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## **CNN INTERNATIONAL: WHY WE NEED IT**

After the sweat and grime of a day in Cairo, nothing feels better than a good shower in a fine hotel and the comforting presence of CNN International on the television screen. The business traveler in Johannesburg, and the vacationer in Jakarta, both share the ability to bring the world into their hotel rooms via Ted Turner's least appreciated and most significant television achievement.

CNN International may be the most important television network in the world. That is because it is the only network that tries to cover the world. All of it .

Michael Jordan's heroics on the basketball court are combined with Dortmund's success on the soccer field, as well as the exploits of the Indian Rugby team. This is a network that tries to put the planet in perspective. The United States is seen as a part, not the whole. The relationship of world trade and commerce is presented in a clear, meaningful manner. It isn't just Wall Street that one hears about, all of the world's key markets are treated, almost equally, by CNN anchors based in Europe.

The *CNN Asian Business Report* is worth the price of admission. I have, during my travels, become a fan of this network, wishing that it were available in the States. How valuable, I've often thought, it would be if our high school geography and government instructors could have students tuned in at home to the world in an unbiased way. How wonderful to know that the weather report will include draught in portions of sub-Saharan Africa, as though that portion of the world, and the people who inhabit it, actually matter. Wouldn't it be great to teach our kids that the weather is more than Willard Scott, it is life and death for the more than half the world that goes to bed hungry each night.

A few weeks ago, I learned from a simple press release that CNN International has been available to local cable companies since January 1st. I was, of course, anxious to know why our local company, the good folks at Jones "The Monopoly" Intercable, were not carrying the network. I was sure there was a good reason. Perhaps the cost was prohibitive, or maybe the service was not available in the Midwest. There could be a conflict, I imagined, with carrying CNN's regular cable offerings.

None of these turned out to be the case. Our cable company doesn't carry CNN International because they have decided that you won't watch it.

"Naperville isn't a very international city" I was told by one of Jones' spokespersons.

Really?

While we are a bit less international in the western suburbs than the immediate area around U.N. Plaza in New York, I would think we were plenty international, what with Fermi Lab, Amoco, Bell Labs, Nalco, Argonne, and Molex

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on our doorsteps. As the epicenter of high tech innovation in the Midwest, we are the definition of an international town that readily accepts and welcomes a wide variety of world cultures.

You see, here's the problem. All of the cable station slots are filled. In order to accommodate CNN International, Jones would have to cut one of the home shopping services and we might miss Suzanne Sommers peddling her imitation emerald jewelry, or Jimmy Swaggert, sponsored by Motel 6, sweating up a storm on one of the seemingly endless number of channels featuring blow-dried preachers selling snake-oil solutions for whatever ails us. At least Suzanne Sommers wears the junk she pushes.

Our kids don't know Hilary Bowker or John Defferios. But these London anchors broadcast each day to a mere 210 countries around-the-world that carry CNN International. At any given time, 155 million people are getting their news from these London anchors. Their broadcasts are probably the most-watched shared experience in the English language. CNN is heard almost everywhere there is electricity or a powerful generator. Everywhere but certain sections of Dupage County. We're just not sophisticated enough.

"We've had a lot of requests for the Cartoon Network" and the "Starwars" channel. We'll probably go with one of those when we have our next opening" says the Jones spokesperson.

Several years ago, you may recall, we had a series of Presidents who kept telling us that we were number one in nearly everything, the great super-power that led the world. It was only later that we discovered we were number one as a country - number one in infant mortality, percentage of citizens in prison, percentage of students who can't read a train schedule, among the industrialized nations.

For the first time, our children have the opportunity to visit several countries that have a higher standard of living than the United States; countries with better health care, a lower crime rate, a more rigorous education system, and a lower national debt.

Studies show that the average TV set is turned on for a little over six hours each day and evening. Will the addition of still another anachronistic pseudo-jock sports show, more Starsky and Hutch repeats, or a network that shows cartoons all day, contribute as much to our understanding of the world as might five minutes a day of the world's only international news service?

Are the folks at Jones right? No one will watch?

Not according to the educators with whom I've discussed this matter. A truly global news broadcast would be assigned viewing in a number of high school classes. College students eager to know more about "the outside world" would tune in to this service. Kids in school today aren't studying Sociology anymore. They're majoring in Business. CNN International produces a daily *World Business Report*, daily world business hourly updates, *Business Asia*, and

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*Pinnacle*, a behind-the-scenes look at executives who have successfully climbed the corporate ladder.

Then, of course, there are the rest of us who would like a truly global news perspective delivered by someone other than Dan with or without Connie.

I should, perhaps, apologize for using this space to moralize. I should be careful not to make too much of what is simply a television service.

But the truth is I see this as a symbol. Cartoons instead of content. World federation Wrestling instead of World News. The assumption by the monopoly that controls our television programming that we are not an intellectually curious community.

I have been fortunate enough to earn a living dealing with people, many local people, who spend some of the most important moments of their lives traveling to far off places. They travel for fun and relaxation but a growing and significant number travel for enrichment. The world is shrinking and, clichés aside, there are now some compelling reasons why we had better tune in to what the rest of the world is doing and saying.

I'd like to think that the folks at Jones have us pegged wrong. It would have been nice if they had let us know that this international news service was available. It would be interesting to take note of the methods they use to determine which networks they will carry in our cable system.

If you think that the international news service might be more valuable than some of Jones' other cable offerings to this community, I trust you will let them know. In the meantime, I will be looking forward to having my HBO scrambled.

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