

I want to start by saying how surprised and delighted I am to be speaking to you at the Asian Racing Confederation conference.

Surprised because in my 30 plus years as a sports journalist in Australia, horse racing is a sport I've had few opportunities to cover.

But I'm delighted because it's a sport that I grew up with a passion for.

I was lucky enough to have a grandfather who was a racing lover.

Pop lived with us when I was a child and that meant that on Saturday afternoons our house was filled with the rhythmic, urgent sound of race callers' voices; occasionally augmented by the excited voice of Pop cheering home a winner.

Sitting at the kitchen table with him I heard stories about Phar Lap and Ajax and Tulloch and Todman, memorised the names of Melbourne Cup winners and learned to read a race form.

I was quite astonished in high school when I first realised none of my friends could read a race form. I felt sorry for them and wondered how their families could've let them down so badly.

As it happened the other side of my family were more into cricket and football so I absorbed a fair bit of knowledge of those sports as I grew up and, eventually, after graduating from university I got my dream job as a sports broadcaster with the Australian Broadcasting Corporation.

At the time it was a big deal because the ABC had never hired a woman sports broadcaster before and there were some dire forecasts that the sky would fall in. Looking back I wish I'd taken the direct approach and told all the doubters to "get stuffed."

Over the years I've not really ever been asked to focus on any one sport. My usual brief has been to go on radio or television and chat about whatever's making news in sport, compile and present sports bulletins and host programs that take in a wide range of sports.

And that, in an odd way, is what's led to me being here today.

My assignment is to give you an overview of sports media, how it's changed, where it's headed and where horse racing sits in that overall picture.

Now you don't have to be a long-time media insider to see the key factors affecting change in the business: cable television and the Internet. They are the same factors that are re-shaping most areas of the media.

Let's start with cable television.

As a sports nut, I love it. We have a saying in Australia that too much sport is still not enough. And too much sport is what cable or pay TV gives you. It's created revenue for sports that might not have made the cut for broadcast television.

But, really for sports administrators it should be seen as a double edged sword.

It means fans of your sports who can afford to pay can feast on it. But the odds of you attracting new fans through cable coverage are limited.

Cable TV allows viewers to consume what they already like. It allows for more viewer specialisation than diversification. I serious doubt it broadens anyone's taste. Take news coverage in the U.S as an example. Now on cable TV Americans watch the news that gives them the version they want to hear: FoxNews for the right wing, MSNBC for the left leaning.

Where a sport like racing has its very own channels, the effect is even more extreme. If you don't know anything about racing it's unlikely you're ever going to switch to that channel. While there's no doubt there is value to racing in having dedicated stations, in a sense you've segregated racing fans from the rest of sport.

It's a trend I've noticed over my years in the media.

When I started at the ABC on Saturday afternoons on radio we would broadcast the races. We would cross from the cricket or the football to Randwick or Rosehill. And it meant if there was a standout performance by a horse, or a jockey or a trainer it would be part of the sports conversation that afternoon. Now, racing fans have their own radio station.

It alienates the potential crossover fan who likes other sport but might not go to a separate part of the newspaper to read about it, or switch to a dedicated radio or cable station to watch it?

I'll come back to that - but after looking at the second big factor affecting sports media: technology.

When I started in the media I was using a typewriter that was so old it typed in pencil. Well. I've stolen that description from the American comedian Stephen Wright but it describes the state technology was at when I began my sports journalism career at the Australian Broadcasting Corporation.

My main sources for general sports news were newspapers, and the old wire service printer that used to relentlessly spit out stories in paper. In terms of live coverage of sports events, if something wasn't on television, then hopefully you had a reporter there and you would cross to them, or phone to get a score update.

Of course, no one had a mobile phone so I would have to phone through to a landline that ABC has installed in the commentary box at the ground. This was a nightmare members of the commentary team had a habit of using the phone for their own purposes. That meant that as a sports bulletin approached if they happened to be talking to their wife or girlfriend or, more likely their SP bookmaker, I couldn't get an up to date score and would have to go with a wire service score that I knew was at least 20 minutes out of date.

These days live scoreboards on the Internet have solved all those problems, which is good because staffing cuts in media organisations mean it's less likely there'll be a reporter at the ground.

And in terms of breaking news from sport, I find that Twitter is light years ahead of wire services and, of course, newspapers - even newspapers in their online form.

If you have a Twitter feed set up following the right people you'll get wind of a story breaking sometimes as it's actually happening.

Yes, for a while many journalists, and others, were sceptical, asking questions like "well, how do you really know who these people are that are tweeting the information?"

But really, it's just like an extension of the old world of contacts and story tip-offs. Unless you're really gullible you should be able to figure out fairly quickly if a Twitter account is real or fake and if the Tweeter is usually well-informed. And, of course, you follow to get the appropriate confirmation or comment.

In a sense it's taken the place of the old wire service feed too. Most sporting organisations will tweet their breaking news too. These days you'll get notifications of team selections, appointments,

tribunal decisions, even results via Twitter before you get an email from that organisation, or before they've had a chance to update their website.

The other huge advantage with Twitter is that it's like an instant forum for opinion so you can. See what issues or personalities are sparking the most discussion.

I use Twitter as sports fan as well as as a journalist. It's fun interacting with others who are watching the same sporting event as me, and I think most Twitter research has shown live sport and Twitter are made for each other. For the purposes of this discussion it's probably also worth me mentioning I bought my first small share in a thoroughbred as a result of becoming friends on Twitter with a jockey.

Now, all of this perhaps begs the question, if fans have access to all these social media updates and website score services, why do they need mainstream media?

This is the question troubling a lot of old media. And clearly print media is the most drastically affected.

I still subscribe to a couple of online newspapers, almost out of solidarity with fellow journalists. But I'm finding less and less that the content is useful. As someone who currently does sports bulletins on radio I find today's paper is what I spent most of yesterday talking about on air. If they could find a way for me to make notes on the race form on the iPad edition, it'd encourage me to keep subscribing.

Radio, as I've touched on, can use the Internet and social media as a tool to help with its immediacy - and the immediacy of radio has always been my favourite part about it. But I'm not blinded by loyalty to my favourite medium to the point where I can't see how it is being changed as a sports broadcasting platform by cable TV and the myriad sport options it offers. I don't believe there's a long term future for radio broadcasts of sport - but sport topics and discussions will stay on the agenda. In fact, I think increased coverage of sport on various TV and Internet platforms means more people will want to talk about sport. And discussions on social media can become part of discussions on radio.

Radio has always been a format for curating things that people already had access to - be it music, information or opinions and using them for content.

And the car is still one of radio's best allies. Because no matter how portable you make social media and streaming video you still can't use it while you're driving. Well not safely or legally anyway.

Television, the other old media format, doesn't face a threat to its existence but perhaps a dilution of the influence of its old flagship channels given the way the alternatives to old style broadcast TV are multiplying. Digital TV has increased the options for existing stations, cable TV offers the more established alternative and streaming online coverage, increasingly available on mobile devices, is another.

The old attitude that having your sport on free-to-air television will bring you new fans is becoming less and less logical because, if mainstream TV viewers have no interest in your product, they have plenty of other viewing options. Gone are the days of, "well, this is what's on so let's give it a go."

So that seems to me the Media Puzzle for horse racing, if you'll forgive the Melbourne Cup/ Aiden O'Brien reference, you've got more coverage than ever, but don't get complacent in your Cable TV castles, because there are potential fans out there that aren't coming to you, you've got to find a way to get to them.

And don't forget the sports media people, or even media people in general, who aren't in the horse racing media might be ones who have access to that potential fan.