

CNN on the Frontiers of the Commercialization of News

By [Jim Naureckas](#)

Global Research, March 14, 2015

[FAIR](#) 11 March 2015

Theme: [Media Disinformation](#)

Variety is pleased that CNN has “gotten over itself” and is inserting ads into its news programming.

“CNN Tests New Ways to Mix Ads With News,” a Variety headline ([3/5/15](#)) declared, over a story about how the cable news channel has “gotten over itself” and has “looked for more ways to weave ad messages into programming.”

Variety TV editor Brian Steinberg reports that the Time Warner outlet used to worry “that mixing editorial and advertising too closely could foster a perception that CNN’s journalism was swayed by a sponsor.”

But faced with falling ad revenues, Time Warner is seeing opportunities to sell ads during programs that are “not so tied to breaking news.” That’s why on its New Day morning show, “a logo for General Mills’ Fiber One cereal shows up during weather reports.”

Katrina Cukaj, executive vice president of CNN ad sales, says she “is open to the idea of running an advertiser’s logo in its bottom-of-the-screen zipper, so long as the appearance is tailored appropriately”: “If it’s financial information, if it’s actual data from the markets,” she told Variety, “I could potentially put a financial advertiser on there.”

Yes, combining real financial information with corporate-selected data designed to sell financial products—that could never [confuse anybody](#), could it?

“As coverage of the 2016 elections gets underway, [Cukaj] said, CNN sees a potential chance to bring advertisers into sponsorship of quizzes and polls.” In other words, CNN likes the idea of making its presentation of public opinion dependent on corporations who are [paying good money to influence public opinion](#).

Variety presents CNN’s new tack—which it depicts as part of a broader trend throughout the TV industry—as advertisers “helping to bring news from an outlet to a consumer, as opposed to interrupting or influencing it.” But it’s [silly](#) to pretend that embedding advertising inside the news isn’t going to impact content.

“Placing these ads in some of CNN’s more traditional programming might be difficult,” the trade paper notes, citing Donna Speciale, president of ad sales for CNN parent unit Turner Broadcasting: “In breaking news, you don’t know what’s going to be happening and a lot of it is tragedy. Clients don’t want to get near that, and that environment is not ideal” for selling the right to stick your logo in the news frame. “But the increase of programming that has elements of entertainment in it lends the network the opportunity to test ideas ‘CNN hasn’t had in the past,’ she said.”

It's as though the "increase in programming that has elements of entertainment in it" has nothing to do with the fact that "clients don't want to get near" tragedy and unpredictable news: Really, there is a cause-and-effect relationship here, and putting the ads inside the news rather than next to it is only going to make CNN and other newscasters less eager to give viewers information that doesn't lend itself to being commercialized like that.

Variety's Time Warner sources assure us they are "mindful of maintaining boundaries between ads and editorial content." Which somehow calls to mind Fry from the sci-fi comedy Futurama, a character who wakes up in the year 3000 and is shocked to find that corporations are inserting ads into his dreams. When a friend asks, "Didn't you have ads in the 21st century?" he responds:

Well sure, but not in our dreams. Only on TV and radio, and in magazines, and movies, and at ball games...and on buses and milk cartons and T-shirts, and bananas and written on the sky. But not in dreams, no siree.

CNN is going to have ads in its weather reports and financial crawls and polls and quizzes...but not in its plane crash coverage, no siree.

Not yet, anyway.

You can contact CNN [here](#) (or on Twitter [@CNN](#)). Remember that respectful communication is the most effective.

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