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Department of
Journalism

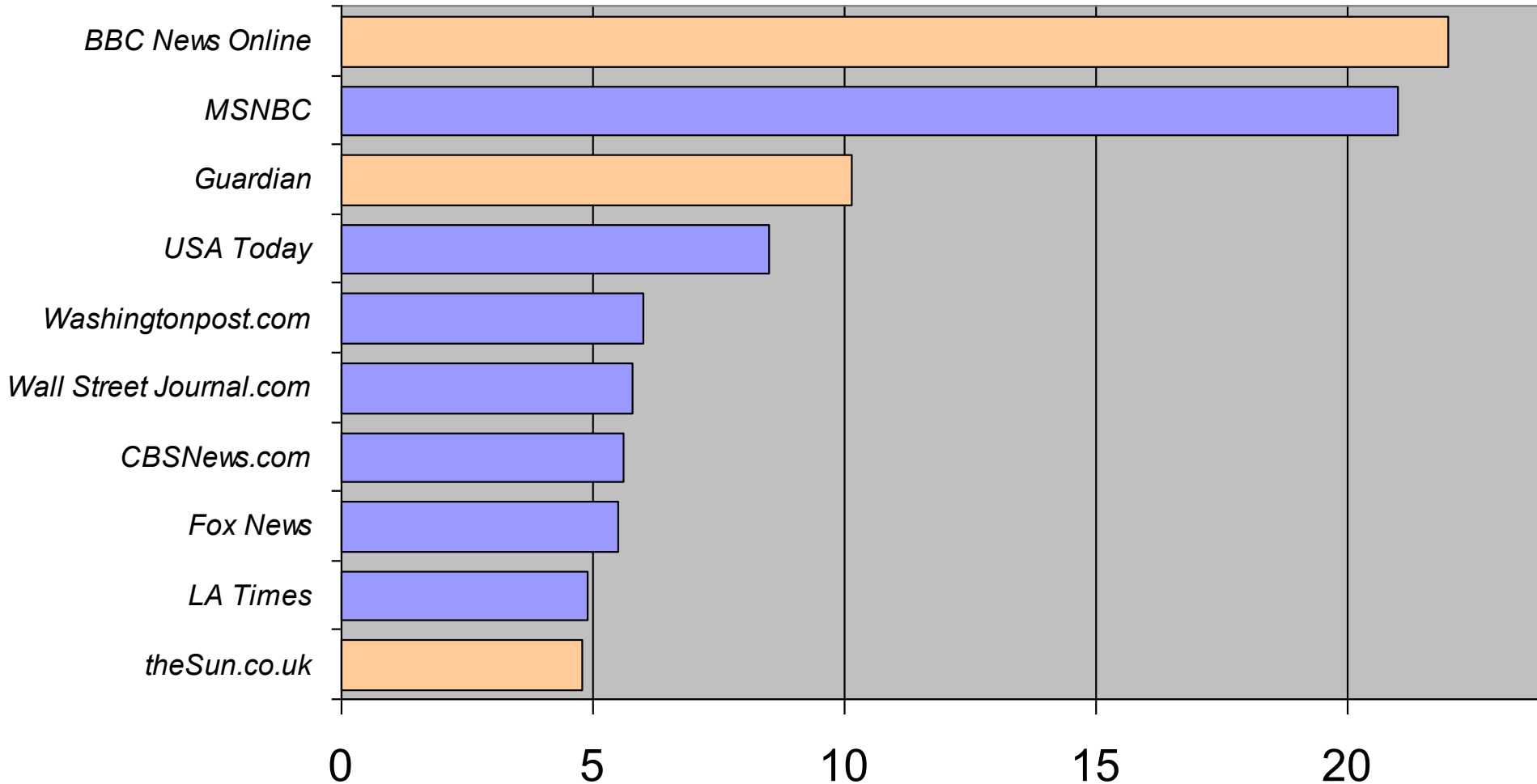
User generated content initiatives at British news websites

Neil Thurman

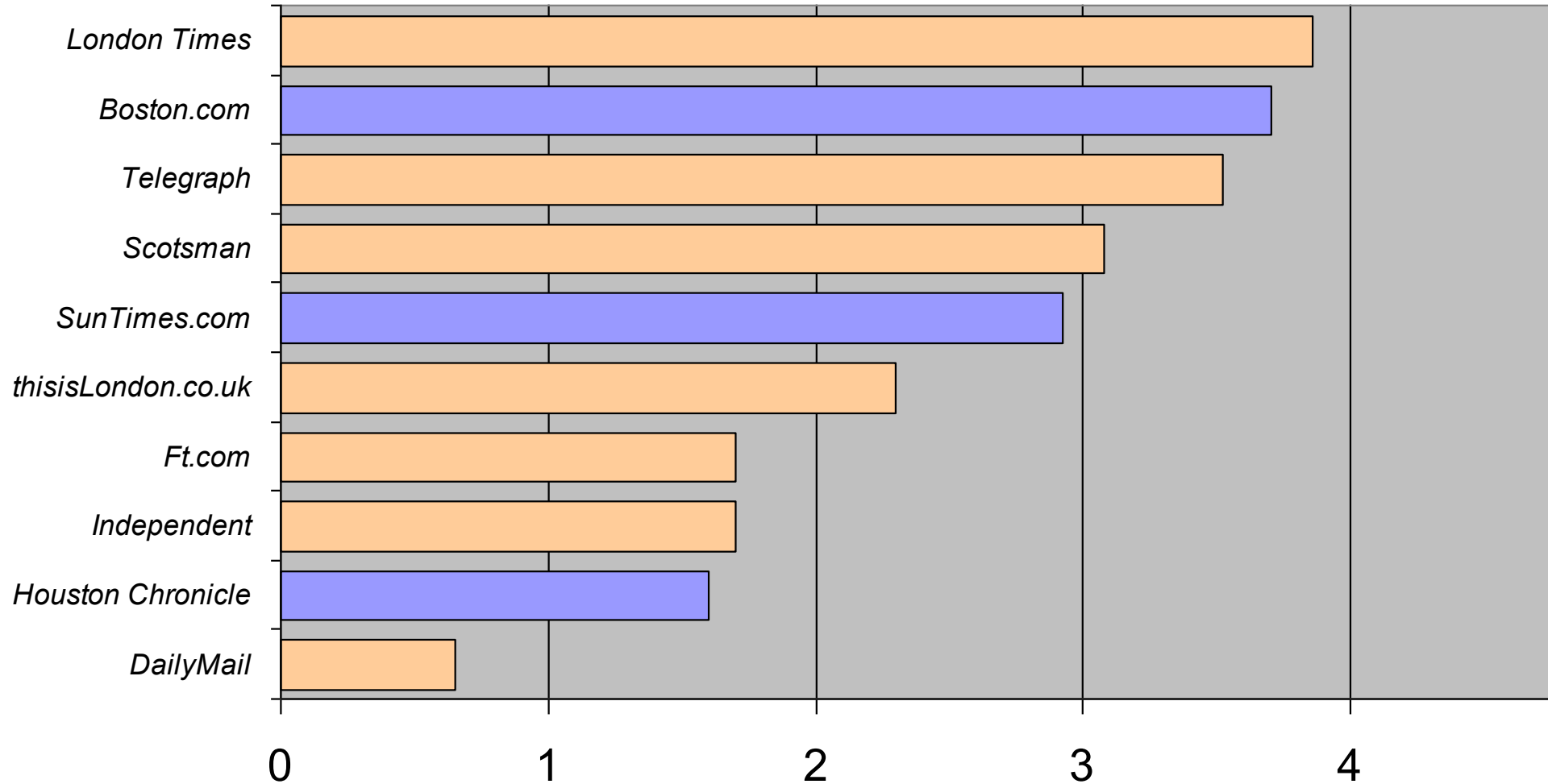
International Citizen Reporters' Forum
Seoul, Korea, 25 June 2005



Monthly Unique Users (4-22 million range)



Monthly Unique Users (0-4 million range)



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Online blog

Friday June 17 2005

 By **Bobbie Johnson** / **Lunatic Tendencies** 09:08am

"PlayStations and television are replacing pets in the modern home," reports [the Scotsman](#):

The percentage of British homes with a pet has fallen from almost 55 per cent in 1999 to 48 per cent today. In some cases, children are even turning to virtual pets instead of the real thing. "The falling number of children has contributed to this decline. What is more, even in those families with children, the demand for pets may not be as strong as it once was, since many children now prefer to immerse themselves in the world of computer games and TV programmes," the study [by Mintel] concluded.

Oh, come on. It's Friday.

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Online: latest technology headlines

[Simon Waldman: Coming to a hard disk near you](#)
[John O'Farrell: What about a little five-card pension?](#)
[Virtual trade gets real](#)
[Student union discount cards for sale on eBay](#)
[Online ticket touts win hands down](#)

Gamesblog: latest news and comment

[Quick mobile gaming round-up](#)
[Snake 'creator' honoured at MEM awards](#)
[\\$26,500 virtual property owner speaks](#)
[Reviewed](#)
[Mobile gaming's answer to E3?](#)

BBC NEWS UK EDITION

Last Updated: Monday, 13 June, 2005, 13:30 GMT 14:30 UK

[E-mail this to a friend](#)

[Printable version](#)

My Day in Iraq: US aid worker

As part of the BBC News website's One Day in Iraq coverage, we heard from people from all walks of life, all over the country.

"Susan", a US aid worker based in Dohuk in the Kurdish autonomous area of northern Iraq, told us about a day spent working with local communities to improve awareness of the burgeoning political system.

“It was the second day of a three-day workshop in Mangesh focusing on the Iraqi constitution and elections.

The night before, I stayed at the home of friends near Dohuk. There were 12 of us sleeping in two rooms on mattresses. Luckily, it was a cool night!

We had problems getting people here from Baghdad as the road is dangerous and we didn't have time to organise flights, but locals managed to



Um Mustufa, hairdresser

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Debate

June 13, 2005

Will extra hours at school be good for children?

The Education Secretary Ruth Kelly has launched a £680 million initiative to keep schools open from 8am to 6pm, with schools running breakfast clubs and a range of after-school programmes. She said the extended hours would help "latchkey kids" and allow schools to become community centres. But teachers' unions question whether the scheme is adequately funded, and whether parents will have to pay. E-mail your view on the new scheme, using the form below

This scheme will benefit middle class working parents, like me, who are prepared to pay for their children to be supervised before or after school, while the parents are still at work. I doubt if it will benefit those "alienated from society" who will have neither the funds nor the inclination to sign their children up. However, as most current after school clubs have great difficulty finding staff to work the hours I can't see that it will ever be available to all children. *Elaine Wintle, Cambridge*

Thank goodness for this. Our daughter starts school in September, at the moment she's thriving in a private nursery. My husband and I both work in flexible jobs, but cannot see how we would be able to continue without relying on friends or neighbours. I'm fed up with people trying to make us feel bad about working and having children - get back to the 50s or wise up to the realities of modern life. *Jo O'Hara, Alderton, Wiltshire*

Long form

Citizen journalism

Short form

Mail ONLINE

« Back to home Login » Register » 17 June 2005

Main sections: **Boards & chat**

Boards & chat
Boards guide
Boards help
Boards map
House rules
Search boards
Internet safety
Report abuse
Terms
Boards log in

Search boards... **GO** » Select board: [Current affairs]

Click for advanced search

Politics

Important! Our house rules **« BACK**

Ou est les europhiles? 10 replies

Posted by: ramblemania on 01/06/05 at 05:56 PM
Just wondering.

Report this post to a moderator **REPLY**

Re: Ou est les europhiles? 0 replies

Posted by: goneforlunch on 01/06/05 at 08:26 PM
> Just wondering.

Drowning their sorrows I expect!

Report this post to a moderator **REPLY**

Re: Ou est les europhiles? 1 replies

Posted by: colonel_bogey on 01/06/05 at 08:33 PM
Plotting how to get their own way without the inconvenience of the people spoiling their power games.

Report this post to a moderator **REPLY**

Quick links

- Weather

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- Register
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99 Can Iraq avoid splitting into separate regions?

Violence in Iraq shows no sign of diminishing in the wake of Iraq's elections. How long should US-led coalition forces remain in the country and can Iraq avoid splitting into separate Kurdish, Sunni Arab and Shia Arab regions?

Hosted by - FT.com **Post reply** **Search**

13 replies All times are BST

Can Iraq avoid splitting into separate regions?

Can Iraq avoid splitting into separate regions? 07 Jun 2005 03:39 PM
by FT.com FT Administrator **FT**

Poll Question:
Can Iraq avoid splitting into separate Kurdish, Sunni Arab and Shia Arab regions?

FT.com discussions feature a representative sample of contributions. Click [here](#) for the discussion rules and guidelines

Choices:
 Yes
 No

Vote now **Vote results**

FT.com 'discussions'
-- 9,433 posts

DailyMail.co.uk 'boards'
-- 1,165,785 posts

“When John Peel died we had, in total, over 100,000 emails. On the first day we had 35,000. Because our approach is to read and sub everything that we put up, we just couldn't cope. We must have delighted about 50 people by publishing their comments but the other 34,500 must have thought, ‘I've spent all this time crafting this beautiful poem and you've just ignored it’”.

Pete Clifton, editor,  News Website

[8 November 2004, telephone call with Neil Thurman]

Have your say

Board Sections: News & City

Current affairs [Start new discussion](#)

Replied	Message title	Started by	Replies
17/06/05	There were 532 anti-Semitic incidents in UK last year	rogerk2	16
17/06/05	So, what did you think of eddy64's thread?	el_wisty	1
17/06/05	Let's form a government	judge_d	22
17/06/05	Whay a non-surprise - Bush and co decided on war for a long time	philno3	0
17/06/05	When Lightning Strikes	connecticut_yankee	10
17/06/05	Michael Jackson: No more boys in bed	judge_d	16
17/06/05	One to make the board Tories weep with joy	judge_d	46
17/06/05	Smash flop	deemus	3
17/06/05	African "Christian" church sacrifices, and gentle Jesus	pipplewis	21
17/06/05	When Lightning Strikes	connecticut_yankee	0

Guardian Unlimited
The talk

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why is the guardian a shit

Topics

- Food and Drink**
42 discussions
- Media**
66 discussions
- IT and computers**
1 folder, 83 discussions
- The haven**
163 discussions

Latest discussions

- [Healthy food for an unhealthy person](#)
Food and Drink - 17/6/05 01:06pm
- [*What* Did You Do Last Night...?](#)
The haven - 17/6/05 01:06pm
- [Ramsay's Kitchen Nightmares](#)
Media - 17/6/05 01:06pm
- [SD cards](#)
IT and computers - 17/6/05 01:06pm
- [Sparkles? They're the new black, dahling...](#)

This is London 'boards'
-- 389,0101 posts

Guardian.co.uk 'talkboards'
-- 1,221,054 posts

Editors' concerns / local constraints

1. Spelling, punctuation, editorial selection, accuracy & balance
2. That introducing blogs would result in a style of journalism more inclined towards personality and opinion
3. Finding the resources required to read and edit users' submissions
4. Uncertain legal environment for publishers hosting open forums
5. The management and professional development of the journalists involved in user generated content initiatives.
6. The information systems involved in the eliciting, processing and publishing of reader contributions.

“[the reason people] buy a newspaper or a magazine is to read a well-crafted news story or feature by someone who is trained and experienced in that field”

Pete Picton, editor, 

[10 December 2004, telephone call with Neil Thurman]

“On any user-invited feedback, most people are making the same point. You'll find that there will only be about, maybe, ten points of view so hundreds and hundreds will all be making the same points in different ways or the same way”

Mike Smartt, ex-editor,  News Website

[25 October 2004, telephone call with Neil Thurman]

“[I] strongly believe ... that there is a premium to be paid for editing experience...readers want you to sift out content for them. That’s why they prefer different brands to others.”

Pete Picton, editor, 

[10 December 2004, telephone call with Neil Thurman]

“99 per cent of the blogs are extremely dull or are of very marginal interest”

Peter Bale, editorial director



[14 December 2004, telephone call with Neil Thurman]

“there are a lot of very mediocre blogs out there”

Richard Deverell,  News Interactive

[3 December 2004, telephone call with Neil Thurman]

“[the contributors were]... a bunch of bigots who were shouting from one side of the room to the other and back again without even bothering to listen to what the other side of the room were saying. If someone did try to put a reasonable, balanced view it was an exception.”

Martin King, editor,



[16 December 2004, telephone call with Neil Thurman]

“we are slightly more comfortable [now that] we are not putting things on the website which we are not happy to have there”

Tracy Corrigan, editor,



[13 December 2004, telephone call with Neil Thurman]

“the message is the only thing that is important. No one knows you, no one cares about you. The reader wants information . . . [the] traditional journalist [.] is a fly on the wall [...] delivering information”

Richard Burton, editor, telegraph.co.uk

[7 December 2004, telephone call with Neil Thurman]

“[bylines are only used] as a reward for special pieces of work, or when we need to make clear who is providing the analysis ... if you put them on every straight news story ... they'd become meaningless”

Pete Clifton, editor,  News Website

[18 March 2005, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/magazine/4361339.stm>]

“reading and subbing everything ... [is] ... just going to get more and more unmanageable over time ... [we] ... cannot carry on devoting the amount of effort that we do At the minute a tiny percentage of the ones we get are actually making it to the site which cannot be right”

Pete Clifton, editor,  News Website

[8 November 2004, telephone call with Neil Thurman]

“[they are] motivated because they just want to write their experiences...the question of getting paid isn't a major issue”.

Mike Smartt, ex-editor,  News Website

[25 October 2004, telephone call with Neil Thurman]

“[user contributions are treated in] a traditional news-gathering way. We interview them, thank them and that would be the end of that”

Pete Clifton, editor,  News Website

[8 November 2004, telephone call with Neil Thurman]

“people love it, they are very loyal to it...the number of pages per visit for those people is very, very high...about forty to fifty per cent of the *DailyMail.co.uk*'s traffic is made up of the [message boards]”

Avril Williams,  

[22 December 2004, telephone call with Neil Thurman]

“[we] were getting very substantial pages impressions.
Something like 20-30 thousand page impressions a week
from just the Middle East chunk [of our message boards but
that was from] about 220 [users]”

Martin King, editor,



[16 December 2004, telephone call with Neil Thurman]

“it's difficult, it's really difficult to get them out of message boards”

Avril Williams,  

[22 December 2004, telephone call with Neil Thurman]

“[we use] intelligent hyperlinks within postings. So if someone writes 'Weller' then that 'Weller' would become a link to the 'Weller' website...[it is the price users] have to pay for their message boards”

Avril Williams,  

[22 December 2004, telephone call with Neil Thurman]

“When the bomb went off in Jeddah and we immediately got an eye-witness account contact us through the web site, which we then put on. That individual ended up being interviewed, I think, on BBC World, Radio 5 Live and World Service”

Richard Deverell,  News Interactive

[3 December 2004, telephone call with Neil Thurman]

“[libel laws are] holding publishers back and certainly give me cause for concern”

Stewart Kirkpatrick, editor, 

[20 December 2004, telephone call with Neil Thurman]

“Maybe we would do more blogs if we had lots of people who had time to write but I think it is difficult to get journalists to commit to doing very long term blogs when they are doing full-time jobs as well”

Tracy Corrigan, editor,



[13 December 2004, telephone call with Neil Thurman]

“What you can end up doing is forcing somebody into something by saying ‘when you are out on this story we want you do a blog’. Reporters are trained in certain ways and they look for certain things, they work to certain deadlines. They work to a brief. Giving somebody an open-ended, ‘have a bit of a rant’ brief doesn't necessarily suit them professionally”

Richard Burton, editor, telegraph.co.uk

[7 December 2004, telephone call with Neil Thurman]

“[I considered a] bulletin board structure...a technological beast in which people can write in and they can be published straight to the web or they can be filtered and monitored [but in the end was] worried [that we would be] going into an area that was just too complicated...the monitoring worried me. The people weren't trained to any discernible standard to watch for problems”

Richard Burton, editor, telegraph.co.uk

[7 December 2004, telephone call with Neil Thurman]

“Blogs worry me. Blogs are the ultimate publishing tool. It means anybody can be a journalist ... this idea with blogs and particularly wikis that you can go in and edit stuff and all join the party. It is a load of fun but it just detracts from what a traditional idea of journalism is. I think we have to be quite careful”

Richard Burton, editor, telegraph.co.uk

[7 December 2004, telephone call with Neil Thurman]

“[it] would be fascinating to hear about day-to-day life in Baghdad. ‘Is it worrying to go out and get your milk and newspaper? What do you do about dropping your kids off at school? Are there days when you don't go out because you think it is too dangerous?’”

Martin King, editor,



[16 December 2004, telephone call with Neil Thurman]

"We are keen to introduce blogging in a way that is different to our rivals and make it relevant for an urban London audience"

Avril Williams,  

[22 December 2004, telephone call with Neil Thurman]

“[blogs can] be useful as a meeting point for some users
and journalists”

Stewart Kirkpatrick, editor, 

[20 December 2004, telephone call with Neil Thurman]

“[blogs can] look quite attractive [they are] something I want to examine”

Richard Burton, editor, telegraph.co.uk

[7 December 2004, telephone call with Neil Thurman]

“We have to accept that we have got to be a bit more relaxed about letting user comments come into a well flagged up area of the site where people will know we haven't gone through these with a fine tooth comb”

Pete Clifton, editor,  News Website

[8 November 2004, telephone call with Neil Thurman]

“We’re looking at software eBay uses called Jivesoft, which would allow readers to access comments in different ways. We would still have the BBC selection which is what we do now but in addition you could invite other readers to rate each comment on how interesting or useful they found it. Then the best ones would rise to the top”

Richard Deverell,  News Interactive

[3 November 2004, telephone call with Neil Thurman]

“[We] thought that we'd be able to depend on those people much more than we can....However well you legally train them, you are not paying them and they are not as effective at policing as we hoped that they would be. At the end of the day we are the publisher, so we have our own team in house and they are our backup team if you like”

Avril Williams,  

[22 December 2004, telephone call with Neil Thurman]

“it's tough, it's not easy. It's been quite a challenge for us, particularly on the Daily Mail, to manage that load and to moderate it effectively”

Avril Williams,  

[22 December 2004, telephone call with Neil Thurman]

Conclusions

- High variance in reader involvement -- reflects legal environment & local personnel, technical & resource conditions
- Editors' attachment to traditional standards not firmly fixed, inhibit less than local conditions.
- Many reader contributions even when tiny % read / published.
- Industry should capitalise on readers good will -- it's a finite resource.
- User forums generate loyalty in niche groups, profitability unproved
- Sites with a public-service ethos / funding most open to user content
- User generated content initiatives often justified in terms of what they bring to the print or broadcast parent: but novelty will wear thin
- Sites should:
 - (1) more fully integrate their user contributions into their mainstream journalistic enterprise
 - (2) find ways of satisfying unmet and growing demand from readers to contribute & be published.

“We have this huge resource of opinion, of really quite vocal readers . . . so how do we get them in the paper? Because if we get their names in the paper they are more likely to buy it”

Stewart Kirkpatrick, editor, 

[20 December 2004, telephone call with Neil Thurman]