

Gerard Ryle: How the Panama Papers Journalists Broke the Biggest Leak in History

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What do you do if you had to figure out the information behind 11.5 million documents, **verify**¹ it and **make sense of**² it? That was a challenge that a group of journalists had to face late last year. An **anonymous**³ person calling himself John Doe had somehow managed to copy nearly 40 years of records of the Panamanian law firm Mossack Fonseca. This is one of many firms around the world that specialize in setting up accounts in **offshore**⁴ tax **havens**⁵ like the British Virgin Islands, for rich and powerful people who like to keep secrets.

John Doe had managed to copy every **spreadsheet**⁶ from this firm, every client file, every email, from 1977 to the present day. It represented the biggest **cache**⁷ of inside information into the tax haven system that anyone had ever seen. But it also presented a **gigantic**⁸ challenge to investigative journalism. Think about it: 11.5 million documents, containing the secrets of people from more than 200 different countries. Where do you start with such a vast resource? Where do you even begin to tell a story that can **trail off into**⁹ every corner of the globe, and that can affect almost any person in any language, sometimes in ways they don't even know yet. John Doe had given the information to two journalists at the German newspaper Süddeutsche Zeitung. He said he was motivated by -- and I quote -- "The **scale**¹⁰ of the **injustice**¹¹ that the documents would reveal." But one user alone can never make sense of such a vast amount of information. So the Süddeutsche Zeitung reached out to my organization in Washington, DC, The International **Consortium**¹² of Investigative Journalists. We decided to do something that was the very opposite

¹ 校驗

² 弄懂

³ 匿名的

⁴ 海外的

⁵ 避風港

⁶ 電子資料工作表

⁷ 貯藏物，高速緩衝記憶體

⁸ 巨大的

⁹ 減弱，逐漸變小

¹⁰ 規模

¹¹ 不公平

¹² 財團

of everything we'd been taught to do as journalists: share.

By nature, investigative reporters are **lone wolves**¹³. We fiercely guard our secrets, at times even from our editors, because we know that the moment we tell them what we have, they'll want that story right away. And to be frank, when you get a good story, you like to keep the glory to yourself.

But there's no doubt that we live in a shrinking world, and **that the media has largely been slow to wake up to this**. The issues we report on are more and more **transnational**¹⁴. Giant corporations operate on a global level. Environmental and health crises are global. So, too, are **financial flows**¹⁵ and **financial crises**¹⁶. So it seems **staggering**¹⁷ that journalism has been so late to cover stories in a truly global way. And it also seems staggering that journalism has been so slow to wake up to the possibilities that technology brings, rather than being frightened of it. The reason journalists are scared of technology is this: the profession's largest institutions are going through tough times because of the changing way that people are consuming news. The advertising business models that have **sustained**¹⁸ reporting are broken. And this has **plunged**¹⁹ journalism into crisis, forcing those institutions to reexamine how they function.

But where there is crisis, there is also opportunity. The first challenge presented by what would eventually become known as the Panama Papers was to make the documents searchable and readable. There were nearly five million emails, two million PDFs that needed to be scanned and indexed, and millions more files and other kinds of documents. They all needed to be housed in a safe and secure location in the cloud. We next invited reporters to have a look at the documents. In all, reporters from more than 100 media organizations in 76 countries -- from the BBC in Britain to Le Monde newspaper in France to the Asahi Shimbun in Japan. "Native eyes on native names," we called it, the idea being, who best to tell you who was important to Nigeria than a Nigerian journalist? Who best in Canada than a Canadian? There were only two rules for everyone who was invited: **we all agreed to share**

¹³ 獨行俠

¹⁴ 跨國

¹⁵ 資金流動

¹⁶ 財務危機

¹⁷ 蹣跚的, 驚人的

¹⁸ 支持

¹⁹ 跳進, 投入

everything that we found with everybody else, and we all agreed to publish together on the same day.

We chose our media partners based on trust that had been built up through previous smaller collaborations and also from **leads**²⁰ that jumped out from the documents. Over the next few months, my small nonprofit organization of less than 20 people was joined by more than 350 other reporters from 25 language groups. The biggest information leak in history had now **spawned**²¹ the biggest journalism collaboration in history: 376 sets of native eyes doing what journalists normally never do, working shoulder to shoulder, sharing information, but telling no one. For it became clear at this point that in order to make the biggest kind of noise, we first needed the biggest kind of silence.

To manage the project over the many months it would take, we built a secure virtual newsroom. We used **encrypted**²² communication systems, and we built a specially designed search engine. Inside the virtual newsroom, the reporters could gather around the themes that were emerging from the documents. Those interested in blood diamonds or **exotic**²³ art, for instance, could share information about how the offshore world was being used to hide the trade in both of those **commodities**²⁴. Those interested in sport could share information about how famous sports stars were putting their **image rights**²⁵ into offshore companies, **thereby**²⁶ likely avoiding taxes in the countries where they **plied their trade**²⁷.

But perhaps most exciting of all were the number of world leaders and **elect**²⁸ politicians that were emerging from the documents -- figures like Petro Poroshenko in Ukraine, close **associates**²⁹ of Vladimir Putin in Russia and the British Prime Minister, David Cameron, who is linked through his **late**³⁰ father, Ian Cameron.

²⁰ 線索，提示，暗示

²¹ 引起，釀成

²² 加密的

²³ 異國情調的

²⁴ 貨品

²⁵ 形象權

²⁶ 因而

²⁷ 辛勤交易

²⁸ 選出來的

²⁹ 同事

³⁰ 已過世的

Buried in the documents were secret offshore **entities**³¹, such as Wintris Inc., a company in the British Virgin Islands that had actually belonged to the **sitting**³² Icelandic **prime minister**³³. I like to refer to Johannes Kristjansson, the Icelandic reporter we invited to join the project, as the loneliest man in the world. For nine months, he refused paid work and **lived off**³⁴ the earnings of his wife. He **pasted tarps**³⁵ over the windows of his home to prevent **prying**³⁶ eyes during the long Icelandic winter. And he soon ran out of excuses to explain his many absences, as he worked red-eyed, night after night, month after month. In all that time, he **sat on**³⁷ information that would eventually **bring down**³⁸ the leader of his country.

Now, when you're an investigative reporter and you make an amazing discovery, such as your prime minister can be linked to a secret offshore company, that that company has a financial interest in Icelandic banks -- **the very issue he's been elected on** -- well, your instinct is to scream out very loud. Instead, as one of the few people that he could speak to, Johannes and I shared a kind of **gallows humor**³⁹. "Wintris is coming," he used to say.

We were big fans of "**Game of Thrones**⁴⁰."

When reporters like Johannes wanted to scream, they did so inside the virtual newsroom, and then they **turned those screams into stories** by going outside the documents to court records, **official company registers**⁴¹, and by eventually putting questions to those that we intended to name. Panama Papers actually allowed the reporters to look at the world through a different **lens**⁴² from everybody else.

As we were researching the story, unconnected to us, a major political **bribery**

³¹ 實體

³² 現任的

³³ 總理

³⁴ 以..為生

³⁵ 貼上防水布

³⁶ 好奇的、窺探的

³⁷ sit on something: delay taking action

³⁸ 打倒

³⁹ 黑色幽默

⁴⁰ 美國目前最流行連續劇

⁴¹ 正式的公司記錄、註冊、登記

⁴² 鏡頭

scandal⁴³ happened in Brazil. A new leader was elected in Argentina. The FBI began to indict⁴⁴ officials at FIFA, the organization that controls the world of professional soccer. The Panama Papers actually had unique insights⁴⁵ into each one of these unfolding⁴⁶ events. So you can imagine the pressure and the ego dramas⁴⁷ that could have ruined what we were trying to do. Any one of these journalists, they could have broken the pact⁴⁸. But they didn't. And on April 3 this year, at exactly 8pm German time, we published simultaneously in 76 countries.

The Panama Papers quickly became one of the biggest stories of the year. This is the scene in Iceland the day after we published. It was the first of many protests. The Icelandic prime minister had to resign. It was a first of many resignations. We spotlighted⁴⁹ many famous people such as Lionel Messi, the most famous soccer player in the world. And there were some unintended⁵⁰ consequences. These alleged⁵¹ members of a Mexican drug cartel⁵² were arrested after we published details about their hideout⁵³. They'd been using the address to register their offshore company.

There's a kind of irony in what we've been able to do. The technology -- the Internet -- that has broken the business model is allowing us to reinvent⁵⁴ journalism itself. And this dynamic⁵⁵ is producing unprecedented⁵⁶ levels of transparency⁵⁷ and impact. We showed how a group of journalists can effect change across the world by applying new methods and old-fashioned journalism techniques to vast amounts of leaked information. We put all-important context around what was given to us by John Doe. And by sharing resources, we were able to dig deep -- much deeper and longer than most media organizations allow these days, because of financial

⁴³ 賄賂醜聞

⁴⁴ 起訴

⁴⁵ 洞察力

⁴⁶ 展開的

⁴⁷ 內在自我喜愛誇張的戲劇化情節

⁴⁸ 協議

⁴⁹ 聚光燈 receiving lots of public attention

⁵⁰ 未預期的

⁵¹ 有嫌疑的、声称的

⁵² 販毒集團

⁵³ 藏匿處

⁵⁴ 重塑

⁵⁵ 動力

⁵⁶ 史無前例的

⁵⁷ 透明

concerns.

Now, it was a big risk, and it wouldn't work for every story, but we showed with the Panama Papers that you can write about any country from just about anywhere, and then choose your preferred battleground to defend your work. Try obtaining a court **injunction**⁵⁸ that would prevent the telling of a story in 76 different countries. Try stopping the inevitable.

Shortly after we published, I got a three-word text from Johannes: "Wintris has arrived."

It had arrived and so, too, perhaps has a new era for journalism.

Thank you.

Bruno Giussani: Gerard, thank you.

I guess you're going to send that applause to the 350 journalists who worked with you, right?

Now, a couple of questions I would like to ask. The first one is, you'd been working in secrecy for over a year with 350-something colleagues from all over the world -- was there ever a moment when you thought that the **leak may be leaked**, that the collaboration may just be broken by somebody publishing a story? Or somebody not in the group releasing some information that they got to know?

Gerard Ryle: We had a series of crises along the way, including when something major was happening in the world, the journalists from that country wanted to publish right away. We had to calm them down. Probably the biggest crisis we had was a week before publication. We'd sent a series of questions to the associates of Vladimir Putin, but instead of responding, the ⁵⁹**Kremlin** actually held a press conference and **denounced**⁶⁰ us, and denounced the whole thing as being, I guess, a **plot**⁶¹ from the West. At that point, Putin thought it was just about him. And, of course, a lot of editors around the world were very nervous about this. They thought the story was going to get out. You can imagine the amount of time they'd spent, the amount of resources, money spent on this. So I had to basically spend the last week calming everyone down, a bit like a general, where you're **holding your troops back**⁶²: "Calm, remain calm." And then eventually, of course, they all did.

⁵⁸ 禁令

⁵⁹ 克里姆林宮

⁶⁰ 公然抨擊, 譴責

⁶¹ 計謀

⁶² 讓你的軍隊躊躇不前

BG: And then a couple weeks ago or so, you released a lot of the documents as an open **database**⁶³ for everybody to search via keyword, essentially.

GR: We very much believe that the basic information about the offshore world should be made public. Now, we didn't publish the **underlying**⁶⁴ documents of the journalists we're working with. But the basic information such as the name of a person, what their offshore company was and the name of that company, is now all available online. In fact, the biggest resource of its kind basically is out there now

BG: Gerard, thank you for the work you do.

GR: Thank you.

Comprehension Questions

1. What did Gerard Ryle and his team do that was ground breaking for the journalism industry?
2. What are the two rules for everyone who was invited to work on this project?
3. What was a challenge that a group of journalists had to face late last year?
4. How did this all start?
5. Who did the Süddeutsche Zeitung reach out to ?
6. What was a big challenge for the project of the Panama Papers?
7. What does it mean "Native eyes on native names?"
8. How many people worked on this project?
9. What did Johannes Kristjansson do?
10. When did they publish the Panama Papers?
11. What happened the day after they published?

Discussion Questions

12. What is the main idea of this talk?
13. What's the most important thing you learned from this talk?
14. What do you think drives people to engage in this kind of project?

⁶³資料庫

⁶⁴基礎的、潛在的