NEWS REPORTS ARE SENT OUT to 210 countries and territories around the world, and in the United States, as well, from the CNN International studio and newsroom. In fact, today CNNI has 85 million subscribers—even more subscribers than CNN has in the United States. CNN International has been in service since 1985, but has experienced most of its growth since the Persian Gulf War. Currently, there are approximately 16 live broadcasts daily from this studio that go to Europe, Asia, Africa, the Pacific and North America. CNNI newscasts also come out of Washington, London, New York, and Hong Kong. As at CNN and Headline News, the anchor desk is open to the newsroom, allowing us to use this working newsroom as the backdrop to the anchor desk, and to bring the viewer right inside the immediacy of the newsroom environment.∗

The International Audience

Throughout the Iraqi occupation, CNN was being monitored in Kuwaiti City by the Iraqi forces and by Kuwaitis who were resisting the occupation. There was a woman who was able to watch CNN in her house. She was a resistance leader. Still, this woman called us. She had a satellite telephone in her house. Then they [the calls] stopped coming. We knew and the woman knew there was great risk in calling CNN to give these eyewitness accounts. We found out after the war had been concluded that the Iraqis had actually tracked her down and tortured her to death for the crime of calling CNN and giving her eyewitness account. I was sick.1

Zola Murdock sits in the middle of the newsroom. Surrounding her are the noise and activity of journalists talking on telephones, news writers working at computers, news anchors consulting on scripts, assignment editors ordering satellite feeds, and, peering down from the catwalk above, the visiting public touring One CNN Center, Atlanta. As director of Public Information at CNN, Murdock oversees a staff that spends its days answering telephones, responding to faxes and e-mail, and working through stacks of cards and letters that pour into CNN Center every day.

Murdock is strategically situated between the National and International Desks, which are the primary newsgathering operations in the expansive CNN newsroom. Her location is more than just a symbolic gesture to communicate CNN’s interest in

∗ http://cnn.com/StudioTour/StudioTour6.html

listening to its audience. Viewers can alert CNN journalists to stories they don’t yet know about, especially breaking news stories. CNN news managers also know that viewers are quick to recognize a mistake. If any detail—in a name, a title, or a place—that goes out over the air is incorrect or misleading, CNN viewers will be the first to relay the mistake to the network. And given CNN’s round-the-clock operation, corrected information—whatever the source—can be integrated into the story the next time it airs, according to Stephen Cassidy, a manager on the International Desk.

The nice thing about TV is that, if you make a mistake in a newspaper and they flop that newspaper up on your front step, that mistake lives for 24 hours, until the next newspaper arrives. But if we make a mistake on CNN, well maybe we can fix it next hour and in hours thereafter. We are more organic.2

Murdock’s Public Information department in Atlanta consists of six people, but as many as 30 people a day may be working telephones and answering mail. She hires mainly CNN staff—typically VJs (“video journalists”)—to work overtime. Working hours are 7 A.M. to 10 P.M. but during times of intense news activity, such as the aftermath of the Olympic Park bomb explosion, the telephones are staffed 24 hours a day. On August 14, 1996—a fairly typical day—her report for the day shows that CNN received 840 telephone calls, 116 pieces of mail, and 920 items online. Each contact is counted and logged. Every member of Murdock’s staff turns in a report each day, from which a daily summary is prepared and hand-delivered to the executives. A copy circulates to all staff through the company’s internal computer network. Murdock also prepares a weekly cumulative report, which is sent to Ted Turner and a select group of company managers.

Feedback from viewers outside of the United States is summarized in a separate daily international report, which is prepared by one of Murdock’s staff members, Dana Caghan. In her report for August 17, 1996, Caghan wrote:

President Clinton received happy birthday wishes from abroad. A viewer from Belgium said, “It is a very special day today. Today Clinton is 50 years young. We also believe on the occasion of this special day that such a young, dynamic and strong president will remain in power at least for another four years. One commented, “I can’t believe Clinton is still going to have a party when his people were killed today.”3

Also noted in the report was the apparent uproar over Germany not allowing the showing of the movie Mission Impossible because of actor Tom Cruise’s religious affiliation; a viewer from Holland wrote:

Not only Germany but other countries too have recognized that there is more behind the Scientology Church. Some journalists in Europe have discovered that high ranked members had ties to Satanic cult groups. In Germany and the Netherlands critics say that Scientology members have infiltrated German and Dutch organizations.

Terrorism was very much on the minds of some viewers who, growing frustrated with the slow pace of the TWA 800 investigation, developed strong feelings about what they saw on television:

We know who supports terrorism, we know where they are trained and training. We know what countries they reside in. We know who are the financial backers and we just sit and do nothing about this. It is time for not turning the other cheek and remedy the problem at the root. Terrorism has no place in a civilized society and should not be tolerated. My stomach turns thinking such violent actions can go on in America.

Even seemingly mundane topics like the weather—more specifically, weather reports—can trigger reactions from viewers. An American in Quatar complained that “CNNI has stopped mentioning any weather about the U.S. I prefer CNNI, and watching the BBC for weather reports is not my ‘cup of tea,’ so to speak.” Another, from Holland, wrote that “I would like to see the

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2 Excerpted from comments made to CNN’s International Professional Program participants (September 1996).

3 Referring to the U.S. military C-130 crash in Jackson Hole, Wyoming.
forecast for North America and Asia back on the program.”
Wrote another:

After talking to business travelers and fellow airline pilots, we really miss the U.S. Weather map. Also, the other international weather maps, far east, India, etc. that were broadcast in the past were invaluable resources.

From her listening post in London, Murdock’s colleague, Sarah Maude, receives and responds to telephone calls, faxes and letters, mostly from the U.K., Europe, and North Africa, regions that take CNN International’s European satellite feed. “The biggest controversy we have at the moment—believe it or not—is the change in the policy on the world weather,” according to Maude.

[The CNN executives in Atlanta] took an editorial decision recently to only do the weather for the area that particular feed covered, rather than the world weather. I was inundated, because the sort of person who watches CNN International is very often a traveller or someone who is an [expatriate] or who has relatives in another part of the world. I happen to know I wasn’t the only feed who got the complaints; other feeds got them too, since it was a worldwide decision.

I had to explain [to viewers that] it was an editorial decision. Then, [CNNI] brought out a program called American Edition which is on three times a day, that is three-quarters of an hour long, and has American weather in it. We have picked that up. If somebody wants Stateside weather, I can at least tell them to watch American Edition. But we have a lot of people in the U.K. who are Asian or have family in Asia. They can no longer see what the weather is doing in that part of the world, or for Australia or New Zealand, and they don’t get it any more. They say, “When are you going to change it?” I explain that it is not my brief to change it. “I will pass your comments along.”

Sometimes, even the job of listening has to be explained to viewers, as well as CNN’s views on the limited power of television, according to Maude.

My proviso to them always has to be: “My brief is a listening brief. I have no editorial authority.” They talk to me and I pass it along to the relevant authorities. I do not express an opinion and I do not say anything will or will not happen. Mine is a listening and passing-on brief.

Maude said viewers will call her office, convinced that she has a direct link to each and every one of CNN’s writers and editors, and that all she has to do is to tell them to take care of whatever concerns the caller. Often a viewer will launch into a long discourse, which goes far beyond the particular story that triggered the call, wanting to explain the history of the area or what happened last week, just to insure that CNN is getting the overall picture. Or better yet, that it changes its news coverage to reflect the views of the caller.

What they cannot understand, having rung us up and given us the information, and having gotten me to say I would pass it on, is why three weeks later things are exactly the same. Then they ring me back. All I can say is, “Well, it’s not up to me. I [will pass] your comment on again.”

More frustrating still are the calls from viewers who seem to believe that CNN is part of the U.S. government.

During the [U.S.] election, people called up saying, “Why don’t you tell President Clinton . . .” or, “Why don’t you tell Senator [Bob] Dole . . .” I had to explain that we are a television company. We have no affiliation with the present United States government or any future United States government. We wish to maintain our independent status. . .
The only time when I can absolutely and totally refute something is when it is hinted that we are associated with any particular government or are receiving money or are influenced by any government in the world. Then, I have to refute that and state our independence.5

But coverage of hot-button topics, or even of certain regions like the Middle East, inevitably results in contacts from viewers who are convinced that CNN does trade in opinions—and always the wrong ones, from the viewer’s standpoint;

4 Sarah Maude (public information department, CNN), interview (January 1997).

5 Ibid.
If you ring up, for instance, and say, "[You] had a piece which was so pro-Zionist, I don’t know why you and all your offices don’t just go and live in Israel," I can almost guarantee you that the next caller will be somebody saying "You are so pro-Arab, are [you] the paymasters for some Arab nation?" [But] we always feel that if we get complaints from both sides then we must be doing something right.\(^6\)

Maudie’s London operation reflects the realities of internationalization, in that she—and CNN—must abide by local [i.e., United Kingdom] protocol, even in the area of viewer feedback.

Public Information here [in the U.K.] is not the same as in the States. We are required by law under the Independent Television Commission to have what they call a "complaints procedure." We answer a range of queries, we take complaints and comments and we log them under the law for the U.K. But then I deal with them in the way that will fulfill the service requirements of CNN International.\(^7\)

Maudie said that CNN’s attention to viewer feedback is not just a matter of fulfilling the law, but in fact reflects the company’s respect for its international audience.

We have certain phrases that we use in our letters which reflect the attitude of CNN International to its viewers. One of them is that we obviously wish to maintain the highest journalistic standards, therefore appreciate it when people take the trouble to call or write, even if it is as minor as a caption under a photograph that was wrong. Sometimes when the graphics department isn’t as knowledgeable as the journalists, they get a territory wrong, so somebody rings up to say, "You have got the Pakistani part of Kashmir in India." Then I can sort that out. I can get in touch with the graphics department and get them to make sure the borderlines are done correctly. ... The thing I love about the job is that practically every single contact that is made has to be approached in a different way. You cannot conveyor-belt it. Every letter that we write may have certain phrases in it—because it reflects our philosophy—but every letter will be individual. I can almost guarantee you that, were you to pick up two letters from two different viewers, you would not say this is the same letter. Or this is the same telephone call. Every query is approached on an individual basis.\(^8\)

Personal Relationships

One day during the spring of 1996, a viewer in Dahran, Saudi Arabia telephoned the CNN International Desk in Atlanta. The caller said he had heard on a military shortwave radio channel of an explosion at the U.S. military base and wanted to know more about it. Once the assignment editors working at the International Desk concluded it was not a prank caller, they started calling official contacts in the Saudi and U.S. governments to see what they knew or would tell. The assignment editors even called hotels within visual range of the U.S. base, hoping to get reactions or statements from persons who may have seen or heard the explosion. On determining that an explosion had in fact occurred, and that it was not an accident, the International Desk mobilized CNN personnel to the scene from various bureaus and from Atlanta. A local journalist in Dahran was hired, another journalist was sent from Riyadh, and phone reports from eyewitnesses were arranged. All this was done within minutes of the initial call from the CNN viewer in Dahran.

Almost simultaneously, an e-mail message arrived at CNN Center from a writer who identified himself as being associated with CIA operations in Saudi Arabia. He begged that his message be treated confidentially, but he nonetheless wanted CNN to know that a bomb had gone off at the U.S. military base in Dahran.

Many in the network’s audience want CNN to win. That is to say, they want CNN to have access to the latest news, and to portray accurately and cover completely the news, whatever and wherever it is. These viewers take the time to call long-distance to Atlanta—usually at their own expense—or e-mail detailed information to the newsroom because they have come to see CNN as part of their extended family. They believe CNN wants to hear

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\(^6\) Ibid.

\(^7\) Ibid.

\(^8\) Ibid.
from them and will take what they have to say seriously. Maude said she observes this phenomenon every day.

You are sitting in your home watching it, maybe with one or two other family members or by yourself, or in a hotel room or wherever. . . . It is not like a cinema where you go into an audience situation. . . . I come from a theatrical background and I have discovered that people have different ways of approaching actors depending on which medium they are in. If they are in television, very often [television viewers] look upon them as a personal friend. I actually have friends who have been sitcom after sitcom, series after series, and total strangers will come up to them in the middle of the street and start a conversation with them as if they were a personal friend. Because they are in their living rooms every evening.9

CNN Senior International Assignment Editor Stephen Cassidy wishes that everyone who works at the network could be required to work in Murdock’s Public Information department at least one day every year.

I think we should all be in a position to take those calls. It’s harder to be arrogant if people are coming around asking about this mistake and that mistake. We make mistakes all the time. We’re human beings, this is a human organization.10

Even prior to the inauguration of CNN Interactive, CNN networks and their specific programs were making a conscious effort to involve their audiences and elicit viewer feedback. On CNN’s domestic service, Talkback Live and Larry King Live actively solicit viewer participation in the program, as does CNN’s Q&A, with Riz Khan. Other forms of interactivity with viewers included contests in which viewers sent in answers to questions such as the location of UNESCO World Heritage sites pictured but not named in the program. Responses came in from all over the world.

The advent of e-mail has made it possible for television news programs to receive a steady flow of viewer responses, and in the case of World Report and other programs that air on CNN International, the feedback comes from any locale that is served by e-mail facilities and receives the CNN signal. The e-mail correspondence received by the World Report staff indicates that many viewers see the program as part of CNN’s international news-gathering operation. Wrote a viewer from London:

If you could get a camera and reporter in to reveal the government-caused suffering of ordinary citizens in the north [of Sri Lanka], it would truly be a scoop that CNN is so famous for. . . . The government is banning food, medicine, gasoline, electricity from its own citizens. They have refused to let the Red Cross or reporters into the area.

From the Independence, which at the time was steaming once again to the Persian Gulf, came an offer from a U.S. sailor to help:

Like to send out a big thanks for the quality coverage of the intensifying situation on our side of the planet. As you well know, things are still up in the air. Should you have any questions about the situation as it progresses, feel free to ask.

And from Saudi Arabia, this offer:

I just wanted to fax you what I have here about the ‘Mad Cow’ disease treatment that was discovered by this Saudi nomad who said he could treat this vicious disease by some herbs that are available in the desert. I see no need for going to contractors for such good news that will save Britain billions of dollars!

Other helpful offers come in response to specific reports on the program:

Some weeks ago I saw a report on CNN depicting the plight of widows rejected by their deceased husband’s family. I was quite moved by this story in part because I am a widower, and recently lost the last remaining member of my family. I am very interested in making some kind of contact with either the reporter/editor responsible for the story, or the women’s rights agency in India.
Others were equally willing to go the extra distance to help World Report improve its international coverage. A woman from Taiwan, desperate to correct CNN's misperceptions about Taiwan, offered to World Report Executive Producer Ralph Wengen "to pay your United Airline ticket and 5 days hotel rooms in Taipei" so Wengen could attend the inauguration of the Taiwanese president following the general elections.

Like the Taiwanese woman, many correspondents are hoping to encourage World Report—and sometimes CNN on the whole—to do a better job of covering the writer's country or region. A Kenyan viewer admonished CNN to

focus your broadcasts to support environmental issues and the concept of the common planet, that we all belong to the same earth ... In Africa, leaders take CNN seriously. They get embarrassed if their actions are broadcast around the world on CNN. The focus for Africa should be on human rights, fighting corruption and supporting positive role models. My country's leaders are better behaved today because of CNN!

A viewer from Israel wrote,

How simple it is to convey the Lebanese as the victims and the Israelis the horrible perpetrators. How untrue and unjust to all of the people involved. CNN has a moral responsibility to evaluate what it screens for more integrity, professionalism, and honesty. Those people in your organization should be held accountable for presenting the most primitive propaganda as "news." How do you justify this?

Other suggestions for improvements were somewhat more down-to-earth, if not entirely relevant to World Report itself. "Please could you bring Style with Elsa Kleinsch more often and please include more African attire," wrote a Kenyan viewer. And from Pakistan, a suggestion that applies to much of television itself: "Please don't interrupt [World Report] so much with a lot of ads."

Audience Feedback

During late 1996, the authors surveyed approximately 200 World Report viewers who had written by e-mail to World Report. Although the recipients of the e-mail survey do not constitute a representative sample of World Report viewers, given their access to e-mail and the fact that they were self-selected, the authors were able to learn more about the issues they had raised in their communications with World Report.

The e-mail survey asked viewers to give their impressions of the World Report program, to indicate where and how often they viewed the program, to make suggestions for improving the program, and to assess how important the program was, from their personal perspective. About 40 questionnaires were undeliverable due to incorrect or nonfunctional addresses. Approximately 100 usable responses were received, some with quite lengthy comment, almost all appreciative of the opportunity to have their say. The responses illustrate the range of opinions and views in those responses.

Likes

Many of the e-mail respondents included positive comments, such as the one from an Islamic student attending university in the United States:

World Report's mission to bring viewpoints to our attention unedited is commendable; and largely it has been successful in this regard. Particularly, I appreciate it when one foreign country will do a piece on another country. One such recent example was a Portuguese segment on returning refugees in Bosnia.

From Charlottesville, Virginia, a viewer wrote that

There are always two sides to every coin. In real-life situations, we are often given news slanted to one side or an-

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11 E-mail address: world.report@turner.com
other. Since this has become an integral part of making news sound more interesting, we need to hear views of all people or groups involved. I love the way World Report splashes in nice, happy things related to different cultures and societies. Having a proper mix of good and bad news is an important part of successful communication.

A priest working in El Salvador wrote:

I love listening to the native reporters and seeing their countries. I understand some of it has to be censored or modified at the source but even that is useful. I am a Korean War veteran, a chemist with patents and publications, who in a different time might have been a historian. But CNN exemplifies what I teach in my classes. Television is one of the best inventions of man. It enables us to see each other in real time and with minimal interference. I would appreciate it if [CNN] would use its pulpit to also teach.

Dislikes

Some viewers saw stories they did not like, oftentimes expressing worry that contributed reports could do harm. A viewer from the United Kingdom wrote,

I find it hard to watch propaganda dressed up as news. As some of the television stations are owned and staffed by government ministers, a bit of editorial comment to state this would not be amiss. For evidence of what happens if you broadcast unbiased news see the BBC World Service who were removed from Saudi Arabia for daring to suggest that the country is not a democratic state.

A viewer from Pakistan wrote that,

While I do appreciate CNN's efforts to telecast "uncensored" news clips from various countries, it is nauseating to see Pakistan Television's government-oriented propaganda on your network. The Pakistani segments on World Report are reducing CNN's credibility among Pakistani viewers.

An international student attending the University of Michigan wrote that, even though he is favorably impressed with World Report:

I still think that CNN's claim to be an international channel is rather dubious. International news coverage is scarce in the U.S. I have found European news coverage to have a much better international flavor. While CNN covers the U.S. well, it does not come close [in its international coverage] to the BBC and various European news organizations.

A viewer from North Carolina had a similar reaction:

World Report fills a very important need in today's world, especially in America. As more and more broadcasts are becoming more specialized and they are marketing to specific groups, our diversity becomes a dividing force. After I spent a few months in England, I was disappointed by the lack of original foreign broadcasts that could be received in the U.S. Foreign news perspectives were almost unheard of. Many American broadcasts tried to attract an audience by claiming to be from a "global perspective." Instead, they only had a global backdrop. CNN World Report is a refreshing break from the norm.

Segmenting Audiences

In the CNNI - Beyond 2000 planning document, CNNI's Chris Cramer outlined for fellow members of the CNN Executive Committee and for the CNNI staff his ideas for the future of the international channel. About the audience, he noted that

Recent audience research for CNNI has shown what we have known for some time - that the channel outperforms all other news and news-related channels in all demographics. Our recent suggestion that viewers should fax or e-mail us their thoughts about our programming has been phenomenally successful. Those messages demonstrate to me on a daily basis that the audience is engaged and vocal about all that we do. We need to respond to as many of their concerns and wishes as we can. We have a loyal and
enthusiastic audience who take world affairs seriously and expect us to do the same.\textsuperscript{13}

Finding out precisely who is watching CNNI is not an exact science. Certainly there is a passionately loyal—if small—group of viewers who follow the CNNI signal from hotel to hotel as they travel from place to place around the world. There is another group of people who have been dispatched—perhaps for years at a time—to locations around the world, who work for embassies, NGOs (non-governmental organizations), and commercial enterprises of all types. These are highly literate English speakers, they are reasonably affluent, and they exhibit a high level of interest in international affairs.

CNNI has a much larger, but more diffuse, regional following, made up of a group that CNN describes as “influentials.” In two 1995 studies, conducted for Turner News Research by the Center for International Strategy, Technology and Policy at the Georgia Institute of Technology, the target group for “influentials” included cabinet level ministers, deputy ministers, chiefs and former chiefs of defence, a vice-chief of defence, a chairman of a joint chiefs of staff, legislators, military service chiefs, a government spokesperson, corporate chairpersons, CEOs, company presidents, corporate vice presidents, ambassadors and former ambassadors, senior policy officials, secretaries general, a president of a national association, a university president, and religious leaders.\textsuperscript{14}

The Georgia Tech studies concentrated on Europe and Asia. In Europe, the approach consisted of 154 personal interviews conducted between January and September, 1995, in France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, and the United Kingdom. Not

\textsuperscript{13} Studies by the AGB/Intomart/Netherlands for Europe in the first quarter 1996 showed that CNNI was outperforming NBC Superchannel in all demographics; the International Air Travel Survey for Asia during early 1996 conducted by European Data & Research Ltd. showed CNNI leading the field in the “viewing of channels by region” when comparing CNNIC, ESPN, ABN, BBC World, and CNNI (except that BBC World (39%) led CNNI (29%) in India.


surprisingly, typical “influentials” in Europe represent an older (45+4) segment of the viewing audience. Most received CNNI via cable (74.3%) or satellite dish (15.2%). Also not surprising is that nearly half of the viewers report watching CNNI in their hotel room while travelling (43.9%);\textsuperscript{15} nearly one-third watch at home (31.1%); the remainder mostly watch in their office (23.7%).

Influential Europeans reported being frequent viewers of CNNI, according to the findings. More than half reported watching the channel more than three times per week (30.6% watch it five to seven days per week, and 24.6% watch it either three to four days per week. Nearly one in five viewers watch it one to two days per week (17.1%). The remainder reported watching it at least once a month (22.4%). A vast majority (85.6%) said they watch CNNI more frequently during coverage of major news events.

For the Asia study, 106 personal interviews were conducted in Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan, and Thailand. As was the case with influential Europeans, typical “influentials” in Asia represented an older segment of the viewing audience. Smaller percentages received CNNI via cable, while the rest received the channel via satellite and over-the-air antenna. The percentages of this population that watched CNNI at home, at the office, and in hotel rooms while travelling were almost identical.

Who the “non-influentials” are—the “average” home viewer of CNN International—is not yet measured, nor likely to be anytime soon, given the expense and the lack of interest on the part of CNN and its competitors. These companies are more interested in the high-end viewer, because even if the numbers in the audience are small, they represent a demographic that appeals to advertisers. According to Lynne Gutstadt, vice president for news research at CNN, the company’s target audience internationally is, in fact, at the high end of the economic scale:

We still are looking at relatively limited distribution. There’s no point in [determining viewership] in the bottom 50 percent of the socio-economic when they don’t have

\textsuperscript{15} 79.3% of the Europeans surveyed said they prefer hotels with CNNI, while 78.5% of the Asians surveyed said likewise.
access to CNN. In fact, it’s a much larger group than that. As an English language service, it’s probably always going to be targeted at a relatively small percent of the population in the countries where we’re distributed.16

“Influentials” bring economic leverage and economic clout. In other words, they have money. The spend it on business and personal travel, computers, cars, and the like. Unlike the mass audiences in the United States, who offer advertisers the chance to sell great quantities of inexpensive merchandise items, the CNNI audience in Europe and Asia can afford luxury goods at premium prices.

CNNI does have a North American audience, but only an estimated 2.4 million cable subscribers receive service that includes CNNI. A weak satellite signal can only be picked up by large, backyard satellite dishes of the analog (C-band) type, a declining market of 3.6 million potential households. Some (but not all) of the backyard dish packages offer CNNI as an option, but in 1996 that offering was halved as distributors introduced the new business-oriented CNNfit, which now fills the daylight hours of that channel.17

The assumption seems to be that CNNI will not find a market in the United States, where CNN and CNN Headline News—the network’s so-called “domestic services”—are well established and where carriage space on cable channels is at a premium. CNNI, along with other niche programs, awaits the opening of new capacity that distributors hope and assume will come with the introduction of digital cable and digital satellite.

The part of the U.S. audience that wants more international news undoubtedly are frustrated with the network’s new niche programming strategy, which has decreased the exposure American viewers have to international news material on the network, and which may go down still more in the future. It already has happened. The afternoon International Hour, which incorporated a daily World Report segment, was replaced by Talkback Live, the

interactive talk show hosted by Susan Rook. The 6 P.M. WorldView program, produced jointly by CNN and CNNI, is the only program that airs on all of CNN’s U.S. and international feeds simultaneously, and is the only significant international program available on a daily basis on either of CNN’s domestic services.18

These programming decisions are based on market research, which indicates that Americans are not interested in international news. While CNNI’s Chris Cramer defended the company’s commitment to international news coverage, he acknowledged that the research did not point to a demand for much international news on U.S.-based channels:

Ted [Turner] and Tom [Johnson] believe that the audience in this country should get a fair proportion of its international news, and they won’t stop doing it. But they’re not helped by the audience research. The audience research is quite the opposite to that, which is a terrible shame.19

When asked about Ted Turner’s comments on the U.S. viewer, given at the 1996 World Report Contributors Conference, when Turner called the American people “stupid,” Cramer said that Turner was more than a little frustrated with his fellow Americans’ apparent lack of interest in the rest of the world.

He does get very angry and I understand why. The audience out there is not stupid. Maybe it’s what they’ve been fed. Maybe it’s because they’ve been fed this over a long period of time. . . . I mean, none of the people I know in this country are stupid. Many of them have an avid appetite for the New York Times and Wall Street Journal, that kind of thing, so why can’t that translate to television?20

But Bob Furnad, executive vice president for CNN, said he is convinced that Americans are uninterested in what goes on around the world because of their geographic isolation.

People in this country don’t care what goes on in the rest of the world. There are reasons for that. We are far different

16 Lynne Gutstadt (vice president for news research), interview, January 1997.
18 A fifteen-minute version of World Report airs at approximately 3:15 A.M., eastern time.
19 Chris Cramer (vice president, CNN International), interview (September 1996).
20 Ibid.
than the nations of Europe, for example. We are an island with nothing but friendly neighbors close by. You look back at the time of the Cold War. We had missiles as close as Turkey to the Soviet states. We raised hell when they tried to put missiles in Cuba, and when they didn’t, we were here very secure. There was no threat that was immediate until long-range missiles were created. We were isolated. That geographic isolation has created a feeling of isolation on the part of the citizenry and how world news affects them.\(^{21}\)

Furnad noted that many American viewers are only interested in international news when it involves the lives of Americans.

If an American life is in danger and the story is out of Africa, they are going to care about it. If the story is out of Africa and it involves millions of non-Americans, people are not going to care about it, even though it is their tax money that will be spent to send food and military aid over. But until our American soldiers set foot there, they are not going to care about it. It is a huge danger.\(^{22}\)

Ironically, it was not marketing/audience research alone that has caused CNN’s domestic services to cut back on their international coverage in search of better ratings. Earl Casey, vice president and managing editor of CNN national news, conceded that the advent of CNNI itself caused CNN and Headline News to become even more American in tone and focus.

We still provide, depending on what the day’s news flow is, international news coverage. But I think that definitely, for the CNN service, there has been a conscious decision to make it more of a national broadcast with international material in it. It’s impossible not to . . . so it’s fairly rich in that regard. Of course we do a one hour newscast a day on CNN which is simulcast on all of the networks—the 6:00 program.

There’s international news throughout the day, but I think if you talk to the producers of those networks, they did decide to do that, particularly when CNN International itself is such a robust service for international news. The odd thing about this is, CNN International now has a program that really is about the United States. We call it American Edition . . . . But you have to think also of all the news stories that are just international by definition. Financial coverage, technology, medicine, all of that is international as long as the scope of your reporting embraces the international [dimension].\(^{23}\)

Richard Roth, CNN’s United Nations correspondent and host of CNNI’s weekend feature program, Diplomatic License, acknowledged that CNN’s use of international news material in its U.S. programming is down, if not entirely out: “[On CNN-domestic] they are going more for the American audience and hope that by hooking them they can slip in international news here and there.”\(^{24}\) But, given the realities of the marketplace, Roth said he sees the situation getting worse before it gets better.

It’s all factionalization, sectionalization. I would like to see more international news on CNN but it’s not happening. It’s happening less and less. I don’t even get seen domestically. It’s overseas that I am seen.\(^{25}\)

CNNI’s Cramer also would like to see more international news on CNN’s U.S. services, even in the face of audience data that indicates a lack of viewer interest: “I think CNN needs to be courageous, but I can say that because I work for CNNI and I don’t have to look at the ratings.” One day the need for ratings services among international television services may increase as advertisers demand reliable audience data. As the competition among the services grows, the need will be acute. Once audience numbers are available from more and more markets around the world, the inevitable push to boost CNNI ratings could be the catalyst that forces producers at CNN International to create television news that appeals to the world’s many local audiences.

\(^{21}\) Bob Furnad (executive vice president, CNN), interview with Paolo Ghilardi (November 1996).

\(^{22}\) Ibid.

\(^{23}\) Earl Casey (vice president and managing editor, CNN), from comments made to CNN’s International Professional Program participants (September 1996).

\(^{24}\) Richard Roth (United Nations correspondent, CNN), interview (December 1996).

\(^{25}\) Ibid.