

inside

An exclusive inside look with your free CNN account

Meet the team behind CNN.com's homepages

By **Erica Hernandez**

Whenever there's a big breaking news moment anywhere in the world, millions of people have an almost Pavlovian reaction: type in **CNN.com** on their phone or computer and find out what's going on.

Yet few know there is a whole team of people behind the CNN homepages, spread out across the globe from Hong Kong to Washington state. The 24/7 task of updating headlines, changing what is in the lead spots and sending breaking news push notifications is handled by more than three dozen people in different time zones.

We recently talked to a few of the people who work diligently behind the scenes to bring the latest news to CNN's digital audiences. Here's what they told us:

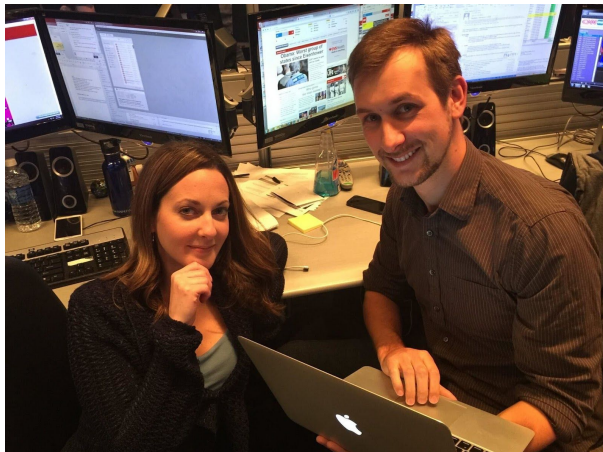


"The chaos of breaking news situations doesn't stress me out. I go into a zone and focus on what needs to happen to get the audience the information."

- **Katie Glaeser**, senior producer

How did you end up working this unique job?

Glaeser: I fell in love with journalism as a kid watching Peter Jennings talk about the biggest stories every night. When I got to middle school, I wanted to be just like **Anderson Cooper** and **Lisa Ling** as I watched them report from around the world on Channel One. I came to CNN as an intern in college and never left. I've grown up here. I've been a floor director, a researcher, a guest booker and more. I've worked on countless breaking news situations that really helped sharpen my editorial judgment. When I made the move to the homepage team nine years ago, I learned about a whole other side of the business — how to best present content visually, to factor data into decision-making, create a good user experience tailored to the type of device someone is viewing content on and, of course, how to write a compelling headline.



Glaeser, left, with homepage programming colleague Zach Wade during the 2014 midterm elections

When news is breaking and the pressure is on, how do you manage the stress?

Glaeser: The chaos of breaking news situations doesn't stress me out. I go into a zone and focus on what needs to happen to get the audience the information. Some stories can be really difficult to cover, like school shootings and natural disasters. Being so immersed in watching these unfold, hearing firsthand accounts and terrifying details, can get overwhelming. If I find myself crying while listening to an interview, that's when I know it's time to step away for a minute to regroup. It's hard covering so many tragedies, but I feel I owe it to the people who are directly impacted to get their stories out.



"I realized I was living through, reporting on and recording history."

- Stephen Mays, producer

How would you explain what you do to someone who is unfamiliar with the field?

Mays: I help readers find whatever it is they're looking for — along with all the interesting pieces they didn't know they needed. The job also involves data and analytics, but I usually avoid talking technical because folks' eyes glaze over. It's a combination of understanding audience interests and marrying that together with journalistic standards.



Homepage programmers are responsible for linking to the latest content and curating headlines and images on CNN's homepages, including the desktop and app, seen here

What is the craziest, most-fun or most intense story you've worked on?

Mays: I can count two occasions where my entire body thrummed with anxiety and that numb-prickly-oh-my-god feeling hit me: **January 6** and **the death of Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg**. Those were moments so stark that I realized I was living through, reporting on and recording history. In both instances, I physically had to say "OK, snap out of it, think" and kick-start my brain.

Your team touches every piece of content published on CNN.com. Do you have a favorite author, series, or topic to work on?

Mays: I love the **Chance Encounters** series from Travel — those heartwarming stories help me keep faith in love. Also, I'm a fan of **Kate Bennett's politics profiles**. I was a hair away from being an astronomy major, so I love all space news — sign up for **Wonder Theory!**



"We're not robots! We're real people making hundreds and hundreds of microdecisions."

- Simone Francis, associate producer

How would you explain what you do to someone who is unfamiliar with the field?

Francis: Sometimes, people hear "programmer" and think I write code, or they envision something very technical. I usually explain my role as a homepage curator for our desktop, mobile web and app. I am also part of the team that sends push notifications to your mobile phone.

What is something you wish people knew about the way CNN homepages are put together?

Francis: A lot of thought goes into how the homepage is put together. It's not automated and we're not robots! We're real people making hundreds and hundreds of micro decisions about how to best present the latest news and features in the most engaging way for audiences.

When news is breaking and the pressure is on, how do you manage the stress?

Francis: First, I take a deep breath. It helps to remember that I'm not alone on an island. I'm a part of a team of smart, creative, thoughtful people. We're all tackling this situation together and are there to support each other. From there, it's a matter of prioritizing tasks and taking things one step at a time.


CNN insider rec of the week





Brought to you by CNN Underscored

If you're looking for a cheap way to mount your iPhone to your laptop to use it as a webcam, **this \$14 device delivers**. It also pulls triple duty as an easy iPhone laptop mount, a one-handed iPhone stabilizer and a kickstand.

before you go

 **Read:** This week, the US Treasury Department revealed **which cars will be eligible for electric vehicle tax credits** of up to \$7,500.

 **Watch:** An elephant at a German zoo wowed researchers with her self-taught trick of peeling bananas with her trunk. **See how she does it.**

 **Explore:** CNN asked readers to share accounts from their relatives who were in Poland at the time of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, which began 80 years ago today. **Listen to their stories and hear from CNN's Dana Bash and Wolf Blitzer**, who shared how their own families were impacted by the Holocaust.

 **Listen:** Musical icon Prince would have turned 65 years old this year. Reflect on the key moments from his life — including when his lyrics gave birth to the Parental Advisory label — on CNN's podcast "**The Prince Mixtape.**" New episodes drop each Wednesday starting today.

 *talk to us*

We enjoy hearing from our readers! Send your thoughts to insidecnn@cnn.com

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