Radio journalism: Week two

After learning a great deal from the first radio journalism session, this week gave us an opportunity to work on the aspects we felt we could improve on. The day focused on scripting and editing, and like in the previous week a lot has been learned.

**Gwaelod-y-Garth scripting and editing exercise**

After being given the story and various interview clips, we decided to spend some time focusing on the angle we would chose for the story. After much deliberation we decided to focus mainly on the affect it has had on the local people and how they have been lucky to avoid loss of life in the past. We therefore decided that the interview with John Caldwell would be the first interview clip that we would use.

This decision came after much planning, something which you really need to consider if you wish to make a successful package. James gave us a tip when it comes to planning, and that is to break down the clips into what you believe are the most important parts, and then write down what you have, who said it, and how long it is. I followed this advice and it seemed to work, with the editing side of things going smoothly, and the package ending as we had hoped.

Another aspect of radio we learned more about – something which I believe we used well in our package – is links. We managed to pick out key words from an interview in order to link onto the next interview clip, such as “It is this potential loss of life...” This allows the package to flow, and means that the listener is not confused.

Cutting the interview clips down to size can be a daunting task, not wanting to cut out anything you believe will enhance the story, but balancing this out by making sure the package is within the time range. Something which we could improve on for the assignment is honing in on this ability to find the perfect balance.

Tone is also important, if you sound disinterested in the story then chances are, the listener will be too. This is something we tried to put across in our package, and on the whole I believe we succeeded in that, albeit we could improve in time for the assessed package.

We did encounter a problem when it came to recording our links, the recorder was picking up the volume at different levels, and this looked as though it would affect our package, but after amplifying the sound it came out well. Making sure to get the entire package at the same level (preferably before the editing process) is something which we will need to improve on when it comes to the next package.

So all-in-all I am very pleased with the way the package has turned out, again with a lot being learned I can take this into the assessed package. I’ve learned of the importance of planning, finding the right angle for the story, the ability to cut down interview clips leaving you with just the bits that are needed, and also how links help to structure the package. With this in mind, I now feel confident going into the assessed package, which I will look at below.

**Focus paragraph**

Having read the letters pages of the South Wales Echo over the past fortnight, I noticed a lot of people who are angry regarding the quality of the road surfaces across most of the busiest streets in the Cardiff city centre. Despite this, it doesn’t get much coverage by the media, this combined with the fact that Christmas is fast approaching and many will be flocking to the City, means that it’s a story that many will want to listen to. The story will appeal to a large audience, such as shoppers, workers, tourists, in fact anyone who visits the city centre. I could conduct interviews with office workers, shoppers, bus/taxi drivers (they will have strong opinions), as well as those who can shine some light on the story, such as members of the council and possibly those who are protesting against all these road works. It is also a time where many will be heading into Cardiff; this is something which will affect a large amount of people. This is a story that will still be relevant in the coming months, meaning that a follow up could be thought about in the future.

**Radio 4 documentary package: Costing the game**

The radio documentary that I decided to look at focused on the London 2012 Olympics, or more specifically, the legacy that will be left behind. The report lasted for 38 minutes, considerably longer than any other we have so far produced, but I decided to listen to it to see how radio documentaries can differ. From this, I have taken some points I believe work brilliantly, and some that don’t work quite as well.

**Works well**

* Though strictly not actually part of the package itself, the presenter link works very well. I have already looked at the importance of the presenter link in my previous blog – a strong presenter link can really help with the flow of the package right from the offset, and should be written by you, the person who knows all about the story and what is in the package.
* The reporter also does a good job at linking interview clips, something which can be seen as being basic, but it is vital. With this package being so long, there is need for a lot of interview clips, therefore, a lot of links are needed, and each one has been done to perfection.
* Another aspect of this radio documentary package I believe worked well is the way that the story has been broken down into segments: swimming, athletics, financing, etc. This all comes down to planning; he knew exactly what this package would sound like on completion before he had even begun conducting interviews.
* The interviews used are all very relevant and add something to the story, with the reporter interviewing an athlete, politician, workers, locals, etc. A couple of these interviews are carried out inside the Olympic Stadium, with the sound of construction going on all around, this works very well. During one interview we start to struggle to hear the person who is talking, but on-the-whole, it is a success and differentiates the clips.
* The pay-off is another area of radio that I have really focused on, due to its importance. Using an interview to end the package is something which should only really be used if it summarises the story up well, or if a strong point is being made – the latter is true with this package, where it ends with a London Assembly member giving strong advice to others.

**Does not work well**

* On a couple of occasions the package contains a wild-track, this is present right at the start with the running of a stream. Again, this is something I have already looked at in some detail – a wild-track at the start of the package from my previous research can be rather hit or miss, sometimes it works brilliantly, other times it doesn’t work well at all. In this instance, I believe it would have been better to begin with the reporter continuing from the strong presenter link.
* Despite me praising the way the package has been so well linked together, at one point we hear an interview, with the reporter not telling us who we have just heard. This is something which, when it comes to making our own packages, we have to avoid. The reporter also makes a habit of cutting in when the interviewee is talking, something which, if you are to do, should be well timed and not too frequent.
* A lot of facts are used throughout the package, something which doesn’t work as well over the radio, without the aid of visual effects. These facts were also at times irrelevant, and didn’t add anything to the main angle of the story.
* Due to the fact that this is such a long package, a large part is made up of the reporter speaking. I feel that it would have perhaps been better to have the interviewees doing all the talking; after all, they are the ones who should be able to shed more light on the story.
* I paid close attention to the sound levels after struggling with this aspect in my own package, and, on the whole, the package has been kept at the same levels, but at a couple of points they experienced problems. During one interview we struggle to hear one interviewee, who it sounds as though was interviewed over the phone. Contrary to this, one interview is rather loud; this is something I believe is possible to avoid if you take more care.

**Chapman & Kinsey – Chapter Nine**

* When planning your questions, you need to think about how your finished interview clips will fit into your package, this way you can ensure you cover all the required areas.
* An interview is effectively a highly structured conversation between two people, often with contradictory agendas – it’s your job to get the answers.
* Choosing the right interviewee is highly important. Get all sides to the story, as well as the views of those relevant, such as locals, emergency services, politicians, etc.
* Make sure that the person you are interviewing knows exactly what it’s being used for and where it will be aired, as well as any other important details they should know.
* Do not underestimate the power of background sound. ‘Atmos’ – as radio reporters call it – provides depth to interviews.
* Following on from this point, it’s important to find the right balance, make sure you’re not struggling to hear the interviewee. You should also be wary of background sound that can be controlled, such as air-con system, radios, TV’s, etc.
* Think before you speak, get your facts right and don’t be afraid to ask the obvious!
* Wording of questions is important, keep in mind the type of answers you would like for your package.
* The use of recorded atmos (or wild-track) is commonly used to enhance a package or to help aid untidy edits. Creative use of editing used to produce packages offers a variety of listening experiences through a range of storytelling techniques.
* Editing is essential for various reasons, it can be used to remove fluffs and mistakes, to help fit your package to a time slot, to help remove any legal pitfalls, and also to help tell a story efficiently and effectively.