



Australia Network – projecting and enhancing Australia’s image across Asia and the Pacific

Background

The world is becoming ever more complex – politically and technologically. There are greater numbers of information sources available to citizens of almost every nation. In this increasingly noisy media environment, in some territories, governments as well as commercial players are seeking to gain influence through broadcasting services that serve regional or international audiences. Significantly, some nations are increasing their spending on international services in the hope of pushing their agendas to audiences that they believe will be receptive, offering an alternative viewpoint to long-established news brands.

At the same time, media is becoming more accessible and many local players are entering the media marketplace. The trend for stronger competition can be observed in media markets worldwide, including the Asia-Pacific region. Increased competition does not guarantee that reliable news sources are available. Indeed, in countries across the Asia-Pacific region, new television channels are being established that are in the direct influence of business and politics, run by people who seek to have control over the political agenda to further their own particular aims.

This document provides context for the current state of international broadcasting and sets out the case for Australia Network to continue to provide a credible, impartial viewpoint from Australia to, and across, the Asia-Pacific region as part of Australia’s public diplomacy and soft power initiatives. The document draws on AIB’s comprehensive knowledge, and understanding, of the broadcasting industry globally, built up since the founding of AIB in 1993.





Historical context

In the last decades of the 20th century, international broadcasting closely reflected the bi-polar political situation of the world. When the Cold War drew to a close in the early 1990s, the USA, China and Russia were the largest players in international short-wave radio broadcasting, competing directly for audiences in almost every part of the world.

As the world order changed after the fall of the Soviet Union, so too did international broadcasting. Russia reduced its short wave radio broadcasting operations from almost 2000 hours a week of broadcasting in multiple languages in 1990 to just 726 in far fewer languages by 1996. China maintained and gently increased its weekly hours to 1620 by 1996.

Even after the end of the Cold War, international broadcasting from some countries continued – and continues – to comprise unalloyed propaganda or unrealistically positive messages about those nations. This is often in direct contrast to what might be described as “even-handed” reporting on those countries by western media.

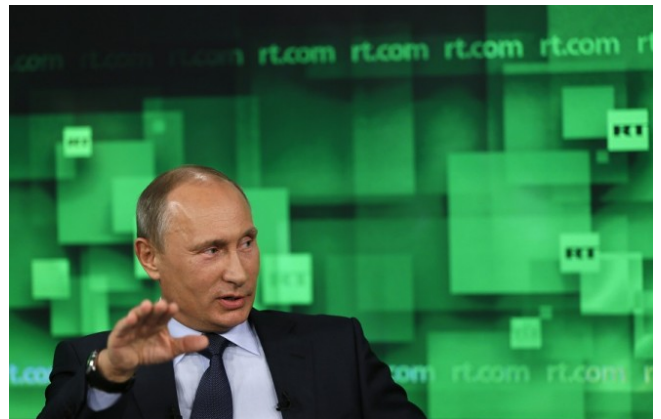
It is important to note that a key result of broadcasting propaganda is a significant and long-lasting diminution of trust in those sources by listeners and viewers. The lack of critical information devalues the worth of the output.

Over the following years, competition from direct satellite broadcasting of television programmes resulted in considerable reductions in radio output – with some stations ceasing operations altogether – and increased provision of regional and international television services.

The launches of Al Jazeera English, CCTV News, Channel NewsAsia, RT and Press TV provide examples of the “new world order” in international broadcasting. Qatar, China, Singapore, Russia and Iran have invested, and continue to invest, significant sums in international television services.

It is clear that we are seeing a growth in international broadcasting that replicates the changes in global politics and economics and in some ways replicates the way in which international broadcasting was used at the end of the Cold War. The major investments by Russia and China to ensure their messages are seen and heard by as many people as possible are tools by which those countries secure their place in the world.

Today, there continues to be unrealistic, highly positive coverage by some nations’ international broadcasting services. These services do not enter the mainstream and are not regarded as reliable, credible sources of information.



Starting conversations

Australia has a number of major advantages when it comes to promoting its place in the region and in promoting the ideals and norms that make Australia such an attractive place to do business. Key among these is the nation’s use of the English language.



The importance of English cannot be overstated; many hundreds of millions of people across the Asia-Pacific region want to learn English to help them improve their living standards and prosperity. For many years, ABC Radio Australia has offered English-learning courses and material and Australia Network also provides world-class English teaching. Providing these courses make the two Australian international broadcasters destinations of choice for people across the region while also creating a positive “feel good” factor about Australia among those who successfully learn or improve their English-speaking and –writing skills.

As more and more people start using social media to communicate and to start conversations, it is likely that people will refer to the English-language courses offered by ABC Radio Australia and Australia Network, encouraging friends and colleagues to sample this teaching output.

At the same time, it is important to note that other nations are working equally hard to promote their languages. For example, China has established more than 350 Confucius Institutes globally which offer Chinese-language teaching courses. The number of Confucius Institutes is now more than the combined total of German [Goethe Institute] and British [British Council] cultural institutes. This demonstrates China’s goal to spread not only the Chinese language but also Chinese culture and thinking to the world and dovetails with the People’s Republic’s immense investment in its international broadcasting operations.

Changes in media consumption

The way in which people consume media is changing fundamentally in almost every market in the world. As a nation that leads in technological development, Australia is well-positioned both to anticipate and to react to changes in the markets that its international broadcasters serve. ABC Radio Australia and Australia Network have already embraced the online, social media marketplace ensuring that content is available on the most appropriate platforms and devices for its audiences across the Asia-Pacific region. From Facebook to Twitter, YouTube to Instagram, the ABC is finding the best way to ensure that its audiences are served on all platforms and that the audience has the means to engage in conversations with the broadcasters. Gone are the days of effectively “shouting” at the audience. Today, engagement is paramount to keep and grow audiences. Australia Network is able to harness the work done by the ABC’s domestic services in this area, cherry-picking the best ideas to deliver genuine audience engagement across the Asia-Pacific region.

It is also important to remember that as increased sources become available, it is no longer possible for nations to “spin” unremittingly positive stories as once they could. Journalists increasingly make use of social media to tell stories, and news breaks on social media platforms. As more and more of people carry ever more sophisticated devices in their pockets that provide



Mobile phone users in Indonesia

instant access to multiple information sources, the role of broadcasters delivering reliable, credible, unbiased news has never been more important. People want to be able to check information delivered via social platforms with reliable brands that they trust. International broadcasters in advanced nations such as Australia are part of those reliable brands and it is vital that governments that fund such operations do not interfere with the provision of credible information to audiences in regions they wish to influence.

Honest approach

It is important to understand that, just as with international broadcasting during the Cold War, not all of the new players in international television provide reliable, unbiased news to audiences. Recent events in Ukraine have demonstrated that some nations are using their international television services to provide misinformation in the hope of influencing international public opinion.

Australia, as a stable, prosperous and democratic nation that is also an important regional power, should maintain and enhance the projection of its core values to the Asia-Pacific region. It should



Journalists taking part in a protest march in Yangon over the jailing of a reporter, January 2014

be a beacon of free speech and unbiased journalism, with news that can be relied upon without question by citizens across the region. This will support Australia's open, flexible and competitive market-based economy.

Australia Network is a vital component of Australia's overall strategy to project democratic and free-market ideals to its neighbours, its trading partners and to others across the Asia-Pacific region. Unlike some

international broadcasters that seek to hide their origins [such as RT from Russia; Press TV from Iran], Australia Network has the

confidence to announce clearly where it comes from. This in itself is a powerful message to its existing and potential audiences.

It is worth remembering that the tender for Australia Network published in 2011 spoke of the Australian Government objective of "providing a credible, impartial and independent voice, delivered to an international audience..." The tender document amplified the notion of impartiality and separation from government saying... that Australia Network should "have a high level of credibility, impartiality and editorial independence of the Australian Government..."

These are ideals that underpin international broadcasting from all Australia's key partners in, for example, the European Union and North America.

From time to time, the output of international broadcasters causes irritation within their stakeholder governments. However, these challenges underpin the credibility of the broadcaster and ultimately reflect well on the nation. Such events also help to amplify the concept of a free press and unbiased journalism and should be welcomed by stakeholders.



Australia in the world

Despite its relative geographic isolation, Australia is a key regional power that can be said punches above its weight. It shares its democratic values with like-minded nations in Western Europe and North America and works with and alongside those nations to promote the concepts of stability, democracy, freedom and rule of law that underpin Australian society.

Australia will host the G20 meeting in Brisbane in November 2014 and will stage the Commonwealth Games in 2018.

The current Foreign Minister, the Honourable Julie Bishop MP, speaking in March 2014, said that the G20 is an important forum for discussion and membership of the Commonwealth “club” is interesting for the diversity of its membership and the ability to share ideas with so many nations on every continent.

As an important, stable, democratic nation, Australia is well-placed to promote its ideals to its neighbours across the Asia-Pacific region.



The bigger picture

Australia’s position in Asia and the Pacific is underpinned by a range of activities that benefit the nation’s role as a regional power.

The New Colombo Plan in which Australian university students spend time studying in the Indo-Pacific region is designed to deepen relationships with the region both at the individual level and through expanding university, business and other links.



Separately, media training programmes have been established to assist countries across Asia and the Pacific in developing freedom of speech and high quality journalism. These programmes help to bring stability to the region, increasing economic development.

Many of these training programmes have been delivered by the ABC and its international broadcasting division. The programmes support the placement of ABC International radio and television on local broadcasters, helping Australia gain additional exposure in the region and to enable the country to influence greater numbers of people.

Working to a different agenda, it is unlikely that a commercially-funded international broadcaster would invest in similar training schemes to those offered by publicly-funded broadcasters.

It is worth noting that major international broadcasters such as Deutsche Welle and Radio France Internationale continue to provide extensive media training courses through their academies. The aim of these courses is, in addition to bolstering the development of journalism, to encourage course alumni to think positively towards the host broadcaster during their careers. There are many examples where course members, as they have become more senior in their organisations, have chosen to put RFI and DW onto local airwaves, demonstrating a significant return on the investment made in training. This is an approach that Australia should consider adopting.



Budgets

Many countries are allocating increasing sums to their international broadcasting operations. Within the Asia-Pacific region, many billions of dollars are being spent. China's international broadcasting operations – including CCTV-News, China Radio International and CNC World – reputedly have a combined operating budget of several billion dollars annually. Russia's international television service RT – operating in English, Arabic and Spanish – has a budget of several hundred million dollars each year. It is pushing hard into markets such as India, securing carriage on DTH platforms in the country.

These broadcasters do not need to demonstrate a return on investment. The money spent is simply to buy influence among the widest possible audience. It is not possible to evaluate the success of these channels using the usual tools employed by historically mainstream broadcasters and their stakeholders.

Myanmar, with GDP of US\$51.92billion [Australia GDP = US\$1.521trillion], has established an international television channel (screenshot, right). Myanmar sees a need to influence the agenda of the discussion about the developing country. AIB believes it is unlikely that Myanmar will succeed in achieving widespread distribution agreements for its international television service in the short to medium term.



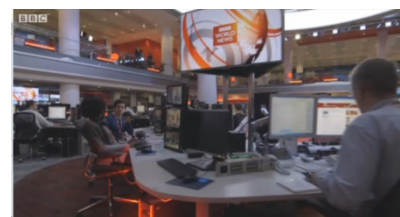
Vietnam, with a GDP of US\$141.7billion, has for some time been examining the options for establishing an international television service. AIB understands that plans are now progressing at an increased pace.

Neither Myanmar nor Vietnam is a beacon of press freedom. Restrictions exist on foreign reporters seeking to work in the countries and media freedom is not guaranteed in either country. In comparison, the budget for Australia Network (and ABC Radio Australia) is tiny. Yet its influence far outweighs its annual operating expenditure. And in contrast with Australia's international aid budget [A\$5.585bn], Australia Network's annual budget [A\$23m] is insignificant given its reach and influence and long-term impact across the Asia Pacific region. The annual cost to each Australian citizen is equivalent to around A\$1. The impact of Australia Network, AIB would argue, is exceptional in comparison with this small annual cost.

One Australian voice

As consumers gain access to increased numbers of media services on an increasing number of devices, the importance of having a joined-up international service grows. It is instructive to look at how other international broadcasting services are ensuring that they operate radio, television and online services under a single brand.

In Britain, the BBC's international services operate from a single newsroom that provides output across television, radio and online platforms, domestic and international [right]. In France, Radio France Internationale and France 24 are now co-located in the same building and co-operate on programming and news coverage. In Russia, Voice of Russia radio is being integrated





with RT television in a new, combined holding company.

These combined entities allow for effective cross-promotion of services to help grow audiences and influence in target markets.

It is essential that ABC Radio Australia and Australia Network collaborate closely to cross-promote each other's output, creating programmes that work across all media and create value and improve ROI for the organisations' stakeholders.

AIB notes from its research among its Members and with selected opinion-leaders in the Asia-Pacific region that Australia Network has a significant impact among audiences. For example, during a visit to India by AIB's Chief Executive in January, we learnt that Australia Network has gained traction in India at the expense of some other major international broadcasters. The channel is well-regarded in the country and has, according to those to whom AIB spoke, garnered a reputation for quality and relevant programming in India.

Conclusion

The world is changing. It is likely that developing nations will seek to play a greater role in world issues, with the larger nations – such as Russia and the People's Republic of China – flexing their muscles, possibly militarily, to secure influence over smaller nations. The geo-political themes that have developed since the end of the Cold War will be replaced by new issues which create significant challenges for developed nations.

In this changing environment, the importance of international broadcasting services should not be underestimated. With other nations investing heavily to influence and lead opinion on major issues of the day, it is vital that Australia *maintains and enhances* its international broadcasting services, and does not retreat from its position as provider of reliable, unbiased news and information to the world's most populated region via television, radio and online platforms.

AIB will be pleased to provide additional information and context to assist decision-making processes.



About AIB

AIB is the international industry association for television, radio and online broadcasting. It has a global membership of broadcasters – public and commercial, television and radio – as well as key suppliers to the broadcasting industry.

AIB was founded in 1993 by a group of international radio broadcasters. Today, its membership is global and includes television channels, radio stations, satellite companies, technology providers and content production companies.

AIB provides strategic consulting services to members and to the wider media industry around the world.

AIB is in touch with more than 26,000 media leaders in 160+ countries who receive industry briefings about the media industry globally and AIB members in particular. AIB publishes a well-respected and widely-read international media magazine, *The Channel*.

AIB rewards outstanding talent in television, radio and online broadcasting in its annual international media excellence awards, known as the *AIBs*.

AIB members are provided with exclusive market intelligence briefings that inform their strategic planning processes.

AIB members benefit from exclusive networking opportunities in different regions of the world.

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Selected international television services

Name	Country	Funding	Budget	Language	Target area
Australia Network	Australia	State	US\$20.8m	English	Asia-Pacific
CCTV-News	China, People's Republic of	State	US\$1-5bn [estimate, includes radio]	English	Global
CCTV-9 [documentary]	China, People's Republic of	State		English	Global
CCTV-A	China, People's Republic of	State		Arabic	MENA
CCTV-E	China, People's Republic of	State		Spanish	Europe; Latin America
CCTV-F	China, People's Republic of	State		French	Global
CCTV-P	China, People's Republic of	State		Portuguese	Europe; Latin America
CCTV-R	China, People's Republic of	State		Russian	Russia
Cubavision International	Cuba	State	N/A	Spanish	Latin America
Africa 24	France	Commercial	N/A	French	Africa
Euronews	France	Commercial	US\$83.7m	English	Global
France 24 Arabic	France	State	US\$139.6m	Arabic	MENA
France 24 English	France	State		English	Global
France 24 Spanish	France	State		Spanish	Europe; Latin America
DW-TV Arabic	Germany	State	US\$406m [including radio]	Arabic	MENA
DW-TV English	Germany	State		English	Global
DW-TV Spanish	Germany	State		Spanish	Europe; Latin America
Phoenix Satellite TV	Hong Kong	Commercial	US\$18.999m [revenue]	Chinese	Asia
CNN Indonesia	Indonesia	Commercial	N/A	Indonesian	Indonesia
Press TV	Iran	State	US\$9.997m	English	Global
i24news	Israel	Commercial		English	Global
i24news	Israel	Commercial		French	Europe
i24news	Israel	Commercial		Arabic	MENA
NHK World	Japan	State		English	Global



Kazakh TV	Kazakhstan	State	N/A		Global
Myanmar International Television	Myanmar	State	N/A	English	Global
TVC News	Nigeria	Commercial		English	Africa
CNC World	People' s Republic of China	State	See CCTV budget above	English	Global
Al Jazeera Arabic	Qatar	State	US\$500m+ [estimate]	Arabic	MENA
Al Jazeera English	Qatar	State		English	Global
Al Jazeera Balkans	Qatar/Serbia	State		Serbian, etc	SE Europe
Al Jazeera Turk	Qatar/Turkey	State		Turkish	Turkey/C Asia
Al Jazeera America	Qatar/USA	State			
RT	Russian Federation	State	US\$300m [estimate; excludes radio]	English	Global
RT Espanol	Russian Federation	State		Spanish	Europe; Latin America
Rusiya Al-Yaum	Russian Federation	State		Arabic	MENA
Channel NewsAsia	Singapore	State/Commercial	N/A	English	Asia-Pacific
Arirang	South Korea	State	US\$45.8m	English	Global
KBS World	South Korea	State	N/A	English	Global
Al Arabiya	UAE	Commercial	N/A	Arabic	MENA
BBC World News	United Kingdom	Commercial	US\$153.26m	English	Global
Bloomberg TV	USA	Commercial	N/A	English	Global
CNN International	USA	Commercial	N/A	English	Global
Telesur	Venezuela	State	N/A	Spanish	Global