

The Rising of the Sun – how Sunrise has revolutionised breakfast TV



Every morning in Australia some 513,000 viewers tune in to the country's most popular breakfast program, *Sunrise*. Clearly the program resonates. It's no fleeting resonance either, for 2017 was its 14th year of consecutive leadership. Thus, what is it about this show that some say has revolutionised the face of Australian breakfast television? *Imogen A. Rose* visited the set to learn more about the stars and the special vibe of *Sunrise*.

Sunrise has set the tone for breakfast television in Australia. It has the formula for success down to a fine art. But there is much more to this show than commercial television know-how. This is a program with heart! Moreover, its lifeblood depends upon its symbiotic relationship with its audience.

Indeed, it would be difficult to identify another program that has established as genuine an audience connection.

Sunrise knows how to cover breaking news, to showcase the spectacular and to deliver interesting, informative content. At its helm is accomplished Executive Producer, Michael Pell. His insight is telling, "Throughout the years, we have always looked to the audience to shape the direction of the show. We have a very engaged audience and we listen to their feedback. In many ways, the audience is the producer!"

Breakfast television is an interesting genre. It requires a continuity of flow that accounts for an audience that is largely time-poor and often distracted by individual or familial morning routines. Hence, the delivery of content in a necessarily segmented format that is viewer friendly and easily absorbed.

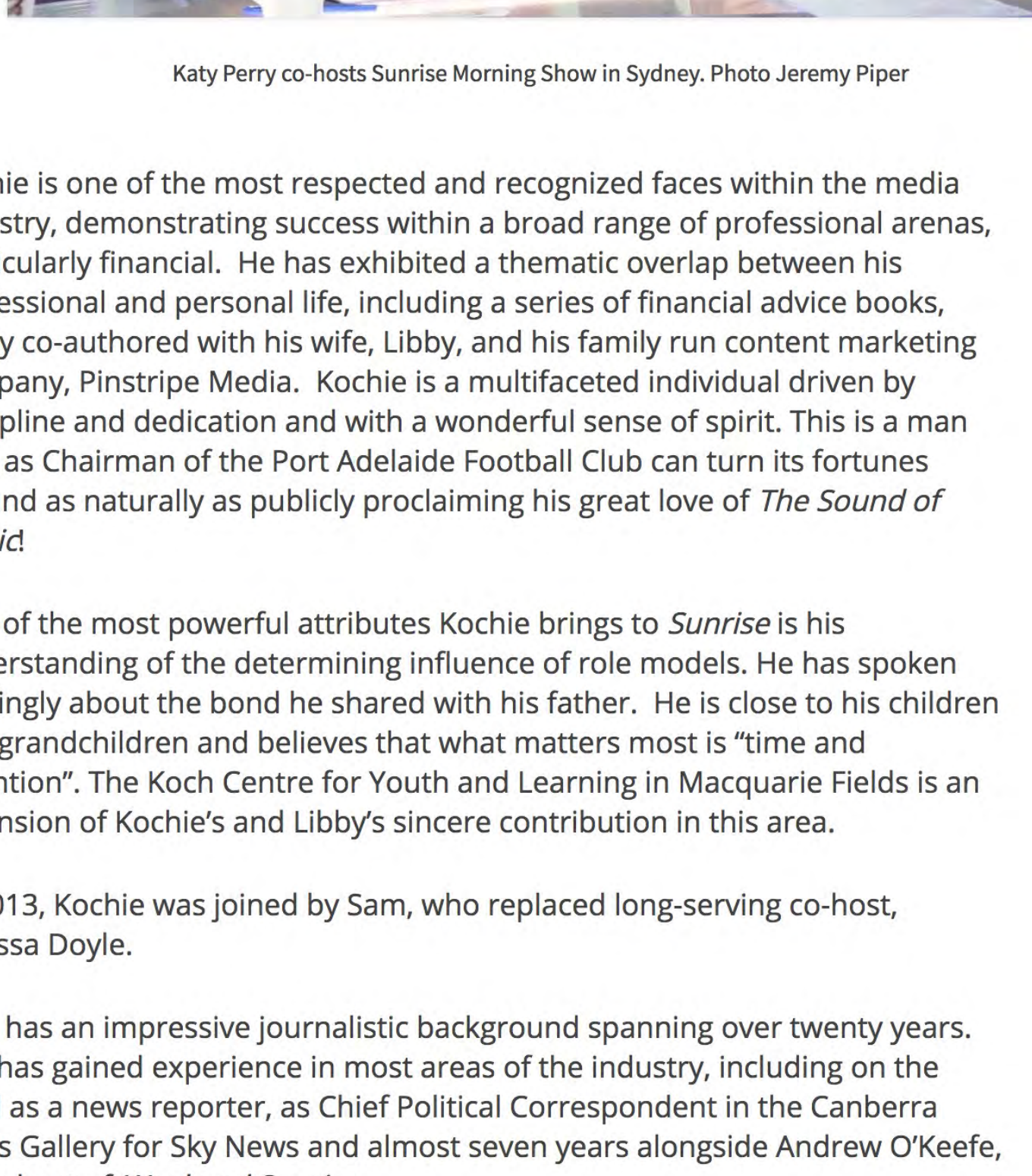
Initially, *Sunrise* aired with lacklustre results. However, it was soon redeveloped under the guidance of its then Executive Producer, Adam Boland. The results were stunning.

It was an overhaul based upon two factors: audience interactivity and the deliberate immersion of the on-air personalities – principally its hosts David Koch and then co-host, Melissa Doyle – within the program.

It is arguably this transformation to an audience-centric one that has enabled *Sunrise* to dominate breakfast television.

Pivotal to its continued success are its hosts, David "Kochie" Koch and Samantha "Sam" Armytage.

Kochie has been in the co-host chair for over 15 years now. Indeed, his name is synonymous with *Sunrise*. His significant longevity is a remarkable achievement, particularly his ability to remain fresh and relevant within a fiercely competitive industry. He enthuses a genuine passion that makes his commitment to the show both personal and professional.



Katy Perry co-hosts Sunrise Morning Show in Sydney. Photo Jeremy Piper

Kochie is one of the most respected and recognized faces within the media industry, demonstrating success within a broad range of professional arenas, particularly financial. He has exhibited a thematic overlap between his professional and personal life, including a series of financial advice books, many co-authored with his wife, Libby, and his family run content marketing company, Pinstripe Media. Kochie is a multifaceted individual driven by discipline and dedication and with a wonderful sense of spirit. This is a man who as Chairman of the Port Adelaide Football Club can turn its fortunes around as naturally as publicly proclaiming his great love of *The Sound of Music*.

One of the most powerful attributes Kochie brings to *Sunrise* is his understanding of the determining influence of role models. He has spoken movingly about the bond he shared with his father. He is close to his children and grandchildren and believes that what matters most is "time and attention". The Koch Centre for Youth and Learning in Macquarie Fields is an extension of Kochie's and Libby's sincere contribution in this area.

In 2013, Kochie was joined by Sam, who replaced long-serving co-host, Melissa Doyle.

Sam has an impressive journalistic background spanning over twenty years. She has gained experience in most areas of the industry, including on the road as a news reporter, as Chief Political Correspondent in the Canberra Press Gallery for Sky News and almost seven years alongside Andrew O'Keefe, as co-host of *Weekend Sunrise*.

However, possessing the right professional expertise is only part of the job. Possibly more than any other news format, breakfast television audiences tune-in, or equally, tune-out, depending upon their connection to the hosts.

What's more, there are no guarantees. Establishing a positive host connection with a national audience requires a certain indefinable quality.

Sam has not only handled the pressure to perform with aplomb, she has added a wonderful new dimension to the show that has charmed viewers.

She has a very natural, warm and direct personality that comes across on screen and in person.

Moreover, she is not afraid to express her thoughts and to stand by her convictions.

Sam hails from the country. She grew up at Bolaro Station in Adaminaby, which is famed for its connection to Banjo Paterson and *The Man from Snowy River*. She enjoyed an "idyllic" childhood and is close to her family. She also remains deeply connected to the country.

Sam has authored a best-selling book, *Shine*, within which she shares her professional and personal experiences in the hope that girls and women might gain insight.

She remains grounded – aware and responsive to those around her. She is genuinely interested in the world and people, and in communicating the best of both within her work. One suspects that this has a lot to do with her popularity, for *Sunrise* has always been, and proudly remains founded upon its audience.

Kochie and Sam are an impressive team. They may be of variance in age and exploring different stages in life but both share an emphatic sense of the importance of family, each crediting the role of family in whom they are as individuals, and their respective approaches to the world. Furthermore, their divide in age and personal circumstance enables them to bring a broader, more complete perspective as hosts.

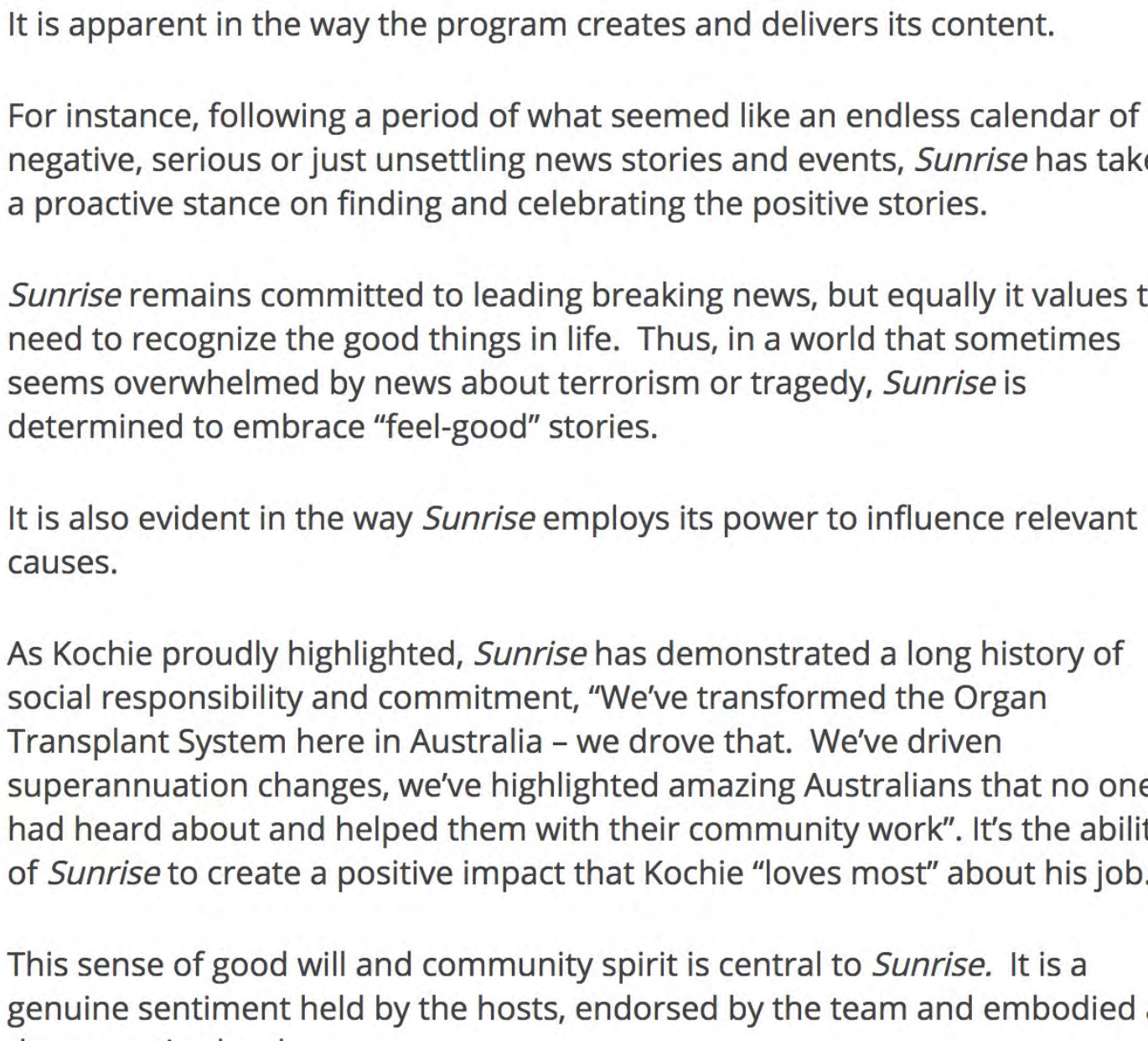
They don't agree on everything. Sam says, "We can be polar opposites on things" adding that often "He zigs when I zag and that's what we're there for".

Importantly, they share a vision as a team and have the same solid professional and ethical principles. They both consider the show as more important than the individual.

Perhaps more than any other program, or indeed, media outlet, *Sunrise* revolves around a powerful philosophy intended to make a difference to the lives of ordinary Australians and indeed, the Australian community.

This kind of philosophy could not work without the genuine backing of its stars, and the support of the entire team. Accordingly, the Brand and the people of *Sunrise* are of like mind.

Kochie and Sam have the unerring support of an on-air team that includes news presenter, Natalie "Nat" Barr, sports presenter, Mark "Beretts" Beretta, presenter Edwina Bartholomew and weather presenter, Sam Mac.



In particular, Natalie and Mark have forged a remarkable connection with viewers through personality and professional prowess.

There is, of course, an entire crew and team that works behind the scenes to ensure the quality and success of the show. Furthermore, the show is conducted under the careful command of Pell, who has long been recognized as a leading force within the Australian media.

Interestingly, the set is smaller and more personal than one might imagine. Yet, it functions much like a slick stage production where every inch of space is utilized and maximized. It also creates a more personal atmosphere which likely contributes to the sense of a *Sunrise* family.

In an industry notorious for its ruthlessness, one might expect a tense, competitive, even combative environment, but there is no evidence of this. The *Sunrise* team really do work together and support, rather than undermine, one another.

The media has extraordinary influence and power. This is particularly true for a show like *Sunrise* where there is both broadcast frequency and audience reach. Moreover, *Sunrise* is more prevalent than one might assume. Even if not a home-viewer, one is likely to have encountered it at any number of business outlets or allied-health facilities – a common background for reception and waiting areas.

Sunrise is not only acutely aware of this reality but committed to maximizing the opportunity this presents.

Sam says, "Kochie and I, and Nat and Beretts, know the power of what we do and we certainly don't ever take that for granted!"

This cognizance is demonstrated in a number of ways. It is reflected in the way the on-air team is, as Sam relates, mindful of "everything we do and say".

It is apparent in the way the program creates and delivers its content.

For instance, following a period of what seemed like an endless calendar of negative, serious or just unsettling news stories and events, *Sunrise* has taken a proactive stance on finding and celebrating the positive stories.

Sunrise remains committed to leading breaking news, but equally it values the need to recognize the good things in life. Thus, in a world that sometimes seems overwhelmed by news about terrorism or tragedy, *Sunrise* is determined to embrace "feel-good" stories.

It is also evident in the way *Sunrise* employs its power to influence relevant causes.

As Kochie proudly highlighted, *Sunrise* has demonstrated a long history of social responsibility and commitment, "We've transformed the Organ Transplant System here in Australia – we drove that. We've driven superannuation changes, we've highlighted amazing Australians that no one had heard about and helped them with their community work". It's the ability of *Sunrise* to create a positive impact that Kochie "loves most" about his job.

This sense of good will and community spirit is central to *Sunrise*. It is a genuine sentiment held by the hosts, endorsed by the team and embodied at the executive level.

It's always easy to dismiss television as lightweight, but the reality is *Sunrise* really does make a difference.

The brand tries to do this on a daily basis as well as through major campaigns.

It champions socially significant causes and lobbies politicians to make real change on such issues. For instance, in 2018, following the tragic deaths of several young teenagers from bullying related suicide, *Sunrise* launched its critical campaign for action, "Beat the Bullies". The campaign has generated significant public and government support – state and national – and its impact is ongoing.

Kochie says *Sunrise* believes every viewer wants "News of the day, something to talk about at work or school, and a smile".

Armytage enthuses *Sunrise* is more than a terrific Brand, "We are a part of your family". She has been moved by "the good vibes and the love you get from so many Australians". There is, she says "no show in Australia, in the world, like it". She adds, "It's brought all of us a lot of happiness. It brings our viewers a lot of happiness. So you have to respect that".

It is this respect for its audience as an equal partner that powers *Sunrise*. It is its optimism and commitment to contributing to a better world that helps explain why so many Australians follow the rays of *Sunrise*.