

Edinburgh International Book Festival – Alan Rusbridger



Alan Rusbridger former editor of The Guardian oversaw some of the key moments in the paper's history, and it became evident in the course of today's talk that there was collaboration with The New York Times. He was chatting with David McCraw who is Deputy General

Counsel at The New York Times, the newest sponsor of the Book Festival.

Both have written books. Rusbridger's book is called Truth Costs Money and McCraw wrote Truth in Our Times. During the event itself we did not really hear so much more about what is contained in either book, but there was a lot of discussion nonetheless.

If you knew nothing about Snowden or Wikileaks, then some of what was discussed would have gone over your head. But then we all do know a little about everything, it just depends on your source what you know and how that news is slanted.

As far as Julian Assange is concerned there is a mutual dislike Rusbridger confirmed. He also said that Assange does not believe in traditional 'gatekeepers' (editors of papers and news broadcasts are referred to as gatekeepers), preferring instead to simply dump the information for all to read without any explanation or interpretation. Rusbridger does not think that process is a good one. He regards Snowden, who also leaked documents, slightly differently, saying that what he uncovered was important to know, and that Snowden was respectful of editors and the press.

It transpires that David Cameron, the then Prime Minister, tried to stop The Guardian from publishing, which only resulted in the Snowden papers being published in the US by the New York Times instead.

So there were a number of times that the two titles collaborated on production of news stories, but where they differ relates to money.

The New York Times runs on a subscription or paywall system (as anyone who has come to Charlotte Square Gardens can tell

you – they will give you a free tote bag if you sign up). The Guardian meanwhile runs on a donation basis, with the 1 million who contribute in this way regarding the paper as a ‘public good’.

It was reported in the Washington Journal last week that Facebook is entering into an arrangement with news outlets to pay them for news stories which then get published on Facebook. This might go some way to helping out ailing news titles – even The Scotsman is up for sale. Facebook already allocated \$6 million towards something called the Community News Project in the UK.

This is a collaboration with a number of news organisations including Newsquest and the National Council for the Training of Journalists (NCTJ), to train “community journalists”. At least two community journalists work in the Edinburgh Evening News newsroom right now. They are to be offered training with the NCTJ although their salaries are underwritten by Facebook.

None of this was touched on during the talk today, instead Rusbridger said that he wished Facebook and other social media companies like Google would pay taxes, that what is called ‘fake news’ is not generated by journalists but by other organisations, and that news has to be more open and more of a dialogue. He admitted however that however bad Facebook is at invading privacy or spreading racism, it can be a lifeline for people in countries where democracy is still an aspiration.

He seemed to echo some of the sentiment of the [Cairncross Review](#) when he concluded by saying : “We have to start reframing news as a public service. There has to be a clean source of information and that is where the debate has to go. But, we have to work out a different way to pay for it.”

Sadly for The Edinburgh Reporter and other hyperlocals like us, even the lofty Alan Rusbridger who claims that a lack of local news and local scrutiny will lead to ‘terrible

problems', doesn't seem to have worked that one out yet.



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