

Press

BREAKFAST TELEVISION

This note sets out basic information about breakfast television which will be introduced in the New Year - BBC on January 17; and TV-AM on February 1. The information and judgements set out below are based on meetings held by Heads of Departmental Information Divisions with the production teams of the two programmes.

BBC

BBC have now reached agreement with their trade unions clearing the way for the official launch of breakfast TV on January 17 after some pilot programming from January 3. The programme "Breakfast Time" will be broadcast on Channel 1 five days a week (Monday to Friday) from 6.30 to 9.00am. There will be full news bulletins on the hour at 7, 8 and 9.00am; shorter bulletins every half hour; and headlines on the quarter hour. The emphasis will be on bringing news and current affairs alive with interviews.

TV/AM

The commercial version of breakfast TV will be presented by TV-AM on Channel 3 from February 1, going out for 3¼ hours - 6-9.15am - seven days a week. The first hour, to 7.00am, will be "Daybreak" - a news programme disseminating information as it comes in and updating it minute by minute. The rest of the programme "Good Morning Britain" will go out from 7-9.15am and, as with BBC, will be very much on the lines of the American breakfast TV news magazine format. The weekend programmes are likely to be more relaxed and to have more emphasis on children and sport.

Audience

As many as 8-10m are thought likely to see breakfast TV over the broadcast period and some estimates suggest that 2-2.5m will watch it regularly. The competing channels will aim to get at least 50% of the available audience. The viewing public will not be static. Viewers will dip into breakfast television for up to 20-30 minutes. Initially, the audience is expected to be predominantly young, though with a sizeable proportion of pensioners among regular viewers.

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Both programmes have strikingly similar aims both in regard to style and content. They particularly want to emulate the success, as they see it, of American breakfast TV - which has been repeated in Australia - of "setting the agenda" for the day, especially for political discussion. They will attempt to achieve this by a combination of two things:

- a fast moving, up-to-the-minute programme developing news stories as they emerge and taking further those appearing in the morning newspapers;
- an easy, relaxed, personal approach by their teams of presenters who are likely to work in pairs - Frank Bough, Selena Scott and Nick Ross in the case of BBC; and David Frost, Michael Parkinson, Anna Ford, Angela Rippon and Robert Kee in the case of TV-AM.

Both will cover news and conduct interviews concisely, with the BBC aiming for shorter interviews of 3-4 minutes compared with TV-AM's 6 minutes. They will go for live rather than recorded material and for interviews with participants in their studios rather than through recordings by ENG "doorstep" equipment. Neither intends to pad out with newsreel from wider BBC, ITV or US sources.

In short, each programme intends to do its own thing. This means an early start for their staffs and for Ministers and officials.

Facilities

BBC will have at its disposal the full back up of its organisation. It will therefore be much the better equipped both regionally and in London. This superiority is likely to be reflected in the regional contribution to its programmes. Space is being made available in its programme for regional BBC-TV stations to insert local news and weather. The existing regional network of studios will be available apart from Nottingham, Bangor and Aberdeen.

TV-AM will have studios in Cardiff, Manchester and Glasgow. It will be able to feed material down the line to its London studios.

Both programmes hope that breakfast TV will quickly establish an important platform for politicians in order to persuade them - and others - to go to their studios for interviews - Lime Grove (BBC) and Camden (TV-AM).

Studio interviews will invariably be preferred to Norman Shaw (only available to BBC) and ENG/studio "doorstep" vans.

As an "incentive" to people to go to Lime Grove, BBC is providing a new studio in the same building for the BBC Radio 4 "Today" programme. By offering two interviews for one trip it is hoping to make BBC breakfast TV particularly worthwhile for Ministers seeking to put over a point of view.

Staff

Apart from their presenters - who are the key to the operation because they will not merely provide the cement and continuity but will also conduct interviews - each programme will have its own dedicated staff.

BBC breakfast TV will have its own news reporters but will make full use of the existing BBC Parliamentary reporting team. TV-AM regards itself as an integral and separate news gathering programme and is establishing a team for that purpose, including a correspondent in Ireland, based in Belfast. It will have a political editor in the Lobby.

Analysis

Breakfast TV is an unknown quantity and has an uncertain future. The expectations of those employed in it seem to have been scaled down with the approach of the launch. But it is predicted to have a lasting impact on the British way of life and to attract cumulatively a sizeable audience, particularly among the young and retired and in the regions outside London where there is potentially a more leisurely start to the day because people live closer to their work.

Breakfast TV is deliberately aiming to influence the day's thinking and discussion - to set out the day's agenda - even though it will attract only a minority audience. The timing of its launch is politically opportune since we are now in the run-up to a General Election. This - and TV-AM's need to make a profit, starting at the bottom of a deep recession - will intensify competition in the media not merely between newspapers, radio and TV and between radio and TV but also between TV Channels.

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There will be considerable pressure on Ministers to appear on breakfast TV and the timing and requirements of TV, as distinct from the other media, will impose new and possibly unwelcome demands on them. But given the ambitions of breakfast TV to set the agenda for the day, and the attraction this is likely to have for pressure groups and zealots in all walks of life, it will be important to ensure that the Government's voice does not go by default.

Breakfast TV is also likely to increase the coverage of Parliament after 10.00pm and consequently to provide more broadcasting opportunities for backbenchers.

Breakfast broadcasting poses particular difficulties of balance because of the transient and changing nature of the audience. TV will seek to maintain it over a period though not necessarily within the same programme. Information staffs will try to concentrate Ministerial appearances in what is expected to be the peak breakfast viewing period of 7.30-8.30am.

It is too early in advance of any experience of breakfast TV to consider whether there might be advantage in gearing publications and news which can reasonably be announced outside Parliament to this medium. The possibility will however be kept under review.

BBC hope to plan 60-70% of any day's programme in advance partly because they may be more magazine oriented in approach than TV-AM's concentration on news and its analysis. But the force of any day's programme will be in its treatment of immediate news issues as set out in the morning newspapers or generated by events overnight in the Far East or in the United States. This emphasises the problem of briefing Ministers early in the day for an appearance on breakfast TV and underlines the importance of Ministers preparing to handle the advent of breakfast TV with their officials.

Ministers are urged to discuss with their Information Divisions their approach to breakfast TV; the handling of requests for a Ministerial/Departmental view (which are being channeled through press offices); and the availability of informed and supportive Backbenchers when it is felt that Ministers cannot or should not respond to invitations.

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Conclusions

Breakfast TV offers a new and potentially important opportunity to the Government to explain its policies and measures. Ministers will need to ensure that the Government's point of view does not go by default.

Ministers are urged to prepare for the advent of breakfast TV in early consultation with their Information staffs.

30 December 1982