

## NBC GOES WHERE OTHERS FEAR TO TREAD, TACKLES ONLINE NEWS HEAD-ON

New name.  
New logo.  
Same great content.



NBC and its new parent company Comcast have dived headfirst into the new business. Whether their decision to do so is brave, idealistic, unwise or just an intuitive decision taken without much thinking, only time will tell, but that they are intent on pursuing it even further, is strengthened by NBC buying out its partner Microsoft in msnbc.com, which was one of the web's topmost news sites. NBC strong foray into news has come almost by default as it's other broadcast competitors abandoned the news business and NBC must have been by as much surprise as has everyone else. In fact it was perceived as one of the weakest of the broadcast networks and, where it finds itself in the new business today has been attributed to a musical chairs situation – when the music stopped all the rest were firmly astride a prime-time chair and NBC was left holding the news. After ten years of effort NBC put MSNBC in a position to earn better rankings than CNN, whose viewership continued to fall during this period, even though it remained far behind the undisputed leader, Fox. If that wasn't enough, amongst the three leading cable news channels, in revenue generation MSNBC is the least lucrative. In CNBC, it can take credit for having built the leading cable channel, but seems lost about what else it can do or what to do next. CNBC's viewership has not grown over the years and continues to remain minuscule whilst its prime time line-up is virtually not there. In its evening news, the network has Brian Williams, an old hand, but with a constantly declining audience it has lost much of its hold over the advertisers who once marketed their products and services over it. In the morning NBC has the Today Show, which is a significant revenue generator and gaining in popularity. However, it is facing competition from "Good Morning America," which is aired at the same time. For quite some time now, industry analysts and experts had labeled NBC's news strategy as a shrewd and intelligent move on its and its then owner GE's part. They said that given that ABC and CBS are giving it a wide berth, it made practical sense to follow the news industry. Moreover, they said that it showed NBC as a courageous and gutsy company for entering an arena where others felt afraid to tread. The yardstick for broadcast stature has long been assessed, mostly by the size of its news operation. Whilst others were laying off staff and slimming their operations to as little as possible, with ABC and CBS, even trying to outsource their news, NBC, with its cable outlets and with its evening anchor, Brian Williams, upholding its name, brand and conventions. In spite of an unsure future and increased innovative ways that were redefining news, especially by Fox News, giving rise to the feeling that traditional ways of presenting the news would be eased out, but in some kind of audacious, or dogged, or no-alternative way, NBC persisted. CNN tried to seek protection from the Fox revolution, to save itself from the news juggernaut. But its defensive posture saw it losing a major portion of its prime-time audience and its brand image in the process. On the contrary MSNBC analyzed what Fox was doing and made an attempt to do what they were doing. They may not have been as adept at doing things the Fox-way but at least they were still in the game and not ousted, like CNN. Undeniably, MSNBC is more renowned for its determination and fortitude to do business in the manner, in which it feels market competitiveness, forces it to do. They have never shied from it, given whatever circumstances. We are much better than what we look like, they seem to say, but we are handicapped inasmuch as we are in cable television. Its earlier forays into news may have been termed as by default and intuitive, but by buying out Microsoft it has made it clear that it intends to march into the internet news business with firm, confident and calculated steps. The internet news business without doubt is an even more uncertain and perilous news sphere than television news. Their decision does not signify that they want to have the best of both the worlds, but a conscious, intended march into the abyss. The purpose it seems is to turn the existing msnbc.com, with its huge traffic, into nbcnews.com then, in an act fraught with risks, recast msnbc.com as a site that reflects the networks themes, not as Fox does, but in a manner that is just opposite to theirs. This philosophy emphasizes the uniqueness of NBC to move into a hostile, indifferent, unchartered territory, fully aware of the dangers of their decision and taking responsibility for the consequences of their acts. It is worth recollecting that at one time MSNBC was desirous of buying the Huffington Post, arguably the most successful US online news organization, but its owner chafed at the price tag that Huffington carried. It is hard to fathom, why so many legacy news brands gain popularity and following but are hard to sustain financially. Many have attracted vast audiences, but none of them seem to have made great profits and the advertising demand, for the infinite universe of internet advertising space, continues to decline and for whatever that is available the price paid is a pittance compared to other advertising spaces. Yesterday, three of the NBC's top news executive, NBC News President Steve Capus, MSNBC President Phil Griffin, and NBC News chief digital officer Vivian Schiller held a news conference to answer queries and apprise the media of the news business' past accomplishments and current tussles and disillusionments. They tried to convince the gathered reporters, that they had been handed a great opportunity and it would be hard to refute that. This is the team that runs the last living network news organization and now they are confronted with internet, but they are all men with proven ability. All three are giants in their fields and have taken hard blows. That they are still in the business, in spite of disappointments, means that they have an undisclosed purpose that they are not willing to currently divulge or that they have sentimental and emotional attachment to their jobs that makes them plod on.