

# Technology and ethics in the new media

**Dennis Redmont**, head, Communications, Media and Development, of the Council for the United States and Italy, based in Rome, on Friday delivers the fourth George Sammut Memorial Lecture, titled 'Ethical issues related to new technologies in media'. MALCOLM J. NAUDI profiles this year's speaker.

**D**ENNIS REDMONT's career in journalism spans over 40 years in which he has reported from over 80 countries. He has covered guerilla warfare and dictatorships in Latin America, Middle East crises, and three travelling Popes, before working as a Rome-based executive for the Associated Press for the Mediterranean area.

In this capacity he handled news, photos, television and multimedia coverage and distribution for over 25 years, before joining the Council for the United States and Italy, a business forum and think tank, affiliated with the Center for the United States and Europe at the Brookings Institution.

Mr Redmont is no newcomer to Malta. He was invited to give a talk, on June 27, 1991, at the first Malta Journalism Awards – or the BPC Award to Journalists, as it was then known. He had been in Malta for the 1989 Bush-Gorbachev summit... "in a stormy December".

Asked what attracted him to the profession initially, Mr Redmont said: "My father was a foreign correspondent, of the Walter Cronkite generation."

Redmont senior worked in Paris and Moscow as the CBS correspondent and the family lived in Paris in the 1950s. "We lived through McCarthyism ('Good night and good luck') for which my father was tarred.... and my parents 'ordered' me back to the United States for college (I called it 'US go home', the anti-NATO slogan).

"I accepted – because this was before 1968 and parents were supposed to be obeyed. My fondest wish was to go abroad again – in some shape or form."

So, after being first educated in a French Lycée, he proceeded to the prestigious Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism, graduating with honours. He joined Associated Press in New York and in 1965 became the agency's youngest correspondent in Lisbon.

"It seemed logical for me to follow in my father's footsteps," Mr Redmont told *The Sunday Times*, "and get back to the foreign correspondent lifestyle, go to Columbia Graduate School of Journalism and return abroad."

"I felt I could bridge cultures by

juggling languages, building bridges and telling stories on either side of the Atlantic..."

Looking back on the changes in journalism since he graduated from Columbia in 1963, Mr Redmont termed it "cataclysmic", although he is quick to affirm that the basic precepts have not changed: "Get it first, but get it right. Write as rivetingly as possible. Keep the highest moral standards you can and keep the credibility high. Learn multimedia (in those days it meant learning photo, radio, TV, magazine reporting, etc).

"So, technically it has changed, and even commercially it has changed: advertising has a much greater voice. Stockholders have a much greater voice. The business side has a greater voice. But the struggle is still the same ('Good night and good luck' again: *Murrow vs Paley*).

"The journalism that is taught today is a problem. We have to come clean and say the students often know more technically than their professors. Their attention span is lower. But the content is more shallow, so more efforts have to be made to encourage self-education."

Mr Redmont said during his reporting career he faced mortal danger in 1967 Beirut, and in guerilla situations in Latin America in the 1970s. "But it's one thing to face mortal danger and another to be scared," he pointed out.

"I was more scared when the political police in Portugal were after me (and I was 23 years old in my first foreign post). I had to take refuge in the American Embassy. And I was more scared when I was stuck in the Amazon jungle having gone too far into the bush. Somehow at those moments, I feared more for my life."

The saddest moment of his reporting career was "certainly President (John F.) Kennedy's funeral in 1963, when I was sent to Washington to follow the foreign delegations and follow the funeral. It was traumatic for every American, but especially for those who had to report the news."

The US election that stuck most in his mind was the first one he recalls when he was in the US. "It was 1960. I had only arrived a few months before in a Mid-West college and I listened to the famous debates on the radio."

"My (avowedly) Republican

roommates came back from watching the debates on TV certain that Nixon had lost. I stayed in the dormitory and from what I heard on the radio I surmised that Nixon had clearly won. It became a media lesson for me – before McLuhan's 'the media is the message'."

This is what happened across America: those who watched that famous debate on television concluded that Kennedy, who went on to win that election, had won, while those who heard the debate on radio gave the 'victory' to Nixon.

Despite moving up the media executive ladder, Mr Redmont continued to write, contributing to magazines and other periodicals besides broadcasting for public and private television networks, commenting on such subjects as European politics and culture and the US presidential elections.

Fluent in six languages, he considers writing to be important to him. "I have continued to write – not nearly enough – inside and outside the AP. The merit of the AP job had been that you could do both. This is not true any more."

"Now editorial and business have been more clearly segregated. It has been important for me to write and speak out – not just write – also doing radio programmes. I think radio is the means of this century. It allows multitasking and maximum absorption."

**M**r Redmont considers his greatest strengths as a journalist to be his ability to identify with various cultures without getting overly involved, being able to pick trends and serving as a talent scout. "Many of my journalistic 'picks' are now in leading positions. I can also summarise a situation speedily, something journalists need to do."

Among his weaknesses he lists suffering from TDD – technical deficit disorder, "but I try to make for it by understanding how things work and why".

Recognising his career achievements, Columbia University's alumni awarded Mr Redmont the Distinguished Alumni Prize in 2005, citing his "even-handed, unbiased and thorough coverage". In 1983 he won one of Italy's most prestigious prizes, the Carlo Casalegno award for distinguished journalism for coverage of Italy and



DENNIS REDMONT

the Vatican, granted for the first time to a foreign news professional.

In 1991 he won Italy's *Solemare* prize for career achievement, sponsored by Italy's Culture Ministry and four years later he received the President of the Republic's medal of the International Prize *Ultimo Novecento* for the most outstanding foreign correspondent.

Despite being a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize in 1978 for his Vatican and papal coverage, he has never received this prestigious prize. "I was very disappointed not receiving a Pulitzer. I had a 24-minute beat on all agencies and media on the death of Pope John Paul I (the 33-day Pope).

"I had the front pages of all US newspapers (it was midnight in the USA when it was 6 a.m. in Rome). The newspapers 'replayed' for my story... which I dictated with the help of zero notes at six in the morning from my bed. I had just covered the death of Pope Paul VI, another major news story."

"The person who received the Pulitzer that year was Richard Ben Cramer, a beautiful writer, who had written a series on the Palestinians. I think it was a case of good reporting vs good writing and reporting"

Having been based in Italy for the past quarter of a century, Mr Redmont considers Italy to be his second home. Still, he points out, "I am not totally Italianised, nor totally de-Americanised. But I can identify with many of Italy's problems and prospects."

In 2000, Mr Redmont helped found a new major Italian news agency, APBiscom (now APCOM, owned by Telecom Italia), which wed broadband technology with traditional wire service coverage in a series of innovative strategies to expand AP news to media, private, corporate, government and wireless subscribers.

Today Mr Redmont, who has served four times as president of Italy's Foreign Press Association (*Stampa Estera*), which recently celebrated its 90th anniversary, also works as a strategic consultant for a major global strategy and consulting firm. He is adjunct professor at the RAI's Graduate School of Journalism in Perugia, and at the University of Gorizia, Italy.

He was the Italian adapter of various editions of the *Trivial Pursuit* game and is co-author of *Mass media e nuova Europa* (Mondadori, 2005).

**I**n his talk on Friday, sponsored by the US Embassy in Malta and the Centre for Communication Technology, University of Malta, at the University's Erin Serracino Inglott Hall, Mr Redmont will explore citizen journalism, social networking, news-sharing and The Daily Me. Technology like the Web and cellular telephones have had an impact on the rush to print, leading to colossal errors. There is a lack of control and checking, with ethics often thrown by the wayside.

Still, he reiterates, "there is nothing like a good read and a fast beat. The future is knowing how to filter out the wheat from the chaff and not getting drowned in the flow. We have more information but we are less informed."

"I will discuss 'people power', video unlimited, 'personalise it', whether computers are replacing journalists, and problems of ethics

## New On Our Shelves!!

most  
wanted

Here's an exciting selection that we have designed for your fast paced life. One that not only gives you the option of mentally escaping this hasty life through the relaxing pages of a good book, but also by giving you a collection of 50 of the best titles from Agenda's all time most popular books as chosen by you, our customers - making it easier and quicker for you to select a good book! These are the books you should definitely not miss. Enjoy the read...!

**Launch Offer Buy 3 Pay for 2!**



Agendabookshop

\* Offer valid on Most Wanted books  
- only, till October 18.

\* The cheapest book will be given FREE at Cashpoint.

Valletta - Waterfront, Embassy Silema - Plaza • St. Andrews - Topline • Bugibba - Islets Promenade • Luqa - Malta International Airport  
Tal Qroqq - University Campus • Msida - Junior College Campus • Qormi - PAWI Supermarket • Gozo Channel Ferries - Agenda Newskiosk