



## The Digital decade

This decade was built on the mainstreaming of digital broadcasting, with an ever-increasing number of households receiving digital multi-channel television and radio from an expanding number of sources, and with analogue receivers being gradually switched off around the UK. BBC content was increasingly watched and listened to across a range of digital networks - ten UK-wide network television services, and ten national and 47 regional radio stations – as well as online, a huge leap from the early days of monopoly broadcasting.

As part of this development, this decade also saw the launch of High Definition television, transforming the impact of many popular programmes, from Doctor Who to Wimbledon tennis, and the development of potentially the first viable 3-D television. In addition, CGI (computer-generated imagery) enabled programme makers across the industry to tackle ambitious topics with verisimilitude never before possible – notable successes for the BBC included Merlin, Robin Hood, Rome and the Darwin season.

## Accessibility and interactivity

Finally, accessibility and interactivity were the keynotes of these ten years, with audiences increasingly expecting to access programme content 'anytime, anywhere, anyhow'. In response, the BBC launched the highly successful BBC iPlayer at the end of 2007, a free service enabling viewers in the UK to catch up on more than 250 programmes screened over the previous seven days. By March 2009, total views had already exceeded 360 million.

Programmes were also increasingly conceived as multi-media formats, with in-built interactive elements. One of the BBC's early successes in this field was the Red Button used by more than ten million people on a weekly basis to access BBC text information such as news and weather, and bespoke interactive content. Page impressions to [bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk) grew exponentially across the 2000s, averaging 3.6 billion per month by 2008, as the internet became more and more an everyday part of people's lives.

## Creative highlights

The decade began with ambitious programming: 2000 Today followed the dawn of the new Millennium around the globe in one of the most complex outside broadcasts in the BBC's history, live on air for 28 hours and involving 60 nations. This was followed by other distinctive event programming – from the first ever Prom at the Palace (2002), tying in with The Queen's Jubilee, to the multi-platform coverage around the 2008 Olympics Games in Beijing where 65% of the UK watched the Games for at least 15 minutes (36.6m people), and there was record take up on TV, radio, online, and via mobile phone.

Comedy also had a good decade with the innovative 'mockumentary' of The Office (2001) creating a new brand of eavesdropping humour as it observed the antics of David Brent in the Slough-based Wernham Hogg paper merchants. Other successes were The Catherine Tate Show, Two Pints of Lager, Gavin and Stacey – all new comedy formats for a new generation. For younger audiences, CBeebies (mostly UK-origin programmes for 2-6 years olds) launched the innovative In the Night Garden, which soon became the most popular programme in its entire history.

There was also a tendency in this decade towards classic reinvention, including two of the BBC's most popular programming hits: Doctor Who (2005) and Strictly Come Dancing (2004), both based on earlier formats but refreshed this time across multiple media platforms, and selling around the world (via BBC Worldwide) as global brands. Drama reinvented the 1970s via the acclaimed back-to-the-future drama Life on Mars, and Bleak House reinvented Dickens as artful TV soap.

Ten years of rolling news were celebrated in this decade, and there was enhanced coverage of the devolved nations as well as from within Parliament itself. All this went alongside a massive integration of TV, radio and online news into one streamlined Multimedia Newsroom.

## **New governance**

Alongside digital development and an increasingly competitive broadcast marketplace came increasing focus on how the BBC was regulated and how its management invested the licence fee and ran the organisation.

However, more than anything else, this new focus came about as a result of the Hutton Report (2004), precipitated by the BBC enquiry into the government's case of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction. The nation had been told in the run up to the Iraq war that Saddam Hussein had been stockpiling such weapons. When no weapons were found and it was suggested by BBC reporter Andrew Gilligan that Prime Minister Tony Blair had deliberately lied to the country, the government demanded an apology. The BBC replied that it had nothing to apologise for.

In the following weeks it emerged that the BBC's source was Dr David Kelly, a weapons specialist, who subsequently committed suicide. Lord Hutton was appointed to conduct an enquiry, the results of which were critical of aspects of Government and the security services, but also very critical of the BBC. Subsequently, both the Chairman Gavyn Davies and the Director-General Greg Dyke resigned, along with other key players.

## **Going forward**

As a result of Hutton, new editorial training was instigated inside the BBC, and externally, the Board of Governors was replaced by The BBC Trust providing enhanced objectivity around the governance of the BBC. MarkThompson took over from Greg Dyke as Director-General; Sir Michael Lyons became Chairman of the new Trust following Gavyn Davies's departure (2004).

Events such as the Hutton Enquiry, and later in the decade the Queensgate and the Ross-Brand editorial lapses, all kept the BBC constantly in the media spotlight and raised the cyclical questions of government intervention, editorial impartiality, and taste and decency, as well as fuelling a constant debate about the role of public service broadcasting in the 2000s.