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Huffington Post + Science. A New Leaf?

By Carl Zimmer | January 5, 2012 10:26 am

HUFFPOST SCIENCE

Today the Huffington Post is launching a **new science "channel,"** overseen by a full-time science editor. This should be interesting.

The Huffington Post is one of the most popular places for getting news and opinion, **attracting** well over 30 million views a month. It started out mainly as a **blogging network**, and then added on a lot of aggregation of news stories, supplemented by slide shows. More recently, they've been hiring full-time reporters and editors on subjects like politics and economics.

When it comes to science, this set-up has led to some...well, let's call it checkered coverage. You could find your way to **straight news stories** about science from the Associated Press and other outlets, along with some lightly re-written **syntheses** of articles elsewhere. Some **strong** voices in the science world paid visits from time to time to share some thoughts. But the Huffington Post has also **run some real stinkers** in the past—the kind that send readers to the ER with foreheads fractured by particularly powerful desk-slams.

This morning, Arianna Huffington herself introduced the channel with a **long post**. Here's its opening:

I'm delighted to announce the launch of our newest section, HuffPost Science, a one-stop shop for the latest scientific news and opinion. From the farthest reaches of space to the tiniest cells inside our bodies, HuffPost Science will report on the world's greatest mysteries, most cutting-edge discoveries, and most thought-provoking ideas.

The section will also be home to a robust debate on issues great and small — from the Big Questions of our time (are we alone in the universe?), to quirky, fun ones (will they ever create a pill that will let me eat all the pistachio ice cream I want and not gain weight?) There's no better time than now to launch a venue that explores these questions, given the explosion of truly medieval thinking in our world — and not just on the fringes. It's a world in which we have senators and presidential candidates who don't believe in evolution and who think that global warming is a myth. A world in which politicians don't just have their own set of ideas but their own set of facts.

Science is a subject that has fascinated me for years. I remember, in the mid-70s, being taken by Bernard Levin to meet Arthur Koestler at his flat in London. I had just read his book, The Act of Creation, on the inspirations that propelled great scientists. Koestler, who described scientists as Peeping Toms at the keyhole of eternity, talked about scientific equations with the ease most of us discuss what we had for dinner (or, if you are a HuffPost regular, the Iowa results). I still remember his lyrical analysis of Einstein's breakthrough equation, E=mc². The equation's assurance that nothing in the universe is unrelated to anything else had a real emotional impact on him — as it soon did on me. An emotional impact not usually associated with scientific equations.

It's the sense of wonder we so often see in our children. I still recall lying on the grass with my then four and two-year-old daughters one night outside our home in Santa Barbara, and Christina looking out into the night sky and asking, "Mommy, what makes it go?" That sense of wonder will be at the core of HuffPost Science. We will explore timeless questions and we will allow our minds to be blown by what is mind-blowing and awe-inspiring.

You can also get a sense of what HuffPost Science will be like by inspecting **this morning's** batch of blog posts. There's some good stuff there, including a piece by Harvard physicist **Lisa Randall**. They even have a **piece** by science writer Seth Mnookin on the latest developments in the controversies over vaccines—which is quite something given all the real estate HuffPo has given in the past to people trying to make the false claim that vaccines cause autism.

I for one am ready to give the Huffington Post another look. If they can bring real science to their huge readership, that will be a great thing.

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Mike Lewinski

Oh nooeces, foiled by big pharma again!

snark

January 5, 2012 at 10:39 am