

# Looking to the Future



## The Next Generation of International Broadcast News

An Initiative of the International Reporting Project  
[www.internationalreportingproject.org](http://www.internationalreportingproject.org)

## Introduction

**H**ow does change in an industry occur? Harvard Business School Professor Michael Beer has a theory. He believes three conditions must be present:

1. There is dissatisfaction with the status quo.
2. The cost of inaction is greater than the cost of change.
3. A vision for the future emerges.

Many broadcast news professionals, particularly those dedicated to international coverage, would argue that the first two conditions have already been met. There is hunger for change in the ranks. Frustrated by the lack of venues on U.S. television for showing quality, in-depth international news, impatient with traditional modes of storytelling, buffeted by cutbacks and declining audiences, producers, videographers and photographers in the next generation are eager to break the old molds and try something radically new.

For two days in May 2005, with the generous support of the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, 15 former **International Reporting Project** video journalist Fellows from around the country gathered at the Pocantico Hills Conference Center of the Rockefeller Brothers Fund in Tarrytown, New York. They wanted to fulfill the third condition of the three-part change formula, by defining a new vision for international broadcast news coverage. The participants, all successful broadcast professionals spanning seven years

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of IRP fellowship programs, came from diverse media backgrounds. They work at the networks and cable channels, in public television, public radio, community television, documentary film, online news and still photography. With experience in traditional media as well as in the new technologies that are revolutionizing media production and delivery, the group was uniquely situated to reinvent international news coverage.

What happened at Pocantico surprised everyone. The group quickly reached consensus on a remarkable new vision, and developed an intriguing concept for producing and disseminating international broadcast news that will be unlike any international programming currently offered anywhere. Their approach bypasses current distribution bottlenecks on television by using the Internet. They plan to repurpose their content for different platforms to reflect the many ways the public now gets its news. And, while they will seek funding for this venture, they've created what they believe will be a sustainable business model.

This report outlines their collective vision for a new type of international news coverage. Several guiding principles informed the journalists' proposals:

- **Authenticity** – The group rejects the tendency of many existing news shows to present slick, correspondent-centered reports and “voice of God” narrators. They want characters to tell their own stories without being upstaged by an on-camera reporter or narrator, to present what photographer **Antrim Caskey** called “reality uncensored.” **Kira Kay**, another conferee, who has worked with PBS, CNN, ABC and CBS, describes it as “an egoless voice telling the story without embellishment.”

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— Joe Rubin  
Freelance Video Journalist



- **Transparency** – At a time when the public’s trust in journalists is at an all-time low, the video journalists commit themselves to greater transparency, to sharing with the viewer information regarding why they chose a particular story, how they got the story, and decisions they made along the way. “What if stories don’t pan out?” says **Rob Schmitz**, a reporter for Southern California Public Radio and a freelance video journalist. “Transparency will help show the audience that stories don’t always work out as you thought. Sometimes you run into roadblocks.”
- **New Audiences** – They are looking for members of the U.S. public who currently tune out or never tuned in to international news. They are also looking beyond the United States to a global audience.

What came across most during those two days in May was the journalists’ enthusiasm and determination. **Joe Rubin**, a freelance video journalist who has worked with ABC and PBS, spoke for many in the group when he said, “There should be a notion of reclaiming a space in journalism for core American values, values like exploration, optimism and understanding. That's the opposite of fear. We should say we're about something different.”

This report outlines the group’s programming concept for an international news series. It gives some of the background that led to its creation, and lists the IRP alumni Fellows who participated.

*If you wish to comment on the IRP Video Initiative Report or would like more information about the Initiative, please contact the International Reporting Project at [irp@jhu.edu](mailto:irp@jhu.edu), or go to the IRP website at [www.internationalreportingproject.org](http://www.internationalreportingproject.org).*