

# The Growth and Growth of Bristol Indymedia

Bristol Indymedia was founded by local activists with help from the London Indymedia collective. It's been going for over a year now and has a very definite local agenda. This direction was established at the initial public meetings that established the site. The discussion centred on the idea that for the site to truly be called 'Bristol' (a city in the south-west of the United Kingdom) it had to reflect Bristol and the surrounding area.

Since it started, great efforts have been made to moderate and manage the site so as to ensure that local voices are the loudest. That's not to say the site does not feature news from outside the area, but always we encourage contributors to seek a local angle on international events. A critic might say that this would leave us as nothing more than an online version of a local paper; but we believe we are far from it. To illustrate this it is worth pointing to some of the successes of the site.

Bristol Indymedia gave an open forum to anti-war voices during the recent Iraq conflict. Bristol's media outlets - Evening Post, Western Daily Press and Venue - are all owned by Northcliffe Newspapers. In line with the group editorial position, they devoted most of their war coverage to international events from the Gulf. Coverage of anti-war voices was marginal at best.

Events such as the historic 10,000 people at Fairford or the blockading of Bristol city centre on the day war broke out were covered extensively by the people who attended and so the Bristol Indymedia site reflected far more coverage that was allotted in the mainstream media.

Coverage and debate of the drugs/crime issues has been extensive on the site, which again, reflects the reader/writer concern. In the main this coverage has been written by the people who live in the areas affected by the crack epidemic within the city and so the voices have had an immediate authenticity not found elsewhere.

Local media have also come under scrutiny. It is interesting to note that the site is frequently visited by the local mainstream media as well as other institutions such as the police and council; indeed the police have been known to post articles on the site. It is arguably inevitable that local media would come under such scrutiny given its one-way consumption method. As such lively debate frequently explodes on the accuracy, impartiality and quality of the mainstream media. The most notable of these debates was local opposition to HTV's 'Currie Night' TV programme, which engendered a lively debate between the site users and the HTV management.

Once other important development that must be afforded space is Al-MuaJaaha, the Iraq Witness. Here we see grass roots inter-community organizing at its best. The Indymedia software and tech-know-how, fund-raising, combined with Bristol anti-war activists and Iraqis, living both in the UK and in Iraq, together have created what is arguably Iraq's first ever truly open, free and democratic media outlet.

Without a strong community and support base here in Bristol, the project could not have happened. Without the international peace movement and its links and without dedicated Iraqi writers on the ground in Baghdad, the project would never have happened. The project has happened and goes from strength to strength!

## **From passive consumer to active participant**

Recently the site's volunteers have been pushing further the local nature of the site and to date it seems to be paying off; there has been a marked increase in comments, local groups using the site and exclusive local coverage of events. The future also looks bright as the addition of a

calendar system is allowing the site to respond to user requests for a forum for publicising events.

Bristol Indymedia also organized the 'Community Media Day' in June 2003, which was a huge success in bringing together local media outlets such as The Spark, Bristle and plugincinema.com as well as national groups such as Undercurrents and Talkiokie. The event was both a platform for debate on independent media as well as a skill sharing opportunity which allowed everyone to pick up some media skills.

This is perhaps the greatest success of the local and international Indymedia movement - blurring the line between consumer and producer. It allows ordinary people the opportunity to cease being a passive participant in the forces that shape their community, and start being an active voice.

<http://bristol.indymedia.org>

<http://www.almuajaha.com>

<http://anarchist606.blogspot.com>