



**Local Heritage  
Engagement  
Network**

# **Toolkit**

**No. 2**

**Working with  
the media:  
Getting your  
voice heard**

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## Contents

**This document will:**

- **Give advice about what the local media do**
- **Give advice on how to contact them**
- **Give tips on how to make your stories more appealing**
- **Explain some of the restrictions journalists face which can help you to understand their roles and work with them effectively**



## Getting your voice heard

This toolkit aims to be a one-stop guide to the basics on the various forms of media, how to use the 'news cycle', and templates for your project or campaign.

Before you begin any interaction with print media or radio, make sure you have some basic social media platforms and information in place on your website in a prominent place – ideally on the front page. Journalists are pressed for time, and it makes their lives simpler if they can access information about your campaign with the least effort. Make sure this is an up-to-date, and always include the latest information about your campaign and a clearly marked contact email address; if you can take photos and share them online of any activities you are undertaking, that helps.

Ensure you at least have a Facebook page and/or a Twitter account, and that you have someone who can respond rapidly to emails and messages received via social media. The links to these accounts should be on all your correspondence.

When you are online, find and follow your local and regional newspapers and radio stations, and seek out any journalists working in your area. It helps to keep all this information on a spreadsheet so this can be easily shared. You might want to think about setting up cloud storage for this sort of media information, so it can be shared and added to easily by all those involved in your campaign. It will hold up your ability to respond to media enquiries if you cannot be contacted easily!

You can get support with setting up or running an effective online campaign from CBA staff by contacting [cbacasework@archaeologyuk.org](mailto:cbacasework@archaeologyuk.org).



## Being prepared

Before embarking on any media campaign, it will be worthwhile creating a media 'toolkit', so you can re-use the content in future media contacts with very little need for major adjustments which can be sent out at short notice if needed. This kit needs to include:

- A brief history of the campaign or issue and the communities affected
- Key facts about the issues, in bite sized pieces, plus any events you are holding - 2 lines of comment that you can use for a number of situations
- Any successes you have had, or replies from MPs/councillors etc
- Photos of projects/places/buildings/sites you are involved with – the more 'professional' looking the better
- A list of two or three people in your group who are willing to give interviews and can discuss your campaign with journalists. Do you have any celebrity supporters or affiliated academic archaeologists with a high profile who would be willing to be interviewed or quoted?
- Any information about the strength of your support. Have you done surveys or a petition? How many members are there in your group?
- A list of links to your campaign website, social media platforms and most importantly, a contact email address **and** phone number for the project – and one which will be checked frequently.



## Contacting newspapers

### **Regional & Local Press**

There are around 80 daily 'paid for' titles across the UK (for example, Manchester Evening News, Yorkshire Post) covering most urban centres and regions. These still have circulations of up to 50,000 and are influential locally and even nationally. All politicians will read their local dailies.

There are a few hundred smaller, more localised weekly newspapers, some of which are free and some have a small cover price. Readers are loyal to these papers too, and they carry political influence locally. It can be difficult to tell from online media directories however which ones are important in a given area so it's best to do your research and ask around locally to make sure you are targeting the right paper. It's also worth getting in touch with your local parish newsletters – no contact is too small, and you will reach the largest and most diverse audience if you have a blanket approach.

You should regularly read your local newspaper, this will give you an idea about the issues they like to cover. Be aware of when the deadlines for publication are, if you are dealing with a weekly, make sure you get stories to them a good time in advance to make it into the issue you need to be in.

### **National Press**

There are about 10 national newspapers in the UK, often referred to as the 'red-top' tabloids (Sun, Mirror, Star, Daily Record), middle market (Mail, Express, Metro) and broadsheets (Times, Telegraph, Guardian, Independent, Financial Times). They have well known political biases and are not obliged to be balanced or impartial.

This makes many campaigners wary of approaching some of these outlets, but - it's helpful to remember that -

1. Journalists and editors are always looking for 'new' stories and for powerful 'human interest' stories, both of these can trump perceived political messages.
2. The issues that are of interest to each of the papers are not entirely predictable along left/right lines, and for example all kinds of health, environmental and social injustice stories have received widespread coverage across different newspapers in recent years. Sometimes it's the way you 'frame' a story (more below).

Journalists and editors always have their readers in mind (and perhaps some prejudices about who they think their readers are) when investigating and writing a story. This is the habit campaigners should have too - always thinking about how what we are saying will sound to the people we want to hear it. When you contact a journalist it's good to be open about this and say confidently, 'I believe this report/statistic/event will be of interest to your readers because...'

The media is changing very, very fast due to the technological revolution we're in the middle of. One consequence of these changes has been real long-term cuts to news and staff budgets across the papers. Put simply - fewer journalists are writing more stories with a very important consequence - they are much less likely to leave their desks and to get out there and investigate stories and make new contacts than perhaps they used to be. We can bemoan this or just add it into our planning which means that - we need to take ourselves and take our stories to them.

Particularly when dealing with local media it is extremely useful to provide all the information they will need to run a story. The best way to do this is by writing a Press Release. Press releases should include:

- An intriguing or exciting headline
- An introduction to the story ('Six W's: who, what, why, when, where, and how?')

- Any dates/deadlines
- Clear, high quality images
- Bullet points of the main issues/interests (think about what your 'hook' is)
- An elaboration of why the story is important
- Quotes
- Detailed description/text which can be used at the reporter's discretion

Emphasise things which are new, unexpected, or important to other people and why readers will care (e.g. a political decision, which will have consequences, which has led to a campaign).

## Useful Links

All the national and local papers are very usefully listed here, with comprehensive circulation information too if you like that kind of thing!:

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/UK\\_newspapers](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/UK_newspapers)

Media UK: free database of UK print & broadcast media, just search for your town

<http://www.mediauk.com/>

## Regional & Local Radio

Every part of the UK is covered by BBC local radio and it is not difficult to get on if your approach is clear and relevant – and all stations seem to enjoy an archaeology or history related story. The BBC has a list of all their local radio stations here: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio/stations>.

Many local radio stations often have lots of times to fill so opportunities to cover and debate local issues are relatively easy to find. Radio allows for phone-in debates. Remember to plug your group, event or project if you are a studio guest.

Speaking on the radio can seem scary, but the studio will usually be very good at guiding the interview and not put too much pressure on you.

Have a look through the weekly schedule which will be on the station website and work out which show might suit you – the afternoon phone-in, weekend breakfast, drive time debate, late night discussion. You could start by calling in and aim to be a studio guest later on.

Around two thirds of local radio is commercial, which is mostly music but its news bulletins, on the hour, reach millions. Some of these are made locally in the bigger local radio station's newsrooms, but many subscribe to a news supplier like Sky News Radio: <http://news.sky.com/info/radio>

Media UK at <http://www.mediauk.com/> also lists local radio and TV.

## Online News Channels

The UK newspapers' websites have an enormous national and even international reach. In addition to them, the BBC and Sky have comprehensive news websites, smartphone/tablet apps and are always working on new platforms. If you're successful in approaching print and broadcast media your messages should appear in this online copy too. Think about what extras this might involve, e.g. links to videos and your campaign site etc.

Some newspapers operate what is known as 'open content' systems. The best example of this is the Guardian's 'Comment is Free' section. This is an online only way to contribute stories directly where you yourself are the writer. This content has an online editor but you can propose the story yourself. There is still a lot of competition for this online space but the website has good guidance which can be found here <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2010/mar/04/you-tell-us>.

This type of approach may give you a better chance of getting a story heard and can open different angles. If successful, your story will look just like a regular Guardian article and be searchable on the newspaper's website and through online search engines.

Key online only publications to target also include Huffington Post, the New Statesman, the Spectator (latter two are still in print as well) in



particular for their comment sections if you're trying to influence opinion. Have a good read first, get a feel for their style and interests.

## **Social Media**

The well-known platforms of Facebook and Twitter are hugely important ways of sharing news items and comments about your campaigns, and you need to think about setting up both of these for your project. Journalists often use Twitter as a lazy way of finding people to comment for their news stories, or to find potential stories with human interest. Using either of these platforms is not a magic bullet for contacting 'younger audiences' or a specific area of society. Be prepared to use these platforms for discussion and comments, and you must also brace yourselves for the fact that not everything you receive through these media will be positive.

Find out if there are any blogs that would be useful to follow and comment on. Add these to your media list and keep them up to date with your campaign – you can treat them like another newspaper, in terms of sending stories and press releases.

## **Piggybacking Other News Stories**

There are often archaeology and heritage related news items in the press that connects, however tenuously, with your campaign – archaeology news stories for example. Taking the time to post a comment on it and provide a link to your campaign news will raise your profile and involve your group in debate which is often used as a source of information and future articles by journalists.

If you can find someone will to track keywords in Twitter, you can jump onto current topics and hashtags in Twitter for example, and find other ways of getting your information out there.



## The harsh reality of managing a newspaper campaign

**Note: This advice was written by David Southwell, an author and journalist with decades of experience.**

### Things to remember:

- Journalists are the laziest of people. Make it easy for them. Huge cuts in media mean most journalists are time poor so the more you do to give them an easy to use package/story it helps.
- Remember, the right sort of stunt works. Think visually. A dozen young people in costume are a photo opportunity to go in the photographer's diary, a dozen people with placards isn't.
- Make stories personal. Almost all journalists are taught to look for the 'people angle'.
- Think in quotes. This makes you stick to the point and makes the time-pressed journalist's job easier.
- Short is better. In a time poor news gathering environment, three paragraphs get read, three pages worth gets deleted.
- Quirky can often work. Being able to offer a Top Five Things You Didn't Know About to go with a story can often swing it.
- Read the publication; listen to the radio show etc before contacting the organisation. Who is the journalist who does the local politics or your area?
- If you cannot find a named journalist, radio producer/researcher etc, address your correspondence to the news desk.
- Understand how a paper runs a diary and try to find out its production schedule and deadlines.

- Never ever call the newspaper on a deadline day. For example, if a paper comes out Friday, it probably goes to press some point on Thursday night. Therefore, Thursday is the worst day to contact a paper unless it is an emergency.
- The early press conferences deciding next week's news etc will likely be held Friday or on a Monday morning. If you ring a paper and ask for this kind of information, most front desks or journalists will tell you this and think better for you saying: "I never want to call on deadline day, please could you let me know your production schedule".
- After a story is published, remember to follow up a story with a letter for publication/to the Editor. 'We are pleased to see the Bugle is covering this important local story, it really matters because of X and Y and here are our contact details'.
- What makes a news story meaningful to you is probably what makes it meaningful to others and you should never be afraid about showing that passion for it. Stories need to be based on facts, but they also need to be about people and passion. A dry press release ticks very few boxes!