



“Audiences are changing. And technology is changing. In a way, everyone knows this of course. What’s surprising - shocking even - is the sheer pace of that change. In both cases it’s faster and more radical than anything we’ve seen before.” Mark Thompson, BBC director general 2006

The Second Digital Revolution

The new millennium kicked-off with an ambitious 28 hour long broadcast, *2000 today*, linking the BBC’s output to 60 other broadcasters around the world. Worries over the Y2K millennium bug causing a digital meltdown were unfounded, and the decade was marked by huge and rapid developments in digital technology.

Six new digital TV channels were launched by the BBC in 2002 (BBC Three, BBC Four, CBBC, CBeebies, BBC Parliament and BBC News) as an ever-increasing number of households bought multi-channel TVs, radios, and as more home computers went online. Freeview, also launched in 2002, provided the BBC’s digital channels for ‘free’ once viewers had bought a set-top box which they could connect to their TVs. Digital radio stations BBC 1Xtra, BBC Radio 6 Music, BBC7 and the Asian Network were added to the mix the same year. Audiences wanted more interactivity with their favourite programmes and the BBC reacted by creating content for the Red Button on digital TV and fielding audience comments and reactions on message boards, chatrooms and online forums.

As part of this development, the decade also saw the launch of High Definition television, transforming the impact of many popular programmes, from a reinvented Doctor Who to 3D Wimbledon coverage, providing an opportunity to watch multiple matches in real time. In addition, advances in computer generated imagery (CGI) enabled programme-makers to recreate epic themes and events with startling clarity: Ancient Rome rebuilt in historical drama series *Rome*, dinosaurs striding the planet in *Walking with Beasts* and the legend of King Arthur in *Merlin*. The next decade would explore even more immersive media, with experimentation in Virtual Reality in particular.

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Audiences increasingly expected to access programme content where and when they wanted. The BBC launched the highly successful iPlayer at the end of 2007, a free service which enabled viewers in the UK to catch up with more than 250 programmes screened over the previous seven days.

In the following decade, the internet expanded its frontiers even further. A standout moment was the coverage around the London 2012 Olympics, viewed by 26.9 million viewers at its peak, the highest figure for any programme since 1997. This was the first truly multiplatform Games, with extensive coverage on TV, radio, PC, mobile, tablet and connected TV as well as the first live broadcast in super hi vision with pictures sixteen times sharper than HDTV plus multi-channel surround sound.

Creative highlights

Some of the BBC’s most popular programmes were reinvented for the audience of the 2000s – Doctor Who in 2005, *Come Dancing* became *Strictly Come Dancing* in 2004, and *Top Gear* became one of the most watched factual programmes in the world. All were based on earlier formats but refreshed across multiple media platforms, and sold as global brands by BBC Worldwide. Drama reinvented the 1970s via the acclaimed back-to-the-future drama *Life on Mars*, and *Bleak House* brought Dickens to a new audience written in short episodes like a TV soap.

Reality TV grew in popularity and comedy created the ‘mockumentary’ with an uncomfortable but very amusing new brand of eavesdropping in *The Office* (2001). The comedy observed the antics of frustrated wage-slaves and their cringe-making boss in a Slough-based paper merchant called Wernham Hogg. Other successes were *The Catherine Tate Show* whose characters and catchphrases entered the British public’s consciousness in the 2000s: a receptionist who blames technology instead of doing her job, ‘The computer says no’ and a defensive millennial teenager who asks the rhetorical question ‘Am I bovvered’? whenever she feels angry or embarrassed.

For younger audiences, two digital channels were created providing an advertisement-free zone for children 12-13 hours a day: CBBC for children aged 6 and over, and CBeebies for the under-fives. The innovative In the Night Garden soon became the most popular programme for the under 3s in the wind-down to bedtime!

In the following decade, reinvented Britishness flourished – Sherlock (2010) made a star of Benedict Cumberbatch and became a global hit, Call the Midwife (2012) captured the hearts of Sunday evening viewers, while The Great British Bake Off (2010) became the runaway surprise success of TV until it was poached by Channel 4. Darker drama notes were struck by Luther (2010) and the distinctly unhappy Happy Valley (2014).

On the Factual front, Brian Cox inherited the astronomy mantle from Sir Patrick Moore (1923-2012) and captured the nation's attention with Stargazing Live (2011). And in 2014, the BBC began to mark the legacy of the WW1 centenary with four years of wide-ranging programming across drama, documentary and music.

Safeguarding Trust – Scandals and sexed up dossiers

New director-general Greg Dyke took up his post in 2000 promising to cut down the complicated BBC internal market and to boost staff morale by creating 'one BBC'. However, he quickly found himself in conflict with the government of the day. On the BBC Radio 4 Today Programme in May 2003, correspondent Andrew Gilligan implied that the Prime Minister Tony Blair had lied to the country in order to gain support for taking Britain to war in Iraq. It was reported that an intelligence dossier had been 'sexed up', evidence exaggerated to show that the Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein had been stockpiling chemical weapons and would be able to launch them within 45 minutes of an order. The source for this turned out to be weapons inspector Dr David Kelly who subsequently committed suicide. Lord Hutton was appointed to conduct an inquiry into the affair, the results of which were critical of aspects of government and the security services, but also of the BBC. Both the BBC's chairman Gavyn Davies and the director-general Greg Dyke resigned along with Andrew Gilligan in 2004.

Further scandals in the 2000s involved Queensgate, Sachsgate and revelations about a faked phone-in competition on the long-running children's television programme Blue Peter. The public's trust in the BBC was shaken, and as a result the BBC decided to roll out new editorial training called **Safeguarding Trust**. During the BBC charter renewal process in 2007, the Board of Governors was replaced by the BBC Trust with the aim of providing enhanced objectivity around the governance of the BBC. Mark Thompson replaced Greg Dyke as director-general in 2004 and Sir Michael Lyons became the chairman of the new Trust, replacing Gavyn Davies who also stood down after the Hutton Inquiry. In 2014, Rona Fairhead took over as BBC Chairman, becoming the first woman to chair the BBC.

The Savile crisis

The highly popular DJ Jimmy Savile died in 2011 aged 84. After his death Newsnight began to investigate reports that he had sexually abused children and young people. Quashed at the time, the revelations were eventually proved to be true and led to a crisis in the BBC over this and other related accusations, precipitating the resignation of the newly arrived Director-General George Entwistle. He had been in office for a mere 54 days.

Tony Hall, Lord Hall of Birkenhead, replaced him in November 2012. As a result of the Savile revelations, the BBC set up two formal reviews, one to look at its management of the issue, and one to advise on its culture and practises. The Savile revelations cast a long and troubled shadow over the Corporation.

Later in the decade, 2017 saw the launch of the new BBC Charter which radically overhauled the governance of the BBC. It dissolved The BBC Trust, and created in its place a new Unitary Board under a new Chairman, Sir David Clementi. From now on, the BBC's activities would also be regulated by the government body Ofcom (Office of Communications), rather than by a BBC-associated agency. In addition, the Charter period was liberated from the political election cycle, by its extension to an eleven-year duration (up to 2024).