

## **Emma Tucker**

### **Deputy Editor, the Times**

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**Welcome to Media Masters, a series of one to one interviews with people at the top of the media game. Today, I'm joined by Emma Tucker, deputy editor of the Times. Emma started her career at the Financial Times as a reporter, before moving to Brussels where she covered the EU for several years, and then edited FT Weekend. She joined the Times in 2007 as associate features editor, and became editor of T2 after just 12 months. She then became editorial director in 2012, when she launched the Times Luxx reports, targeting the fashion and luxury market, and took on her current role a year later.**

**Emma, thank you for joining me.**

Thank you.

**Let's start with a nice easy, open question, shall we? The Times has bucked the failing circulation trends, and even overtook the Daily Telegraph recently. What is the secret to the current success of the Times?**

Well, I don't think it's complicated. I think it's actually very simple. I think our success is down to the fact that we haven't lost sight of our journalism. So it's all about investing in high-quality journalism, making sure we're giving people journalism they can trust, journalism that they won't find anywhere else – and it's not losing sight of that. In the digital maelstrom that we're in, it's very easy to lose sight of purpose – but we've been very clear all along that what comes first and foremost is our journalism.

**It's the only paper that I read every single day. Because I work in New York every other week, and even when I'm in New York I still take the Times every day. It's very readable.**

Yes, it is. We put great store in our writers; we're very carefully edited still. Our sub-editors are rigorous. As I said, for us, a lot of it is about the quality of the writers and the writing, so again, we set great store by our columnists, our funny writers, our star reporters. We understand that there's a lot of competition out there and we have to stand out. We have to be different in order to get people to keep reading us every day.

**How can you be distinctive, given that there's hundreds of websites and loads of things competing for your readers' attention, not just other newspapers, but other websites, apps, TV on demand, iPlayer... the list of things commanding everyone's attention now is huge.**

Absolutely. We decided, more or less two years ago, that we can't compete on rolling news. We're never going to be able to compete with the BBC, the news wires. If we were going to, it would have required the sort of investment that we just don't have. So we made a very conscious decision not to compete on breaking news, but to focus on what we're really good at. What are we really good at? News, comment, analysis, big reads, features, advice – quality journalism, as I said before. So we made a decision, we're not going to try and compete with the BBC or rolling news, we're going to do edition-based publishing. And this was what lay behind the revamp of our website. So we publish our morning edition, and then we update it three times during the day, and that gives readers a manageable quantity of news to read. They don't feel like they're missing out. They know when the updates come. They know that when they get there, the news will be considered, thoughtful. It will have been thoroughly checked. It's news that they can trust. They're not going to come in there to cover every twist and turn of a breaking news story.

**I remember when the Times went behind a paywall. I used to read it once or twice a week at that point, and I remember thinking at the time, "That's very foolish of them, given the huge amounts of really quality news websites like the BBC and the Guardian that are available free," and I thought, "Well, this isn't going to work." And within about a month, not only did I miss the Times, and then subscribe, but now because I'm a subscriber I want my money's worth, and I read it every day now rather than twice a week. So, what I thought was folly at the time has subsequently in hindsight turned out to be genius. Has that been the journey of a lot of readers?**

Yes. Our paywall was magnificent in its impermeability when we first put it up, and the number of detractors we had. Everyone said, "This is a big mistake. The Internet is all about free content. Information wants to be free, you're going to lose all your readership." And the initial figures were cataclysmic in terms of the numbers reading us.

**I was one of the naysayers!**

Yes, well, I think a lot of people were, but I think there is a sort of vision all along that you don't get quality journalism for free. If you want to read good quality journalism, you're going to have to pay for it. So we had this impermeable pay wall – which we have now softened, for good reason. And in fact now, five years on, it turns out everybody, pretty much everyone, is following – unless you're funded by the taxpayer, or you're a charity, the only way you're going to be able to fund your journalism is by charging for it. And so we're softening our paywall – others are hardening theirs – but we're all coalescing around a similar model in the middle.

**So when you say you're softening the paywall, and it's not a hard paywall, how does that work? Is that osmosis now? I'm trying to think how that would work. Semi-permeable membrane.**

When I say soft, that's probably the wrong word. It's not that soft! All it is, is that we realised that there are audiences out there who weren't reading us; that we weren't necessarily reaching all the people we'd like to reach. So we introduced a scheme called registered access, which means that, in return for your email details, you can read two free articles a week on the Times – and this allows people to sample our journalism, where previously they couldn't without taking out a subscription. And that's been fantastic, because we now have a pool of near on four million registered access users, people who, at some point, have given us their details in return for reading one of our articles, or two of our articles. And that's been great, because that's helped us with the marketing push to then try and convert some of these registered access users into fully paid up subscribers.

**Because it is almost a philosophical textbook dilemma isn't it? How do you showcase your journalism without showing it to people? Because the minute you've shown them, they then don't need to pay for it.**

Exactly. And so, what we hope is that by allowing people to sample our journalism, they'll be so hooked, they'll appreciate it. You can continue on via registered access for as long as you like, but at some point we hope you'll say, "You know what? There are more than two articles a week I want to read here. I'm going to convert." If you look at other newspapers, they're following similar models. I think the New York Times, you can read five articles for free a month, which actually makes them less permeable than us at the moment, and others are following similar schemes. So you allow people to read, to sample, but only up to a point – and after that they have to pay. But it's been good for us to get our journalism out there and encourage these registered access users.

**I did start with a soft opening question in terms of what has the paper got right, but what has the paper not got right yet, in terms of what's top of your to do list in terms of steering the paper in the direction that you want to go? What do you need to add to it, what do you need to remove from it? How do you perfect the formula, I suppose is the question.**

Well, there are always improvements to be made, and obviously the challenge for us, as it is for so many legacy publishers, is getting the balance right between print and digital. We can't afford to neglect our print product, because so many people still read the Times in print. But equally, we cannot allow old print practices to hold us back digitally. So it's a constant nudging forward on the digital front, whilst maintaining the quality of the print product. I think that's our big challenge, and you live and learn doing that.

**What's your relationship with Facebook like? I know the Times has led the way over the past year with investigative reports into extremist content on YouTube and concerns over Facebook, but I imagine you still need Facebook to drive traffic to your own website as well.**

Yes. Like all publishers, Facebook is important to us. It's the most effective platform for getting our journalism out there. It drives a lot of traffic, just as it does for other publishers. So at that level, Facebook is important to us. We have little choice there, really – these social media platforms are very, very powerful; we have to use them. Journalistically, our relationship is perhaps a bit patchy, because we obviously had this big investigation led by our investigative reporter Alexi Mostrous, who looked at the way in which platforms such as Facebook were not being held to account for what they were effectively publishing online.

**And where do you think that story is ultimately going to end up? Because it seems to me that Facebook is, rightly, under more pressure than ever.**

It's very difficult to know, because at the moment it's still pretty much the Wild West out there in terms of these big digital monopolies. There's a feeling that they need to be reined in, they need to be regulated; they need to have the same restrictions placed on them that regular publishers have, but it's very difficult to know how you do that. They're global entities – so how would you regulate them, where would that regulation come from? They're also very popular, so it's difficult to restrict something that people like. Having said that, the European Commission has fined Google a couple of times now, has taken them to task, Germany fines Facebook now if they put up dodgy content – the pressure is on. And I think some of it will come from within the companies themselves, who are much more conscious of their reputations now. But I honestly don't know. I think it's still very nascent. I think there will be a call for more regulation, but I'm not entirely sure how it will come about.

**You mentioned there the international element of Facebook and Google and so on, but how has the Times internationalised with the opportunity that digital has presented? I follow you guys on Twitter, and I know you call yourselves 'The Times of London' – and of course I'm very London-centric, so I'm thinking, "Why have they added 'of London'?" And then, of course, looking at it from a global Twitter point of view, there are hundreds of newspapers in the world called the Times, so rightly 'The Times of London'. Do you have many international readers? I subscribe to The New York Times; do you have people in New York subscribing to the Times?**

We do. In fact, our global subscribers are very important. We have a global subscription offer that we launched about a year ago that's somewhat cheaper – it's a digital only subscription, obviously. Most of our global digital subscribers come from the US, but we also have a lot in Germany, France, Australia, India, other areas. In fact, I'm pretty certain we have subscribers in every country in the world. We even have subscribers in North Korea, we're told.

**Hence it's digital only, because posting a copy of the paper to New Zealand will obviously mean that, by the time it arrives, Trump will have done something else.**

Quite, yes.

**Actually you could just have the perpetual deadline, “Trump has done something outrageous,” and that could work for any day.**

Exactly. But we think the voice of London is important. You can read the New York Times to get the sort of liberal voice of America, you can read the Wall Street Journal, you’ve got the FT, which is a global newspaper. But we feel very much that we are the voice of London, and that still presents a different perspective on world affairs, so our global subs are very important.

**What does a deputy editor do? I used to watch Star Trek: The Next Generation. Are you Jean-Luc Picard’s Will Riker, or Spock to Captain Kirk?**

Well, I think what a deputy editor does depends very much on what the editor is like! So my editor, John Witherow, he is a very hands-on editor, so I’m not one of those deputy editors that does everything while the editor goes out for lunch. He’s very hands-on. So, at the moment, I’m very much more focused on digital than he is. Our head of digital has got a huge task of transforming the newsrooms; he needs people to help him advocate that in the newsroom, so that’s very much the role that I’m playing. So I’m very focused on digital, I also sit across the relationship with commercial more than John does – because that’s how we divvy it up – and I talk a lot to marketing. I do sit in on all the regular meetings of the day, and obviously I edit when he’s not there, but we have quite a good distinction of roles.

**So what is a typical week then?**

A typical week, or a typical day?

**Both! We’ve got an hour, so...**

Well, a typical day, we’ve recently introduced an early morning digital news meeting at 9.30, so I try to get in for that. Because at that point we’ll talk about what we’re going to do for the editions, rather than focusing just on the print edition that obviously goes to bed at 10 o’clock. We’re looking at what are we going to do at midday, how are we going to update stories, what big numbers are we going to do for the five o’clock edition. So I try and go to that meeting. After that, I’ll sit and read as much as I can on other websites, other newspapers, all the hundreds of emails I get from news publications. It’s actually very difficult to know where to begin, but I’ll try and get across as much as I can. At quarter to 11, we’ll have an ideas meeting with the editor and various heads of department, we all come together and talk about what’s interesting us that day, or where we think we should be doing more, or if there are interesting stories that we want to follow up. Then we have conference, which takes the best part of an hour, where everybody presents their lists for the day. Then after that it will either be a lunch, or talking to people, you know, looking ahead, reading – you know what it’s like. And that will carry on until... I’ll sort of scurry around until 3.30pm when we have afternoon conference, which then lasts another hour, and then after that it’s into the evening edition. And it’s very much reading until we put the paper to bed. I usually go home at about 7.30pm-8.00pm. So it’s quite a long day – but not as long as if I’m editing, in which case I’ll stay until more like 8.30pm, and then hand over to our excellent night team, who will see everything off.

**Do you have the ratio for what an ideal paper would be in terms of light and shade, international and national, columnists? Do you email David Aaronovitch and say, “I want you to rant on about this this week,” or does he just send his copy in and he talks about whatever he wants? How do you manage someone like Danny Finkelstein?**

Well, I think the great strength of the Times, and this is something we're very conscious of, and we try to promote every day, is that we try to have a range of voices. So we're neither coming at you from the left, nor are we coming at you from the right, we're trying to offer you both sides of the argument. And that is played out very much on our comment pages, where we will have people from both sides of the spectrum writing their opinions. I think that's a strength for us, it's a great advantage for us to do that. So that's very much how we manage the columnists – try to have both voices on any one day. And anyone who reads the Times will know we do have a very good, broad range of voices there. And then, in terms of the news run, again, at the moment it does feel very doom and gloom so we do always try and offer something a bit more constructive, something more positive.

**An antidote to reality.**

Yes, an antidote to reality. We very much value humorous writing, which is actually much harder to come by than you'd imagine.

**My Week – love it.**

Yes, Hugo Rifkind is absolutely brilliant, Giles Coren's very funny, Patrick Kidd. We set great store by our humorous writers, because in the end, if you can make people laugh, I think you're far more likely to keep them satisfied than if you're going to make them feel miserable. So, yes, we do value that.

**Is the problem these days that you've almost got too much news? I used to know a lot of journalists, particularly in local media, where they would be scratching around for something for tomorrow's splash or whatever. Whereas now, there's just so much going on with Brexit and Trump and North Korea and almost everything else, the challenge is almost what to focus on.**

You'll never get a journalist to say there's too much news, never! The news at the moment is like boulders rolling down a mountain; they just keep crashing down. Ever since the referendum, it hasn't stopped.

**It's an onslaught, isn't it?**

It's an onslaught! But the news may be big and challenging, but it's a fantastic time for journalism because people need to make sense of it. We're living in extraordinary times. I mean, Brexit is a massive challenge. Whenever we write anything about Brexit, we have incredibly high engagement. We can measure it all now with all the data tools we've got. People are fascinated by Brexit. Trump! I mean, he is the gift that keeps on giving in terms of news.

**Although he is a lunatic that will one day kill us all, in my view.**

In your view. I couldn't possibly comment – we're neutral on our news coverage. And actually, in many ways, because there's so much chat out there, so many people, so much partisan comment, again, people say, "Oh, it must be awful being a journalist now." I actually think it's a really good time to be a journalist – for a reputable publication. Because what you're trying to do is help people to make sense of these extraordinary times we're living through. So if you are a trusted source, which we are, it's a good time. Our mission is clear: to explain, analyse, comment and help people make sense of these great historic events that are taking place around us.

**I agree with you, but on the other hand, journalism seems to be under attack as never before. You've got the president calling out fake news all the time, Laura Kuenssberg, the BBC's political editor, had to have a bodyguard at Labour Party conference, you've got a hue and cry – not the Hue and Cry, obviously – marching on BBC Scotland complaining about Nick Robinson, you've got Donald Trump standing next to Theresa May at Chequers saying CNN is fake news... David Aaronovitch on Twitter, everyone's always having a go at him saying, "You're just a Murdoch stooge." It seems to be that everyone wants to shoot the messenger as well.**

Yes, they do – but again, I would say, if anything, that gives us a greater sense of mission. In my mind, since I've been a journalist, there's never been a more important time to be one than now; to be providing clarity and a voice of reason in all the madness that there is. Yes, it's nasty if you get trolled, or if people write unpleasant comments under what you've written, but I think if you're clear about what your mission is, that's something that you can handle.

**The commenters on the Times articles seem to be less hideous than, say, the Guardian and various other things, because they're subscribers and you've identified them. There seems to be a certain level of nastiness that anonymity grants you. I read something on the Guardian, and I almost daren't look below the line, whereas at least on the Times, yes, they might be a little bit churlish or a bit whingey, but they're not unpleasant or aggressive.**

Well, again, that's one of the big advantages of our subscription model. So we have very dedicated commenters and subscribers, and a lot of them form communities around certain subjects. And they can come for a Times article, they can conduct a conversation underneath an article, in a relatively civilised forum, which is something you can't do on the Internet because anyone can pile in and write offensive comments. You're in a trusted community here. And we've looked a lot at our commenting, and one of the things we found is that when our journalists go in and join in the conversation, readers absolutely love that – and also they're much more likely to come back and comment again, they're less likely to churn their subscription. We have a challenge getting more women to comment below the line, but that's something that our new engagement editor is actively looking at, and looking at ways to get more women to come in. But we've actually invited our commenters into the office – we had a group of them, we picked a bunch that were pro-Brexit and a bunch that were anti-Brexit, and we brought them all together.

**You let them fight it out. Give them a shot of espresso each and loads of chocolate.**

We put them around a table and they left best friends, vowing never to be rude to each other again – almost. But it was a really interesting exercise. They loved it, and it was interesting for us to talk to them about why they comment below the line. One man said, “Well, I’m really fascinated by politics but my wife and daughter don’t want to talk to me about it so I go on to the Times website and I engage in discussion there.” And it was really interesting. So we’re very keen to build communities around subject areas with our subscribers, because it is a civil forum for them, unlike so much that is out there on the Internet.

**But to state the obvious, that’s not what a newspaper did decades ago. You simply just bought it on the newsstand, read the news, and then handed it over to the chip shop so they could put fish and chips in it the next day. Nowadays, you’re talking of community building and all of these kind of things, so it seems to me that digital is changing the nature of what a newspaper is.**

Well, I think it’s changing the nature that a newspaper engages with its readers. Our fundamental mission to provide news that you can trust, good, high-quality comment and analysis, that’s not going to change – but what is changing is that we’re in a dialogue with our readers, and that can only be a good thing. We’ve always had a letters page, and this is just an extension of that. And we get feedback from them, which obviously is useful to us as well, plus, like everybody now, we have all this data to measure what really keeps readers engaged. And that’s something that can help inform us in the future. How do people like to read things? Do they prefer it with a picture gallery? Would they like an interactive to go with it? What is it that really engages our readers? It’s fascinating, but it’s also very useful.

**Because in the old days, the only metric you really had was newsstand. How many copies did we sell last Tuesday? Whereas now you can look at dwell time on individual articles, how they came inbound, where they left to, etc.. Is there almost too much information now?**

No. And we’ve always been very clear; the data that we use is, we’re data-informed, not data-led.

**Oh, that’s good.**

Well, it depends. Some articles are good for reach, so you’ll do something that reaches a lot of people, we get a lot of registered access from it. Other articles are good for converting people to subscriptions. Others are not so good at converting, but once people have bought a subscription they’ll spend more time reading, so they’re good for engagement. So we look at articles, how many comments they attract, how many saves they get, how many shares. It’s just a rich data that we never used to have that helps us, I think, to produce a better product.



**Before becoming deputy editor, you were in charge of creating that close relationship between the editorial and the commercial teams. How did that pan out?**

Well, it's that old conundrum. Well, it's not a conundrum, it's how do you separate church and state. So again, I think people tend to over-complicate this, but to my mind it's not complicated. I think the test that I always used to apply was obviously we wanted to help commercial, because it's tough out there, we need to make money, but we were never going to compromise editorial integrity. So the test is always if you're a reader and you're reading something, either in the Times print edition, on the website or on the app, do you know where you are? Do you know whether you're reading something that's been produced by a Times journalist, or do you know whether you're reading something that's been commercially sponsored? So long as readers know where they are, then I don't think it's complicated. People get very exercised about native advertising, which is obviously something that you see a lot of on digital news products.

**What's native advertising?**

Native advertising is what we used to call advertorials. Sponsored content.

**Partnership arrangements, as some call them.**

Yes. As long as a reader understands that a piece of content that's been sponsored by a commercial partner, then there's no problem with that. And actually, some of it can be very good. There's no reason why it has to be low quality, just so long as the reader knows where they are. So it was useful for me to understand the commercial pressures that were there, but also to act as a sort of gatekeeper for editorial values and integrity.

**I started reading the newspapers when I was a young teenager, and I can remember the Observer having like pull out sections about obscure African countries that were sort of 20 pages about 'Come to Zanzibar' and it would say at the top 'Working in partnership with the Zanzibar Tourism Authority'. I mean, clearly they had paid the Observer to put that together, and it was distributed as such, and declared to the reader. There doesn't seem to be a problem with that.**

No, exactly, and it's the same principle in digital. I mean, I think there has been some blurring of the lines, but not by us.

**Is it more difficult to be a journalist these days? We've talked about the commercial pressures, but in terms of the editorial pressures, politicians wanting their side, and people seem to be quicker to complain these days, both privately in terms of intrusion, but politically in terms of balance, or is it basically the same challenge it always has been?**

I think journalists are under more pressure now; it's inevitable. You write a column, you write a piece, and somebody takes objection to it.

**You have to put your tin hat on straight away, whatever you've said.**

Yes. In fact, this came up when we were discussing comments. One of our journalists said he didn't want to get involved in commenting under the line because reading the comments was so distressing. I had to tell him to man up and get on with it, but I think it is difficult. I think being trolled on social media is pretty unpleasant, so you have to develop a very thick skin.

**It is unpleasant – I get trolled from time to time, even me. I'm no one. Probably once or twice a week, someone will be beastly to me on Twitter, and it stings a bit.**

Yes, and it's also harder to walk away. We publish our news in a very considered manner, but even so, journalists may have to file... in the old days, you only had to file once for the evening edition. Now, you may have to file for the 9am update, midday, 5pm. The news never goes away. And so I think people at the Times work incredibly hard. The journalists work very, very hard, and they're very productive. I think they always did, but I think it's tougher now to actually walk away from it.

**How do you balance the articles, then? As you said earlier, in terms of most readers of that edition will already know the immediate news, because they'll have listened to the Today programme or watched BBC Breakfast or Sky News or whatever, they'll have been on Twitter. But you've also got to cater for the people that are reading the paper for the actual news, so you've got to tell them what's happened in a way that doesn't repeat what a lot of the readers will have already heard, and then gone to the analysis and the thoughtfulness. How do you do that?**

Well, I think that works because we're not chasing breaking news, so the edition is sacrosanct. So overnight, the website is a fairly good replica of what's in the newspaper.

**So you're off stone at what, nine o'clock?**

Ten. And then we have a second edition at midnight, and that forms the basis of the next day's coverage, including online. So obviously, by 5pm the next day, a lot of the stories will have been updated and extra stories will have been put up based on what we do at midday and at five o'clock – but the actual core edition will still be there. If you want to find it, you'll be able to find it. And I think that allows people who haven't got round to reading the paper, and who pick it up late in the day, or who go on the website later in the day, you'll still get the core of that day's Times. But if you have read the morning edition cover to cover, which means you would have a very long commute or a lot of time, if you then come back at 5pm you'll see how the stories have been updated – and I think readers like that. I think there is a slight sense of there's too much news out there, so if you can if you can present them a carefully curated product, they like that. They feel that they're on top of it, but they're not overwhelmed by it. And I think that's a real strong point of our model.

**How do you deal with the morning-based speculation, so for example on a Wednesday if the prime minister's going to have to react to something at Prime Minister's Questions, obviously your morning edition will speculate about the options that Theresa May has available to her. But then, in the afternoon, not only has the prime minister chosen what she's going to say, the article speculating about her choices is almost redundant at that point, is it not?**

Yes. So we would update that article. We would update it in line with what she said. A lot of the morning speculation on politics comes through our Red Box email, which goes out every morning, and that's a sort of setting you up for the political day, written by Matt Chorley, and that allows a lot of the speculation and sort of gossip to get out there, and then obviously we use the edition to update what actually happens or what is really said.

**And the Red Box podcast is fantastic. I think it's the second best podcast out there, frankly!**

Ah, yes! I'm very proud of our of our Red Box podcast, it's very successful, along with some of our most successful podcasts. So The Game, which is our football one...

**Which I've never listened to, because I consider football to be a waste of time.**

Well, you'll have to give it a go.

**I'm aware that's a minority view. But tell me about podcasting then, because that's not something a newspaper would have done 10 years ago.**

No. And in all honesty, we're very judicious with our podcasts. We don't try to do too many, because again there's a lot of competition out there and we only want to do things that are actually worthwhile.

**We're back to that word "distinctive" again, aren't we?"**

Yes, distinctive. So we apply the same rules to our podcasts as we do to our website and print products.

**And how do you develop them? Because you've already mentioned there football and politics, but there's a myriad of other subjects that you could use. The Guardian, for example, has a great science podcast. They used to have a really good media podcast but they cancelled it.**

Well, we have a podcast called Walking the Dog, which is people walking their dogs, which has proved very successful. The other successful podcast is the tech podcast, which is produced by Danny Fortson, the Sunday Times tech correspondent, and that's a big success as well. But again, we're judicious about how we do podcasts, because there was a time when the answer to everything seemed to be a podcast, but it turned out the numbers of people listening to them were just weren't very high

– so we scrapped the ones that don't attract a lot of listeners, and focused on the ones that work.

**Don't do any one to one media interviews, otherwise I'll be at your office!**

I don't think we will!

**But in a sense, there's not just podcasting, is there? There's video, there's animated graphics... I often read the Times on my iPad, and it will tell me to click here for this pop-out which will explain Brexit in three animations – good luck there. But you've almost got too many choices in terms of how do you decide what to focus on?**

Well, again, that's a really good point. What happens is, we do something that's a success, and then suddenly everybody wants to do that. So an interactive Q&A drives a lot of engagement, and suddenly everybody wants to do it. So we sort of get overexcited about things. But again, we're learning. Digital journalism is a constantly evolving process, and we now have a very effective interactive team who have a very good sense of what works and what doesn't work. They work closely with our reporters, and they work closely with the news editors, to say, "Okay, we're going to do a big piece about the weather. What would really enhance digitally a big piece about this extraordinary weather we're having? Is it maps? Is it a time line?" Is it a chart of temperatures? Is it a video?" We're learning as we do it, but we have real experts now in the newsroom who really know what works and what doesn't work. And in that sense, our newsroom is changing; it's not just reporters rushing around, you know, shoe leather, notebooks. It's skilled – I have to say, they tend to be younger – digital journalists who have a different perspective on how to put the news out there. But the lovely thing is, you'll often see them working with some of our oldest, most seasoned journalists, who realise that these young digital journalists can actually improve what they're doing, improve their articles, and give them greater reach or greater prominence. And so, a lot of what we're doing at the moment is bringing these two worlds together to produce journalism that we can be proud of.

**And what does drive traffic to the site? What does drive clicks? Because you guys, with your paywall, aren't as guilty – well, you're not guilty of this – but with no disrespect to say, the Independent or the Telegraph, they're quite clickbaity in their tweets and when they're trying to drive traffic. You know, five things you didn't know about this, and click here to reveal the one secret of x, y and z. But do you know, when you're writing a story and you're putting it online, whether that's going to be a driver of new traffic to the site? Like you say, is it about the weather, or sport or football?**

But the great beauty of our paywall is that we don't have to worry about that. Once you get behind that paywall, either as a reader or a journalist, you're just free to concentrate on good journalism. We don't do clickbait, because we don't have to. We've got subscribers who pay good money to read quality journalism.

**I declare an interest as one of them!**

So the great joy of it is that clickbait is not something that we have to worry about. Obviously, sometimes we'll do an article that for some reason gets massively picked up and drives a lot of traffic. But in the end, perhaps it will drive a lot of interest but it won't convert people to subscriptions. It's a nice one-off thing to have, but what we're all about is making sure that once we've got people to subscribe that we're giving them what they want – and that's where a lot of our energy is focused; on keeping our subscribers happy, making sure they don't churn. Even while we're trying to grow it. And I should have said earlier, we've now reached half a million subscribers, we passed that milestone in June.

### **Congratulations.**

It was a very big moment for us, and it's a damn good number as well.

### **Will there always be a print edition of The Times?**

There will certainly be a print edition of the Times for the foreseeable future. Of our half a million subscribers – more on our digital than print, but it's pretty much 50:50 – lots of people prefer to read the paper in print. So it's not going to disappear.

### **So you're always going to be tree killers.**

We will carry on being tree killers and driving around in white vans for a lot longer yet! I mean, I think there was a time, maybe five, 10 years ago, when it felt like print was under immense pressure, and there were lots of predictions that publications would become digital only, as it happens, it turned out, you know, it was the Independent, but the print edition is still so important. It's a shop window, people prefer to read in print, it's a marketing tool. So yes, I can't say there will always be a print edition of the Times, but certainly... yes, it'll be around for a lot longer yet.

**I get the train into London every day, and they offer free paper copies of the Times. But I wouldn't even consider doing that, because I'd have to pick it up, whereas I can read exactly the same content on my iPad and on my iPhone. So even though it's free, I prefer the digital version.**

But you're youthful!

### **Thank you!**

That's how you like to read your news. There are more print editions read on a Saturday, for example. Because there's a difference between when you're sitting on a crowded train and you want to read the news on your phone, that's very convenient, but at the weekend, perhaps you'd like to sit down and spread the papers out across the table and have a more leisurely read. So I think there's a time and place for the print product, and a time and place for the digital edition. But certainly, all the growth is on the digital side.

**Do you think there's something to be said for that curated, linear experience of reading a paper, either physically, or on an iPad, for example, where you actually have to turn the page, and then the whole journey from front page through all the various sections, and you deciding the importance of where to place the story is still important. Because on websites, and particularly on the iPhone, it's almost like a cafeteria where you can pick and choose the bits you want in the order, whereas I actually still enjoy that wholly curated journey through the news.**

It's very interesting. If you look at the reviews of the app, a lot of them say, "Thank goodness that the app is clear, it's hierarchical, it's easy to navigate." It seems to me exactly what you're saying – people still want to get the sense that they've read an edition, which again brings me back to our editions. We're not trying to do too much; we're trying to give people a package that is manageable. So people like the design of the app, because it's not complicated, it's very clear, the sections are there. You can read it pretty much as you would read the print product.

**Now you were the editor of the excellent T2 section. How important is T2 as a space for more leisurely reads? Can they survive that transition to that 'quick snack' digital world?**

You see, I'm not sure that the digital world is quick snack, because one of the things that works really well for us are the longer reads – they do very well for us in terms of engagement. And the great thing about T2 is it goes back to what we were saying before about the relentless gloom of the news – T2 can be much more upbeat, less gloomy, great fun, lots of fun writing, useful as well, you know, people like to be given advice. So T2 is a magnificent section, and yes, it's very useful for us to be able to have a space where you can get away from some of the more grim stuff out there.

**Now, you started your career at the FT, eventually becoming FT Weekend editor. How different is the FT culture in readership to the Times?**

Obviously, the FT... it's really interesting. It's a fantastic paper with a global audience. So one of the things when I moved to the Times was, you get much more response to the journalism. I mean, the FT had this huge global audience but it meant that it often felt like...

**Slightly more remote.**

Slightly more remote, exactly. And it's interesting, a journalist for the FT, Lucy Kellaway, she wrote a piece for the FT about this transition from being a journalist to being a teacher, and it was so great I asked her to do it for us, which she did, and she said – I mean, in many ways it's not surprising – but she said she got a much bigger response from her piece in the Times than she did from her piece in the FT, because obviously more people in Britain were reading it.

**I don't read the FT during the weekdays, if I'm honest – but I love FT Weekend.**

Yes. Well, it's a great paper, and there's wonderful stuff in there, but it's a very different audience from ours. So we've got the luxury really of focusing on the British audience, which does help you to focus how you approach the news. Whereas the FT is appealing to a much bigger, or rather a more diffuse, audience.

**When you're looking at the metrics and the dwell time on the website, do you see a lot of people like me that, for example, skip past anything to do with sport, particularly football? The reason I ask is, you've got the home news and then you've got world. If I'm honest, and this is to my discredit, I tend to be slightly more skippy during the world things. The first one or two stories I might read, but then after that, and to my discredit, I tend to read less and less of the world news. I know that's wrong, I ought to, but I don't. Can you tell that? Are there certain articles that are journalistically important, but you can then tell aren't as well read?**

Yes... and I don't think you should beat yourself up if you're not reading world news! I mean, there'll be other people who read world news rather than home news – there's no right or wrong. I think one of the challenges for newspapers in the future is going to be deciding what not to publish as much as what to publish. So, at the moment, we're these massive bundles that present readers with everything from politics to fashion to sport to arts to obituaries; we're presenting the ultimate bundle. And I think, probably in the future, some of what we currently cover we will stop covering, because one of the great things about digital is you can work out what people are reading and what they aren't reading. If honestly there are whole swathes of articles that no one's looking at, why would you carry on doing it? And also, you need to focus your resources on the stuff that's really important. But it's going to be a very slow shift; it's not going to happen overnight.

**Are there still obstacles to women getting the top jobs at newspapers? Is it possible that you could be the first female editor of the Times?**

Well, I can't speak for other newspapers, but I can honestly say I don't think there are obstacles to women at the Times. We have a lot of very senior women there.

**John identifies as male.**

The editor definitely identifies as male! And yes, that certainly goes without saying. No, from my perspective, we have a lot of senior women. I don't think there are obstacles to women getting on. I mean, the issue for British newspapers I don't think is so much women, it's that we're not very diverse – and that's much more of a challenge, frankly, than whether or not women are getting promoted. Our head of production is a woman, we've got a new head of news starting, it's going to be a joint job share, one man one woman. Obviously, our chief executive is a woman, I am a woman, our Saturday editor is a woman. I mean, really, you'd be hard-pressed to argue that there was any sort of discrimination.

**Last couple of questions then. You went to school in East Sussex, and then New Mexico. That's an unusual combination, is it not?**

Yes, I think it is a bit unusual! But I can explain.

### **Do tell!**

So I was at my local school, happily getting on with my O-levels...

### **So we're not in New Mexico at this point, then.**

No, no – we're not in New Mexico at all. But I saw an advert for a school, an international school. It was actually for a movement called the United World Colleges, and I'd vaguely heard of the founding college, which was set up in the 60s in Wales, called Atlantic College, and I thought, "Oh, that looks fun, I'll apply." I think East Sussex back then still had enough money to give scholarships to these schools, they gave two a year – although actually, by the time I applied they had abolished the scholarships, but that's another story. So I applied to go to United World College, and totally unexpectedly won a scholarship to a school that had just opened in New Mexico. It was called the United World College of the American West. And so I set off with two other British girls aged 15 – no, we were 16, we did our O-levels – to this school, literally in the middle of nowhere.

### **That is brave!**

I don't think it was. And when we got there, we did the International Baccalaureate. There were children from all around the world, and the wonderful New Mexico landscape, so it was a sort of life-changing decision to go there.

**Now, one story you didn't expect to write was being on holiday in Italy close to where that major earthquake struck. How scary was that experience? Because were you traumatised or upset? Because Isabel Hardman, for example, was in Nice at the time of the atrocity there, and not only did she report on it, but it clearly affected her very deeply as well – she's been very open about that. How do you strike that balance between the kind of dispassion, that objectivity that you have to have as a journalist, but also being a human being and seeing the suffering first hand?**

Well, it was absolutely terrifying actually being in the earthquake. But in all honesty, we got off lightly where we were. The house that we were in was very damaged, and we all had to evacuate it, but the real damage took place quite a way away from where we were. We were fairly isolated, so we didn't see. I mean, something like 300 people died in that earthquake. But where that happened, we were quite a way away, so it was relatively easy to be dispassionate about it. I think what happened was, we were all sitting in the garden at four o'clock in the morning after we'd left the house, and I think I tweeted something, and then after that I just couldn't stop the requests coming in, because, you know, 24-hour news, everybody wanted a comment. But because we didn't see the real horror – I mean, it was terrifying for us, but nobody got hurt – you just snap it back into action the minute something like that happens.



**Do you like reporting, then? Did you get a journalistic thrill going back to the actual reporting of the news?**

Yes, I think I did. And I think, when you are an editor, you slightly lose confidence in your ability. You often think, “Well, could I actually go back in the field and do it?” And I did, about two years ago, just for various reasons, I went to Columbia before their peace referendum to interview the president – don’t ask why, but I did – and I was really taken aback by how much I enjoyed it. I was very anxious going out there, thinking, “God, I’ve got to write an interview. When was the last time I did that?” But I found the whole experience really thrilling. I suppose it’s a bit like a head teacher going back into the classroom – oh, that sounds really pompous, but do you know what I mean – it was just good fun to actually do the journalism. So yes, I do enjoy it. But I wouldn’t want to make too much of a habit of it.

**Penultimate question, then. What’s the best bit of your job, and what’s the worst bit?**

Okay, the best bits are my colleagues, because I do work with some incredibly talented, interesting, funny people. So coming in every day, I mean, honestly, what a gift! It’s brilliant. The worst bit... I suppose the worst bit is this sense of – I say it’s worse, but it’s also a challenge – this sense that you can’t keep still, that we are an industry under pressure; and you have to maintain rigorous journalistic standards whilst trying to make money whilst dealing with this digital revolution – so at times it can feel very two steps forward, one step back. But again, it’s good to have a challenge; it keeps everybody on their toes.

**Final question, then. What advice would you give to someone starting out in their career, that’s maybe doing a journalism degree at the moment, that wants to be the next deputy editor of the Times?**

My advice would be write as much as you can, get involved where you can, persevere, don’t give up. There are so many more outlets now than there used to be. So write blogs, get involved, write for trade publications, write for websites – just be really enthusiastic, and don’t give up. I used to think, “Oh, God, I wouldn’t tell a young person to go into journalism,” but I’ve changed my mind about that now, because actually, I think in many ways there are many more outlets now, and there are more possibilities for young people wanting to get into journalism than there were when I started.

**Emma, that was hugely interesting and hugely enjoyable. Thank you for your time.**

Thank you.