



Ivo Burum and Flemming Munster edit footage using an iPhone on location in Aarhus, Denmark.

# Digital evolution

*Ekstra Bladet*, one of Denmark's oldest news publications, is now also one of its most prolific online news producers. **Ivo Burum** looks at how things are changing

“Things have changed so much, so quickly that in three years' time we won't earn any money from our newspaper.” It's a chilling prediction by Poul Madsen, editor-in-chief of Danish print and online tabloid and web TV producer *Ekstra Bladet* (EB). While EB's paper edition still accounts for 70 per cent of the business's revenue, a downward spiral in sales over the past 10 years has led to Madsen's fatalistic approach to print. “We knew that our jobs depended on going digital.”

His primary focus is to “keep journalists, produce strong content and make money”. This has meant developing strategies across four platforms: print, free online, a paid online section called *EKSTRA*, and EBTv, a new web TV channel. And while the price of Danish newspapers means *Ekstra Bladet's* print version still makes money, Madsen is betting that, with up to 750,000 daily visitors to their online site, his digital plan is working.

A key piece of completing the digital jigsaw is coercing journalists into producing mobile video for online stories. But Massimo Grillo, EBTv's executive producer, says it's “an ongoing psychological battle”. Grillo believes many print journalists are initially reluctant to cross the divide, fearing it will result in shoddy journalism. “It's true we can live with the unfocused shot in a good story – we are web TV,” but signposting that “your work is not good, but we'll publish it anyway” is a red rag to journalists.

EB is hoping to allay journalists' fears of a drop in quality with its new site, *EKSTRA*. *EKSTRA* editor Lisbeth Langwadt says it plays to “our quality news traditions, in disclosures, detective journalism, crime investigation, critical consumer journalism, politics and

sports”. A small *EKSTRA* team works to refine stories from EB's print version, focusing on quality journalism that people are willing to pay almost 4 euros a month for.

Langwadt says its dual focus is to convert “existing users into paying customers so we can keep creating journalism that matters and, of course, keep our print journalists.”

Like *EKSTRA*, which wraps traditional and mobile video, audio, photos and graphics around text, the new web TV platform EBTv seeks to develop journalists' skills so they can move from online story to web TV formats.

A first step is to train journalists to *mojo* – to use smartphones to create user-generated content (UGC) and user-generated stories (UGS). *Mojos*, or mobile journalists, shoot, edit and publish directly from the scene using just their smartphones. They can then upload the content through a 3G or 4G network, giving the news editor a number of immediate content and story publishing options.

Thomas Stokholm, the director of EBTv, says one of EBTv's key roles is to assist print journalists to make the jump from *article* to *program*. “TV is a long haul that requires a shift of mindset from the 24-hour cycle to a 365-day operation, where planning is key.”

One journalist who made this shift is Anders Berner, the producer and host of a new motoring format, *Topfart*. “It's a big transition but not as big as I thought,” says Berner. “It's actually a nice feeling when you can evolve yourself and your skills.” Jon Pagh, the host of weekly sports format *Football with Attitude*, agrees, but says enthusiasm is tempered by reality. “If you produce for the paper you talk to two or three sources on the phone and write your story. To produce a video segment you need appointments, you have to inform them before you go, organise the camera, shoot, edit, write the article – basically you are doing everything yourself.”

It's a big difference that Stokholm believes requires “someone with a broadcast DNA who understands the planning, how to work, when to shift to sixth gear”. But Pagh adds that

making the shift in an under-resourced unit can compromise “the quality of the story, the time you spend researching and the people you interview”.

Grillo believes that extra staff and training will help, but what's needed is a change of culture. “It's about making TV first and not thinking we need to make the article first and then stick the pictures around it.”

All content on EB's digital front-page, however, is still referred to as an article. And because this page can be a metre and a half long, stories can get lost. An EBTv web program, which may have taken a week to produce, may be given a spot lower down the site's front page due to its perceived lack of news value.

Imagine, says Grillo, if your TV program was “pulled five minutes before the newscast and you were told you can run it between 9 and 10pm. Try saying that to a broadcaster.”

This clash plays out at the editorial meetings where editors choose and shift stories up and down the front page depending on how they are trending.

“EB is an old publishing house with news traditions,” Berner acknowledges. But he feels “a 15-minute program is a big investment” and needs more time to settle. “If we are only on the front page for two hours we'll only get 5 per cent of our readers.”

Stokholm says people “are coming to *Ekstra Bladet* no matter what,” so editors could “think of slowing (the front page) to let the people stay longer rather than read more articles.”

Madsen is focused on the future. In just two years he hopes to see the eb.dk portal sitting alongside eb24 news and other channels. “We are combining great journalism with our tradition at EB and for me it's a great pleasure to be head of this organisation where we can combine doing it on different media, with mobile or *mojo* at the centre of it all. Yes, there's a plan that will give us a great future.”

**Ivo Burum** is a journalist and TV executive producer who helped EB make the transition from print to mobile and now web TV

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