
When celebrities are ignored

Contributed by Mike Stotts

The AP blacked out Paris Hilton coverage for an entire week, and yet the earth continued to spin on its axis as if nothing out of the ordinary had occurred...hmmm

By Mike Stotts

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(Paris Hilton at the MGM in 2004/

Photo by Mike Stotts)

For a few days last month socialite and Las Vegas party maven Paris Hilton was removed from The Associated Press (AP) crosshairs by written decree from their entertainment editor. Starting February 19 and effective for seven days, Paris Hilton “blackout week” was pronounced.

Why? Reportedly, AP was conducting an internal experiment to see if anyone would notice — or care.

Drum roll…they didn’t. None of The Associated Press media affiliates called in and asked for a Paris Hilton blurb. There was Hilton hype supplied by other news outlets a few times but it wasn’t until she was ticketed for driving with a suspended license, a couple days after the blackout week was over, that the AP moved a Hilton story.

At the risk of sounding narrow-minded, I’ll volunteer the thought that a Paris Hilton event is seldom really newsworthy. How many ventures or new ideas has she launched? How has she helped society? Pure (and I don’t mean PURE, like the Las Vegas nightclub she so frequently visits) and simple: she is merely a socialite, albeit not a particularly productive one. (There are many wealthy women, some living in Las Vegas, who regularly and positively contribute to society by chairing philanthropic organizations and using their resources to bring the best minds to bear upon an issue. Where's all the breathless news coverage about them? Perhaps if they did lurid things in nightclubs ...)

During this Silence of the Hilton moratorium, people in need of a celebrity media fix were not force into withdrawals: For example, a Hilton starved public could zero in on all the intimate second-by-second sensational details of the Anna Nicole Smith funeral or baby-daddy adventures. Or, if Smith wasn't your cup of tea, you could play the new celebrity hide and seek game: Brittany Spears, In-Or-Out of Rehab.

Media editors have always been charged with the responsibility of filtering what they will and will not cover. The fact of the matter is there are just too many newsworthy events occurring at any given time in Las Vegas and around the world and not nearly enough staff, resources or time to cover them. On the media consumption side, almost a day doesn't go by where I don't hear someone complain that there isn't enough time to do this or that. Maybe if we had fewer celebrity fluff stories hitting our eyes…

There is nothing wrong with celebrity or sensational news stories's people need diversions from more depressing items in the news. And celebrity media exposure can be productive, for the celebrity and the public. Just ask Bono.

But if we could use a little more of that, we could use a little less of the choke-hold, repetitive, seemingly non-ending microscopic news shock reviews on any given celebrity tragedy that have become the modern day reincarnation of Japanese water torture.

As witnessed with The Associated Press decision, eliminating superfluous celebrity commentary does not result in a cataclysmic event. Media organization should use the AP experiment as a point of departure, to rethink they're internal They probably won't do it, but this would be a good time for media organizations to rethink their internal operational policies when it comes to celebrity coverage guidelines, and formulate some definitions on what is and is not newsworthy celebrity fodder.

Had Anna Nicole been able to experience some of the by-products of such constructive measures, maybe she could have better balanced the desire for celebrity stardom with the desire for personal space. And maybe then she could have had what we each expect: peace and a measure of dignity after her death.

{Editor's note: In full disclosure, Mike Stotts is a Las Vegas-based professional photographer, photojournalist, and sometimes writer whose clients include celebrities}.

