

BlogTalkRadio Bridges Information Gap During Mumbai Crisis and Gains World Focus Indian Communities, Journalists Worldwide Gather to Share News

The Crisis: On November 26, 2008, Sree Sreenivasan, co-founder of the South Asian Journalists Association, was hosting his regular [BlogTalkRadio](#) show, “[SAJA](#),” when news broke of the terrorist attacks in Mumbai, India.

At the time, what Sreenivasan – who’s also a journalism professor at Columbia University – was discussing had nothing to do with terrorism. He was in his Manhattan office chatting with Rinku Singh and Dinesh Patel, who had recently been signed by the Pittsburgh Pirates, making them the first-ever Indian-born baseball players to be drafted by a U.S. major-league team.

Less than one hour later, Sreenivasan was back on BlogTalkRadio with a special 90-minute report on the horrific events unfolding in his homeland, which would ultimately claim the lives of 175 people, including 18 foreigners. As the news continued to break over the next four days, he would return to the air every 12 hours with special two-hour reports.

In his effort to keep Indian communities the world over as informed as possible by allowing them to share real-time information, Sreenivasan brought some 20 experts, authors, journalists and witnesses to the attacks on the air with him.



[Sree Sreenivasan](#)



His guests included Randall Larsen, director of The Institute for **Homeland Security**; Betty Wong, global managing editor for **Reuters**; Deepti Hajela, writer/reporter, **The Associated Press**; Nisid Hajari, foreign editor for **Newsweek**; Suketu Mehta, **author** of *Maximum City: Bombay Lost & Found*; W. Pal Sidhu, vice president of the **EastWest Institute**; Roy Wadia, Former Executive Producer, **CNN International**; current Mumbai-based media consultant Sabina Saikia, a senior journalist with **The Times of India**; Naresh Fernandes, editor of **Time Out Mumbai**; Anirudh Bhattacharyya, senior US editor, India's Network 18 (**CNN-IBN and CNBC-India**); and Haysi Daniel, Mumbai-based journalist for **Rediff**. During many of Sreenivasan’s live reports, his chat room literally overflowed, filling with more than 100 listeners at a time.

Also during the series, having recognized SAJA’s social-media pioneering efforts in response to an international crisis, a number of media outlets helped spread the word of what one reporter dubbed “the little organization that could.”

Technology Transformation

As NPR’s Steve Inskeep noted in his NPR interview, [Technology Helps Speed Mumbai Web Call-In Show](#), “(Sree’s) experience (using BTR) may tell us something about how media are evolving.” Other outlets covering SAJA’s show, included [The New York Times](#), [WorldFocus.org](#), and Jim Ronanesko’s media-watchdog site, [PoynterOnline](#), where Sree told reporter Al Tomkins how BTR allowed journalists to not only report but record conversations for long-term online effect:

“Wednesday night had 1,500 live listeners. Thousands of other listeners have come to the radioblogs that were recorded and archived. It is important to record these conversations and post them because often the recorded versions will, over time, touch more listeners than the live events.” Sreenivasan calls it the “long-tail effect.” SAJA has a philosophy that everything the organization produces should be linkable, clickable, shareable and embeddable.

Sreenivasan also noted how journalists should embrace new technology to break stories effectively:

“Journalists are reluctant to try new things. When blogs came along, Facebook came along, Twitter came along, and journalists have been slow to find new journalistic ways to use these technologies. A crisis can clarify that. Journalists wake up in the middle of the story and try to figure it all out. In this case they are trying to figure out how to cover a region that does not get much coverage and also try new technology. Figuring all of this out on deadline is nearly impossible. That is why we must constantly experiment with new technology.”



Photo: AFP

World Focus Takes Notice

On the morning of November 28, in the midst of his special reports, Sreenivasan got a call from “WorldFocus.” Anchor Martin Savidge invited him on the nationally-syndicated PBS news program for an update on his role in keeping South Asian communities around the globe informed.

“With news and communication outlets like BlogTalkRadio, Facebook and Twitter,” went Savidge’s on-air introduction later that day, “journalists and non-journalists have been talking about the siege in Mumbai, informing each other – and the world – how the crisis has unfolded. One of those journalists is Sree Sreenivasan.”

Intrigued by the network’s potential, Savidge himself aired a special “WorldFocus” report on BlogTalkRadio less than two weeks later.

His focus was Kashmir, the long-disputed South Asian region controlled by India, Pakistan and China – which, in the wake of the Mumbai terrorist attacks, has once again become a political hot button.

Two days later, Savidge wrote on the “WorldFocus” blog:



In case you didn’t know it, this past Tuesday marked another milestone for ‘Worldfocus’ – our first time on the radio. It was BlogTalkRadio, another new tool of the Web. And it was wonderful. This wasn’t a formal interview. Rather, it was a talk amongst friends, as if we were all seated at a kitchen table after the plates have been cleared, with only cups of coffee before us. It was such a hit... that we decided the next day to make it a regular thing.



To listen to World Focus on BlogTalkRadio, please visit: <http://www.blogtalkradio.com/worldfocus>