WE INTERRUPT THIS NEWSCAST

Local television newscasts around the country look alike and are filled with crime, accidents, and disasters. Interviews with more than 2,000 TV journalists around the country demonstrate that news looks this way because of the ingrained belief that “eyeball grabbers” are the only way to build an audience. This book contradicts the conventional wisdom using empirical evidence drawn from a five-year content analysis of local news in more than 154 stations in 50 markets around the country. Correlating the content of local news with ratings success shows that news stories on a wide variety of substantive topics draw viewers and that audiences reward good journalism with high ratings. The book shows that “how” a story is reported is more important for building ratings than what the story is about. Local TV does not have to “bleed to lead.” Instead, local journalists can succeed by putting in the effort to get good stories, finding and balancing sources, seeking out experts, and making stories relevant to the local audience.

Tom Rosenstiel designed the Project for Excellence in Journalism and directs its activities. He also serves as vice chairman of the Committee of Concerned Journalists. A journalist for more than 20 years, he is a former media critic for the Los Angeles Times and chief congressional correspondent for Newsweek magazine. Among his books, he is coauthor, with Bill Kovach, of The Elements of Journalism: What Newspeople Should Know and the Public Should Expect (2001).

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HOW TO IMPROVE LOCAL NEWS
AND WIN RATINGS, TOO

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