Media Masters podcast

Listen to our podcast and get the media's inside view.
www.mediamasters.fm

Ricky Sutton

Founder & CEO, Oovvuu

Media Masters – April 21st 2022

Listen to the podcast online, visit www.mediamasters.fm

Welcome to Media Masters, a series of one-to-one interviews with people at the top of the media game. Today, I'm joined down the line from Sydney, Australia by Ricky Sutton, founder of Oovvuu, the world's leading AI video matching engine. Launched in Australia in 2014, Oovvuu uses AI to match ad funded videos with relevant news articles anywhere in the world, instantly. The business has 400 participating broadcasters and its content is seen by millions of people daily. A former war correspondent and news editor in the UK and Australia, Ricky shifted his focus to video with a stated mission to "provide an alternative to the deluge of unreliable content on Facebook and Google." Before Oovvuu, Ricky was head of video and entertainment at Microsoft, and also worked for Rupert Murdoch's News Corp in several senior editorial roles. Ricky, thank you for joining me.

How are you doing?

Yeah, I'm doing really well, thank you. And thank you for making the time, it's early here so knowing the space-time continuum as I do, it must be late there.

Yeah, we live in the future here. It's already tomorrow for us.

And how is tomorrow? Is it as terrible as today?

It's wet in Australia. We've in the middle of massive floods here at the moment.

So, I mean, obviously, we've only got you here to talk about one thing. What's the latest from Summer Bay and Erinsborough?

It's not a thing here. It's a bigger thing in the UK. They don't really follow that here. And we're much more interested in the US soaps here.

It's bizarre actually, because I didn't mean to go off on this tangent, but yeah, it is British viewers that keep both soaps going, isn't it? And I think channel five has pulled the funding for Neighbours and they've closed the showdown.

That made some headlines here.

We digress. Oovvuu launched in the belief that the future of news telling will be video-led. The Ukraine conflict that's currently happening has obviously demonstrated that. Could you tell us about Oovvuu?

The objective with Oovvuu was that we wanted to put a contextually relevant video in every article in the world. As you just said, Paul, we believe that the future of news telling will be video first. So we didn't know it was gonna be a pandemic. We didn't know that it was gonna be a terrible war like Ukraine, but we did know that the most powerful way of telling the news that I've ever seen is in a powerful video. And there's an awful lot of it. And not enough of it gets used in articles. And the actual inspiration were two events. It was the deepwater horizon oil rig disaster that was such a visual story. You just couldn't tell that story with words and pictures alone. And then it was the plane crashing in the Hudson, both of which were incredibly powerful news telling with video. And I was actually working for the Sydney Morning Herald at the time that both those things happened and we were able to report both those stories with video in ways that just really lifted the experience for the consumer, but it was also just for us as journalists, a really compelling way to tell it. And my question was there's news happening every day, so much of it is visual and yet, so few articles have a video, how can we solve that? And that was the concept, that was where Oovvuu was effectively born as an idea.

For the first time footage shot by both professionals and citizens is reaching the screens of billions in an instant and Oovvuu is at the centre of that.

Yeah, very exciting time. But the visuals that we're seeing are incredibly powerful. So if you're a news nerd, like I am, you'll know that the world wars were transformed by print articles from the front and people were really changed and affected by that. And then of course, when you had Vietnam, Vietnam was on television and you saw the protests that were brought out on the streets of America when people could actually see the horror of war for the first time, this feels like the first real war that's happening in the era of online video. And so we're seeing incredible news and that creates all kinds of challenges because you have to make sure that the news is real and that the video is real and authentic, but it does mean that we're getting reporting from there and at an incredible pace and an incredible volume. And as you mentioned earlier on I had a very brief stint covering the wars in the Balkans. And the things I saw there, my job as a journalist was to witness them firsthand and then to use my journalism to write about them, to be able to transport people emotionally to the events that I was witnessing for real. And I didn't have video at the time as a news telling tool. And the best I did was to kind of affect people emotionally, I think. But now people are feeling it viscerally and in the moment. And that really opens up a whole new era in my mind for how news is told in the future when effectively everyone's got a camera and

everyone's at the scene. And then the question is how does that get effectively reported? I don't think that's been solved yet. And that's really what Oovvuu is trying to sit right on the cutting edge of to try and figure out how we take that opportunity and convert it into an authentic and trustworthy news reporting tool.

I mean, as you've said there, you're finding, researching, filming and distributing thousands of videos to publishers. How do you actually make sure that each video is true?

Yeah, that's a good question. At the moment we ingest and distribute about 1600 individual videos a day across about 60 different genres on tens of thousands of topics. And at the moment, our focus is on taking produced video from known and trusted broadcasters. So at the top of the tree would be people like Reuters and Bloomberg and the really big agencies like Agence France Presse and France 24, all of whom have correspondence all over the world and correspondence in Ukraine at the moment. And so the vast majority of the video that we syndicate and move around is coming from those professional wire agencies. But we do find there are gaps. And when there are gaps, Oovvuu through its media fund will fund the creation of video, often with those same agencies to fill gaps, to make sure that we're covering the arrival of electric cars and that means for the environment. Or looking at what the impact of COVID is on education for this generation of children, all the kinds of things that we know people are talking about and writing about and that video may or may not exist for when there's a gap, we go and fix it, or we fill it. But the answer is that we only take video from known and qualified sources, and that's how we know that it will be accurate.

It must be resource intensive. Your newsrooms are still populated by experienced journalists and they enhance the descriptions and the images, do all the verification. It's quite labour intensive. Is it not?

Journalism always has been. You can’t automate trust and authenticity, not yet. And so what we do is we have a global newsroom. So when all these videos are syndicated from all the content providers, we'll take those videos and then enhance and optimise them. So to go back to the case study I just mentioned. There's an article that's talking about COVID and the impact on children that will often arrive to us, tagged from the supplier as a news video. But it's more than that. It's also a parenting video. It's also a health video. It's also an education video. It's also a video about children. So our newsroom will use tools to enhance and optimise every single video to make it more relevant. So it can be used more and more and more often in more and more locations to enhance the news. So the next time there's an article in central America, that's about the mask mandate that they might have in schools there. You'll suddenly find that a video that was created by Agence France Presse in Paris, for example, will suddenly be relevant to that. So there's a really interesting stat, Paul, which is that there's about 27 million articles written every day at the moment across all the world's publishers and those are read over the course of a month, 300 billion times. So the numbers are enormous, but less than 1% of articles today have a video in. And when you think about the size of the opportunity that represents when the vast majority of the front pages of the biggest news brands in

the world are covering the same 20 or 30 stories. So getting the right video in those articles has incredible power. And it really means that a piece of really good work by Oovvuu's newsroom can actually literally benefit tens of millions of people in a day.

I mean, the power of video, the transformative power is just incredible. Is it the case that a rising tide lifts all boats, or do you have competitors like in the way that The Sun used to have the Daily Mirror and indeed still does it in a way.

We believe the future of news telling is video. And lots of people are trying to solve that gap. And some people are content syndicators, some are content creators, some of them are advertising agencies trying to fund the creation of this new type of content. There are journalists in newsrooms and video teams in newsrooms, right across the world, trying to solve it. Everybody's trying to solve it. Like any major change, it will take more than one company or one team to do it. But I think everybody has woken up to a single realisation that it is gonna be a video-led future. And so if you know that then whether it's us or us in conjunction with lots of other people that solve the problem, it's a problem that needs to be solved. So I often get asked, how long is that gonna take? I think we're ending era one of video, which is that I put a video in an article if I've got one. And at the moment we know that only 1% of articles have a video in a slightly less. Era two is what we're trying to usher in right now, which is that there's always a video for every article, but era three, that's the one that I'm really focused on. That's really what the 10-year moonshot is, which is that everything is then video told in the news. And that has a really, really profound impact on the media industry, because the way that news is told, broadcast effectively comes to the web, web becomes broadcast, print becomes digital, digital is just the story on a screen, the screen has a video on it. You can see how all media merges in this single-screen experience. So it doesn't matter whether you are watching it on your television at home, or whether you are watching it on your mobile, or you are watching it on an iPad or a desktop in your office. It really doesn't matter. You're still reading the news 22, 23 times a day, and those articles need to have videos in them. That's really what the focus is. But the impact of that on the media industry is huge because a video ad, a pre-roll ad that runs before that video on the page will sell for roughly 30 times the current value of all of the advertising on that page. So if the media industry can coalesce behind the mission to put a relevant video in every article, there are billions of dollars of ad revenue to be recovered back to our industry. That for me, means that we can reinvest in recreating and rebuilding our industry that's had a pretty tough decade.

I mean, we've spoken about this before, but clearly, the aim is also to repatriate the billions in ad dollars back from Google and Facebook to the actual journalists, publishers and broadcasters who report the world. And I've seen this myself, I'm no longer on Facebook, but they would cream all the advertising revenue of a newspaper's page on Facebook. And yet it'd be the newspaper that would have to pay the journalist to populate it with content. It just seems unfair. And I know Australia recently stood up to Facebook and eyes all around the world we're seeing who would blink first, but in the end, Facebook reluctantly did a little bit of the right thing at the last minute, did they not?

They did, they paid publishers, but it was really only a very small move. In all honesty, the media industry has probably lost $20 billion over the past three to five years of what it used to earn to these platforms. And you're quite right. What they do is distribute the content, they don't make it or fund it really in any meaningful way. And the media industry does that and is expected to do that. And so we have to find a new commercial model. So Oovvuu's mission from day one, when we started the company in 2014 was to put a relevant video in every article in the world, to tell trusted news to a billion people and to repatriate that $20 billion from Facebook and Google back to publishers and broadcasters to enable them to continue to innovate and report the news. And our situation, our belief has not changed one degree since we said that, coming up for a decade ago now. And so I think that, when we said it first people tended to look at us pretty askance, Google and Facebook where everyone's friend back then, but I'm just not sure people feel that anymore. I don't think people wake up in the morning now and think I'm really keen on doing a deal with Google today or doing a deal with Facebook today. I just don't think the publishing industry's thinking like that, which means it's looking for what the next big thing is. And subscription has been a focus for a good while now. And a lot of newspapers have done a really good job of that, and finally put a price to the quality of the journalism that they're providing. But video in my view has the opportunity to be the other side of the coin. It's the opportunity for billions of dollars of ad revenue, paid to publishers for putting content on a page that the consumers, the readers, really enjoy and really consume and really engage with. The right video in the top of an article will be watched to the end 89% of the time. If you need proof to know that people are happy with the product, it's those kinds of numbers. So in that scenario, if an advertiser is willing to pay 30 times as much money for the advertising, for something that your consumers watch all the way to the end 89% of the time. And if you've got all of these page views that currently lack video, video feels like the opportunity to add to the money that you are making from subscription to put your business back on a solid financial keel. And that is what Oovvuu is absolutely focused on.

You seem very optimistic about the future. And indeed, you could argue that Oovvuu is a manifestation of that optimism. I was researching for our conversation, and I read that you've welcomed a "new era of positive disruption in news" where audiences frankly, get better quality reporting.

Yeah, I'm a lifetime journalist so I feel the pain that the newsrooms are experiencing and have experienced. I absolutely believe that journalism has good eras and bad eras, and we've just had a particularly bad one, but journalism lives through things like that. The pandemic has woken the world to the need for trusted news. The war in Ukraine has reminded people very strongly that it matters. And now really the industry has an opportunity to pick itself up after a decade of losing, and the advertising market, the advertiser, that many publishers have now stepped away from because they've kind of given up feeling they can't compete against Facebook and Google. Those advertisers themselves are now turning away from Facebook and Google. And they're looking for new places to place their marketing dollars. And it's not gonna go to display those little dots and spots that you find on a page. There aren't enough people in the world to take back 20 billion in display advertising across

publishers. So it has to go to a higher-yielding product and the only product that consumers like, that journalists like, that marketers like, is video. So the only thing the industry needs to do to get its 20 billion back is to get a relevant video in every article. And that I think should be the first order of business for every newsroom. If it's intending to take back the money it's lost.

You clearly are not an isolated lunatic in a stretch jacket saying "the future of news is bright" because you've secured more than 5 million in funding.

Well more than that now, we're significantly more than that. We're up past 11 now. And all of it is invested by investors who explicitly have invested in companies that are post-Google, post-Facebook companies think about that. So the VC says to you, Ricky, I'm going to give you millions of dollars to help the publishing industry because we are explicitly investing in a post-Google future. I think you should read a lot into that. That is a big deal.

It is a big deal and it's incredibly impressive. What do you do with the money? What are the expansion plans? I mean, I'm available if you want to pay me for anything.

Thank you, Paul. That's very kind. We already have a news team and people in America and Africa and India and Australia and New Zealand and Asia, not in the UK Paul, I will give you a call. But we are expanding very quickly. So we'll grow 20 X this year, which is a reflection of us doing well, but it's also a reflection of the fact that people are waking up to videos, power and importance in the future. So it is good. As a journalist, we're not supposed to be good at numbers, we're supposed to be good at words. And I never set out to be a founder or a CEO. I just wanted to be a journo. I just wanted to sit down and write stories. And every time that I've worked in a newspaper and have got that opportunity, I've felt my career is already at its peak, but I couldn't step away from this because I couldn't see anyone else solving the problem. And so probably the most common refrain in my newsroom here around the world, is me bemoaning the fact that I wish I could do their job, but the truth is at the moment I seem to be in an army of one to do the job I'm doing. So I can't get back on the frontline, but as soon as I've finished this job, as soon as we've completed this mission, my absolute goal is to take any gains that I've got and to throw it into building a new media company. Because I think that, oh my goodness, does the world need more great, innovative journalism right now!

The thing really is that Facebook was a powerful source for good originally in terms of the end-users reconnecting with old school friends and the Arab Spring, and there were lots of really good things about it, but then they had a chance to do the right thing and then frankly, didn't. It has just become about chasing the dollars and there's this toxic tech bro sort of worldview, which means that they let some of the most horrible people post. I'm thinking of Trump, I'm thinking of QAnon, I'm thinking of all of these kinds of things, if you had any decency, they would've nipped that in the bud.

The thing I find fascinating about Facebook is that when it got to that scale that you are talking about, when it got to the monopoly scale, its opportunity was to do what media has done for generations, which is to be responsible for the content that's being published on its site and to be confident enough and courageous enough to stand up for what a it published. Now, every media company of note in history has done that. So everybody that has ‘editor’ in their title will know that they are effectively the guardian of that job for a short time until they need to hand it onto someone else. And their job is to try and make the brand or the trust that they publish under, the band that they publish under, better when they leave. That's really what their role is. And every editor I've worked for has told me a version of that story. What Facebook said was I'm just not responsible for that, so, therefore, sue me. And no one did, which is astonishing to me because if somebody had, we would never have been in this situation. So all the laws that are required to make Facebook clean up its act exist and all the laws that exist to break up Google or Facebook because they've become a monopoly that's actually now toxic to society exists. And you referred earlier on to Australia's anti-corruption and A triple C organisation taking a really tough stance on Facebook and Google. They really took them to task really hard. And we had a situation where Google literally said, we will leave Australia. It was funny after they said that we're gonna leave Australia they said on the TV news, and then the next day, my team and I went out on the streets to talk to people in coffee shops to see how they felt about that threat and the entire conversation in every coffee shop in Sydney that we went to was not oh no, Google's leaving it. Well, what search engine am I going to use now then, shall I go to Bing or shall I go to Ecosia, what should I use? When I heard that, It told me that monopolies, no matter how big they are, are always short-lived. And if you abuse that power position, which I think they both have, I think they've reached the line and gone well past it. I think people have just given up on them now. And so it's just really a matter of time I think before the authorities in some country, it's probably gonna be in Europe, I suspect, really starts to hammer down on them. But they're not going to go anywhere. They're still gonna be massive companies, but so's Microsoft and so's IBM. But I do think that when they get hammered, when they do start to shrink back to their natural size, when they actually are the size that represents the contribution they actually make to the world, then I think that leaves a gap for the media industry to grow back into that space. The only question for me is, does the media industry have the energy to leap back into that space? Does it have enough fire in its belly to innovate? I really hope it does. But there are teams of people around the world. I can see them popping up all the time often with new media companies or in offshoots of existing media companies or in companies like ours, who are just basically saying, yeah, let's actually fight this fight. This is good. This is good. Let's go and fill that gap. Let's make next year's media better than the one that we've got this year. And honestly, I really worry that we've gotten so used to losing. It's like a football team. You lose every Saturday for a decade, you just don't wanna turn up for your next game. But you turn up one day and win six nill. You'll find that all the team will turn up the following week. And if just a couple of wins, a couple of small wins, I think the industry will find some win back in its sale. And that I think is gonna be driven by video.

You are a chief executive on a mission, aren't you? Because not only do you have the organisation that you founded and lead, but you're also a campaigner of sorts as well. I mean, the company itself is an initiative to change things for the better. How do you go about doing it? Balancing all of these kinds of

things. I suppose it's a very long-winded question of saying, what do you do? What does a typical week look like?

A typical week, I've never been asked that, that's a good question. I'll tell you. So I'll probably talk to two or three media companies that have already worked out independently that videos are the future. And they're looking for a solution that doesn't look like it's gonna bankrupt them. Those are people that usually become customers. Then there'll be a couple of media companies that will ring who are deeply sceptical that video matters. So I still frequently hear people saying, no one's going to watch a video on my article, they come to read my article and look at the pictures. I'm not sure that's typically true. So there'll be a conversation where we're trying to show them how the article can be improved and how the user experience can be improved. So there'll be some of that. There'll be some dragons to slay in a week. There are frequent calls with broadcasters. I had two today with global broadcasters who were literally saying, “we're still broadcasting to television, but our audiences are declining. What should we do with this video that we have? How do we get it to the rest of the world?” That's kind of music to our ears because we truly believe that the difference between broadcast and digital is going away. So putting everything that's being broadcast into articles, because you're covering the same stories, right? It's the same story on CBS News as it is on the New York Times or it'll be on the Times of London or it'll be on the Times of India, right? It's the same stories on the front page often. And so I'll have those calls. We tend to field an awful lot of commercial calls now, so there are an awful lot of major world household brands who've advertised for years on Facebook and Google and effectively use their cheap reach as a way to expand their brands. But they now believe that there is brand damage with them featuring in those sites. And so what we're now seeing is them coming to us, whether through their agencies or direct and actually asking how we can actually help support premium media? Because we want our brand to be associated with brands we're proud of. And they're not feeling proud of Facebook and Google anymore. And Paul, when we spoke before, if you recall, I had a conversation about four or five years ago with the regional CEO of the world's largest ad agency, Group M, his name's Mark Lollback, and I cold-called him. And I went to see him and I sat in his office and I said Google and Facebook have eaten my industry. And I think that they're gonna come after yours. And I think that they want all the money. And I think that they're gonna come after the advertising agencies. And so I think you as Group M have a responsibility to support companies like us, who are trying to redress the balance to ensure that there's a plurality of media out there for people to choose where their ads can go in the same way as they can choose where they read their news. I think you have a responsibility in this whole miasma of change. You have a job to do. And his response to me was, “I completely agree with you, but I'm just not sure it's yet.” Well, early last year he rang me and said, “it's now, and I'm quitting Group M, and I'm joining you to do that.” And so the regional CEO of the largest ad agency in the world now works for us explicitly to move that money on behalf of those brands back to publishing. So there are some big guns moving in this space. I think the media industry has an opportunity, probably for the first time in that decade I mentioned to feel optimistic and honestly, all they need is just the chance to win. And there are a few of us out there just trying to provide that.

What are the biggest challenges ahead then? What keeps you up at night?

Persuading companies to make that change. Emotionally they know that they need to do it, commercially they know they need to do it, unemotional numbers show them that they have to do it. Their competitor is perhaps already doing it. Everything says there should be a complete shoeing. It should naturally be what you do, but change isn't that simple. And we've already seen the media industry fail to adapt to the digital era. It took 20 years to adapt. When Facebook and Google in four years had taken so much of their space, they failed to adapt. They have to adapt now. So what keeps me awake at four in the morning is media companies that are still saying to me, I just don't think we're ready yet, because I think you can make a mistake once. No one expected Google and Facebook. It was like war of the world war. It was like aliens had landed with weapons that you'd never seen before. As media companies, we were used to fighting the media company down the road, but we weren't ready for that. That was something we'd never seen before. So that can be excused to some extent, but making the mistake twice, I think the media companies that fail to adapt to the video era, I think they might not survive that second failure. And so what keeps me awake at night is any failure that I have to convince them that they need to make this change. And so I probably spend the most energy not being a CEO or managing my team or doing deals or raising money. The vast majority of my energy is trying to move companies that are fearful of change to the future that they know they must have, but it honestly feels sometimes Paul, if I'm very honest, it feels like some of them have perhaps given up already. And that's what haunts me at night.

Well, that's quite profound, but I agree with you. I mean, change is needed and it's to credit that you're actively bringing about that change. Let's have a change of pace if we can. I mean, every superhero has an origin story and we have a lot of listeners who are aspiring journalists and studying and want to get ahead in their career and want to know how you sort of really get to the top nos career goes in a straight line. Could you share with our listeners your career journey, did you always want to be a journalist? Did you decide that when you were a kid? Did you study? Or was this an unlikely career? If you can, walk our listeners through your career, the highs and the lows.

So I can tell you when it started, I was 12 years old at my grandparents' house, watching the news on the TV. It tells you my age, it was the Falklands War.

You've aged well.

Oh, thank you very much. Photoshop, I work in digital. I watched on the news at my grandparent's house, Max Hastings announce that the British forces had taken back the ful islands from the Argentine. And I turned to my dad who was behind me in a chair, I was sitting at his feet and I just turned to him and said “I'm gonna do that, dad.” I was a very intense 12-year-old. I just said to him “I'm gonna do that. I'm gonna be a war correspondent. And worse than that, I'm gonna be a war correspondent for the News of the World. I've decided.” And my dad said, he ran away to sea when he was 16 so he was always an adventurer, and he said to me “you should do that.” And so I went back to my school. I was at a school in the outskirts of Bristol and I went to see my careers teacher and I said, “I am going to be a war correspondent for the

News of the World.” And I don't think she'd heard that before. And she said to me, “have you thought about something else? Like double glazing or something.” And I was like, “no, I'm gonna do this. And I've decided, and you are my careers teacher and it's your job to help me.” And she looked somewhat nonplussed. What happened was I was completely committed from that moment. And so I couldn't leave home until I was 16. That was the law. But when I was 16 and within a week of leaving school, I went and persuaded my local authority to give me a grant to study out of my county. And then at 16, and about four weeks, I left home on a train and went to Chippenham to study at Chippenham technical college, which was the only college that offered a journalism course. I did that for two years. And then from there, I was hired, I was very lucky. I was hired by the Bath Evening Chronicle, a daily paper. And they sent me to a journalism school in Hastings. I'm sure that some of the listeners on here will have either been on that course or will have been maybe on it with me. I loved it and I did that course for six months. And then at just under 18, I started my job at the Bath Evening Chronicle. I wrote an article about one of the guys from Tears For Fears, which he didn't like. Tears For Fears were from Bath and I got fired from my first job. I was horrified. And so I went to a very, very local paper, but then at the local paper, I learned very quickly that I had tons of time on my hands. And so in the evenings, I'd take my really rubbish rusty Ford Fiesta that cost me 75 pounds, and I'd drive it to London and I'd park outside News Corp's headquarters, which was then at Wapping. And I'd sit on the bonnet in my car and I'd watch the first editions of the paper rollout. And I got to know some of the print guys, and I got to know some of the security guards and they'd see me there fairly frequently. I was very obsessed. I was gonna get to the News of the World. It was gonna happen. And then from there, I went back to my local papers. I worked my way up through the regional papers. Then I started to shift in the evening. So I was doing the night shift. So I'd work the day as news editor of the Exeter Express and Echo or the South Wales Echo, where I worked, and then I'd drive to London in the evening, work the night shift there, drive home, sleep for an hour, go back to the office and carry on. And then I got a massive breakthrough. I was doing a shift at the Daily Express, and this is the story that people that wanna be a journalist should think about. I was doing a shift at the Daily Express and the Welsh guards in Banja Luka during the Balkans war, basically their base was overrun. And because I was the news editor of the South Wales Echo, I knew the numbers of all of the families of the soldiers. And I think I was pretty much the only person in London that knew the numbers of all their families. And so I rang the editor of the South Wales Echo, and I asked him for permission to use that for the Daily Express. And being a great guy, Keith Perch, he gave me permission. And so I rang them and we had the photographs and the interviews with the families and everything you could have asked for. And I think on my second shift at the Daily Express, I had the first eight pages of the paper. There's so much luck in that, but then the Daily Express didn't have a job. So they rang the Sunday Mirror and said you have to give this guy a job. He's good. I went to the Sunday Mirror and then after two years of fantastic time at the Sunday Mirror, which I really, really loved. The News of the World rang me one day and just said, “come to us.” And then 27 years old, I pitched up at the News of the World and I was achieving that dream from 12 years old, I loved it. I was eight years at the News of the World in London, in various roles, as a reporter, as their first head digital, as deputy features editor, and then ultimately as news editor. And I absolutely loved, feared, exhausted, brilliant, exhilarating, amazing eight years, probably the most exciting eight years of my life.

What came next?

After eight years at the News of the World, it's a pretty intense environment. I went to see my then editor, Andy Coulsdon. You've interviewed him on this podcast.

Absolutely.

And I told him that I needed to change. And they very kindly offered me a job in New York. But I didn't really want to go to New York. And so they moved me to Australia to rest up. I think they thought I was probably gonna come back fairly soon, bored. But when I got to Australia, I kind of discovered a really interesting media market, it's far away, but it's a very interesting media market, this one, and I just then never left. So I did a couple more years at News Corp, but then I could see digital was really happening. And I'd spent a couple of years now at News Corp, which was a media company, a traditional print company, trying to be digital. And I'd experienced that. And I could see the growing pains they were having making that transition. So I faked my CV and left a senior position at News Corp and went and took a job as a maternity cover at MSN. And it makes no sense to anybody why you'd do that. I took a massive pay cut. No one really knew who I was and I took it because I wanted to see how a digital company was trying to be a media company, because I'd just seen a media company trying to be digital. And I didn't know which of them was gonna get to the sweet spot first, I didn't know. And so by seeing both ends, I could take a view on which one is gonna get to the winning post first. And to my horror, I discovered that neither of them was gonna get there with a halfway decent product, which meant somebody else had to build that good product that sat in the middle. So confused, I left the job. It was only maternity cover, and I only did it for six months. And then I left and I went home and I spent a year reading and researching everything. This was right in the time of the .com, it was happening everywhere. And I just read everything about valuations of media companies and what was driving that and what new technologies were emerging. And the more I read and the more I researched, the more obvious it seemed to me that it had to be video. So I then went back to work as head of video for the Sydney Morning Herald at Fairfax. And then there started to put videos in articles, started to analyse how people were consuming those articles when there was video in them, how was their behaviour changed if there was video in that page? I mean, we really rock the boat. After the deepwater horizon disaster, we bought a documentary from the BBC. It was an episode of Panorama about the deepwater horizon oil rig disaster. And then we ran the entire episode, the entire hour on the homepage of the Sydney Morning Herald. It was radical stuff. And so much thanks goes to the Sydney Morning Herald to allow us to try these incredible things that no one else was doing. But then what was happening was that a quarter of a million people were watching this show on the Sydney Morning Herald homepage at 7:30 PM in the evening when Sydney Morning Herald typically didn't have an audience. We had a larger audience in the public service broadcaster at that hour. And so we could see and prove years ago, before Netflix, before anything like that existed, BBC iPlayer was around, but there was nothing else really. And then you've got people investing an hour on the homepage for Sydney Morning Herald to watch a documentary from the BBC in London that they would never have otherwise seen. And a light just went on for me, it was just, okay, I don't know exactly how this is

gonna play out, but it just has to be a video doesn't it. And so that was it. I quit. And I went and locked myself in the room again and started the process of building Oovvuu. And that's my journey from hyperlocal paper and being fired from my first job, all the way to running this business that I'm now desperately hoping is gonna give the media an opportunity to regain the ground it's lost.

So you're obviously a very driven, very disciplined, very ambitious guy, I am too, although you are infinitely more successful than I am. Is that the key to success then? Is it just a sort of passion combined with frankly hard graft?

I needed excitement, Keynsham was kind of famous for two things when I was a child. It was famous for having the Turkish Delight factory at the south end of town and the largest chicken manure factory in Europe at the north end of town. So depending which way the wind was blowing, that was probably the most exciting experience of the day. There wasn't much to do. My dad had been an adventurer, he'd put adventure in my soul. And I was determined that I wasn't going to be in Keynsham my whole life. And I wanted to see the world, I had to get to that war. For me, it was the Balkans, I had to get to a war. And I did, and I've lived a life that I really set out to achieve. It wasn't chance. Certainly chance gave me step-ups that I never expected, but you do make your own luck. And so if your life is staying in the town where you are born, then all respect to you, but I just wanted a different path. And I knew that journalism just drove me and it gave me the opportunity to see all the things I would never otherwise see. And now when I go back to see friends and family or even talking to my children now, I've got three wonderful kids. They know that there's more to the world if you have the gumption to go out and try and do something. And so you do make your own luck to some extent. But I've lived a life that, oh my goodness, I couldn't have even imagined in my wildest dreams when I set out on this path, but had I not headed to the train station at 16 and a bit to go to journalism college, none of that would've happened. So you have to start somewhere.

A lot of our listeners are based in Europe, particularly Britain and the east-west coast of America. And I think we've had one person from Australia, because I used to go there regularly when we worked for AGL. I think a lot of our listeners will be asking, what is it like as a Brit in Australia? Could you share with our listeners that? What are the things that are the same? What are the things that you would expect to be the same, but are different? And what are the eyebrow raises? Were there any sort of unknown unknowns where you thought something you never even thought that would be different and it is? What's life like there?

Well, life's actually pretty good to be honest, all the things that you think are wonderful are wonderful. So clearly the beaches are amazing. The weather is fantastic, but that's kind of table stakes really, isn't it? That's what everybody expects from Australia. The people are very warm. The sharks are big, the spiders are scary. Those things are all real.

I'd take on any shark and any spider that wanted to have a go at me.

They're big, there's a ying and a yang to the world. Which is that if you live somewhere wonderful, like Australia, it will have massive sharks and massive spiders. But if you're in the UK where it rains a lot, I know, cause I live there for most of my life. You only have adders. So you see how the world is kind of balanced by ying and yang, but Australia's a great place. It's a very sophisticated media market. So I would say that probably Australian and New Zealand publishers are the most sophisticated in video in the world. That might come as a surprise to other markets, but that's certainly our experience. It is a sophisticated market, so I wouldn't have stayed here if it had been boring. It's certainly not boring. The most important lessons I've learned in digital and certainly in video have been learned here. So shouldn't be discounted in any way whatsoever. It's a very good place to be, but there are things I miss. So people ask me why don't you come back to the UK? The things I really miss, I miss pubs, I miss beer. The pubs and beer here are just not the same. I have to get up at four o'clock in the morning to watch the EPL. That kills me. I'm following Liverpool at the moment. So it means I have to get up at four o'clock in the morning to watch the games. That's tricky. But I also miss the culture. So when I come back to London and for anybody that lives in the UK, take this away as an expat, from an expat to somebody that's still there. The UK is a cultural, beautiful thing. It is a wonderful place. The history is rich. And I know you all know that, but when I came back to London and whenever I come back to London now I never take a cab anywhere. I make sure that I've got time to walk to my appointment and you'll walk down the Southbank and you'll go down some lanes somewhere and you'll see the most amazing history and things of London that you never saw, that I never saw when I worked in London. Because I was in a cab everywhere and I was always going at a hundred miles an hour, just sit down and enjoy the country for what it is, because it's really special. If you want the sunshine and the beaches, Sydney's amazing. But if you want the culture, nothing beats London and I feel enormous affection for London and I can't wait to come back. I'll be back in a few weeks and I cannot wait.

I suppose it's always the sense of the other isn't it, is that you take for granted what you have now. When I've been to Australia, I loved it because of the differences. I've never lived there, but I've spent quite a bit of time there. This might sound a really bizarre and obvious thing to say, but I really felt a sense of kind of remoteness when I was there. Do you feel that because you have the same stuff we do, you've got McDonald's, you've got emails, you've got traffic, you speak the same language, same TV, that kind of thing. And yet it just felt a world away.

It does. It's really a stark awakening. When you jump on an aeroplane, and you're flying back to Europe and eight hours after you get on the plane, you're still flying over Australia. I think it's seven hours actually. You realise how far away it is. That's true. And how big it is. But I have the best of both worlds now because most of Oovvuu's business is not in Australia. So 90% of our business is outside Australia. So I have the incredible good fortune now to spend probably 90% of my calls with international media companies in other countries. And before the lockdown, when the planes were still flying, I was on a long haul flight to somewhere in the world, every three weeks for three years. Think of the dream that represents, you wake up in New

York and then you're in Boston, then you're in Dallas and then the next day you are in London, then you're in Cape Town. And so now I get to see the whole world and the Oovvuu business has given me the opportunity to work with every media company, not just with one. And so a very large part of what Oovvuu is for is to create, I hope, a coalition of the willing amongst publishers that actually want to be a part of this video future. Now to do that, someone needs to put a banner up for the industry to coalesce under. And I just don't think that's gonna be Facebook or Google. And I really pray that it won't be. If it's us, then that's great because it'll be a homegrown, out of journalism technology solution for journalism. And so all I want to do with the rest of my days and the rest of my career is to drive and drive and drive to provide that solution for every publisher everywhere. And the incredible side effect of that is that I get to see the world all the time. So yes, it's very far away. Yes, everybody on the Qantas flights knows my name now, because I'm on them all the time, but it's also utterly thrilling.

It's amazing. Because you can almost be based anywhere now can't you? I've got stuff in America and I've got some in the far east and we're all on slack. There's the time zone difference, but I mean everyone's 24-7 these days. It doesn't really matter. When I used to work in America before the pandemic, I would be dealing with clients in Britain on email. And when I was in England, I'd be dealing with American clients over email and essentially it doesn't really matter where you are now. It's more about what is physically the best geography for you personally to raise your family so that you've got that sense of community to then power the knowledge that you're doing, because you could run Oovvuu from anywhere in the world.

Actually a mission of Oovvuu was that we wanted to make the text so simple that you could run Oovvuu from anywhere in the world on a mobile phone. So we can with a mobile phone embed any video from any broadcaster on any publisher, on any device, anywhere in the world, in one click from our mobile. So your article is published. The video is on the Oovvuu platform on your phone. And then you can just say that video goes in that article and click go and it'll put it in the article. And so we are trying to take the very best of technology and merge it with the very best of media. The outcome then is that all of the great stuff that media already does, that's engendered a century of trust with readers can be optimised with technology. That's absolutely cutting edge right now. And so I remember in our earlier conversation, Paul, we talked about a presentation I gave once, which comes back frequently now, which is that I honestly believe that technology can be learned. I know that because we've built an AI engine and I'm a journalist, I've got some engineers in the business, but we built an AI engine. So I know that technology can be learned, but trust, trust has to be earned. So when I look at the media industry as a whole, I know that the media has trust and I know it can learn technology. So that means is it likely that Google and Facebook are going to learn trust? I just don't think they are. So I actually think that the media's in the box seat here because of the technology that's available right now, but the trust that takes a century to earn. So that's one of the reasons why I'm so confident that the industry has a bright future ahead of it.

Ricky, that was a hugely interesting conversation. Thank you ever so much for your time.

My absolute pleasure. Thanks for the time.