

The TV-Weather Report: Between audience, data and politics.

Our Association has been confronted with a lot of problems our members have been facing due to the devaluing-strategy for meteorological data. On the TV-side - the number of new TV-channels has been exploding an enormous movement in the whole media-scene. Luckily for all TV-weather- presenters - the weather-report even more important than ever, but at the same time the availability of meteorological data at reasonable prices become more questionable than ever.

The members of our Association are the public face of the "weather-industry" and have to deliver weather information to a huge community all around the world. No one better than we on the forefront know that our task is very difficult. We should be like a news-presenter on one side, to deliver as much information as possible, to explain such events, to predict weather as good as possible which means we have to handle the weather-information in a responsible manner, and finally we should be an entertainer on the other side, some might entertain too much enough at all. Anyway to combine both qualities is not so easy.

But in any case it is quite clear that the credibility of the weather-report is very much influenced by the presenter, who is very much influenced of course by his personal capabilities to understand and handle the information but to the same extent on the reliable information he receives.

As most of the weather-departments are associated with the news, every presenter has to deal with certain occasions somewhere around the world, where he might not be familiar with. As soon as the TV-station reports to be in the broadcast, the weather-presenter might find himself to speak the comment, because he would like to be a person to know about certain weather circumstances. So he really needs to have serious information.

Weather is not a static situation which stays for days or month, it is closely related to an ever changing atmosphere. It does not stop on boundaries, even if some Met. services would like the weather behaving like that. They are creating a vast amount of weather-data. The presenter's task is, to evaluate some data in order to extract the most important information for the audience. If you predict heavy rains and thunderstorms for a summer-weekend you could prevent people from going somewhere, recreation and swimming-areas would be empty. Even if the weather would be just the opposite, it could take perhaps ¾ of the day for most of the people changing their mind about their planning.

Especially during this year with the upcoming of El Nino, almost every presenter has been confronted with the forest-fires in Indonesia. I have seen a lot of information being distributed through the press and some of it has been wrong. For a lot of colleges not professional meteorologists an information from the local Met. service is much better.

The presenter is very much dependent on serious information no matter whether it is a written text including the raw data he has to sort out by himself, the output should be top quality, because a lack of information reflects the credibility of the entire weather-industry - public and private.

In these times where every institution looks for possible means to save money, a lot of our TV-colleagues are under pressure, when they have to pay too much for their meteorological data. At least a restriction in the supply of data will lead to less accurate weather-forecasts and will leave the presenter with the image of not being reliable back to the whole industry. Therefore time has come to discuss that package in both ways - TV meteorologists and National Met. services in order to use this public face of the weather-industry" for the benefit of the audience, who has paid already with tax money, and the whole weather- industry.

Inge Niedek, Broadcast Meteorologist for ZDF (German state TV)