

# BBC online sacks 360 staff in cutbacks

A nail in the coffin of the BBC's online presence was announced by BBC Director-General, Mark Thompson, today. The BBC is to reshape **BBC Online** by 2013 to deliver its public service mission in the digital age.

The reorganisation will mean the service licence budget for BBC Online is reduced by a quarter. It will also require the closure of up to 360 posts, which is about a quarter of its workforce. The other key points are that the BBC will no longer dwell on celebrity type reporting online, and they will try to encourage click-throughs to external sites where the story is told by others, and perhaps more fully.

The new plans, which set a much clearer digital agenda for the BBC, are the first step in the delivery of the BBC's strategy, **Putting Quality First**.

The changes, which have been approved by the BBC Trust, are promised to deliver:

- A better quality service based on the BBC's five editorial priorities
- A 25% reduction in service licence budget and a halving of the number of Top Level Domains
- Commitments and clarity on what the BBC will and will not do online
- A pledge to engage with industry twice a year about its plans
- Action to double the number of referrals to external websites by 2013/14 to around 22m each month

Under one unified strategy, BBC Online will be transformed into 10 distinctive products: News, Sport, Weather, CBeebies, CBBC, Knowledge & Learning, Radio & Music, TV & iPlayer,

Homepage and Search. Each of them will share common technical features such as consistent design, improved navigation, and the ability for licence fee payers to personalise and access them across a range of devices, from computers and mobiles to tablets and TVs.

To deliver the new BBC Online, the BBC will implement new ways of working around product management, including enhanced collaboration between teams from editorial, technical, design and audience research.

BBC Director-General **Mark Thompson** said: "BBC Online lies at the heart of the BBC's digital future. As in television and radio, licence fee payers look to the BBC to inform, educate and entertain them online. As digital technologies advance, internet delivery of content becomes more important and more profound in our lives.

"BBC Online is a huge success, but our vast portfolio of websites means we sometimes fall short of expectation. A refocusing on our editorial priorities, a commitment to the highest quality standards, and a more streamlined and collegiate way of working will help us transform BBC Online for the future.

"I know that these changes will be painful for affected staff. But I firmly believe that they are right for the BBC at this time."

The BBC is also announcing a reduction in scale and scope of the website and is spelling out areas of refocus, closures and reductions, along with clarity on areas BBC Online will not cover at all.

Editorial focus of the new BBC Online:

- High quality news focused on up-to-the-minute news updates backed up by rich multimedia content from correspondents across the UK and the world

- BBC News Entertainment & Arts section will have more culture and arts coverage
- Dynamic 'editions' of BBC Online for each Nation that reflect the interests of the audience
- Clearer focus of local sites on news, sport, weather and travel
- Sport will focus on fast, reliable and in-depth news and dynamic coverage of the best live events that bring the nation together
- Safe, creative spaces for children
- A single merged offer in Knowledge & Learning, making the most of BBC content, from science to literacy, arts to maths – for adults pursuing a passion or brushing up a basic skill, and for children learning at home and school
- Radio will focus on live output, and the discovery of new music as played and recommended by BBC DJs and iconic musicians
- BBC iPlayer will be reshaped into a unified television offer, bringing together TV channels, programme information and live and on-demand content
- Selected archive content will be featured in TV & iPlayer and Radio & Music

The BBC is announcing a set of closures and reductions as follows:

- The closure of half of the 400 Top Level Domains (with 180 closing ahead of schedule later this year)
- The replacement of the majority of programme websites with automated content
- The automation of bespoke digital radio sites 1Xtra, 5 Live Sports Extra, 6 Music and Radio 7
- The closure of RAW, Blast, Switch, Video Nation and the disposal of h2g2
- The removal of non-News features content from Local sites

- A substantial reduction in showbusiness news on the News website
- Fewer News blogs, with more focus on the updates from leading editors and correspondents
- A reduction in the overall amount of Sports news and live sport
- Stand-alone forums, communities and message boards and blogs to be reduced and replaced with integrated social tools
- The closure of the 606 community site and the closure of the BBC iPlayer message board

BBC Online will not:

- Launch its own social network
- Offer specialist news content for specialist audiences
- Publish local listings
- Develop encyclopaedic propositions in Knowledge
- Provide continuing professional development materials for teachers or a managed learning environment for schools
- Become a video-on-demand aggregator in BBC iPlayer, although it will link to other on-demand providers
- Produce online-only music sessions
- Offer track-by-track music streaming
- Invest in exclusive online sports rights

The BBC Online service licence budget will be reduced by £34m from £137m today to £103m by 2013/14. As a result, there will be up to 360 proposed post closures which will be phased in over the next two years.

As announced by the BBC Trust in December last year, BBC Online's three-year strategy and business plan will be reviewed annually by the BBC Trust. In addition, BBC Online will engage with industry twice a year about its plans.