

Interview

A Diversified Portfolio

An Interview with Steve Capus, President, NBC News



Steve Capus

EDITORS' NOTE Steve Capus was named to his current post in November 2005. Capus had served as Senior Vice President of NBC News since June 2005, and was the Executive Producer of NBC Nightly News since May 2001. He has received four Emmy Awards, eight Edward R. Murrow Awards, one Alfred I. DuPont, and six National Headliner Awards. In 2007, he earned the Ida B. Wells Award from the National Association of Black Journalists (NABJ). From 1997 to May 2001, Capus was the Executive Producer of MSNBC's The News with Brian Williams. Before this, Capus served as the Senior Broadcast Producer for MSNBC's daytime news coverage since its launch in 1996. During 1995, he was the Supervising Producer for Today, and before that, he was the Broadcast Producer of NBC News at Sunrise. He joined NBC News in 1993 as the Senior Producer of NBC Nightside in Charlotte, N.C. Capus graduated from Temple University in 1986 with a Bachelor of Arts in journalism.

COMPANY BRIEF By 2009, NBC News (www.nbc.com), the news division of television network NBC, had established leadership in network news, airing the highest-rated morning, evening, and Sunday interview news programs.

There is much conversation today about the future of network news. Do you feel there is an adequate appreciation of the value it provides?

Although, I don't think we can take it for granted, network news provides an incredibly important service and plays a key role in society, and it's still valued. *Nightly News* has grown its audience year over year. NBC in recent years expanded the *Today* show from the original two hours to four hours a day, and we have an offshoot of NBC News now on cable with MSNBC. So, at least for NBC News, the marketplace values our output and there is a desire for news more than ever before.

What is it about the model that has helped you remain strong and profitable while others have not?

We have a great diversified portfolio, including the leading morning news broadcast with the *Today* show; a very aggressive number one evening newscast, *Nightly News with Brian Williams*, that never takes any of its success for granted; and the number one franchise on Sunday morning, which is the longest running show in television, *Meet the Press*. Our diversified portfolio is based around a couple of things: first, our primary business is the broadcast newscasts, and we are committed to those being leading properties; we have a cable news business, which automatically makes our portfolio different from our competitors; then you round it out with MSNBC.com, which is an incredibly successful online news outlet. We also have some exciting news businesses like Peacock Productions, NBC Learn, and TheGrio.com.

We were not immune to the recession, but we have much more of a cushion by the fact that we have MSNBC as part of our portfolio.

With people like Brian Williams, David Gregory, or Matt Lauer, this is a brand that has retained a lot of its talent – they stay and grow within the company. How critical is that consistency?

It's incredibly important. Our success these days is built around the consistency at NBC News. People understand that they can expect quality, and see people they know, recognize, and respect.

How critical has maintaining a diverse newsroom been to your success?

It's extremely critical. We recently received the Best Practices award from the National Association of Black Journalists. That is a great honor for this division because it underscores the kind of opportunities and practices we have in place.

It's incredibly important for a news division to have a diverse makeup and people in key

positions with diverse backgrounds. Otherwise, when a story breaks, we're likely to all respond the same way. It's also not enough to have people around the organization with diverse backgrounds; they also need to be empowered to speak up in editorial meetings.

Cable is now known for broadcasting very partisan shows. Does that concern you long-term?

Cable news is in a different game at different times of the day. There ought to be a diversity of viewpoints on the air, but it should not always be about who can shout the loudest or which party is in charge at any given time. I encourage our people to be smart in the way they present those opinions, offer well-reasoned arguments in support of their stances, and treat people with respect. MSNBC has earned the reputation in recent years as the place where some of the smartest dialogue is taking place.

How has MSNBC.com grown, and what do you see for it going forward?

MSNBC.com began in 1996 at the same time as MSNBC cable. MSNBC.com is still a joint venture with NBC and Microsoft, and the partnership with Microsoft is terrific. One of the things we have brought to the equation is constantly increasing the online video in the news space. We have entire teams working at NBC News who are just producing for MSNBC.com, and that is working well; this is a differentiator for us. We have the power of NBC News, the reach of MSN and Microsoft, and the video content of NBC News. All of that together forms a pretty good strategy.

If someone suggested that 17 years after joining NBC News, not only would you still be there but that you would be its President, would you have believed them?

No, I never would have anticipated being in this role. I came here because I liked the energy and camaraderie. There was something, and there is still something, that is different about the way this place operates in comparison to the others.

For the people in this news division who are now the age that I was when I joined, there is so much opportunity within this place. In an era where newspapers are being shuttered, we're moving in the opposite direction. I want to grow NBC News and I want people to be able to build their careers here. I want to stay relevant to the consumer in a saturated 24/7 news environment ●