
From: Heidi Blake [heidi.blake@buzzfeed.com]
Sent: 4/1/2015 2:01:42 PM
To: Robert Colvile [robert.colvile@buzzfeed.com]
CC: Alan White [alan.white@buzzfeed.com]
Subject: Re: thoughts...

Hi both, following quick phonecall with Rob, here's my suggested revision of the email to Mike. Give me a shout if any Qs and see you tomorrow!

Dear Michael,

Thanks so much for your time this morning – I really enjoyed chatting to you and would be really pleased to continue our conversation. The idea behind our piece is to explore the challenges of reporting in the digital age in depth, and how the appetite for quick-fire viral news can end up starving serious journalism of oxygen. I'm particularly interested in the way you manage that mix, because our chat made it clear to me that your agencies are doing important, challenging investigative journalism while at the same time producing a very high volume of lighter viral or tabloid stories. I'm so interested in how you that balance works, and I'd love to talk to you about it some more. I was especially struck by your mention of your lengthy investigation into child trafficking and your failure so far to secure funding for it, and also the mention you made of women's rights in Turkey and child abuse in China – these are exactly the things that the current online ecosystem seems to make it harder and less rewarding to do. CEN seems to be a really interesting example of taking quirky stories from across the world and turning them around quickly for a western audience, and then using the proceeds (as you say) to fund more substantial investigations. I'm also interested in whether it's possible – or achievable – to bring the same kind of rigour to reporting viral stories as you would to a more traditional piece. I've noticed that some of the CEN stories which have appeared in widely in the UK media, for example this one (hyperlink) about an Argentinian teacher taped having sex with a pupil or this one (hyperlink) about a bear who was scared off by a Justin Bieber ringtone, have ended up being debunked elsewhere. Does this sort of thing end up happen because of the pressure to churn out huge amounts of quirky content to support the serious work that is clearly your big passion? In short – I think you're in a really interesting position in the current media landscape, straddling a divide between the most and least weighty forms of your trade, and I'd love a chance to chat to you about all this in depth. I would be so delighted to head over to Vienna and talk about this over lunch or a drink if you could make a bit of time to see me, or to chat to you again on the phone and talk in some more depth.

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On Wed, Apr 1, 2015 at 1:11 PM, Robert Colvile <robert.colvile@buzzfeed.com> wrote:

Looks good - a few thoughts below... Heidi, any views?

Dear Michael,

Thanks so much for your time this morning. The idea behind our piece is to explore the challenges of reporting in the digital age in depth, and while I understand you're not currently keen I feel strongly you'd be a vital contributor and I really want to do an interview.

I was especially struck by your mention of an investigation into child trafficking and your failure so far to secure funding for it, and also the mention you made of women's rights in Turkey and child abuse in China among your tabloid stories - these are exactly the things that the current online ecosystem seems to make it harder and less rewarding to do. While I appreciate you don't see much to be gained from talking about the tabloid stuff that's paying the bills, it's still something I think could be great for both of us to discuss, especially in terms of how you try to balance the two.

EITHER

On this side there's another thing, which I feel a little awkward bringing up over email - I also want to talk about accuracy and sourcing in viral stories, and in researching the piece I came across a few stories from various agencies where I found problems with the details of some stories: some - but not all - seemed to originate from CEN. I can give you more details on this via email, if you'd like as will have to get responses from you, but I feel like a sit-down interview, if you can spare the time, would be the best way to do it.

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Obviously a part of this is whether it's possible - or achievable - to bring the same kind of accuracy to reporting viral stories as you would to a more traditional piece, or whether you just have to go with the flow. CEN seems to be a really interesting example of taking stories from across the world, but using the proceeds (as you say) to fund more substantial investigations.

On 1 April 2015 at 12:43, Alan White <alan.white@buzzfeed.com> wrote:

Dear Michael,

Thanks so much for your time this morning. Our piece is going to look at the struggles of reporting in the digital age in depth and while I understand you're not currently keen I feel strongly you'd be a vital contributor and I really want to do an interview.

I was especially struck by your mention of an investigation into child trafficking and your failure so far to secure funding for it, and also the mention you made of women's rights in Turkey and child abuse in China among your tabloid stories - I'd love to write more about both these things in depth.

While I appreciate you don't see much to be gained from talking about the tabloid stuff that's paying the bills, it's still something I think could be great for both of us to discuss.

On this side there's another thing, which I feel a little awkward bringing up over email - I also want to talk about accuracy and sourcing in viral stories, and in researching the piece I came across a few stories from various agencies where I found problems with the details of some stories: some - but not all - seemed to originate from CEN. I can give you more details on this via email if you'd like as will have to get responses from you, but I feel like a sit down interview, if you can spare the time, would be the best way to do it.

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Robert Colville | News Director

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