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The use of library footage in the production of television news: a case study of BBC TV's "Newsroom South East" programme.

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Background

The catalyst for this piece of research was the introduction by the BBC in 1992 of a cost accounting scheme known as Producer Choice. Prior to this, all BBC resource departments had their own budgets and provided what was in essence a 'free' service to programme makers.

With the advent of Producer Choice all budgets were transferred to the programme makers themselves. They now hold the purse strings and can choose whether to purchase the services they require from either 'in house' BBC departments, or from outside the Corporation altogether. As a result, all BBC resource departments now have to be self financing within this new, more competitive market place.

The study was based at the Videotape (VT) Library at BBC Elstree. Its main role is to supply moving image material to the local regional news magazine 'Newsroom South East' (NSE). This half hour programme is broadcast from Elstree, Monday to Friday, at 6.30pm.

As a result of Producer Choice, the Elstree Library now relies upon selling its services to NSE. In this new commercial relationship there is a need to be able to quantify the service that the Library provides. It was this need that provided the central impetus behind this research project. The resulting analysis should not only enable the Library to be more conscious of the demands placed upon it by NSE, but should also allow it to demonstrate to the programme makers what an essential role it plays in getting NSE 'on the air'.

Aims

The following were identified as key aims in quantifying the role of the library in supplying material for NSE.

- To establish *how much of NSE* is made up of library footage
- To establish the amount of library footage used by *different types of stories* within NSE. For example, do *Transport* stories place a greater demand on the library than *Sport* stories? This has important implications for decisions on the retention of material.

- To establish the *characteristics* of the library footage used by different types of story. This was achieved by defining the footage used as in one of two ways - as either "stockshot" or "archive". (See under Methodology for definitions of these terms). Again, this has implications for the type of material that should be selected for retention.
- To establish the *source* of all the library footage used. Although the Elstree VT Library is quite extensive, material can also be obtained (through the Elstree Librarians) from many other archives both within and outside the BBC.

Methodology

The fieldwork at Elstree TV Library took place over 12 consecutive days in August/September 1994. This period covered approximately 5% of the total number of editions of NSE broadcast during the year.

Data was collected relating to each of the twelve 6.30pm programmes transmitted during the fieldwork. Two types of measurement were made, relating to:

- The programme as a whole
- The individual stories within each programme

The measurements for the entire programme were relatively straightforward. They involved monitoring the supply of library material during each day, and then noting the amount that made it into the final programme.

The measurements for individual stories were more complex. They were based on classifying each story according to its subject content. Each story was put into one of the following classifications:

- Crime
- Politics
- Sport
- Transport
- Health
- Business
- Education
- Social Affairs
- Environment
- Arts
- General (for any stories that did not fall into the above categories)

Each story was then analysed for the amount of library footage it contained. The characteristic of the library footage was also noted - whether it was archive or stockshot.

For the purpose of this study, archive material was considered to be footage of an event, a person, a moment in history - images which cannot be shot again. For example:

- The poll tax riots
- Ian Wright scoring a goal for Arsenal
- The Kings Cross fire

By contrast, stockshots have a more mundane quality and are used in an essentially money saving role. Why send a camera crew out when perfectly acceptable pictures are already held by the library? Examples are:

- Hospital wards
- School classrooms
- Tube trains

By measuring the amount of either stockshot or archive material it was possible to analyse the particular characteristics of each type of story.

Results

The amount of library footage in NSE

The result of most significance to both librarians and producers alike was the basic percentage of NSE that was library footage. This figure was found to be 14% - which is equivalent to 3 minutes, 38 seconds of screen time in a typical 26 minute edition of NSE.

This demand appeared to be constant - 11 of the 12 programmes studied were made up of between 12% and 18% library pictures.

These figures were slightly lower than a rough estimate of 20% offered by Lee ⁽¹⁾ in the only other paper found that touched on the subject of the re-use of library footage. (Indeed, the remarkable lack of research in broadcast media libraries in general was commented on by Nicholas and Pandit ⁽²⁾).

The demands of different subjects

Three subject areas accounted for almost half the library footage used - crime, sport and transport. Crime stories alone accounted for 26% of the total amount of library material used in NSE. This figure was undoubtedly influenced by the coverage of the Rachel Nickell murder trial, which was extensively reported on the last day of the study.

Sport stories were responsible for 12% of all library footage used. This figure was probably due to a combination of consistent demand (it has a regular 'slot' in the programme), and the nature of the items which often illustrate recent sporting fixtures with pictures from the library. Only one Sports story out of the nine transmitted during the study failed to use library material.

Transport was the other area that stood out. This is a key issue in the region and is given a high profile on NSE, with consequent demand for relevant footage from the library.

Characteristics of different subjects

Overall, 63% of the library material used was "archive" and 37% "stockshot". Interesting trends emerged when looking at different types of story.

Use of archive material was particularly strong in Crime, Politics and Sport - all subjects that lend themselves to footage of people and events. Examples during the study included:

- The Rachell Nickell murder (*Crime*)
- Goals from the 1994 World Cup (*Sport*)
- 1992 General Election canvassing (*Politics*)

By contrast, Health, Business and Transport - which tend to look at 'issues' rather than specific events - were high users of Stockshots. Examples during the study included:

- Hospital exteriors (*Health*)
- Glaxo buildings (*Business*)
- Inter City trains (*Transport*)

Library sources

The study found that, not unnaturally, the Elstree VT Library itself held the majority (73%) of tapes required to service NSE. The rest of the material came from the BBC News Library at Television Centre (11%), the BBC Television Library and Archive (11%), the BBC Sports Library (4%) and BBC Regional Libraries (1%).

These figures underline the excellent moving image resources of the BBC - the supply of library footage for NSE was entirely self contained within the BBC.

Conclusions

The study established that library footage plays an essential role in the production of NSE. It is a common denominator that appears in all types of stories, such as High Court murder trials, local sports items, in depth features and short news pieces. All rely upon library pictures to a varying degree.

The high demand for library material related to Crime, Transport and Sport stories, whilst significant, may not necessarily be a constant long term requirement. News priorities can change throughout the year. For example, political items were thin on the ground during the study due to the Parliamentary summer recess. But at other times of the year they are likely to be the most common type of story.

Of more interest to the Librarian is the differing reliance upon stockshot and archive material. Several subjects showed a distinct preference for one rather than the other, and it is reasonable to assume that this will remain a constant characteristic. This is significant when developing retention and cataloguing policies, particularly of stockshot material. (Archive footage tends to be retained without a second thought). The identification of Transport, Health, Business, Environment and Education as stockshot dependent subjects indicate the type of material that should be targeted for retention.

In a period where broadcasting libraries are increasingly having to justify their existence, the fact that 14% of NSE is library generated material should provide great reassurance to those working

in the Elstree VT Library. It should also serve to remind NSE's Editor and the Elstree Resources Manager of its importance to the programme.

Future developments

Whereas the amount and nature of library footage being used in the programme in the future is unlikely to change significantly, the method of retrieving it will probably alter radically.

Greater user access to the Elstree VT Library catalogue and collection will undoubtedly occur. In the near future reporters are likely to be able to call up the catalogue on their terminals in the Newsroom. In time, the actual pictures themselves will probably be available on-line as well, thanks to digital technology. The new generation of computer literate, multi-skilled journalists will come to expect such sophisticated systems.

Newsroom South East will almost certainly start using digital cameras when it moves to its new base in central London in 1997. This may well act as the catalyst towards a fully digital library service, with consequent far reaching implications for the Elstree VT Library staff and users.

References

1. Lee, David. Educational requirements of librarians and information scientists in British broadcasting. In Michael, J., ed. Curriculum developments in information science to meet the needs of the information industries in the 1990's. London: British Library, 1989, p. 32.
2. Nicholas, David, and Pandit, Pan. What happened to libraries in Independent Television? New Library World. 1994, 95 (1114) p. 4-7.

A comparative analysis of marketing management in British and German university libraries: the results

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This research was originally introduced in this publication in 1994 (issue 61). It focused on a comparison of marketing management in British and German university libraries in the context of their respective environments.

The project consisted of an extensive literature review of all aspects of marketing management, which served as a framework for a set of interviews with library managers in both countries. These respondents were chosen by using a stratified random sampling approach. Ultimately, 23 in-depth interviews with senior managers in both countries were conducted.