



Media Minutes
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TRANSCRIPT

Where's the Video?

People around the world are communicating with video on two billion computers and more than one and a half billion television sets.

Surely that means our television networks – the folks who rely on video – are keeping up with the video revolution? Not exactly, says a recent article in the Columbia Journalism Review by veteran TV reporter David Marash.

Marash's investigation found U.S. TV news is turning away from video reporting. Instead, networks are substituting arguing pundits, conversations among anchors, so-called "experts" who expound on what a situation *might* be like from afar.

David Marash: *So instead of reporting from the field, you're getting discussing from the studio, or the university office, or anywhere but the field.*

The Center for Excellence in Journalism helped Marash compile the data. While ABC, CBS and NBC have all cut back their use of video reporting over the last four years, CNN's numbers are the most dramatic. In 2007, 46 percent of CNN's programming consisted of video packages. By 2011, it dropped to 18 percent.

David Marash: *What gets covered and how it gets covered is first and foremost a budgetary question these days rather than a journalistic imperative. Now there never was a Candy Cane Land where budgets didn't matter. But I think it's safe to say that they matter more today than they did when I got into the business, which was 50 years ago.*

Marash says the move away from on-the-ground reporting is troubling.

David Marash: *You gotta be there to be there. You can't dial this stuff in. You can make stuff out of what you can get by dialing it in. And the networks and the cable channels are getting better at this. You clip some video from here and some video from there and some pieces from your file and you put a stand-up in it and you try your best to make sense of the story. But that's quite different from truly covering the story. And to cover the story, you gotta be there.*

Marash worries about the endless hours of bitter, angry feuding that now gets prominent airtime in lieu of actual reporting.

David Marash: *I think that television news, along with radio talk, has facilitated a culture of clash and conflict rather than civility and reason. We've modeled shouting at one another. We don't model talking reasonably together.*

Still Wasted After All These Years

Newton Minow: *I invite each of you to sit down in front of your own television set when your station goes on the air, and stay there for a day. Without a book, without a magazine, without a newspaper, without a profit and loss sheet or a rating book to distract you. Keep your eyes glued to that set until the station signs off. I can assure you that what you will observe is a vast wasteland.*

It's been 50 years since Newton Minow, President John F. Kennedy's Federal Communications Commission chairman, delivered his first speech to the National Association of Broadcasters. In addition to his memorable line about television, Minow issued a stern directive to the nation's broadcasters.

Newton Minow: *Gentleman, your trust accounting with your beneficiaries is long overdue. You must provide a wider range of choices: more diversity, more alternatives. It is not enough to cater to the nation's whims. You must also serve the nation's needs.*

This week, Harvard University's Berkman Center for Internet and Society revisited Minow's controversial speech and its relevance in this digital age where technologies are creating dramatic shifts in news and entertainment. Minow, now 85, addressed the audience of Harvard professors, journalists, media critics and other former FCC commissioners.

Newton Minow: *There's been a fundamental, basic transformation in the world of communications. And yet, there has been very little thinking about what that really means.*

Minow felt then – and still believes – the government's role is to expand choice. He worked to open up the UHF band for TV channels, expand cable and shoot telecommunications satellites into space.

He has remained involved with the public interest and civic responsibility since his time at the FCC. He expressed his concern about how television and money drive the political process.

Newton Minow: *Today's politics is dominated by money. Most candidates spend most of their time raising money. Why do they need the money? They need the money so they can*

buy radio and television time. So they're buying, they're raising money from the public to get access to something the public owns – the airwaves. It's a crazy system. We're one of the few countries in the world that does not provide public service time to candidates.

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