London, the service will complement the BBC's existing Persian radio and online services for Iran. It will initially broadcast for 8 hours a day, 7 days a week, from 17.00 to 01.00 hours – prime viewing time in Iran. It will be freely available via satellite or cable in the region. The operating cost is £15m.



▲ Egton House (right), home to BBC Arabic TV, alongside BBC Broadcasting House in central London

crackdown on protests spread via the internet, the junta closed it down. And in Pakistan, one of the first moves under the recent State of Emergency was to take international news channels off the air.

FREE INFORMATION AT A COST

In February 2005 BBC producer Kate Peyton was shot and killed in Mogadishu, a city where the only source of reliable news is the BBC's Somali service. And BBC correspondent Alan Johnston was kidnapped and held hostage for 114 days in Gaza, where he had reported from for three years.

It is well to remember that there's sometimes an unacceptable cost to keeping world society informed while promoting openness, fairness, economic and political development. ■