

## Multimedia metamorphosis

by Erik Bettermann, Director General, Deutsche Welle

Two-thirds of the world's people live in countries with limited freedom of expression and less access to information. Citizen journalism is seen in many areas of crisis and conflict - users are filming, blogging, tweeting and posting via mobile and the Internet, when a connection exists. The expanding reach of broadband around the world is giving people access to a wider selection of content, and to multimedia distance-learning, but many regions lack broadband access, so traditional radio and TV broadcasts serve a vital function.



*Erik Bettermann is the Director General at Deutsche Welle. Germany's international broadcaster it produces news, background information and cultural highlights worldwide. Mr Bettermann came to DW from the Free Hanseatic City of Bremen, where he worked as a Representative for Federal Affairs, European and Developmental Cooperation. Early in his career, he worked as a freelance journalist for several daily newspapers in Cologne and for a newspaper published by the Evangelical church.*

*Erik Bettermann studied philosophy, pedagogy and social pedagogy at the Universities of Cologne and Bonn, as well as the Academy of Economics and Administration in Cologne.*

The benefits of global broadband have been well documented. And while we are excited about the possibilities, we realize that as an international broadcaster that broadband is just one way to reach an audience that varies by region, country and sometimes even city. Deutsche Welle, along with many other broadcasters, needs to make use of all forms of media - and that includes the radio transmissions that we started nearly 60 years ago.

Deutsche Welle has a history that goes back nearly 60 years beginning with radio in the 1950s. As an international broadcaster, we respond and react to the demands of the changing media

markets. Until the 1990s, the broadcasting landscape was to a large extent clearly defined: broadcasters simply produced and transmitted TV and radio programming. The situation has changed significantly.

The rapid change that we have witnessed in the last ten years is like nothing we have seen before. Content is now widely available on the Internet, blogs, podcasts and branches into to portals like YouTube, Facebook and Twitter. New technologies, digitalization and especially the Internet have changed the distribution and consumption of content. There is a general trend towards more mobility and time-independent usage of media.

Moreover, viewers, listeners and users have become active participants, rather than mere consumers. They want to decide when, where, what and how they consume content. Many even produce it, share it and discuss it. Interactivity is on the move, Web 2.0 applications generate new, exciting forms of communication.

If we have learned anything from the past it is that those who want to succeed in the future need to be able to adapt to changing conditions. This is especially true for the media. Some say, that newspapers are becoming the dinosaurs of our generation - something that was unimaginable 20 years ago. This isn't just a matter of paper

**“Life is quickly changing in Africa: education is the key to development, but schools and universities are still rare in Africa. Internet and mobile phone usage continues to grow, yet thousands of people are still cut off from the digital world. Young Africans search for their perspective in a globalized, knowledge-based society and wonder which path will lead them to a successful career or education. For instance, many ask what opportunities for learning and studying are available online and what opportunities globalization has to offer.”**

vs. digital; this is much more. We are talking about a paradigm shift in media consumption - and media entities must examine what is the ‘right’ content and the ‘right’ platform for the ‘right’ target audience.

Where does broadband fit in? We have seen how consumption is moving more and more towards all-digital, all the time. By connecting the world to broadband networks, you create an open market for opinions, perspectives and ideas. By broadening the scope of broadband around the world, we can include even more people in the conversation - and more people are getting involved.

Two-thirds of the people around the world still live in countries with limited freedom of expression and freedom of the press, as well as less access to information. With the expansion of broadband, the media can be instrumental in the realization of human rights. Citizen journalism has already been seen in action in many areas of crisis and conflict. Users are filming, blogging, tweeting and posting via mobile and the Internet, when a connection exists. Obviously, the expansion of broadband will benefit ‘new media’ and social media is putting the user in the forefront - a new form of distributor for news and information.

The international media can highlight alternative perspectives and expand the range of information and the diversity of opinion. The media must live up to its responsibility by making impartial and nonpartisan information available - and not just opinion based. This will become more and more important as it is possible to distribute up-to-the-second news and events from one end of the globe to the other.

However, what many forget in this rapidly changing media environment is that in many parts around the world, people still rely on classic forms of media for information. With regards to distribution, broadband is just one way to reach a given target audience. In Africa, radio has remained one of the most prevalent forms

of broadcast media and Deutsche Welle, along with many other broadcasters, still relies on radio to reach its target audience there. That is the main reason why, when we implemented our multimedia distance-learning programme called Learning by Ear, we wanted something designed to bring knowledge to every corner of Africa. We decided to focus on radio. As Frank-Walter Steinmeier, the former German Foreign Minister, said about the project: “When children can’t go to school, schools have to come to the children.”

Life is quickly changing in Africa: education is the key to development, but schools and universities are still rare in Africa. Internet and mobile phone usage continues to grow, yet thousands of people are still cut off from the digital world. Young Africans search for their perspective in a globalized, knowledge-based society and wonder which path will lead them to a successful career or education. For instance, many ask what opportunities for learning and studying are available online and what opportunities globalization has to offer.

We want to use Learning by Ear to reach out to people in areas with little or no computer and Internet access - nevertheless, it was created so that content could be easily expanded to online platforms and with our series on computers and the Internet, we are prepping them for the future. We have now expanded the programme to Afghanistan - another country that relies on radio.

Still, it doesn’t stop with just individual measures for education. In many regions around the world, the online footprint, as we know it in the Western world, just isn’t as large. For example, in the Arab world, the market for television over satellite remains the most prominent. In many countries there, more than 90 per cent watch television daily. In Southeast Asia, in countries like Bangladesh and Indonesia, more people are accessing the Internet via mobile. In Indonesia, the number of households with broadband connections is on the rise, but many predict that it will only reach 12 per cent

by the year 2018.

There is no cookie-cutter approach to reaching audiences around the globe. Media entities need to adapt their platforms, content and delivery methods to meet the needs of the viewers, listeners and Internet users around the world. By expanding the reach of broadband around the world, many audiences will finally benefit from more freedom of choice - with a wider selection of content, more access to education and new perspectives. But we aren’t there yet. ●



**Connect-World is celebrating its 13<sup>th</sup> anniversary**

Through the years, *Connect-World's* authors told of the rise of mobile, of fibre, of wireless and of broadband; they told of the dot.com meltdown, of digital inclusion and convergence, of standards and breakthroughs, the rise of IP and the fall of switching and of the regulatory turnaround.

In every issue of *Connect-World* heads of state, ministers and regulators, heads of international institutions and leaders of industry speak of what the ICT revolution, as it happens, means to the people in their regions of the world.

[www.connect-world.com](http://www.connect-world.com)