

FROM THE INDUSTRY

A Conversation

WITH STEPHEN NUTTALL, CHAIR, IBC

BY MELISSA COGAVIN, BROADBAND JOURNAL



STEPHEN NUTTALL IS THE CHAIR OF THE IBC (INTERNATIONAL BROADCASTING CONVENTION), BRINGING EXTENSIVE EXPERIENCE IN BROADCAST AND MEDIA INNOVATION. AS A STRATEGIC LEADER, HE OVERSEES IBC'S MISSION TO SHAPE THE FUTURE OF CONTENT CREATION, DISTRIBUTION, AND TECHNOLOGY. IN AN INTERVIEW WITH BROADBAND JOURNAL, STEPHEN REFLECTS ON THE EVOLVING BROADCASTING LANDSCAPE AND IBC'S ROLE IN DRIVING INDUSTRY TRANSFORMATION.

WELCOME TO YOUR NEW ROLE. HOW ARE YOU GETTING ON?

I was attracted to the role of Chair of IBC because the event is all about shaping what's next, not just reacting to it, but trying to lead the change. With my background at Sky and Google I've always been most at home in businesses that are relentlessly innovative. The scope of our industry has widened hugely in the last few years – there are streamers, broadcasters, international businesses creating their own content and there is new talent coming into the industry all the time.

IBC has amazing convening power. If we can be a good destination for innovation, inspiration, and collaboration, then that's an exciting opportunity for us. The brightest minds in media and entertainment share knowledge, create solutions, forge the future of content, and IBC is the catalyst for it all. That was the reason that I was interested in becoming Chair. But as non-exec Chair, I'm here to encourage, support, be useful; to inspire, to be inspired and to learn from my fantastic executive team.

IBC IS SUCH A POWERFUL BRAND THAT DOESN'T SEEM TO HAVE ANY ONE IMAGE ATTACHED TO IT.

We're lucky. It seems to be one that is able to move with the times. Well, I think that's one of the strengths of the show. It's owned by the industry and it's for the whole industry. It genuinely appeals to the whole business, from film to TV, but it's important to content creation, postproduction, distribution, streaming. With 14 halls and more than 1,250 exhibitors, a narrow focus doesn't work.

DIVERSITY IS THE SHOW'S STRENGTH, IN OTHER WORDS. WHAT THEMES ARE ON THE AGENDA?

The way that people consume content is changing so much. Across the whole media entertainment industry, we are experiencing an accelerated shift from AI and automation to new content models, to shifting market dynamics. You can see TF1 putting its linear channels on the Netflix platform, for example, so that's an

interesting new market dynamic. YouTube is embracing broadcasters and vice versa; a new market dynamic. Employing AI to create either better content, as EVS is using AI to enhance replays for sports events or using AI to make the most of the resources that you have in efficiency terms.

Shaping the future in these ways is really exciting; the industry is actively redefining itself. AI is now just a part of editorial workflows and personalisation. Platforms are fragmenting, there is a rethink of commercial models because ad-funded broadcasting is undergoing some pretty significant changes. The pay TV bundle has exploded and now is reactivating in a slightly different form. Content experiences are changing. You can watch in UHD, you can watch in an immersive format now.

The net result of all this is countless opportunities for new approaches to growth and for talent development, bringing the next generation of people through into the industry. IBC is intended to meet all of that.

WHAT ARE THE STATS FOR THIS YEAR SO FAR?

We have attendees from 170 countries, 14 halls across the RAI Exhibition Centre, 44,000 square metres of space already. The list of exhibitors is growing all the time; *[at the time of writing]* it is 1100, a record number so far. We've got an amazing lineup of new and also familiar names all telling their stories at the event to what should be hopefully a record attendance.

We're anticipating a vibrant and well-attended event that reflects the energy and diversity of our global industry.

TELL ME HOW YOU GOT INTO THE BUSINESS.

I studied applied physics at university, so I'm logical and numerate, and I became a management consultant in the media industry when I graduated. Media people are challenging, entrepreneurial, entertaining, I liked working with them. I did an MBA at Bocconi in Milan, I went to UCLA, to the film school as well as the business school. My first job in the TV industry was at Telepiù in Italy, where we launched the first digital platform in Europe; it's now better known as Sky Italia.

Then I was at Sky in the UK for 10 years as Group Commercial director. Then onto Google, where I was responsible for the EMEA region for YouTube. Lots of diversity and change within all that and working in different countries.

YOU MUST HAVE WITNESSED A LOT OF CHANGE IN THAT TIME.

Indeed; since graduating from Bocconi where I did my MBA, I've not had a job that existed when I left Nottingham with a physics degree. My science degree has been quite handy in the end. I'm still quite committed to making science a sort of bigger part of everybody's everyday lives, because I'm also a trustee of the Royal Institution, because of my general belief that if there was a bit more science, a bit more data and a few more facts in life, that would be a good thing.

I AGREE. NOT THAT LONG AGO WE WERE BEING TOLD 'THE COUNTRY HAS HAD ENOUGH OF EXPERTS,' AFTER ALL. HOW HAS THE INDUSTRY EVOLVED OVER THE YEARS?

Technological change has enabled previously siloed sectors of the industry to communicate better. You can watch video on your phone or streamed on your television now. Some of the original experiments to set up TV took place just around the corner from the Royal Institution in London; John Logie Baird's original offices were in the building that is now Bar Italia in Soho. And around the corner, Michael Faraday was discovering the electron at the Royal Institution. There's a long tradition in London of mixing the creative with the scientific; the molding of what's possible technologically, using that technology to tell stories. AI is just the latest in a series of many technological changes which continue to define our industry.

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THERE IS SPECULATION ABOUT AN EMERGING SKILLS GAP IF AI TAKES AWAY ENTRY-LEVEL POSITIONS IN MEDIA, AND WHAT HAPPENS TO SENIOR POSITIONS DOWN THE LINE WHEN THERE IS NOBODY THERE TO FILL THEM. WHAT ARE YOUR THOUGHTS?

I like to quote Amara's Law. Roy Amara was a computer scientist, born the same year as John Logie Baird produced that first television transmission in 1925. He said that the impact of new technology is overestimated in the short term and underestimated in the long term. I have a glass-half-full approach to this. Tech businesses have always made the most of what's possible, they look at the potential ahead; they aren't legacy businesses. They are relentless about progress and doing the right thing for their customers. My view is if you do the right thing for your customers, everything else will flow from there.

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'Amara's Law'

WHAT IS POSSIBLE? WHAT ARE YOU SEEING THIS YEAR?

In Hall 14, you will see how AI is moving from the conceptual to the practical, from everything from live production automation, generative content tools and new uses, LED backdrops and virtual worlds, augmented reality, real-time VFX. Exhibitors include Amazon, Google, Microsoft, Mo-Sys, 3Play, CaptionHub, Monks, Tata, Veritone and the Ultra HD Forum.

TELL ME ABOUT THE ACCELERATOR PROGRAMME.

We've got nine accelerator projects tackling some of the industry's toughest challenges, with unlikely consortia in some cases of people working together to solve those problems. There's a future tech stage sponsored by Microsoft. There's a two-day Hackfest done in conjunction with Google Cloud with an incredible attendee list; a roll call of the biggest names in the industry collaborating together. There's a Google AI penalty challenge, like a football fan experience, using 15 different integrated technologies to showcase AI-driven decision making and sports performance.

HOW ARE YOU CELEBRATING 100 YEARS OF TELEVISION?

We have an exhibit that looks back and celebrates great things that have happened in the last 100 years and all the progress there has been but also offers a glimpse into what the next 100 years might bring. The fact that for YouTube, TV is the most watched screen means that actually the future of television is pretty bright. As is the future for the cinema industry. It's far from the doom and gloom you hear about.

THE MEDIA LOVE NOTHING MORE THAN TO REGULARLY REMIND YOU THAT CINEMA IS ABOUT TO DIE.

The people at YouTube and Netflix are very positive about the future of the media industry. On average, the industry's growing slowly but it is growing, which belies the fact that there's stunning growth in some sectors of the industry. The box office for the first half of this year has been fantastic. I've been to the cinema twice this week alone. Other areas are doing a bit less well than they used to. You need to focus on the positives; IBC is very good





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at that. So, it's reinventing itself, trying to shape the future of the industry. That's what we're here for, to be a meaningful force for those discussions to happen.

WHAT'S HAPPENING AT THE CONFERENCE THIS YEAR?

There are three themes for the agenda for the conference: transformative technology, shifting business models, and the third concerns people and purpose. We have the CTO of Warner Brothers Discovery, ABC, Fremantle, Sling TV, YouTube, Channel 4, ITV, Sky Deutschland, TikTok and ProSieben confirmed as speakers and more joining the lineup all the time. We've got a terrific mix of technologists, content creators, distributors and analysts. We're thinking about how the ad sales industry will evolve and change as the broadcast industry is reshaped. Then there is the technical paper programme, which is part of the DNA of IBC, and brings us back to the point about science being a driver for so much of this. I feel proud that the technical paper programme is part of the convening power that I talked about. It's the rhythm of the year for a lot of people. It's part of our heritage and an important thread within the whole community.

WHAT ARE YOUR VIEWS ON THE TERRESTRIAL TV SWITCH OFF?

We should embrace progress. The terrestrial TV switch off is coming. I suspect Amara's Law may apply again here; it'll probably take a lot longer to happen than anybody really believes for a whole host of reasons, including digital inclusion and making sure people don't get cut off from current affairs, but it will happen. But the television is now the most watched screen for YouTube, followed by the mobile and then the computer. When I joined YouTube in 2012, the computer was the most watched screen, then the mobile was growing, and TV was this thing in the corner that nobody really focused on. Television's good at reinventing itself. I'm not sure how you would define television these days, but you certainly wouldn't define television as being a broadcast, linear channel distributed by a broadcast medium.

That wasn't so long ago. We will both remember Channel 4 launching in the UK as the fourth national channel. I used to work with someone who was the controller of Icelandic television in the 1970s; there was only one channel which only ran five days a week and only for a few hours a

day, because they were concerned about the distraction that having TV on all the time would cause. Jonas basically decided what the entire country would watch.

THERE WAS CONCERN AROUND Y2K AND THEN IT CAME AND WENT SEAMLESSLY; A LOT OF PEOPLE SAID, "WELL, THERE WAS OBVIOUSLY NOTHING TO WORRY ABOUT, WAS THERE?" WELL, ONLY BECAUSE OF THE ADVANCE PREPARATION. WHAT PREPARATION WILL BE REQUIRED FOR TELEVISION?

The switch off will have a lot of knock-on consequences, not least the license fee model needing to be redefined. Ongoing access to multiple sources of impartial news and current affairs is critical for democracy. How terrestrial TV could either be reduced in scope or completely eliminated will be policy questions to consider. The older audience in particular is very loyal and reliant on linear TV, plus it's important that the ubiquity of public service broadcasting is maintained.

With YouTube now easily eclipsing viewing figures among the under 35's for BBC iPlayer, never mind terrestrial television, it is clear that Jonas' job description is a world away from the sophisticated viewing habits of today's audiences, who will find government intervention like that of 1970s Iceland incomprehensible. The pace of change is bewildering; audiences are keeping up a lot better than the decision makers much of the time, often setting the pace themselves, one of the biggest challenges the industry faces. IBC's continued stewardship of the innovation, communication, business and policy of broadcast and streaming will be vital as we turn this next historic corner, remembering to bring everyone with us on this journey.

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