

Press prepare net strategy

Robin Millard in Edinburgh

MAY 29, 2006 GLOBAL press chiefs have gathered to discuss how best to deal with the rise of the internet, and the bloggers and citizen journalists it has brought in its wake. Media professionals, huddled in the Scottish capital for the International Press Institute's World Congress, debated the long-term challenges and opportunities that the new media age would throw their way.

From instant news on the internet to passers-by recording extraordinary events on mobile phones, the threats - and opportunities - for traditional newspapers are increasing.

Krishna Bharat, a principal scientist for internet search engine giant Google, warned editors that the web was going to reshape their industry. "With each previous new technology, the face of journalism changed and we reinvented ourselves, but the heart of journalism -- the editorial process, editorial objectivity and values did not change," Mr Bharat said.

"Our industry's methods of information collection and dissemination will change but not core editorial practices." He told editors: "Rather than ask 'How is the internet going to affect my current operation?' it is smarter and more useful to ask: 'What benefits can the internet bring to the news audience?', and 'How can I help bring that opportunity to the market?'"

He warned that bloggers - people recording their lives, the events they witnessed first-hand and what they thought of it - were going to grow increasingly significant. Mr Bharat said that as the number of bloggers rose, those churning out valuable journalism would too - which editors had to take into account.

Delegates debated the value of citizen journalism, citing last year's London attacks, where many of the most striking images and footage were captured by people on the spot - trapped in the bombed Underground trains, which professional journalists could not access.

Emily Bell, the editor-in-chief of the website operated by British newspaper *The Guardian*, said the press could not hope to succeed in the internet age by simply replicating the printed page online. "The momentum of change is terrifying," she said.

"We have to be of the web and not just on the web. We've introduced blogs. We've built a podcast studio producing nine podcasts per week, averaging 100,000 downloads - and we only started that six weeks ago."

"You have to go where the audience goes, otherwise you don't have much of a future," Ms Bell warned.

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