

Hacking Scandal - Transcript

Reporter: Nathan Bazley

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INTRO: We hear about scandals all the time whether it's regarding celebrities or politicians. But the latest scandal making the rounds involves Britain's biggest selling newspaper. And now it's led to the whole paper being shut down and some of its staff being arrested. Let's have a look at how journalists chasing a story can become the story themselves.

NATHAN BAZLEY, REPORTER: The business of news is all about getting the big stories before anyone else. To do that, journalists will spend hours interviewing sources and going through information, trying to create a report that could be headed with that all important word - 'exclusive'.

For news organisations, that one word can mean bigger audiences and therefore bigger profits. But in London, the chase for that one word has gone to crazy and illegal lengths. Tabloid newspapers here are filled with celebrity scandal on a daily basis. And whichever newspaper uncovers it - gets the readers. But that pressure led one newspaper, the 'News of the World', to do things that are not only an invasion of privacy, but are also illegal.

REPORTER: Mr Williams has your phone been hacked by the celebrity tabloid scandal journalists?

ROBBIE WILLIAMS: Yes.

REPORTER: Are you worried about that?

ROBBIE WILLIAMS: No, I don't have a phone. I haven't had one for two and a half years now, for that very reason.

Phone hacking is when journalists access the private phone messages of people, like sports stars and celebrities, to attempt to get an exclusive story about their private lives. For example, say Justin Bieber got this voicemail from a mysterious woman on his phone messages.

WOMAN: Hey Biebs baby, I loved going to the movies with you yesterday, call me!

Then a journalist could hack into his phone, listen to the message and report it as an exclusive.

HEADLINE: Bieber has new girlfriend!

NATHAN: And to do this, they would use a special trick involving two phones to hack into his messages. And because many people don't change their pin code, often they could get in just by typing zero four times.

For others, private investigators were paid to uncover the pin code or to bribe phone company employees to give it up.

PAUL MCMULLEN, FORMER NEWS OF THE WORLD EDITOR: It was a tool of the trade. I mean you were not just expected to do it, you were expected to get a story.

And it wasn't just celebrities who were hacked. Last month more victims were discovered, including victims of crime, the families of dead soldiers and even people caught in terrorist attacks. Politicians and the public were outraged.

DAVID CAMERON, BRITISH PRIME MINISTER: The things we are hearing are absolutely appalling.

All up, it's thought that thousands of people may have had their phones hacked. And each one of those hacks is a criminal offence. So the question now is who's responsible?

Well, first up are the News of the World journalists that actually hacked phones. Then there are their bosses, if they are found to have told them to do it or turned a blind eye. Private investigators and police that were involved could also face the music. Then right at the top of the food chain are the bosses of the whole organisation, News International. Rupert Murdoch and his son James could get in trouble if it's proven they knew about it, and they are some of the most powerful news bosses in the whole world!

In the meantime, it's the end of the world as we know it, quite literally. News of the world has been shut down, going out with an apology to its millions of readers for the behaviour of its staff. Which is one exclusive they now probably wish they'd avoided.

Hacking Scandal - Homework Questions

1. Why is it important for journalists to get an 'exclusive' story?
2. What did the News of the World do to get exclusive stories?
3. What is phone hacking?
4. As well as celebrities, who else had their phones hacked?
5. Phone hacking is not a criminal offence. True or false?
6. Who is responsible for the phone hacking?
7. Who is the boss of News International?
8. What has happened to News of the World?
9. What do you think the consequences should be for people found guilty of phone hacking? Why?
10. What do you understand more clearly since watching this story?