



John Hardie

Chief Executive, ITN

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Welcome to Media Masters, a series of one to one interviews with people at the top of the media game. Today I'm joined by John Hardie, chief executive of ITN. John started his career in marketing, working for Procter & Gamble where he led European cosmetics business and was responsible for household name products like Max Factor and Oil of Olay. He jumped to the media in 1997 becoming commercial director at ITV Network Centre during a period of significant digital disruption. He looked after all of their commercial operations, was responsible for ITV 2 and online and helped turn it from a regional to a national brand. John then moved to Walt Disney TV. Covering Europe, the Middle East and Africa, he more than doubled the unit's revenues and launched their very successful Cinemagic TV channel. Appointed CEO of ITN in 2009, he was overseeing consistent growth, put his stamp on their distinctive news bulletins and significantly expanded their production zones, which now creates TV adverts, online content and sports programming.

John, thank you for joining me.

Oh, you're most welcome.

That took quite a while to get out actually, there's a lot there, isn't there? Did you ever dream that you would end up chief executive of ITN when you started out in your career at the beginning?

No, I don't think so. I think that... oddly enough there was... when I started university, I was kind of interested in maybe journalism, but my real interest in life was always television. And although it seems a circuitous route to have come through – I was 14 years at Procter & Gamble and then I ended up in ITV – actually it was television was all of my interests. So at university I was the head of programmes of Glasgow University's student television, and among my compatriots at the time were people who were known to forge really good careers in television.

Hamish Barbour, who created Location, Location, Location. John Nicholson, now MP, but most famous probably Steven Moffat, the creator of Sherlock and Dr Who.

Fantastic programmes.

Absolutely brilliant. And others too. So television was my interest, and I guess I hoped I would end up forging some kind of career in TV and entertainment. I then took a short 14-year detour through Procter & Gamble before finding my way back to my natural home.

Did you always feel it was a detour then, when you kind of started off? How did you end up at Procter & Gamble, then?

Well, it's very simple, you know, but this is... I graduated in 1983 and, like most people, applied to join the BBC and didn't even get a first interview despite the fact I thought I had a relatively interesting CV for that, such was... not that I carry a big chip on my shoulder, but maybe just a little one! So I applied. Getting into television was very, very difficult back then – I'm not saying it's easy now, but it was particularly difficult – and I had to work at what to do, and I took part in a legendary marketing vacation course run by Procter & Gamble in my final year at university. And actually apart from BBC, it was the only job I applied for, and I just turned up one day for interview, was offered a job there and then, and spent the next 14 years. And from time to time I thought maybe I'd want to do something else, but it's a pretty good company, I had quite a good time there. So but, you know, eventually the day came. The headhunters would call me back then and invite me to take jobs in consulting; I was offered a job by McKinsey, I was actually offered a job by EMI Records to be director of international artistic development, but while I love music, it wasn't quite the natural fit. And my great career plan was to sit by the telephone and hope one day somebody in television would call – and one day they did, and that was 1987.

So how did that happen, then? Did you feel your time at Procter & Gamble come to any kind of natural end, or was this call entirely unexpected?

It could have been two years before or two years afterwards, and I had literally said to these headhunters, "I'm not really interested in selling beer or whisky or soft drinks or whatever, but I would be interested in making a move into media." In one of those conversations did result, six months later, when ITV... ITV was going through a big change at this time, and that the 90s was still a time of big internecine warfare among the various ITV companies, but they decided in 1997 that they really needed to try to draw on the ITV Network as a more cohesive single business unit.

Which seems obvious now, doesn't it, in hindsight all these years later?

Well, back then it was still... the point I was off the job, there were eight companies that became seven, ITV companies, and the much more valued prize the local name Granada and Carlton, and actually the expression that ITV hardly appeared on screen.

It was like Yorkshire Television, Tyne Tees... just as as a youngster growing up.

And they were powerful regional brands and there was a role for them, but also there was... those were the days when ITV virtually had a monopoly in television advertising. It wasn't long before that ITV actually controlled the advertising for Channel 4 as well as ITV – this is ancient history now, of course – but anyway, by the time I get to '97 it had become a more competitive world, multi-channel TV was growing very significantly, so audience ratings on all the channels were declining. There was dissatisfaction among advertisers who thought that ITV wasn't trying hard enough to compete with the BBC, so the ITV companies decided to put in place a new team, and it was Richard there was chief executive, David Liddiment was the director of programmes and I came in as marketing and commercial director.

Some big names there. Was that part of, like you've alluded to, a deliberate initiative to start to step up ITV's game?

It was. I mean, and you know, and behind us we then recruited just three levels up from me now, a whole new team to run the ITV Network as it was called at the time. It was a very exciting time. One of the first things we did after a quick strategic review was to decide to set audience targets, public audience targets, for peak time, because we essentially ran part of the schedule. We ran primetime, the evening, we ran daytime, and we were very much focused on audience performance between 7:00 and 10:30 and so we set three year goals; for 1998, 1999 and 2000, and the audience share targets we set were 38%, 39% and 40%.

Can you imagine suggesting that now?

It was a lifetime ago. And it is the best part of 20 years ago, and the world has changed dramatically and we came pretty close. We – again this is ancient history – but against a target of 38% in '98 we did 37.8% I think, against 39% I think we did 39.1%, and then actually in the third year we fell back a little bit; rather than 40% we did 38.8%. And those are the years when we brought in things like *Who Wants To Be A Millionaire* and *Cold Feet* and *Pop Stars*.

Never heard of these shows.

It was an incredible year. You're far too young to remember these things, but it was an electric period in ITV, a very successful period from most points of view. Some challenges to.

But it seems to be, like you say, a heyday, because you were creatively very ambitious and doing very successfully as well as commercially.

Well, that's right. There was a real sense of ambition and a real sense of competitiveness, and back then we set our targets very much focused on the BBC. Now, from a business point of view ITV competes with all the other commercial broadcasters. The view at that time was that in order to show confidence of the advertisers we wanted to show we could take market share, audience share, from the BBC. And actually, after those first three years we set a new target, which I set, which was in prime time we wanted to have a 10 percentage-point gap against the BBC. It's huge. And those were the days when actually BBC was floundering somewhat. They called *Millionaire* the Exocet of television scheduling.

It was a good show. I used to watch it. I admit to watching it.

I mean, we all have our anecdotes, but I remember... because I was possible for both marketing, but also for buying the programmes. So I had a team responsible for the budget, and back then was all short of £700 million as we ran. And early on one day, David Liddiment came into my office and said, "We want to schedule this new quiz show. It's called Cash Mountain. So they're going to come in and see you. But they've got a brilliant idea which is they're going to give a £1million a week maximum," – and up to that point the record giveaway was I think £72,000 or something – "So we're going to give away £1million. We're going to give these big prizes – but the great news is this; we only have to pay for the production of the show because all the prize money will be guarded by people making premium rate telephone calls in order to take part initially, and that will raise all the prize money."

Please ask the bill payer's permission before I make any calls.

Precisely. So this had never been done before, and so I could look into it a little bit, and there was no precedent for this. Obviously premium rate phone calls existed, but I mean nobody had done anything like this. So we accepted doing it, struck a deal with Paul Smith at Celador at the time to say, "We'll try to take insurance on this, if we go over if we have to go over budget we split the difference 50/50," because I wanted to make sure that the questions were set difficult enough so it wasn't like every single night we were giving away £1million. And to their credit they did it. And they are the geniuses behind... Celador really did it. But the other thing was we were trying to take ITV upmarket at the time and saw a few people said, "Cash Mountain? It doesn't sound like a very upmarket name." So it was actually at ITV Network

Centre, they said, “Well, what could be an alternative name?” It wasn’t me who came up with it – I wish I could say it was me, it wasn’t – but we did one of these emails around the office and somebody in your office came up with the idea of *Who Wants to be a Millionaire*. And the rest is history.

It was an amazing show.

Absolutely brilliant.

And of course, it was very successfully sold all around the world. I mean it’s available in dozens of countries isn’t it?

Nothing to do with me, I’m afraid. Because this was an independent commission, so ITV bought the show and had the success as in broadcasting the show, but it was Celador who then ran the show around the world. Actually I once went to... there was a conference in the USA and that was bought by ABC, whom I later worked for of course, for Disney. And the person at ABC said... you would have thought that they had invented the show, and they ran it fully a year after it had been on ITV, and it was an absolute clone. Everything down to the wardrobe matched the wardrobe that Chris Tarrant wore, and the guy from the US said, “Well we’ve piloted the show in the UK first.” I nearly threw something at him. Because it was... it was one of the most exciting periods ever.

And did you feel that you’d found your home industry at that point, that you were going to stay on telly for the rest of your career?

I think so. You know, I did four years at ITV and we had a great time. We had some, you know, obviously some problems along the way too, because the BBC started to bite back in and Greg Dyke joined and made some scheduling moves and the few things so we... and then the advertising recession hit back in about 2001.

When I think of Greg as DG I always think of people in meetings holding up their signs saying ‘cut the crap’. That’s the only thing I tend to... other than is dramatic resignation. Do you remember that?

Well, you know... I mean, I remember all very clearly. I don’t really know Greg at all or well... I think he was he was a true charismatic leader and he focused the BBC back then. I mean, he basically took the BBC and did a very simple rebranding of their multi-channel line-up – BBC One, BBC2, BBC Three, BBC4. He pioneered going into CBBC and CBeebies...

Because John Birt actually set up the news channel, didn’t he?

Oh, yes – John Birt launched both a news channel and online, so John did that whole modernisation and Greg came in and did the next generation. But also he took over, went on digital collapse and basically created Freeview – and Freeview was the major catalyst for digital growth in the country thereafter. And Greg, I think, can take a lot of credit for that. So I recall him being this focused, cut straight to the chase, charismatic leader.

So you did four years at ITV – what came next and how did you come to move on?

Well, so four you seemed to be the right time at ITV, and I think I'd found my home, that I want to work in television. And then the following thing occurred to me as to what I would do next. There was an expression in a film at the time – not a great film, but an interesting expression – which is somebody said, "If I had lived in Roman times, I would choose to live in Rome." And I thought that that applies to this business; if you're going to work in the television and entertainment industry, at some point you probably want to work for one of the big Hollywood majors. That would be an interesting next step. And then I read actually Michael Eisner had written a book called *Work in Progress* about his time at Disney, and it seemed to me this is a perfect union of where television and entertainment... where entertainment meets marketing, and that's the two things that I'd done, so it occurred to me that Disney would be probably a good company to join. And somehow, magically, the telephone rang one day and I was offered the job to be the head of Europe for Walt Disney Television, and really jumped at the chance.

So what were the challenges there, then?

Well, the day job, and what I did most of, was running Disney channels. There were other bits and pieces involved with that was it. And the Disney channels... I worked with them in 2001 and Disney channels had launched in about 1995, so they'd existed and expanded through Europe by the time I turned up. The issue was this: that my predecessors, who were very clever businessmen, had struck fantastic carriage deals all over Europe with satellite companies, sometimes exclusive, and all of them were based on being in the premium section. So those were the days when satellite companies were albeit focused on Premier League football, movies and the premium offer.

Yeah.

And then the basic came along with, because that's what differentiates them from the cable companies. Disney Channel had been sold into being part of the premium package and made a lot of money relatively speaking for that. The problem was this: is by the time I got there, the Disney Channel was in a total of nine million homes in the whole of Europe, and what it didn't do was act as a massive marketing force for

the whole of the Walt Disney Company and its product. The dilemma was if you were to go to what was then called basic, then you wouldn't get anywhere near as much money.

But you'd get the audience.

So actually... there were those in the company that said, "Forget about the Disney Channel being a profitable business in itself, just go into the widest distribution and just be a kind of a marketing 'barker channel' for the rest of Disney. So that was a challenge, and the strategy we came up with back then – and I did one of those Venn diagrams that said what we want to be is a profitable business in its own right as Disney Channel, a massively broadly reaching marketing platform for the whole of Walt Disney, and a content creator that creates its own material; it becomes a franchise for the whole company. So we don't just want to sell other people's movies, we want to sell our own things. And so we changed the whole business model with all of the multi-channel operators across Europe. And we went to what we called – I used to call it the pyramid model but some people didn't like that – a tiered portfolio. So we would be... in some countries we'd be free to air, like we launched free to air in Spain, and others we'd be broadly basic. And then we had other channels which would be in the premium tier. So that would stop people from churning down from the top tier to basic. So you mentioned that we created the channel Disney Cinemagic, which is I think is now called Sky Disney in this country, which is we would put on movies. But the main channel, Disney Channel, became basic. So we grew... over a period of just about three years we went from nine million households to 45 million households. But we made more money doing it and we expand into more countries. We expanded into Poland and Africa and Turkey as well as we went broader reach, and we doubled our reach in the UK and we did all that. Fantastic. So that made us a much more powerful franchise vehicle for the rest of the company, but it also happened that the programmes we were making for Disney Channel really started to work, and we lit upon the idea of focusing on what was then called the 'tween' audience, and the two major hits we then had were High School Musical and Hannah Montana.

Both massive brands.

Massive brands. Particularly... I mean, and actually interestingly, the process was we would make these sitcoms for Disney channel and every year the US would... they were the geniuses who created these things, but they would have about six scripts ready for pilot in one year, and they would send them round the world, and Hannah Montana landed on my desk, and I was a massive fan of The Monkees in the 60s and I thought, "Do you know what? Where music meets kind of sitcom for kids is going to be dynamite everywhere." But actually the majority of what was for another... another show. So I said I will put up the money to make the pilot of

Hannah Montana, and it went ahead, and about 18 months after that to make even the pilot, because it took over a year to find Miley Cyrus.

But of course reality has now even gone behind the fiction, because she's a real pop star now. Globally recognised.

She pretty quickly did become a star. I mean this series was huge, huge hit. And so actually she did a tour which I think was called Both Sides, so she did half the concert as Hannah Montana and half the concert as Miley Cyrus. And of course, eventually Hannah Montana disappeared and Miley Cyrus became the global legend that she is. So that was a mission. It was a very... so I was eight years at Disney, essentially focused on expanding out Disney Channel and to a large extent making it the global brand it is. The European side of it, you know, was... the people in the US didn't want it worldwide, only run by a European partner. Rich Ross was my boss at Disney Channel.

And that was the first kind of global media brand that you worked for. Did you find the culture empowering? Was it easy to get things done? Because you hear tales of people who work in big companies in any sector that, you know, they lose that agility. It's like wading through treacle sometimes just to get anything done.

Yeah. No, I didn't find that. I think that you know, you hear stories of these big... I mean, I worked for two major American companies and I found both of those companies, even as a as a relatively junior executive in Procter and a middle manager I guess in Disney, I had plenty of access to Bob Iger and Anne Sweeney and people like that. You could get things done. Yes, there are complications, and these can be quite political organisations, but I found it wasn't it wasn't difficult to get agreement on the big things. I did one negotiation with a major satellite platform which was an 11-year deal which was worth \$1billion. And it was like I'd said a couple of emails updating it. We just did it. But other things sometimes you find... the things that surprise you are more difficult to get done or cause more concern in the big organisations, and I've said before, in the jungle it's not the tigers that get you it's the mosquitoes. So it can be small matters that cause you more aggravation or frustration than the big things that really drive the business. But certainly the big difference between being an executive running a part of something like Disney, vs. being chief executive here, is at least in my chair we're not held back by corporate politics. We just make decisions and try to do things.

So after eight years what came next? Why do you feel it was time to move on?

Well... so I'd been an executive vice president running a decent-sized part of Disney television, but I wanted the chief executive experience. Really that. Really to, you know, given the choice between just running a bigger part of a major multinational or

running a smaller – but really running – a smaller company, I wanted to do the second.

The buck stopping with you.

Yes. And I actually remember the day that I was looking at the media press and I saw that the chief executive at the time was leaving, and I thought, “ITN.” Of course, I’d known ITN from my days at ITV, clearly, so I thought I had an idea what ITN was.

Well, they provided you with your news.

As we do now. And of course as the commercial director was responsible for, you know, the oversight of the commercial terms of that. So I knew ITN a bit, I thought. So I thought it might be interesting. Sure enough, the phone rang and I was offered the job. It turned out to be a little different from what I had anticipated in advance.

Better or worse?

Well the truth is, there’s no secret that ITN... so I was offered the job at the end of 2008 and started on June 1 2009, so it’s seven years now, and it’s no secret that the current company was much more challenged than I think really anybody had appreciated it was. It was actually after I had resigned from Disney but was working through some notice that the pension deficit resurfaced for ITN, so that was a challenge. And, you know, it was also... back then was, you know, there was a bit of pressure on advertising revenues, and ITN was kind of losing some business, and really the strategy wasn’t working out so well. So I turned up at what was I thought was going to be a growth opportunity which turned out to be a turnaround for us. We had to get turnaround first and then move into the growth cycle, which we’ve now done. So yes, it was more of a... slightly more crisis management mentality when I turned up at ITN. That’s long gone, I’m pleased to say. It’s a very confident organisation now.

Tell us about your plans for growth, then? Like you say, you’ve mitigated the problems at the beginning, that kind of crisis management, you going into growth, and you’re diversifying what ITN is doing as well. Tell us about that.

So the journey, as the Americans say, we’ve been on was... what we focused on at the start was it was a very simple proposition. ITN had tried to diversify into some areas but not very successfully, and certainly not profitably. So the first thought we had was, “Look, if we’re good at one thing at ITN it’s making television news, so our success had better be built on that – otherwise what are we doing in business?” So we kind of coined a mantra back then which was, “We will be world-class television news, and business arising naturally from that.” And we focused on improving our news programmes, improving our profit margins from our news programmes,

improving our relationships with our customers. And we did that, and we improved the profitability of our broadcast news group. We won back Channel 5. And so essentially, before we started, the profit contribution of the news division was below the corporate overhead. Now, it became profitable and rather much more successful, and at same time as we tried to build businesses arising naturally, what happens is that they worked very well. So the point of this year, we realised, simply categorising our future business as a by-product of broadcast news doesn't capture at all the scale and size of the opportunity. So we recalibrated our mission to be what we say it is now, is that were focused on two divisions and five businesses. Broadcast news is still the largest part of what we do, but television programming, particularly factual, advertising production and branded content, sports production and digital content, and each of those individual businesses is as big as the total productions business we started with, in fact bigger, than what we started with all those years ago, but it's still all comes from a single organising proposition for ITN, which is all the businesses are about high-impact, authentic storytelling – that's what we do best in television news, and I think we do better than anybody else in the television news business. We do great journalism which tells us stories, and we make a big impact. As we've moved into whether it's television programming or whatever we do, it's those same elements that make us successful. So we move quickly, we are very informal so people like working with us, but we are great at storytelling, and whether that storytelling is for a 60-minute programme for the BBC or an overnight election programme, whether that's for making commercials for Barclays or Thomas Cook or branded content, whether it's dealing with sports providers, it all rises out of the same essential qualities that always reflected the best of what ITN was for. So we're expanding as quickly as we can in those areas, both in the UK and also very significantly in the United States. So having grown, I mean this year our revenues will probably end up being about 40% larger than the business we started with in 2010, which for a 60-year-old company, and it's all organic, our position in there is not too shabby. But we think we can grow another 50% on top of that over the next five to six years by building... because there's a lot of business out there in television production. People say, "Advertising? Why advertising?" But you think advertising market, advertising is Google, advertising is Facebook. Advertising is where the future is, and our role in the in that – in that and all these other markets – is to look at the big emerging global media companies and create services that they need. So we've got some of the best in the business today. We've got ITV and Channel 4 and Channel 5, we work for Sky, we're increasingly working for the BBC, and these are the big beasts in the jungle. Beyond that, I also want to work for the biggest brands, the biggest advertising agencies like WPP, the biggest advertising clients like Barclays and Suzuki. I want to be serving American clients, and so we're working with CBS and CNN, and of course like everyone, we're talking to Netflix. So our rule in the future will be expanding what ITN are essentially about to this massively growing international market of media companies; whether they be classic broadcasters that we deal with, whether they be converging forces in telecoms. You know, so who knows one of these days maybe we'll do some work for BT and others

like that. So we're very bullish about our growth, but we're very grounded on doing what we're good at doing. So I've said before and I'll say it again, I'm not planning right now to work on the next *Game of Thrones*; ask me again in five years about that! So we're still... we're still very totally focused on what we know we're good at doing.

Do you think it's challenging to kind of maintain the audience levels of your flagship programmes like News at Ten? You recently kind of reengineered the whole programme and had a more conversational style with Tom Bradby; a lot of people really liked it, including myself, but there were a lot of critics as well. Maybe those people just don't like change. But it's not even just about that, it's about kind of appointment to view news, you know, the challenge of rolling news. ITN famously had a rolling news channel which you closed down. But there's the Internet, there's a lot of... you know. I come home at night and watch News at Ten for a different experience, because already know what's happened. Was that a deliberate strategy then to reframe News at Ten to someone who's watching who already knows what happened, who already knows the news?

What you just said was your answer, which is, people who are watching the major bulletins on ITV, Channel 4, Channel 5, BBC are not watching to get the headline news. It's not about the breaking news that happened, because by and large, even if you've been out and about and on your mobile device, you've heard the headline. So the bulletin is here to exist for a long time to come. But it's not about an either or. It's not about will we hold on to the bulletins while the inevitable forces of digital expansion will eat away. Any news organisation, any news brand, has got to be both powerful on television and powerful in digital, so in terms of the audiences, our audience of Channel 4 News have actually grown in the last couple of years, audience share. Audience for ITV across our bulletins is at least as good this year as it was last year. So obviously there was, in the previous 20 years, a seismic shift in the move towards multichannel, which brought with it a decline in the overall size of the main channels – ITV1, BBC One and so forth – but I think we're now at a point where the audiences for the major bulletins are probably... have levelled out, and there's no reason why they have to continue to decline. Clearly what you do in terms of the nature of those programmes must evolve with the time. And that's why, you know, what people are looking for is a well-ordered news programme that puts the different news stories into order, into context, has a combination of reporting and gets the big pictures and tells the stories, but has very thoughtful analysis. And, as important as anything, is challenging. Because clearly, the difference between us and, let's say, other people out there is the ability to hold power to account, and to do that intelligently, and to shine a light on matters of the day. So the audiences do come to News at Ten and to Channel 4 News and all the rest of our services, even knowing, even having seen the big picture of the day, whether they've seen it on breaking news, but in addition to that is you have to be very expansive digitally, so

actually the expansion of digital in the last few years has been great news for us virtually, because of this: 20-odd years ago, every television news service and channel created a website. The challenge for our websites was that they were up against monoliths like the BBC or even the Guardian investing massively in building destination websites. And a website, which is essentially the accompaniment to a television programme, will always find it difficult to really compete against these massive destinations. The great thing about the growth of both mobile and social media is it creates a platform that can arrive effortlessly to an audience. You no longer have to have a 24/7 news channel or a massive destination website. What you do is you take your journalism and adapt it to the mobile social media audience, and you get fantastic numbers from that if you do it appropriately. So take Channel 4 News. We made significant changes to what we did digitally to Channel 4 News just over a year ago or so, and the numbers on Facebook alone are astonishing. I think it's in the last three months we had close signed 300 million views of Channel 4 News alone on Facebook. I think 10:1 ratio compared to Vice News, 10:1 on Facebook, just Facebook, more than the BBC gets on Facebook. By the way that is all hardcore, high-fibre, Channel 4 News journalism – this is not curating video of cute kittens doing things and putting it under the brand name. This is political stories, this is stories on Syria, this is major articles from around the world – but done cleverly so that they work for the digital audience. So we have learned how to use YouTube and particularly Facebook, how you edit differently and correctly, you know, how you put into a square rather than the rectangle, the clever use of subtitles – and not just subtitles, but writing it in a different way, editing in a different way. So the same essential story done in a different way for an audience that by and large is looking at it on mobile and is probably not listening, because some people put their headphones in, some people don't. Anyway, that's a little bit of our secret sauce! So for the future, it's not about either/or, it's about both – because the television platform is still, you know, an hour, half hour. We do an hour broadcasting on ITV – 6.30 and News at ten – an hour on Channel 4 News, Channel 5 News, 5.00 and 6.30. And that programming will exist, I'll put a month's salary here and now against anyone who bets against me, not just five years from now but 10 years from now, the major bulletined organised programmes will still be the most watched video news in this country. And in addition to that, the digital audience will massively grow, and it will be particularly strong for the younger audience. But both will continue to survive and be required.

But the tastes seem to be changing on traditional broadcast, because if you watch BBC News at 10 for example, Huw Edwards is a great anchor, but it's what I would call the traditional. He reads the news. We had Sir Trevor McDonald on the podcast recently, and he deplored the fact that we seem to be moving to a more chatty personality-driven news. I mean, Tom Bradby gives his own opinion when he's in the anchor's chair; we all know that Jon Snow is a bit of a lefty and he must eat muesli and he cycles in, etc. etc. and

you kind of choose that – that’s part of the warmth and personality of the programme. But is that a deliberate policy to differentiate yourself from the increasingly more traditional BBC?

Well, clearly what we’ve done is very deliberate in all those programmes. First of all, to be clear by the way, everything we do in our news programmes completely complies with all the Ofcom codes. And the thing about Ofcom is it’s very easy to raise complaints. So in terms of due accuracy, due impartiality, due fairness, all those things, we are unblemished and unchallenged in terms of anything that people – and from time to time people do make comments, so I think they do work. It seems to me that for a modern audience, it seems odd that you have a news presenter, let’s call it an anchor, who is talking about the major news of the day, who has probably got 25 years of experience of covering world events, of dealing with politics at the highest level, and then they have no scope at all to make any kind of comment from their experience and knowledge in journalism. It seems to me that the general public out there is interested in not just, if you like, the contained reporting of ‘these are the events of the day and then we go over to our specialist correspondents’, is actually the... and some of the conversations among our presenters and our special correspondents are fascinating, given their experiences. They always have to get the balance right at all times in everything they are talking about. And I do think we have seen there is a significant appetite for that. And so we don’t... it’s not a chat show, you know, it’s not just... I mean, I think people overstate, by the way, the extent to which Tom and other people are kind of giving opinions. They’re not just sitting there and opining. It’s not editorial, and by the way it’s never, “Here’s my view of how the world should be run.” They’re typically commenting on things like, you know, how big a deal is this for the Labour Party, and that’s appropriate; that’s due impartiality still to make... the rules of Ofcom or not never, ever, ever, ever express an opinion or observation. It’s about due impartiality, due accuracy, due fairness, and I think we do that very well. So yes, I think there is an appetite for that, and I think it works quite well. So I’m very proud of both of... you’ve talked about both those services. I’m very proud of all of our services, but I think we strike the balance exactly right by having intelligent, experienced journalists who are able to bring their experience to bear, but at the same time we’re not a newspaper on television. We are not biased, and we don’t take sides like that. We hold all sides to account equally and with as much gusto, whatever you think about the political leanings you can determine from choice of transport of any of our people. So there you go.

Well put! Tell us, what’s a typical week for you?

They’re not that typical. I sometimes say that, you know, I run a relatively modest business but I’ll put my weekly diary up against those of any FTSE 100 chief executives and say, “You may run a bigger business, my week is more interesting.” So it does range in the course of a week from my... I mean, every morning I chair the 10 o’clock cross-company editorial meeting so I know what the agenda is across

company, how we're working at co-operating on things that need to be co-operated on from news gathering and technical, where all the legal issues are, where any of the safety issues are. So it kind of kicks off with the news and news agenda. I may then have a meeting about a dangerous deployment into Syria or a meeting or a meeting about we're going to do some undercover filming for a show for Channel 5, Paul Connolly Investigates.

That must be difficult because you've got to balance the safety of the reporter with a desire to actually tell the story and let the wider world know what's going on. Because the safe choice will be to say, you know, "Stay here at Gray's Inn Road and have a nice cup of tea, son." You've got to send them there, but knowing that they'll be put in harm's way.

In my experience, the difficulty sometimes is holding them back from going into difficult places. These are all very ambitious, determined people, you know, and over the seven years I've been here, you can imagine we've had one or two incidents where we have issues, so actually we spend a lot time on getting the right balance and protocols for safety, particularly in what we call 'red assignments' because we want to go and report. It's our job to go and report from these areas, but the world I think has truly become a more dangerous place because it's become a less predictable place.

And the old rules seem to be being set aside in places like the so-called Islamic State where reporters are not only routinely killed, but killed deliberately on camera to humiliate them and spread yet further fear.

Indeed. And, you know, there are places that our people cannot go now that could have gone a few years ago. There are some accepted practices. There were times where experienced journalists would tell you, "I can go into this village because I made an agreement with the chief there," and that sort. Now you can't. The things you could have relied upon in the past don't apply as much any longer, so it's a more dangerous world, it's a less predictable world, and the situation on the ground changes very quickly. So you may find there's an area in, I don't know, the DRC, that six months ago was absolutely fine just to drive to, but things have changed since then. So you always have to have up to date assessments of any area you're going into. So there's nothing more important to us than the life and the safety of our people. And by the way, we have exactly the same policy to anybody we employ locally. So it's not just our employed ITN staff, but if we're employing local stringers or local journalists and contacts, we insist that all the safety precautions they take are exactly the same as the precautions we take with our own people. But we don't want to not report if it's important report these stories. So if you consider the ITN productions... incredible story last year, *Escape From ISIS*. We worked for many, many, many months and we were dealing with people in Raqqa who were inside Raqqa, communicating with us and doing secret filming and making arrangements

for escape for people to escape from Raqqah. And then we also filmed in the outside of the those who are organising for escapes. If you imagine the dangers involved with somebody living under ISIS in Raqqah...

Incredible.

... communicating with other people. So... but these are incredibly important stories that have to be brought to the world, and that's what our people are dealing with on a weekly basis, if not a daily basis.

Back to your typical week, then. We got to your 10 o'clock meeting.

So it's the daily news agenda across... maybe there's a negotiation with one – we just signed a five year deal, four-and-a-half year deal, with Channel 5, so I obviously I am very much involved with those things. I mean, we then have our meeting where we are making... I've been asked to... my people have asked me to comment on a pitch they're making a major advertising client. And so it ranges from pitching for a new sports contract or we're dealing with a negotiation on pay with the unions, or as a meeting where our pension fund sits and so forth. So the variety... it's everything involved in running a company, but it just ranges from how are we handling Brexit and the reporting of that, all the way through to tell me what we're doing for club 1830 next year, and everything. And by the way, those are not opposites. They just show the range of what ITN is about now and what I do.

I appreciate you'll enjoy the whole mix of it, but do you have a kind of favourite aspect of your job? Is it when you are dealing with journalists or the creative side, or do you prefer the more kind of corporate deal making? What floats your boat, if I can put it as brutally as that?

I think that... it's invidious to choose one of those things. I mean, when we've been doing breaking media investigations, you know, when we're making allegations, particularly against a major organisation, so we did undercover filming on Channel 4 News on Yarl's Wood, the detention centre, and that was months of planning and going undercover. That was incredible to see that come to...

That was incredible.

... to fruition. You know, the day that ITV News got the pictures after the killing of Drummer Lee Rigby and the decision to broadcast them, and broadcast Adebolajo holding the knives and to do that, that was exhilarating too. Winning a contract for the football league, to win a three-year contract to film almost all the football league matches and take ITN to a game-changing place, that was pretty exciting too. So yes, asking me to pick my favourite is like asking me to pick among my children. They're all my favourites really. And yes, it is the variety of the job, but you know,

once in a while when the topic of conversation is how we're reporting on, you know, events in the Middle East...

You can't win.

You know, to find yourself, as somebody who thought it was exciting being a young brand manager of Fairy Liquid 30 years ago, to find yourself seriously in those discussions, sometimes I pinch myself and say, "Do I really do this for a living?" And yes, I do.

I've spoken to quite a few editors, and they say look, if both sides of the argument, if an equal number of them think you've been unfair to them on either side of the argument then you probably are doing a good job.

I don't subscribe to that theory.

All right – what's your theory?

I know it's typically said by the BBC, if everybody is angry with us then we must be doing something right – I don't think that. I don't think that's... I don't think offending everyone equally is actually a good barometer of the accuracy of the impartiality of journalism. I think you just have to hold yourself accountable. The Ofcom Code, and I know I've quoted it a few times, is pretty well-written stuff. You know, the doctrine of fairness that says, "Reach for all the facts." Don't just report a story and gather those facts which seem to support a particular case. Go to all the inconvenient facts too – make sense of all of those, present those, challenge everyone – then you've done your job. And it's not enough just to say, you know, we've annoyed enough people so we're doing a good thing.

Penultimate question then, John. What are the kind of challenging aspects for the job? Personally I imagine it's quite long hours, is it? If you were to grumble about the job, what would you say?

I don't find too much that bores me in the job, you know, and if anything it will be done after seven years, it would have been, "Well, is the job finished?" But actually we've kind of re-energised ourselves to a whole new vision of what the company is, so... you know, problems emerge all the time and we're a small enough company that, you know, if a satellite dish breaks down abroad in the middle of one of our programmes I will have a meeting about that too. And everything that you've put in place operates... and it's a bit unfair to pick up on operations for that... you know, there's day-to-day stuff that has to be done. I found myself in a discussion about how many insects are getting into one of our toilets the other week, and I had no idea. But actually if you work in the part of the building that's doing that... you might think, "Is

this chief executive stuff?" Well, we're a small enough company that it turns out it is chief executive stuff!

No one could accuse you of being aloof then, if you get into that level of detail.

Maybe not. So, you know... but actually, that's part of the... that's the fun I suppose, that when you're running massive corporate entities, and I've worked for some of them, it can become almost academic. Whereas a job like this is everything from negotiating multi-year, multimillion pound deals through to how do you deal with a fly infestation. I could talk like if you want, because it's a fascinating topic about flies and seasonality.

I'm sure it is, and I'm sure you're an expert on it now! Final question then, and I've never got anyone to successfully answer this, so I appreciate you might want to sidestep it, but what's next for you? What would be your next career move? I mean, I'll be honest, I want to be director general of the BBC – is that a job that you would aspire to do? I think you'd be a, you know, a replacement for Tony Hall when he wants to move on.

I don't think it is something I would do next, to be honest. You know, maybe in 10 or 15 years time. It sounds very arrogant to say that. No, look... I really... I think that... I've been working for 33 years now, and I tend to think the best career plan is to do a great job of what you do. When the time is right and the opportunity is there you will know rather than kind of daydream about what one might do next. I think I love television and entertainment though, and I mean, I've grown very quickly to love journalism and the world of politics and all that. I'm not going to become a politician. So I'm very happy doing this job for a few years, and then who knows after that.

John, I've learned a huge amount, it's been a fantastic interview. Thank you ever so much for your time.

Well, thank you – and thank you for coming to ITN.