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## Audio Transcript

Episode 244 of "[E&P Reports](#)" Vodcast Series  
with Mike Blinder

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### [Engaging the next generation: Mike Beaudet's vision for Gen Z news consumption](#)

In this exclusive interview with E&P Magazine, Mike Beaudet, an investigative reporter for WCVB-TV in Boston and a journalism professor at Northeastern University, shares his vision for adapting local news to resonate with Gen Z through his pioneering Reinventing Local News Project. Funded by the Stanton Foundation, the project aims to repackaged traditional broadcast content to meet the digital consumption habits of younger audiences. Beaudet emphasizes leveraging digital platforms like TikTok and OTT to deliver short-form videos, experimenting with longer, context-rich stories, and focusing on authentic, relatable storytelling. By employing innovative strategies and maintaining flexibility in talent acquisition, Beaudet's project offers a roadmap for news organizations to engage Gen Z and sustain quality journalism in the digital age.



0:00:19.5 Mike Blinder: And greetings once again, Mike Blinder, publisher of E&P Magazine. As always, we kick off with housekeeping, listening to this programme on a podcast platform of preference. See, I got that out. Please follow us, watching on our YouTube channel. Hit that subscribe button below me. Smash that bell to the right. You'll get an update each and every time we upload this weekly vodcast series dedicated to the news publishing industry we call E&P Reports. Mike Beaudet, can you tell I was a disc jockey in my youth?

0:00:47.9 Mike Beaudet: I feel that vibe.

0:00:48.8 Mike Blinder: Here's how we kick off these programmes with famous people like you. Rather than looking at your LinkedIn background or your About Me page on some broadcaster website, we go to ChatGPT. Do you understand how important that is in today's [0:01:05.0] \_\_\_\_? So I'm gonna say to you what ChatGPT says about Mike Beaudet, and you tell me if it's... Give it an A to an F. You ready to go?

0:01:14.5 Mike Beaudet: I'm ready.

0:01:14.6 Mike Blinder: Mike Beaudet is an investigative reporter and a professor. He's a journalist professor at Northeastern University and an investigative reporter for WCVB-TV Boston's ABC affiliate. Beaudet has a reputation for exposing important issues, holding powerful entities accountable through his investigative work. You only got a paragraph, Mike. How did they do?

0:01:33.6 Mike Beaudet: I'd give that an A. It's not very complete, but I think it's a... I give the AI an A for that, for accuracy at least.

0:01:42.0 Mike Blinder: Well, with our audience of news publishing executives and all that and more, is there any other aspects to your background you'd like to tag on?

0:01:52.7 Mike Beaudet: I think... I just feel like I'm at this lucky place where I'm at the intersection of the industry and academia. And so I get to do both, which I feel fortunate to do. So I've been teaching at Northeastern for 10 years now, and I did adjunct earlier at Emerson and Northeastern. So being able to have my foot in the industry, but also being able hopefully to shape the journalists of tomorrow in some way, hopefully in a positive way, I think is just... I feel fortunate. So to me, that's an important part of my bio that I like straddling those two worlds.

0:02:21.6 Mike Blinder: Well, the teaching part is what we're mostly gonna be focusing on in this interview 'cause you are like the centre piece of our cover story for our July issue. Local TV News takes Gen Z beyond broadcast. A six-year study gleams insight into what resonates with younger news audiences, and we're gonna unpack all of that on the backside of this message.

0:02:44.1 Announcer: This episode of E&P Reports is exclusively sponsored by BLOX Digital, formerly TownNews. Even though the name has changed, their commitment to the media industry is as strong as ever. BLOX Digital is now even better positioned to deliver integrated solutions, like content management, audience development, advertising revenue, video management, and more.



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0:03:47.8 Mike Blinder: Alright, Mike, I'm gonna try to sum up the story we wrote, and of course, those listening on a podcast platform, go to [editorandpublisher.com/vodcast](http://editorandpublisher.com/vodcast). We'll have a link to Gretchen Peck, our associate editor's work, and it was a great story. We loved airing, I mean, publishing this. But basically, did you create the Reinventing Local News project? Are you associated with it? I know it was funded by the Stanton Foundation, and it's out of Northeastern. Do I have that right?

0:04:15.7 Mike Beaudet: You do. And yes, I created it back in 2017. And we had actually been working with the Stanton Foundation on an unrelated grant, looking at public disclosures by officials and elected officials. And so obviously, my world being in broadcast, we... And Stanton, Frank Stanton, the former president of CBS. And so I found that that could... I hoped that it would be this opportunity. And we just sort of clicked with the foundation and went back and forth on ideas. And they've been so supportive of what we're doing. And it really fits into their mould because they're all about strengthening democracy and sort of reaching the masses. And so I think doing research in the broadcast area just fits really nicely into that.

0:05:08.7 Mike Blinder: Well, basically, this is a project, correct me if I'm wrong, that's just trying to figure out how we can repackaging our content to make sure we're pulling in a younger generation, the Gen Zs, if I can use that term. Do I have that right? I mean, it's just...

0:05:12.0 Mike Beaudet: Yeah.

0:05:13.6 Mike Blinder: You're finding the best ways to make sure the content can be absorbed by newer audiences. Is that right?

0:05:19.0 Mike Beaudet: Exactly. And some of it, really the genesis of it came from being in the classroom and showing my work, showing colleague's work, and students sometimes would just question it. And you could see this disconnect between younger people and what we're doing on the broadcast side. And they would just question everything and be like, "Well, why do you do... Why do you like things this way? Why do you tell stories this way? Why does everyone sound this particular way on TV?" And so it just got me thinking that we're missing this opportunity. And then obviously, the digital revolution has changed everything. And so it's like, how do we reach young people where they are? Even my students who are interested in broadcasting and television, most of them aren't sitting down and watching a newscast at six o'clock or 11 o'clock. That's just not how they consume content. It's all on their phones.

0:06:08.4 Mike Beaudet: And so that's what it's really about, is like we have this infrastructure with the broadcast industry, and it's doing well comparatively to a lot of other media industries. And so how do we sort of translate that and grab hold of this audience and meet them where they are? So that's really what it's all been focused on.

0:06:19.8 Mike Blinder: No, and I get that. I mean, broadcast, broadcast, broadcast, because I was I was back in the day managing a station where you run that, you do a little morning, you do your morning thing, and then the Today Show or whatever comes on, and then you're really focusing on that 04:00-6:30 PM block, or 05:00-06:00, or where you're trying to capture that audience and maybe something at 11:00. But it's all about that time. Everybody's gonna sit down in front of their TV or turn it on while they're cooking dinner, those days are over for younger generation, they don't think in terms of watching a programme at a certain time, we... I get that. But this goes beyond broadcast, doesn't it? I mean, any news publishing organisation should understand like, for example, in the article, we talked about how at WCVB, you piloted a project, you use OTT to do short form video, correct, of the larger block content you produce at the TV station, correct?

0:07:18.7 Mike Beaudet: Exactly.

0:07:18.7 Mike Blinder: And it worked. You brought in... Your TikTok viewership jumped massively. Am I right?

0:07:25.4 Mike Beaudet: It did. And it's like, it's just it's, I think the key is like focusing on these digital platforms. I think, as a whole broadcasters, media organisations sort of give lip service to digital, they know it's important, but they're not necessarily making as much money on the digital side yet.

0:07:42.0 Mike Blinder: Of course.

0:07:43.3 Mike Beaudet: They're not investing and they're not paying attention, they're just repackaging their content. But when you actually pay attention to it and say, we're gonna produce content specifically for digital, whether it's the website or social media, you actually can get some traction we're finding.

0:07:56.2 Mike Blinder: At WCVB, and I know you're on the content side, not the the dirty ad side that I come from, the dark side or whatever. Are you making money with it? Did that did that digital growth prove maybe to senior management you're looking at every expense and top line revenue, it's important that there's an audience you can you can monetize this way?

0:08:16.4 Mike Beaudet: Well, we're hoping. I think that's really what this fellowship... So we have the... We have four fellows that are working in television stations right now for this year of experimentation. And that's that's the goal, is like how do you get an audience, but how do you monetize it? And I think that's what we're trying to figure out and research. And hopefully, we're seeing trends based on the metrics that we can gather right now from the TV stations, but we're gonna be doing a deeper analysis of that and trying to figure out like, obviously, how do you make it profitable? But I do think it's an investment that people need to make.

0:08:51.3 Mike Beaudet: You can't just look at the bottom line now. Because if you're waiting to make the money, you're gonna miss the boat. We need to be focusing on this now and know that creating this content is important. And I do believe that we're gonna figure out a way to monetize it.



0:09:04.2 Mike Blinder: Oh, I agree. I mean, and our reporting on the ad side, some of the most knowledgeable prognosticators are predicting, Mike, that this may be the last year where you guys in broadcast, you're gonna have a windfall of political and automotive. You see what I'm saying? Those two massive amounts of money that you bring in on a demand level may not be there. So ownership of local content across all your audiences and first party data is everything.

0:09:33.3 Mike Beaudet: Absolutely.

0:09:34.5 Mike Blinder: For the future of all media. So so let me break down the story now. Gretchen, I think, wrote an amazing job... Did an amazing job writing this thing. You mentioned something that I didn't understand. See here, I'm the nerd. On our team... We have an editorial team that writes, they wanna write 3000 word 4000 word enterprise journalism. And I'm seeing the metrics that no one's going to be on the third paragraph. Do you see what I'm saying? I'd rather pay that journalist to write five stories. But I'm not a journalist. I'm just the guy looking at the numbers.

0:10:11.9 Mike Blinder: You said, and you were quoted saying this, it's a misnomer that Gen Z's don't like long form journalism. Am I correct?

0:10:17.8 Mike Beaudet: I think they do like, I think it's both. I think they want short form because think of... I know my kids who are 19 and 21, and just students that I see, I mean, everyone's on their phones, they're flipping, they want the TikTok, the... That that feed is coming and changing and everything's quick. And if you're not interested, you move on to the next thing. So I think they do appreciate interesting content, and they're going to move on quickly if it's not engaging them. But I also find that if you produce good content, they will stick around. And so I think part of what we've proven in our earlier phases of the research is that when we made the stories longer, people did like them when we added context and historical footage and made the added interviews and just made the stories more interesting, that people will stick around. So I think it's that balancing. It's like, if you're gonna make it long, it better be good. It better be engaging. It better support that.

0:11:09.5 Mike Blinder: Alright.

0:11:10.5 Mike Beaudet: But I think you need to give it to them in lots of different formats. And that's what we're experimenting with now with our fellows. They're creating longer form content. In some cases, we're having them produce documentaries that might be 15, 20 minutes, but then they're slicing and dicing those up and trying to come up with some social reels that will get people's attention and hopefully what make them wanna watch the longer content.

[overlapping conversation]

0:11:33.4 Mike Blinder: Define good. Hold on, hold on. I got to... Define good. You said good content, compelling content. What's the secret sauce? Is there something we should all be looking at as we look at the content? Whether we're a news publishing newsroom with a legacy press or a legacy transmitter, or a digital startup, it don't matter. How do I get... What do I... Because remember in the old days, it bleeds, it leads. Remember that?

0:11:57.2 Mike Beaudet: Yeah.

0:12:00.5 Mike Blinder: What are you... Are there a couple of bullets you could suggest on what you use from your content to get that eyeball to just love you?

0:12:08.0 Mike Beaudet: Yeah. Again, if we all knew the recipe, we'd all be making millions, right? But I think authenticity is really important with the younger audience. I think people want... And I think that that's a shift for some broadcasters, right? Because I think we've been doing broadcasting essentially the same way for decades. And so I think telling stories in a different way, being more natural. So authentic. I think they want a messenger who's... Who they can relate to. So I also think that means like younger people, like we need to hire younger people if you wanna attract younger people. But then topics that people care about. One of the... One of our fellows in Boston did a story about Boston nightlife. This was a story that the student researchers came up with looking at, is Boston like not cool because things closed down. That story has like blown up online. And it's gotten all sorts of attention. So I think it's like finding a topic area that's interesting to people and then giving real content.

0:13:07.1 Mike Beaudet: They hired a night czar in Boston, and our fellow went out and interviewed the night czar. And like, how are they changing things to try to attract more people and make it a hipper city? So I think the content has to be relatable and then it has to be presented in a way that's interesting and authentic. So I think it's balancing all of that.

0:13:24.0 Mike Blinder: Another thing you mentioned in the article, which I found fascinating and I agree with, I spoke years ago at a college newspaper association convention in Washington, DC. And I attended a lot of the panels and one of the outsiders was screaming, "You're not teaching people the business. You're all..." They're living in a little bubble in these... You kind of... And I don't wanna be disparaging to university... J-schools, but you mentioned that we should be looking for talent outside of the journalist. Do I have that right? I don't wanna put words in your mouth, sir.

0:13:57.5 Mike Beaudet: Well, the second... I think in some cases, yes. So the second phase of our research, we focused on animation and we created positions in Boston and Chicago for a year. We've helped them visual content producers, but they were trained animators. And we went to animation schools to find these people. And what was interesting is both the people that took the fellowships hadn't majored in journalism, but both of them ended up falling in love with journalism and both are still in the business and in doing well. So I think keeping an open mind for some of these positions of where you're pulling your talent from. I do think J-schools, obviously I teach in a J-school...

0:14:35.4 Mike Blinder: Of course.

0:14:35.6 Mike Beaudet: And I think we provide an important backbone, especially on the journalism side, but I think keeping an open mind to... Everyone doesn't have to take the traditional path. I don't think they do. And so depending on what position you're trying to fill, I think you can look inside and outside of J-schools.

0:14:53.5 Mike Blinder: You teach at a great J-school. I mean, there's no... [0:14:56.6] \_\_\_\_\_ where these are, right? I mean, we've had Dan Kennedy. You know Dan, right?

0:15:00.7 Mike Beaudet: Oh yeah. I...

0:15:00.7 Mike Blinder: We've had him on the program as well.

0:15:00.8 Mike Beaudet: Dan's great.

0:15:01.9 Mike Blinder: So let's get into the weeds on that. You're teaching the youth of today at a journalism entity. Do people still wanna be journalists? How are they looking at this industry? Because remember, you said in a way, we both know that having that transmitter at your TV station means nothing today, right? I mean, no one's really watching over an antenna anymore and really focusing on a programme at a certain time of day. People are cutting the cable cord. We're all in this streaming world of wild west, we're trying to figure out where the content's coming from, how it's being consumed. And like 20 years from now, they'll look back at this era, [0:15:36.7] \_\_\_\_ it's over time. Are these kids motivated to join this weird ecosystem right now? And are you seeing that fire in their belly to be that necessary part of our constitutional Republic, that final check on power?

0:15:52.8 Mike Beaudet: I think there are a lot of students that want... Still have that passion. We have like incredible storytellers who are going through our programme and who believe strongly in democracy and exposing wrongs and being a voice for the voiceless. And so I think there are still a lot of people that want that and want that traditional route, but we're also seeing people that want the journalism education, but might be thinking about digital platforms, right? Or social media or thinking about public relations, God forbid, right? But other things other than just the traditional journalistic pathway. And so I think journalists, we... I think the education, and we always say this to our prospective students is still whatever you go into, it's a really good foundation in terms of like being able to communicate, being able to write, being able to tell a story. Every industry needs someone like that, a communicator who can effectively tell a story. So I think we're preparing people to be communicators and a lot of them go the traditional route, but a lot of them go different routes as well. And so it's just kind of, I'd say it's across the board.

0:17:01.6 Mike Beaudet: And we also have a lot of bad publicity in terms of the media industry now, and you're hearing about layoffs. So I think parents sometimes get a little scared sending their kids to J-schools and dishing out tens of thousands of dollars to do that. So we try to like prepare them and find their passion and give them the different routes that they can take so that they can have a career that they're passionate about, but also make money and be successful.

0:17:28.2 Mike Blinder: How famous are you within the broadcast industry now? I'm not making a joke when I say... I mean, is this all happening in a little tiny ecosystem, or is the word travelling to other stations, other entities? Are people reaching out to your project now from different areas saying, what have you learned? What can I do now? How... Is it growing? Are you seeing that... Are you seeing it just start to become more and more and more part of the industry as a whole?

0:17:55.9 Mike Beaudet: Yeah, I mean, I think our research is really industry focused and has been since the beginning. So everything we do is aimed at the industry and trying to communicate and give them roadmaps and pathways to sort of navigate this new landscape that we're in. And every time we publish something, we get a lot of reaction from the industry from... Whether it's reporters

and producers, news directors, general managers, we've had a ton of interest in what we're doing. So I think the industry is hungry for answers. I think we... I don't... We don't have the answers, but I think people appreciate that we're experimenting and trying different things. And I think these fellowships, because it's being funded through a foundation in our project, the stations have nothing to lose. We're saying like, put these people in your newsroom for a year, let's experiment, let's have them just work on digital. And people are saying, okay, you're paying for it, we have nothing to lose. And then they're seeing the results. And they're saying, wait a minute, this is working, it appears to be working.

0:18:57.0 Mike Beaudet: We're right in the throes of this latest phase, but I... Our goal is to be able to convince stations why they should hire these OTT streaming content producers in their newsrooms, why they should make it a paid position on their digital team for someone to specifically produce content for digital. So the industry has been very receptive, I will say that. And so that's, I think, what keeps us motivated, that people want answers, and people enjoy talking about sort of the future and where do we go from here.

0:19:23.9 Mike Blinder: The challenge I have on this programme is our audience is vast and diverse. You'd likely have a few CEOs of major news media organisations hearing your words, and you got a lot of people that are just starting or they're just a small family operation trying to get the school board information and city council information up in their small communities. And they sometimes email me or text me and say, all the stuff you talk about is for the big guys. I can't do that here. Just give me some useful thing I can do just to make payroll. What do you say to the small operations? Should they do everything they can now, go find a local college and incubate it on their own, find interns, get the kid in there and tell them to have fun? Is that what you'd suggest right now? I mean, don't put this off to every single news publishing entity?

0:20:19.1 Mike Beaudet: Absolutely. And if you say like, well, I don't have the... I don't have the dollars to add a body to payroll, well, that's fine. Well, think about the bodies that you do have and how you're allocating people. And so if you have a staff of five reporters, can you pull one of those reporters one day a week and they're focusing specifically on digital, right? Can you just really rethink within the infrastructure that you have within the group. Yeah. But yeah, you can't... We can't wait. I think stations for too long have... All media has been sort of like sitting back.

0:20:58.0 Mike Beaudet: I can remember when I first got... When the web was new. We remember those days back in the '90s and we didn't wanna put any of our content on there. We were like, we can't put it on there because then they're not gonna watch TV. And so I feel like obviously we all are breaking news online now and have been for years, but I think we're still slow to fully embrace the power of digital and that it's the future, but it's also the now. And so I think if you're not investing in it and you're not like prioritizing it, then you're missing out and you're gonna be behind.

0:21:26.2 Mike Blinder: How many psychiatrists does it take to change a light bulb? The answer is one, but the light bulb has to want to change in the first place. Mike Beaudet investigative reporter of WCVB-TV in Boston on loan to us for this 20-minute interview. And of course, a professor of journalism at Northeastern university and founder of a very important, very innovative programme called the Reinventing Local News Project. Mike, we appreciate your valuable time. Thanks for joining us.





0:21:56.2 Mike Beudet: Thank you.

