

A vibrant, competitive, independent, news media is a cornerstone of *Nationhood*. It is also a sign of a vibrant economy. With Wales reported to be falling behind England and on occasion the other constituents of the United Kingdom on many economic measurements we see media ownership consolidating and advertising revenues squeezed

The arrival of Social Media has removed all meaning from the traditional measures of success from existing products that offer news as a service as part of a communications package.

Launching a local television channel into the market at this time has given Bay TV (Swansea) Ltd a unique insight into market conditions and audience in South West Wales which may also be relevant to Wales as a whole.

At the time of writing Bay TV (Swansea) Ltd is one of 22 local television channels in the United Kingdom. It launched on July 12th 2016 and broadcasts in the conventional sense on Channel Eight on one terrestrial transmitter (Kilvey Hill) and on Channel 159 on Virgin Media – a cable TV service operating in Swansea. Other Local TV Network (LTVN) stations in Wales are Made in Cardiff and Made in North Wales.

Bay TV (Swansea) Ltd is licenced by Ofcom and under its 10-year licence has made a commitment to provide a local news service to its potential audience in the communities of Swansea, Neath Port Talbot, Carmarthenshire. This includes bulletins in the Welsh language.

The reception footprint from the Kilvey Hill transmitter covers 125,000 homes from Burry Port in the West to Pyle in the East. Due to local terrain reception from Kilvey Hill is patchy and can be affected by weather conditions. In Swansea itself, as a city of “seven hills in seven miles” this means being able to receive the channel at all is a lottery and television aerials in the same street can be seen pointing in many different directions as the occupants struggle to get a signal from neighbouring transmitters namely: Wenvoe, Mendips, Carmel and their relays.

It is no surprise therefore that many householders have given up on Digital Terrestrial (Freeview) and opted for Virgin Media or more usually British Sky Broadcasting “Sky”. (Reception of the channel on Your View and BT TV depends once again on access to the Kilvey Hill Transmitter.)

Based on this trading environment Bay TV (Swansea) Ltd had two options:

- To pay a substantial sum to gain access to a channel on the Sky platform
- or make the most of emerging social media channels to broadcast to an unknown audience.

Due to difficult local trading conditions for an emerging brand in the Swansea Bay Region purchasing a Sky channel was not possible in the current business plan. Instead with a very young team fresh from university it was decided to opt for the social media option.

As soon as it was possible to broadcast live on Facebook (in August 2016) Bay TV burst onto the social media scene with live broadcasts being supported by a high activity program of Twitter posts and updates. Once licenced by Ofcom for linear broadcast online the channel was also available on its own website www.baytvswansea.com

The social media audience soon made itself know and now (June 2017) the channel has had more than two million viewers watching our news coverage around the world on Facebook alone.

Recently during an emergency situation in Swansea City Centre following the Manchester bombing the channel streamed the ongoing situation live. Within minutes 2,000 viewers were watching the

news output live. By the time the Bay TV Evening News Bulletin aired at 6pm a total of 9,700 viewers had viewed the news footage and 30,000 others had accessed the news alert.

Although we had previous demonstrations of the popularity of formal news broadcasts via social media this reach surprised everyone at Bay TV (Swansea) Ltd and provided possible evidence of the future of news provision to the people of Wales.

These social medial viewers were not sitting at home in front of a TV set or even a home computer screen. They were accessing a live LOCAL television news programme on their smart phone or tablet probably at work or shopping or at the gym. These are a generation that want their news *visual, vibrant* and *as-it- happens*. They don't want a bulletin they want easy digestible chunks of news.

The provision of such services, in such circumstances, can provide vital public service broadcasting to the communities of Wales at a fraction of the traditional cost.

On the day in question May 25th 2017 people were able to make decisions in real time based on broadcast information from an Ofcom-regulated broadcaster of an ongoing incident. Bay TV were told of a First Bus driver who seeing the news on Bay TV as he queued on the Fabian Way entrance to Swansea told his passengers they may be safer if they got off at Sainsburys than be driven into the city centre where a possibly hazardous incident was in progress. The many comments from Bay TV Facebook viewers tell similar tales.

It is generally accepted that as the print editions of region newspapers decline their brands may sustain a continued on-line presence. But in what form and what will the content be text only or multimedia and will local advertising migrate to the online brand in sufficient quantity to sustain quality local online journalism in the long term?

The news output of BBC news channel is available online too but all these brands use their own domains to broadcast and not social media channels although Twitter is used to point viewers towards their service.

It is possible without the cost of having to have traditional broadcast facilities local communities throughout Wales could form their own social media community channels. And there is evidence of this already. But with no regulation there looms of course the spectre of *Fake News* and the likelihood of defamation.

A better option would be perhaps for the National Assembly for Wales to investigate if a network of locally based not for profit community organisations could be instituted to broadcast local television to communities in Wales via social media to sufficiently high standards and be regulated by Ofcom Wales. Community Radio broadcast online of course is already supported by the Welsh Government.

Turning to the performance and delivery of existing news services in Wales the decline over the past 30 years is obvious to any professional observer. The introduction of new technologies in print and broadcasting should have meant a growth of news gathering in Wales but in reality provision of local news to communities falls away drastically once the city boundary of Cardiff is reached. Newspaper titles have been brought under common ownership and printing centralised. The latest news is not accessed in locally printed late editions but in Online Editions. Local commercial radio too is owned by national conglomerates. Local news programming on ITV 3 Wales and BBC Wales is restricted to approximately an hour a day when there is enough news happening in local communities to do so much more. It puzzles us why BBC Scotland is being given a new channel for

the nation and yet in Wales no such offer has been made. We are also puzzled how the BBC's new Local News Partnerships will operate in Wales.

Another possibility for another national English language channel for Wales would be linking the existing LTVN stations together Bay TV (Swansea) Ltd, Made In Cardiff and Made in North Wales to provide news and programming for the whole of Wales using the British Sky Broadcasting platform. And perhaps this too could be supported by the Welsh Government.

Should traditional media migrate to online only and undertake linear broadcast via the internet and/or social media then their output should be regulated by Ofcom - although this may need legislation.

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