

Angelos Frangopoulos

CEO, GB News

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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 down the line from the studios of GB News by Angelos Frangopoulos, their Chief Executive. Launched in June 2021 to shake up the TV establishment, GB News survived a rocky start and is now building a loyal audience, regularly beating rival Sky News and TalkTV in the ratings. For two decades previously, Angelos ran Sky News Australia, challenging the TV establishment and his home country. A well-travelled executive with a reputation for speaking his mind, Angelos spent two years before starting GB News in Dubai, running Sky News Arabia. Angelos, thank you for joining me.

It's my pleasure to be here.

Are you a kind of professional journalistic feather-ruffler than a trouble-causer, in the best possible sense?

Not really. I mean, I guess, I've always felt that journalism is about connecting with communities and there's always an opportunity where rivals aren't connecting with communities, that actually make up a significant part of a nation's community fabric. And that's really my motivation. My training came in regional television and radio in New South Wales, my first news director, a fellow called Peter Andron, who sadly passed away many years ago, then became a member of parliament, always talked about the importance of connecting with towns, villages and broader communities that otherwise aren't really represented by establishment media. And I think that's really kind of stuck with me all my life.

Well, I mean, to carry on that then, plenty of people wrote off GB News after its launch. So for you guys to be beating the rival news channels must be very satisfying, both journalistically, but also in terms of like seeing off your competitors.

Yeah, look, I think that these media businesses are just a lot of hard work, and while we have been doing well, we cannot rest on our record so far. We need to keep growing and, you know, we've got formidable competition here in the form of the very well-funded BBC, the obviously Comcast-funded Sky, and also news corporations TalkTV. So our mission really is to just keep working really hard and connecting with those communities as much as we can really, it's a pretty simple process but it just takes time, a lot of effort, and you know, quite frankly, we've got a terrific team here who are not just committed, but also incredibly resilient.

And you've just announced a new 60 million capital injection. And you presenting hires, including Michael Portillo, frankly, a real vote of confidence in the channel's future.

Yeah. I think that we have seen a change in sentiment in the last six months in particular, or eight months now, really, since the start of the year. And that really is, I mean, I think when you launch something new and we did launch from scratch, in the middle of a pandemic, hiring more than a hundred people over Zoom and, you know, supply chain issues the whole lot. But ultimately, it is very difficult to start one of these things up from scratch, but, you know, we sort of got through the early difficult times and we've just built momentum now. And I think that it's a real tribute to the terrific work done by the team. You know, everyone from engineering to the journalism side, which is the core of the business, obviously, you know, it really is a really promising place that we're in right now. We're very focused on growth and focused on doing the very, very best we can to serve the communities of the UK.

I mean, much of the complaints about GB News originally came from the very metropolitan Twitter that you're actually providing an alternative to.

We see ourselves at GB News as being the mainstream and the rest of the media is very much the establishment, you know, I've said this before, Twitter is not the United Kingdom. It's not the United Kingdom at all. And the conversations that we have, whether we're out doing people's forum events with, you know, Liz Truss just outside of Manchester or Nigel is out on the road on, you know, Farage at large, the conversations we're having with people are not the conversations that you have on Twitter. Twitter is a subsection that is largely metropolitan based. And certainly, it doesn't really talk about the true day-to-day issues being faced by the people of the UK.

Well, frankly, there's an audience beyond the south of England, isn't there, that, until you guys came along, wasn't being adequately catered for.

You know, there's always been media in the UK that has been focused on local issues. And, you know, the BBC has put a lot of it, a lot of resources into local news coverage, have the ITV network of local stations as well. But there's one difference I think that we have really strived to bring to the media landscape, and that is the coverage of national issues from a local perspective. You know, what do the people of Scotland, Wales, England, and Northern Ireland think about a whole range of issues, not really focusing on, you know, what's happening locally, it's not parish pump. It really is treating these communities with respect, seeking their perspectives on the issues of the day, what is affecting them. And we have seen some of those topics — so topics really come through in some of the programming that we have done, particularly in programmes, such as Michelle Dewberry, some of the issues that Nigel raises and some of the issues that Mark Steyn and Dan Woodman have really focused on as well. We've tried to be different, and sometimes being different is quite confronting for the establishment to take on, and I think that a lot of the pressure that we had initially was that, you know, we were doing something different.

I mean, I'm a big admirer of you and a big admirer of the channel, frankly. But if I didn't like it, I just wouldn't watch you. There seems to be this sort of genuine conspiracy against your channel. How damaging is it to free speech in the station that there's literally this ongoing, coordinated attempt to boycott your station? That seems to me that it's not enough that you are ignored, according to your detractors, but that you actually have to be killed.

Yeah, I think that there's a lot of hot air around that and we are finding that that is evaporating over time. You know, I think that people are now seeing that we are a part of the media landscape, that we are a legitimate part of the media landscape, that we are serving audiences that are growing, and that we are doing something different to what the status quo establishment broadcasters are delivering. And I think a lot of it is just really communicating our messaging. Clearly, in the early days, we had lots of messaging that was not helpful. And you know, I think that well, I do know that that's well and truly behind us now. And I think we're in a far stronger position. And really, we are focusing on the audience, focusing on serving those communities, and in time, things will improve. But, you know, certainly, the challenges that we've had on the advertising front have been quite damaging to us

as there's no doubt about that, but we are overcoming that by having conversations and building trust because, you know, quite frankly, social media campaigns designed to bring down GB News are not really going to work long term because GB News is providing a service, it's providing a connection to the community that is greater than a single social media handle.

Well, the very first record I ever bought was “Relax” by Frankie Goes to Hollywood, and I bought it because the BBC had banned it and I thought, well, if people are gonna try and cancel this record, obviously we didn't call it that then, that's all the more reason to check it out and support it, frankly, stifling free speech.

Yeah. Look, you know, I think the thing about free speech is that it is a really critical foundation for our entire society. And yet, you know, it's interesting, free speech doesn't mean that it's absolutely totally open free speech. There are bounds and there are community standards, which we must all adhere to in that free speech. And in the case of broadcasters in the United Kingdom, you know, there is Ofcom and Ofcom is an important part of the equation because they do operate a regulated environment and we are very happy to be part of that regulated environment, it's important because it means that we are able to reach the broadest audience possible across mass reach broadcasting platforms and there's a responsibility that comes with that. And now we are happy to accept that responsibility. Now, all broadcasters have their challenges when it comes to Ofcom regulations. But you know, we are obviously very committed to ensuring that we operate at the higher standards in a live broadcasting environment, which has its own challenges in itself, as you can imagine.

Well, it is, and then sometimes in the name of balance, you can have this bothsidesism, can't you, where you basically just have two guests on either side, and you say, “this is the debate as it were.” I mean, how far can GB News push the envelope like that where, obviously as journalists, you've committed to telling the truth, but you've got to tell it through your own lens? Does Ofcom ever get in the way of that?

I have to say, I think Ofcom has been terrific to deal with, you know, all broadcasters have interactions with Ofcom. I think they've been really fair in, you know, any feedback that we've had, and we've seen that they provide feedback to broadcasters

on an ongoing basis. But I can't think of it as actually curtailing any debates or discussions that we've had on air. You know, there is this concept of, in fact, it's when talking about impartiality, it's due impartiality, but that does not in any way prevent any broadcaster in the United Kingdom from being able to openly debate and discuss issues that are important to the community. I think what you do find though with GB News is that we are talking about issues that you otherwise do not get on other establishment broadcasters. And that can be challenging at times, but, you know, the reality is that that's what we are here for. We are here to challenge the status quo, to challenge the limits that are placed on some of the topics that are discussed in the community. And to hear All Perspectives, it's no coincidence. That's actually the parent company for GB News is actually All Perspectives Ltd. And we do live up to that, as we live up to our editorial charter which shrines our aims as a business.

Is there a GB News viewer that you have in mind, in your mind's eye, when you're sort of setting the tone about not only what you will and won't cover, but how you'll go about doing it editorially? Do you have someone in mind?

No, we don't really, and I think that I've actually been asked that question before. The reality is that we have to think of a broad range of communities because we serve them all. So an issue that would be of interest to the community in Belfast, for example, is also of interest to a community in London or in the north of England because we are talking about issues that are affecting everybody. Yes, of course, sometimes there are localised things that we do think about, but we don't have a picture on the wall here of Fred or Jane who are our typical viewers that we're broadcasting to. And I think that would be very limiting anyway, you know, we do by our topic selection and our, you know, the range of programs that we have, we are trying to serve communities that otherwise have not been adequately served in our view by the establishment broadcasters, and that is why programs like Farage spend time going out into Wales and the north and to communities that otherwise they are quite large metropolitan areas at times, but they're not considered as that by those who are living in London. And it's interesting, you know, we go to Manchester quite a bit. Manchester has been our number one market in terms of audience. And that's really quite fascinating for us because it is a big city with similar challenges to what you have in places like London. But the perspective and the challenges are, you know, slightly different because they're not normally involved in the national

conversation. And that's what we are bringing to these communities here on GB News.

And what makes some, is your job as chief executive a bit like a, you know, a football manager wearing a heavy sheepskin coat at the side of the football pitch, sort of buying up the talent of other teams. I mean, you've got Eamonn Holmes, Stephen Dixon, Anne Diamond, you've got some big names. Do you watch other channels and think “oh, that's a good journalist, I'll have that person”? How does it actually work? Do you have some kind of, I was gonna say fantasy football league kind of thing, but you must have an eye on top talent.

Well, I don't have a sheepskin jacket. I can tell you, but look, you know, ultimately we're after people who can connect with the members of the community that we're trying to reach. You know, Eamonn's a really good example. So, you know, Manchester is very much home to Eamonn and he understands the north, he understands people, he's one of them. And, you know, we are always looking for people that can actually connect with the broader community. This ultimately is, you know, this is not a football game. So, you know, we're not moving players around, but ultimately it is, you know, ratings are really important to us, connecting with the audience, driving audience growth. And yes, you've gotta adjust the team's positions from time to time and also look at what's working in which slots you know, guess like football, you wanna win. And that's what we are here to do — we're here to win.

And as I said, I hugely admire that drive. How does that manifest itself in terms of your job as CEO, you've only got 37, 40, 50 hours a week, you know, to do your job, whatever you choose to focus on is inevitably gonna come at the expense of something else that's pressing. You can't just sit there and watch the channel, can you? I mean, how do you actually divvy up your responsibilities? What does a typical day, what does a typical week look like for you?

So we have got a terrific team here and all these channels depend on teamwork across the seven days of the week. That's not to say that, you know, I, along with others here in the management team, in fact, right across the journalism team, we all consume a lot of GB News, including my five-year-old daughter who listens to it a lot at home when we've got it on in the background. My children have, sadly or

fortunately, depending on your perspective, grown up listening to 24-hour news channels at home, but occasionally CBeebies does win out. So she does get her way.

So there is some heart then, they're allowed a token hour on CBeebies.

These are all-encompassing businesses. We staff 24 hours a day, seven days a week. And it really comes down to the terrific team that we have. But ultimately we all consume the product, getting phone calls at midnight and four o'clock in the morning and five o'clock in the morning. That's just part of the course and that's part of quite frankly, the adrenaline that you get working in the 24-hour news environment and the same would go for anyone who's working at Sky News, or, you know, the BBC News channel, that is part of the exciting part of it. You can plan as much as you like, but you can't plan for events.

Do you ever get together with John from Sky or Sam from BBC News channel and sort of, you know, chew the fats with fellow channel controllers?

I don't know Sam, but I know John Riley very well. We're very old friends but we haven't caught up for some time, but, you know, I have huge respect for the leadership teams at any of the 24-hour news channels because they are the ones that know what it takes to actually make these things work, you know, on the flip side though, we do have a lot of operational contact with Sky, BBC and ITM, and that is through our membership of the pool. And our news desk has got an ongoing relationship with them in terms of arranging coverage of events of national importance when it comes to politics. And that's something that you know, there's a lot of cooperation that goes on behind the scenes, within this industry that people don't see. And there are a lot of friendships that exist behind the scenes of this industry that people don't see either. And, you know, it's one thing to be a competitor, but it should never be at the price of personal relationships in my view.

Absolutely, friendly rivalry, I've always thought that's the best way to be a gentleman about these things. This, obviously isn't a job interview because you've got the job and I'm not on the board of GB News, but do you have like the midterm plan? Do you have, like where you're gonna take the channel of

the next 3, 5, 6 years in your mind's eye, like a direction of travel and are you able to share any of that with our listeners?

Well, I think that we've been pretty clear in saying that, you know, we are about growth. We're about growing our audience, about growing the quality of the production that we deliver, about investing more in journalism and success comes through achieving all those things. So, you know, our plan is to just keep growing, keep investing and keep improving what we do. We're only what, 15 months old. It feels like a very long time, but, you know, we are still getting our act together, building expertise, teams working together. The equipment is now, you know, our technology, which our cloud-enabled technology is working really well now. So, you know, these are journeys. And if you ask me in another six months where we're at, we'll be hopefully even further down the track towards the state that we want to end up at. And that is actually being a real contender for the number one slot here in the UK against the BBC and Sky.

I was in Philadelphia running up the Rocky steps. When your email came through saying, you very kindly would take part. And it made me think that in a sense, GB News is a little bit of that underdog, isn't it? I mean, it must give you some satisfaction that despite the huge marketing campaign for the likes of Piers Morgan, Nigel Farage, they've more than held their own, your channel is beating them in the ratings and you're doing it by many words, you're doing a better job rather than out spending them on marketing.

We don't, I mean, while we monitor what the others are doing, we are really focused on doing our thing. You know, we've got a clear focus on just connecting with communities and serving the communities that we serve really well. And sometimes that means we do things differently from the other three competitors in the landscape, but we do things "the GB News way". And one thing that we've really focused on is actually being authentic. When we say "we're Britain's news channel" — we mean it, when we say "we're the people's news channel" — we mean it. And we work very hard to live up to those taglines of "Britain news channel" and "the people's channel." It's a very important part of our ethos and philosophy here that, you know, we are ultimately about the people.

Well, the Americans call them "teaching moments", don't they, we call them "mistakes" here in Britain, but, and I'm not suggesting that we should go and

revisit, you know, things like Andrew Neil and everything, but have there been any unexpected teaching moments along the way? And I don't want to revisit all the stuff that happened at the very beginning before your tenure, but in terms of like, as you're now in this new chapter, what's gone according to plan, and what's not?

Look, “mistakes,” “teaching moments,” “learnings,” whatever you wanna call them — this is the startup. Three months before we launched, the place I'm standing in or sitting in right now was actually just technical flooring and some lights hanging off a concrete slab above us. So we have learned a lot — everything from air conditioning kits, to technology challenges, to some of the downfalls of trying to build a business during a pandemic. And the reality is that it's really about overcoming the obstacles as quickly as you can. And there are lots of things that, you know, haven't gone right, lots of things have gone right. And some of them unexpected, you know, it's hard to sort of hone in on one thing or the other, but, you know, if we'd had our time all over again, of course, I'd do a million things differently, but we may not have learned the lessons that have got us to where we are now. So sometimes you've gotta think of life's lessons as being there for a very reason. And of us who, you know, were part of, you know, the bulk of the staff here actually were, who are still here, actually were part of the startup. We've all learned a lot. And the other thing that it does teach as well is the power of teamwork. You know, there were some pretty tough moments where lots of things were going wrong, but ultimately people working together with a focused goal on achieving something that's unbeatable. And also, it helps build culture, which is something that is difficult to build in a startup, particularly when everyone had basically met each other just a few weeks beforehand because we were all in lockdown.

There's something quite existential about that. The question of where if you could quantum leap into a younger version of you, would you tell “the you” about the mistakes you're about to make? Cause I agree with you, I don't think I'd change anything because all those mistakes that I've made over the years, painful though they are, have actually made me the person I am. And frankly, I'm a better leader in business and entrepreneur because of the scars on my back.

Yeah. Well, you know, I think that is true and it goes more broadly about life too, mistakes that you make in life. And they lead to creating, moulding a better you, you

know, the person that you are right now and everything from education to schooling, to family, to relationships, the whole thing, you know, it's important, and I think the other thing is actually when you've got a team like we had here, all of us learning together, it is incredibly empowering.

What advice would you give to someone listening to this that wants a job at GB News? Like what do you want to see in the people that work with you?

The most important thing for us is someone who loves journalism and loves connecting with a community that we serve. Being a storyteller, being a great communicator is really important. We don't hire just from journalism courses from the university. We hire very broadly with a broad skill set because ultimately we, as a journalism business, have to reflect the community that we serve. And that goes for diversity in all its forms, you know, including regional diversity, which I think is really important and something that is not really focused on enough in the establishment media. And you can see that, you know, obviously, there's lots of talk out of places, like the BBC, about making sure that workforces and news stories reflect the broader regional diversity of the United Kingdom, but that's something that we've believed in since day one. And that's something that we will continue to focus on and build up.

Could you walk through our listeners like a run-through of your career so far? Because it's incredible that you did two decades at Sky News Australia. Did you always want to be a journalist when you started out? How did you get going on this? And tell us about some of the, there were some downs along the way, I mean, you've had an incredible career.

I've had an interesting career. I guess, look, I fell in love with journalism when I was 14 and I joined a community radio station, as we call them in Australia, which had a kid show and I just fell in love with radio and radio production and radio journalism. And then I went off to study at a university in Western New South Wales, then called Mitchell College, now called Charleston University, and my formative years off the back of that course were spent, as I said earlier working in a small newsroom in western New South Wales serving you know, a wide range of the state, but based in a city that had at that stage, I think 32,000 people living in it, and we were solos commercial operators back in the days that there was just the ABC, which is the state broadcast equivalent of the BBC and the local station mid-state television. And that's where really I fell in love with, I fell in love with connecting with communities

because you could actually go out and do stories in a town that were really important to the people in that town — economically, socially, you know, a school closing down or a business closing down that would have massive challenges and repercussions for a community. And that's something that was always sort of stuck with me. And then I was very fortunate to get a job at Channel 9 in Sydney, which was by far the biggest and best television newsroom in the nation at that stage, and to some extent, it still is the biggest television newsroom in Australia to this day. And then in the mid-nineties, I came to work at Sky News here in the UK and spent the best part of two years working here and then went back to Australia. But I've always treated career as being part of an adventure that you go on. And you know, we've had lots of different adventures, we've always learned from every adventure that we've been on as a family, some have been better than others, but the reality is that we all, you know, going back to the earlier point, we're all a product of the environment and experiences that we have. And I think that that's actually a really important thing for journalism. And that's why, you know, we seek out people, who've got life experience to be journalists because that gives you context and depth and a sense of understanding of what the issues are that really affect people.

Was there a moment in your career when you decided whether you wanted to sort of write or present in front of a camera or be an executive? Because I passionately believe that good journalism not only must be invested in and paid for, but managed well. We had a chap on Scott Armstrong a couple of weeks ago saying that one of the problems that the industry of journalism have is they take talented journalists and they over promote them to news managers and they give them no skills and it's not great for their mental health or the people they're managing. You're obviously a very effective manager and media leader. Was there a point where you wanted to be like the leader, the runner of the business rather than a journalist actually producing and covering the news?

No, I don't think that, I think that just kind of happened. It's not something that I had a life plan to seek out, but, you know, I see so many terrific journalism leaders in our business here at GB News, such great promise, you know, young people who are just clearly in love with journalism and telling stories and love working hard and believe in the mission of journalism, because journalism isn't a job, it's a vocation. You've gotta really treat it that way because it's really something that you've really got to love. And because it's really hard work, and it's long hours, and it's punishing,

and it impacts, you know, all aspects of your life and it totally consumes you. But it's for those who, you know, who are considering going in a journalism career, you've got to really love it. And you know, the greatest privilege I think anyone can have is actually to get paid for what they love to do. And that's really where it sort of landed me in getting into the management side of things.

Well, like you say, if you do the work you love, it's not even really work, is it? You never work a day in your life. I usually ask a sort of standard question along the lines of who are your heroes? You know, what qualities in them do you admire? I've always found even some of the people that the traditional media demonise in journalism I've actually found to be very pleasant, very warm-hearted. You know, it's not how they are sort of in real life as it were. Have you come across people that, like they say, never meet your heroes, but when I've met them, I've always been pleasantly surprised?

I've been lucky to have a number of people who have been really important to me professionally and personally, the one who really does come to mind, who probably would mean something to British audiences, is Sam Chisholm, who was the former CEO of Sky here in the early days and really, really, truly disrupted the media landscape here along with Rupert Murdoch. And I was very fortunate to have Sam as my chairman in Australia for a number of years and we became quite close friends and I was very saddened when he passed away a few years ago, but he was a classic example of someone who was seen to be, you know, quite firm, so to speak, but ultimately just really had a passion for the business and really was a terrific person to learn from. He'd always tell you the harsh truth. And that's something that I feel people don't do enough anymore. It's sometimes better to actually be told what is really going on rather than be given some sort of confectioned answer and I've always admired Sam for that, that was a really important time for me to have the benefit of his wisdom and his counsel.

Much missed. As you say, I've always admired the sort of plucky nature of GB News. And I was wondering whether you had any advice to someone starting out in their career. I mean, is journalism more difficult to get into? Because in a sense, if you're plucky and you are self-started, there are more means to make a name for yourself, blogging and podcasting and so on. In another sense, most other media organisations are shedding jobs, newsrooms are barren there that they've got fewer people in than ever. Is journalism worth it?

I think journalism is worth it. It's a very important part of a healthy society. It's an important part of making sure that those in power are held to account. It's an important part of the conduit to the connection between communities as well and for issues that are important to people to be brought to the national stage.

Is it harder to get into, though?

I don't think so. You know, we have got so many, and as I look around the newsroom here, we've got so many wonderful young people. Many of them who've just come straight out of university or have, you know, had been at university and have worked for a few years and then decided to get into journalism. You know, that's probably the one thing that I think has been really underestimated about the impact of GB News. And that is, you know, we have brought more than 200 jobs to the media market here in the UK, jobs that didn't exist before. And I think that's a really, really healthy thing. The more diversity of opinion, diversity of platforms, diversity of employers journalists have to go to, it is a better outcome for journalism overall, and as I said, the communities and society, which journalism serves.

Angelos, that was a hugely interesting conversation, obviously wishing the very best of luck with GB News. Thank you for your time.

And thank you very much for your time. I really enjoyed it. Thank you.

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