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What are your responsibilities at the BBC?

I've got three roles. The first is that I'm Controller of Radio 1, the second is that I'm the controller of the sister station, 1Xtra, both channels, of course, carry news content. I'm also the controller of BBC Switch, which is the new BBC teen brand for 12-16 year olds. So if you take that together I guess I am the controller of content for 12-30 year olds on the BBC with the exception of BBC3, that's Danny Cohen who is controller of BBC3.

What was your role in the Creative Futures project?

Creative Futures was the project that Mark Thompson, the Director General, launched about two and a half years ago. The idea was to ask a group of groups, I think there were about 8 small groups, and one of them was led by me looking at children's output and teen output, to make a kind of situation report and look at future trends and suggest what the BBC might do to ensure it was successful with those groups, which is what I did along with Geoff Goodwin and submitted a report. The report showed that there was a clear requirement that the BBC needed to do something specifically for 12-16 year olds and Mark asked me to take up that role.

Is there the same concern in radio as television in terms of declining younger audiences for news?

Well, I think that it is broadly accepted in TV that younger people are drifting away from, or declining quite steeply, depending on which piece of research you read, those formal set piece bulletins on the TV, BBC1 6 O'Clock and 10 O'Clock news or Channel 4 news. So I don't think that would be a surprise to anybody in the industry. I think people think less about radio than they do about TV. On the radio, news broadcasting is part of the mix, as enshrined by service licence agreements, on Radio 1 and in 1Xtra. So news is consumed by many millions of young people but I think in a slightly different way than television news. In other words, on television it's discreet programmes which sit in a schedule. On radio the Newsbeat programme, a 15 minute programme, sits in the middle of the day between two other music entertainment shows and therefore people choose a station to keep themselves company so they will take that 15 minutes of speech, tolerate at worst and enjoy at best.

In terms of your radio responsibilities, is there not a problem, then, with reaching younger audiences with news?

I don't think it is a problem. There is a belief, one which I subscribe to, that a brand like Radio 1, by definition of what it does so well in music and entertainment reaches millions and millions of under 25 year olds who we know consume little news elsewhere, is obligated from a public service perspective to actually provide news content, be it those big international stories, Afghanistan and the Middle East, or big national stories, Gordon Brown becomes prime minister, or indeed, and what I think is more pertinent, is stories which don't usually make the mainstream media, like mobile phone crime or changes in the way UCAS works and so on. So we major on those stories that are of relevance to a young audience. So I don't think it's a problem, I think it's actually quite an easy fit with Radio 1's brand. In the rest of the radio industry, commercial radio for 16-24 year olds, the news provision is tiny. I think the Radio Centre itself has said that the 16-24 year olds don't tune into Kiss to get news, they tune in for something else. We're very different to Kiss, we're a big public service channel and therefore a news team and a news output is part of the remit and I think it's quite a comfortable one. It's been there for many years, it's been there since the 1970s, and it's kind of interwoven with the music and entertainment output and it works very well. So it always makes me smile, it's true to say that with specific media, reading a newspaper, watching news on TV, is in decline with young people, however, there is this brand called Radio 1 which has two 15 minute newscasts every day in mainstream which is consumed by millions and millions of young people. It's a paradox.

Is it a worry, socially, if young people aren't getting the news?

Well, I think it should be a worry if you believe in public value or social capital because those are the kind of big socio-economic concepts that underpin the licence fee and the existence of the BBC and part of the six strands of public value is sustaining democracy and you have a better democracy the more citizens are informed of the issues, the people, the ideas. In other words, on a grand scale, looking right back, should you be worried that people aren't engaging in news? I think we should be worried, yes.

If young people are getting news from somewhere, through one medium or another, is it really a problem if they're not getting it from television so much?

I don't think you should be worried about that unless you believe that some media are inherently better at communicating, and I don't, I'm pretty platform agnostic and media agnostic about this because you can see people extracting value out of the web for content, where they can get it where they want it, when they want it on what device they want it. If they happen to be drifting away from a formal set-piece broadcasting bulletin at 10 O'Clock...That's not to say I don't think that you should maximise the potential of that media to do well with young audiences. There's a classic approach where older news brands would say 'the popular music combo Oasis...blah, blah, blah'. I'm exaggerating to make the

point but that attitude of deliberately almost setting themselves apart from young culture, that's not helpful if it's a serious story.

The current worry over falling younger audiences seems to be largely based on the fear that where once the younger audience, as it got older, would eventually drift towards the television news but now, when there are so many more media options, that audience may never migrate towards television news.

I'm not sure on that one. There's some kind of reasoning that says when you have a family and you buy a house and you've got a job and you've got new responsibilities that your horizons broaden and you start worrying about your local school and so on – then you grow into News as a genre. But, on the other hand, the explosion in media choice means that if you really do grow up in a multi-channel household with broadband internet and you make a set of choices about collecting meaningful inputs, it's very, very hard for another brand to make headway against that, once you're in that world..you're in that world. If your TV portfolio on Sky is ITV2, Living, MTV and the Disney Channel, and on radio its Kiss and on the internet it's Ebay, your presets are full up. We found that in our own research that there is a section of the under 25s that don't listen to Radio 1 - we reach approximately half of all UK 15-24s which means there's half that don't - and it's not a question that they wouldn't like what we do but it's that, metaphorically, their presets are full up, they've got enough media thank you very much, and to make some headway in there is quite a challenge.

Unquestionably amongst all audiences that we speak to the BBC has a very strong brand value around news, which can be a negative sometimes. If you ask a group of 16 year-olds who aren't BBC consumers, tell me about the BBC then? They say, well, my mum and dad watch it for news or it does news. It's extremely strong that the BBC equals 'it does news and if you want news you can go to the BBC to get it'. It's pretty clear that that's what it stands for. But as I say that can be negative because it can mean that's all you see the BBC for, you don't see it as somewhere to go to get entertainment, that's a problem.

In terms of reaching young people with news it's said that if you take the Radio 1 figures out of the overall picture the BBC's reach in that demographic declines dramatically.

I haven't got all the data off the top of my head but if you look at the reach for all 16-24 year olds to those prime time mainstream news programmes it's in sharp decline. But in terms of mass audiences you might get 4 million people listening to Newsbeat, that's a lot of people, broadly under 30 years old that's a lot of young people, so in terms of volume Newsbeat is right up there.

What do young people say they like about the news on radio?

They value those simple statements that 'it keeps me well informed', 'it talks about the issues that matter to me', 'I know what's going on', all of those fairly

banal but none the less very important things, and 'it does it in a tone of voice that's appropriate to me'. It scores well on all of those measures.

And what do you they get from news on radio that they don't get from television?

I think it's a targeted offer, that's the big difference. It's where it is and how it's delivered and what the content is. So there are three factors. Where is it? It's on a service that is targeted at a young demographic for a start and if you're playing new music with entertaining Djs then by definition you're going to skew under 30, that's the context. It's where it is, it's right smack in the middle of the day, it's not tucked away in the evenings, which means that if your station's any good that's where people listen to the radio, so that's where it'll work. How it's delivered is important too. If you delivered the World At One for half an hour on Radio 1 it would devastate your listenership – not because it isn't a fine programme - it is but because everything about context and tone would be wrong. So it's how it's done - young journalists, the language is less formal, the stories are chosen very carefully, the pace of the programme is much faster, we don't default to Westminster politics. So it's how it's delivered, where it is and the tone of voice is crucial too. If you assemble the array of journalists that you have on air they are most definitely in their early 20s.

Can all or any of that be translated into a television format?

I think one of the things we can do with Switch, the new teen brand, is to emulate some of that success in AV. So we've just appointed a new producer who will create a couple of stories a week, for broadband initially but possibly for BBC 2 as well in the teen zone we have on Saturday afternoons on BBC2. I think holding those ideals of how is it done, how does it sound, who does it, what story you choose. Holding that close, and I think the belief that you can make contemporary issues, journalistic issues interesting and alive for the audience.

Do those ideals have to be presented in new programming or new branding or can they be adopted by existing news programming to make them more appealing to younger viewers?

There's an interesting dilemma here because if you put Newsnight in a pair of sneaker and jeans it's not right for the brand values of that show where you expect to have discourse about the issues of the day dissected by journalists who make a lot of assumptions about the audience, who they know what the government's policies have been on Iraq for the past year, for instance. To dress that up superficially [for a younger audience] isn't going to work and buggers up the experience for the core audience. I think you've got to be very careful about 'younging' down news.

I think that there's another approach, which is to treat seriously some of the stories that do affect young people that you might brush past if your journalists and the culture has a certain centre of gravity. So for example, the rise of the rather nasty STI as a risk when young people are having sex is a very real issue. It's called by some an epidemic, it's a very serious issue. Should it be covered, debated, dissected? It could well be by a more grown up news programme but without falling into the trap of patronising any of the younger audience. You've got to do it on the level. So if you're choosing a story about the music industry, for example, on the Today programme and you're asking why is Prince giving away his album with a newspaper, what's going on? There's a very interesting business story here about the seismic shifts in the music industry and their business models as a result of downloading. So there's a serious story that needs to be told there and told in a tone of voice that doesn't make the assumption that you know who Prince is and not distancing yourself from it. So there are ways in which you can, as a more 'serious' news programme, treat all stories with equal respect. I'm sure that the BBC particularly has moved on from the 'popular beat combo' kind of days.

There does seem to be a reaction from some older viewers, often part of the core TV news audience, towards stories about and issues concerning young people irrespective of the way they're presented.

Yes, I think you have to work hard as a programme to show that it is proper news. I'm not here talking about entertainment news, which is a different thing again and may not be a brand fit for some programmes. I suppose what I'm saying is you have to be quite careful and respectful of your own brand values and your own core audience when thinking about these issues, because there's nothing worse in my view than kind of 'younging down', the vicar in trainers kind of approach to it. And it also may be true that certain kinds of formats, in certain media, ie the built, formal television news broadcast for half an hour, doesn't work so well for some audiences, and that's fine because there's BBC News online which is a whole different kind of media.

The question is, is it the audience that's become less interested in those issues over time or have the programmes just not kept up with the audience in terms of tone and style or content? In other words is it cause or effect? And I think Newsbeat has perhaps an answer here because, as I say, Newsbeat does not cause a mass turnoff from the audience at all, in fact I think it adds positively to the value of the experience, and it shows that figures are sustained. 15 minutes is a long time in your day if you're just driving listening to a DJ playing tunes and keeping you company and then suddenly you've got 15 minutes of news programmes.

One of the things that younger audiences invariably say when asked what they don't like about the mainstream news is the way they are portrayed in it. They complain about the negative portrayal of young people.

Quite rightly, quite rightly they do, there's a tirade of negative stories, a tirade of negativity in the mainstream news press. I wouldn't include the BBC so much in that, I'm talking about the newspapers particularly, but I think that some of it does tap into the mainstream broadcasters. I suppose you might say that it's a kind of natural result of covering news e.g. crime, a crime has been committed by this kid that's been seen on CTTV, or a kid giving the finger to David Cameron. But it's a tirade of negativity and it's little wonder that teenagers think. What kind of world would you think you lived in if every time you opened a newspaper you read that you were socially irresponsible, responsible for crime, that standards of your working practices had been falling readily, that you were having sex too young, that you were consuming too much alcohol, that you're the worst in Europe? It happens on a daily basis, you can flick through the papers now and find it. Clearly there's a reason why this happens. I've read a little bit about it, teenagers are a relatively small proportion of the overall proportion of the UK. So if there are 60 million people in the UK today, four and a bit million are aged between 12 and 16, ie at secondary school, and so if you divide that between two, boys and girls, you got about 2 million young girls or young boys. I think it was the BBC's home reporter who said we're living in a very anxious time, there's a number of factors, of which technology is one, that kind of scares the older population, i.e..it's developing so quickly that we can't keep up whereas teenagers seem to be people who can keep up, who are living with the internet and find it simple to log on, to create an avatar, to go and have a muck around. Older people think they're living in a different world and there's a kind of fear of that divide, I think, and I think that may be partly responsible for this idea that we're fearful of our own young people. The fear of crime, the fear of teenagers is very tangible stat and there's the fear of crime among teens themselves.

There's a book called Bowling Alone, about the rise and fall of civic life in America, which shows many of these trends, that when people stay in more, watching the television, on the internet, they have less time for going out and taking part in the community life. There's also the disengagement from news programmes and from issues towards entertainment. It's quite a good read on this subject.

How, for example, would the news services your responsible for cover what would be typically seen as a negative youth story in the mainstream news in a different way?

I suppose the difference might be that you'd give...well, when there were those dreadful shootings on new year's eve a few years ago 1Xtra, because of the nature of the reporters who were on the job, who were young and from ethnic minorities, they were able, because of who they are, to talk to friends and family about the situation and get more, more context, more sense of what had been going on – they got access and people spoke more openly to them – perhaps more than a more traditional news crew and news reporter arriving. So I suppose our approach would be that it's about context and understanding of content. It's

also done by young reporters, so it doesn't feel like it's saying all teenagers do this. Of course you report the facts, the story, but maybe it's the tone of voice that it's done in, the context, language that says it's not a separate thing.

It's more in the newspapers than in broadcasting but there's an absolute daily drip, drip, drip of those negative stories about the internet, alcohol abuse, unwanted pregnancies, falling standards in schools, ASBOs.

BBC1 is about to launch a 60 second news 'programme' in prime time aimed at predominantly younger viewers. Is that saying that anything more than that and younger viewers just won't stick around, they'll switch over?

If the question is, is 60 seconds better than nothing? Well what's wrong with 60 seconds? You can do a reasonable amount in a very short period of time. What you can't do is to hear those traditional narrative debates or news investigations that takes time. It's not the World Tonight where you have ten minutes of debate on Europe, you're not going to do that, there's no appetite for that from the audience. So there's nothing wrong with 60 seconds just for getting some information across.

There's another programme which is quite interesting, The Surgery, which can contain more elongated debate on the subject matter. This happens on Sunday night from 10pm to midnight, presented by Kelly Osbourne, with a doctor and a psychologist on hand. The audience contacts the show and says 'my parents have broken up, I'm feeling suicidal and I'm starting to self-harm', and that can then be quite a protracted debate about getting other people on who have self-harmed, the doctor talks, it might be a whole programme devoted to those kind of debates. So depending on the right subject there's an appetite for the right subject to be discussed.

In film, the more polemical kind of current affairs, ie Michael Moore films or Super Size Me, have proved very popular with younger viewers. Can that approach fit into news coverage at the BBC?

I think the BBC says there is room for polemic and strong story telling as long as it's balanced at some point and people understand that. We don't tend to on Newsbeat. We have an environment week or a car week where everybody has a say in their own way. I think what Rod [McKenzie, Newsbeat] would tell you is that our audience is more conservative than you might think a young audience would be. So if you ask people what are your concerns generally, it's the Health Service at number one, it's surprising sometimes. It's not all about the green agenda and new bands and spiky presenters, that's a smaller minority.

One of the common arguments about reaching young people today is that broadcasters can't wait for the audience to come to their platform, they have to get their content on other platforms, other media.

I think that's one of the challenges. We were looking at where...Because big brands, big commercial brands also want to make sure they stay connected with young people on the web, and it's not just broadcasters it's every big established organisations are aware that their consumers down here are operating in a different way and that's a prelude to the future. One big company produce a website of sex and health or relationship advice so if you Google a question you're as likely to land on a branded website. I'm not saying a branded website couldn't produce good information but of course they are trying to sell a set of products.

The web is a massive, massive canvas and you google away and the algorithm is the deciding factor, and you get presented with those top six stories and you click away. Well, where do you get your information from? Do you get it from a wide range of sources. Who do you trust.

So do you have allow BBC content to appear elsewhere?

Yeah, I think that's right. You have to allow your content out and my view is to be fairly relaxed about it because...Radio 1 is a very strong brand so if it's Radio 1 branded and it's Dominic from the Breakfast Show talking about story x with funny clip y and that's sitting on an embedded player on somebody's Myspace site, why would I be unhappy about that? I know some people talk about that mass of surrounding content and you don't know what it is but the truth is that as long as when you hit the embedded player it's branded BBC Radio 1, it's a quality piece that lasts two and a half minutes. For me I feel very relaxed about where that's sitting, within reason. I think it would be a good thing because it would be syndicating my content out to places where it wouldn't otherwise get consumed.

We have this phrase 'watermark' but you've got to be careful about not over-claiming with a youth audience. In other words you can't smother it with your branding, desperate to get credit. If you do that it just gets in the way of the audience enjoying it. What you see quite often is very low key branding, so there's something good on it, like a gorilla playing the drums to In The Air Tonight and then at the end there's a subtle Cadburys connection...it's a bit of entertainment done by a brand. The point is to do something funny and not to over claim. But still, however you do it we always brand our content so that you know, either through the person, the type of content or through your logo or an attitude or something about it that you know where it's from. That's my view about it.

TV news has always put great value on its presenters, people like Jon Snow and Trevor McDonald are seen as embodying a channel's whole news values. Is that as important for a younger audience do you think?

Well of course there are parallels [with Djs] , we need that to relate to another human being. Zane Lowe is a great music presenter, he's got credentials, credibility, he's likable and fun and knows his stuff. In a similar way [in news] you're looking for people with authority, credibility and with that extra human characteristic of that ability to communicate and make you interested in stuff. Doesn't it translate in the same way [in news]? You've got to be engaging and have an ability to communicate and people have got to believe that you know what you're talking about and that you've got credibility to actually say what you're saying.

But do news presenters have to be young? For instance, Jon Snow and Jeremy Paxman both rate highly with younger audiences.

It's absolutely not necessarily an age thing. The thing about Newsbeat is that on the whole the presenters and reporters are young and on the whole the programme sounds young, just like Radio 1 is on the whole mid 20s but that doesn't mean to say that Annie Nightingale can't happily exist on it because she got credibility oozing, the late great John Peel, credibility oozing, the attitude, saying what he felt, that's all very attractive. A similar thing might apply to Jon Snow. So it's not necessarily an age thing.

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