

Successful B2B Media Writing

A **HURA** workshop

Adrian Wheeler

Zagreb 18th November 2019

Britain's ties with Croatia



The purpose of journalism

*'To feed the mind
and touch the heart'*

Rupert Murdoch



The purpose of this workshop

Good media writing is difficult. *Is it worth it?*

Headlines and leads are *all-important*

Composition and structure should comply with the *rules and conventions* the media themselves obey

Our goal: little or no editing or adaptation

What do I know?



Reporter



GCI Europe



Trainer

B2B and B2C media writing

What's the difference?



What are we up against?

Basil Clarke 1924

'one in a hundred'

Anthony Hilton 2014

'one per cent'

Global PR 2018

\$150 billion

Spray and pray or *relate and place?*



Three views of public relations



'A hamster is just a rat with good PR'



'If I had one last dollar I'd spend it on PR'



'Whoever controls the media controls the mind'

The media matter

'The media are the root of consensus, the organisational motor of society. They are surely a more influential force on our lives and the world's changing beliefs than politics or governments'



Michael Wolff *The Autumn of the Moguls*

Workshop agenda

The media as *customers*

The business case

About the media

What is B2B news?

Structure, composition, format

Content, story-telling

Messages, quotes

Style, self-editing

The Inverse Law of PR

The *easier* it is to obtain coverage,
the *less useful* it is to our client or employer

The *harder* it is to get coverage,
the *more valuable* it is

*There are more and more PR people competing for the
attention of a dwindling number of media outlets*

A press release from Barclays

'I am very pleased to welcome Stephen to our growing team. His extensive knowledge of the area and range of experience in dealing with high net worth individuals will be a significant asset to our team. His appointment not only enhances our presence in Milton Keynes but also emphasises our commitment to our clients there'

'I am excited to be joining the team in Milton Keynes. The town and surrounding area is a growing business hub and I am looking forward to bringing our wealth management proposition to clients in the region'

A press release from Motorola

Impossibly strong and undeniably cool, the new Motorola DEFY PRO is built tough. You can trust that DEFY PRO will deliver, no matter what life throws your way

'DEFY PRO offers the complete package – a life-proof design packed with smart technology from Motorola' said Darren Seefried, national account director. 'Whether you're chilling poolside or stuck burning the midnight oil at the office, this phone is built to keep up and provide users with peace of mind'

A press release from AOL

The site will leverage Huffington Post's powerful engagement and blogging platform and will deepen conversations around key lifestyle topics, including the need to unplug from work and technology and ways to improve quality of life

The section will reinforce some of our key beliefs: that in our hyper-connected world it is more important than ever to redefine success, embrace our own creativity, and live the lives we want – not the lives we settle for

Editors get 400 of these every day

Banal

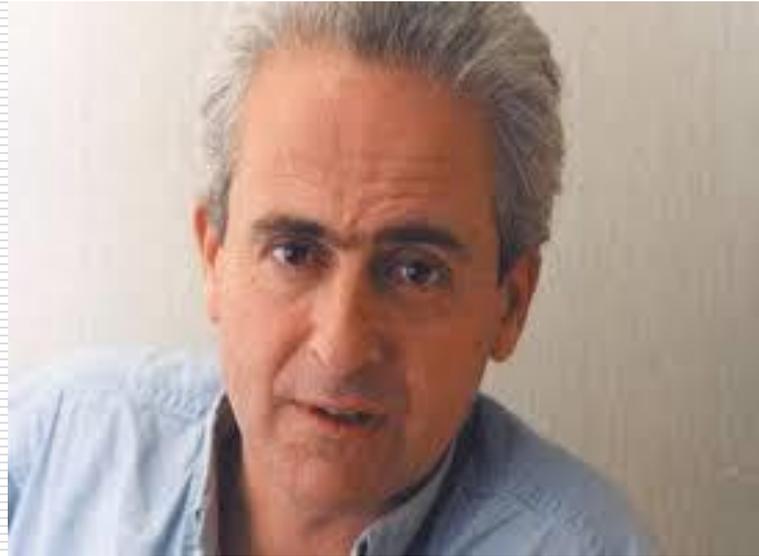
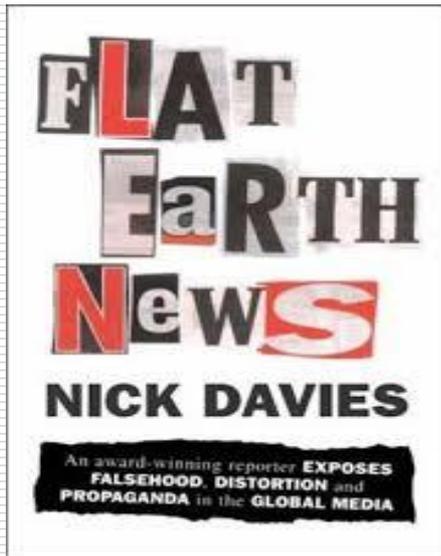
Illiterate

Undisguised advertising

Guff



Flat Earth News



90 per cent of the news content of TV, radio and MSM in the UK is sourced from a PR agency or a PR department

Fleet Street circa 1960



The media as *customers*

What do they really want from us?

What do they usually *get* from PR people?

It's easy to stand out

Components and composition

Structure and presentation

Media language

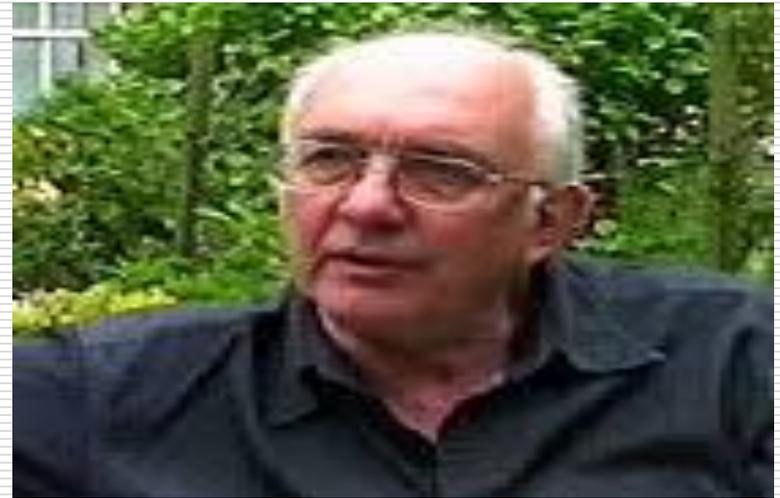
Placing, pitching, selling-in

Journalists on PR



Rod McKenzie, BBC

Why can't PR people get their heads round the basics? Know who you're pitching to and what your message is. Use news language!



Barry Fox, New Scientist

We don't expect PR people to have all the answers – just to know who does, get them and get them right

The business case. *Is it worth it?*

The Hierarchy of Effects

Advertising today sets out to create *awareness only*

Online and social media deliver *unverified* content

MSM and TTP deliver *credible* facts and opinions

The Relay Effect – multiplication – Word of Mouth

Daniel Kahneman's discoveries

Market Contact Audits

The media landscape in the UK



- 11 national dailies and Sundays
- 1,100 regional dailies/weeklies
- 2,000 GI magazines
- 4,733 trade/technical/professional

Who are we writing for?

Our manager or client?

Corporate PR department?

Lawyers?

Reporters, researchers and producers?

Editors and sub-editors, correspondents?

Readers, viewers, listeners, browsers?

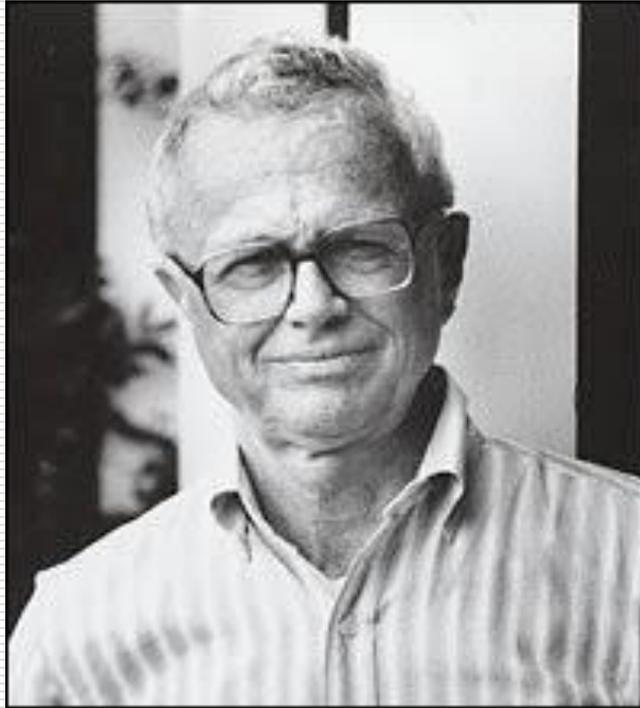
The PESO Model is changing the equation

Reporter's Golden Rules

Make it interesting	'Wow - really?'
Make it relevant	'This is important to me'
Make it meaningful	'I need to change something'
Make it enjoyable	'I will read this story'
Make it simple	'I can understand it'
Make it short	'I will read it all'

Most of us give a story **less than ten seconds** before we continue

William Zinsser, Life Magazine



'Executives at every level are prisoners of the notion that a simple style reflects a simple mind. The opposite is true; a simple story is the product of hard work and hard thinking'

About the media

More like each other than like us

Personality

Motivation

Work pressures

Training

Ambivalence about PR



'A carnival of insecurity' *Andrew Marr*

The media on the media



'All reporters run on a flammable mixture of imagination and anxiety'



'A raw, high-octane style of management'

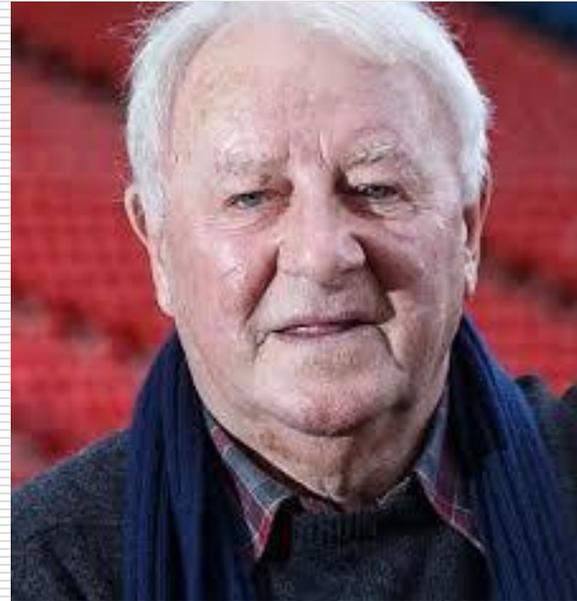


'I have come to the conclusion that panic *is* the system'

Two more views of the media



Lord Harmsworth



Tommy Docherty

How the media see themselves



'There's nothing wrong with disliking journalists – I won't have them in the house myself'

Marina Warner, Guardian



'Journalists aren't supposed to praise things – it's almost as bad as buying your own drinks'

P J O'Rourke

How the media see us

When the Economist requested an interview with the President of Nigeria we were asked if we would make a contribution to his election campaign – or should he pay us?

I wrote a short Lex piece based on a company press release. The next day their MD rang up to thank me for printing his story – ‘but, next time, please don’t change the words’

Some journalists hate PR



'The relentless cycle of cost-cutting and the economical staffing of new media give growing and potentially worrying power to the PR industry'

Robert Peston, BBC-TV News

What sells?



What do the B2B media want?

News

Context

Facts and figures

Expert opinions

Exclusives

Gossip, tips

Access

Availability

above all, **NEWS**

What do the B2B media *not* want?

Unreliability

Lack of knowledge

Time-wasting

Hype, puff



*Top hates in 2019 survey of US B2B writers:
doesn't know topic; doesn't know outlet; hype,
no story; mass email, not personalized;
waffle; jargon*

What is B2B news?

Hard (*OMG*)

Acquisitions
Appointments
Investments
New locations
Closures
Scare stories
Quoted results
Inventions, cures
Crises

Soft (*Hmm*)

New strategies, policies
Problems solved
Trends perceived
Success stories
Orders
Sponsorships
Opinion
Research
CSR

News is a little different in Kent



Editorial choice



Media outlets have a specific amount of space or time for each item.

- Selection for possible inclusion
- Selection for inclusion
- Cut to length

Hard news, soft news, filler, spike

Editors use short-cuts

What is news?

The News Blueprint

Who?

What?

When?

Where?

Why?

How?

How much?

Woman finds a hat in a tree

A HAT has been found up a tree in Bilton.

The woollen head garment, which is red and has a bobble, was discovered on Tuesday by Bilton Lane resident Sharon Bromance, 43.

"I could hardly believe my eyes when I saw it up there," she said. "I got it down with a stick and put it on a fence post."

The owner now has until April 10 to reclaim the hat, after which it will be destroyed.

The media writing challenge

Most *sent* material won't be seen at all

Most media consider twelve, use four

'I don't read the emails. I look at the sender and the headline. I nearly always know if I want it'

Daniel Lyons., Newsweek

Stacking the odds in our favour

Media relationships matter above all else

Good *headline* gets the story looked at

Good *style* gets the story considered

Good *intro* gets used

Media relationships



Fledglings' events

A good way to begin positive relationships with young journalists and their editors

Making the most of a weak story

Topical link – anniversary, day of, year of

Response to existing story

Public benefit

Surprising research/forecast

Hero

Pictures, clips

Vivid CEO quote

F-Secure's 'Herod Clause'



Types of B2B media writing

Releases/announcements/briefing docs (<600 words)

Backgrounders (history, context, bios)

News-features (800 - 1200 words)

Op-eds (1200 - 1500 words)

Case-studies (1200 - 2000 words)

Features/long-form (>1200 words)

Letters to the Editor

Blog responses, discussion threads, Twitter etc

MSM and online

MSM verified, credible, paid-for
Online branded outlets and others
Social perform as media but aren't

Nearly all journalists use online/social to source and research stories. Most contribute (paid or free)

The Verification Handbook (Craig Silverman et al)

Distribution: wires, email lists, **phone**, (*hand delivery*)

Structure

The Pyramid *intro, development, elaboration*

All key facts (who, what, when, where, why, how, how much... so what?)

Proof-points, quotes

Consequences, background

David Randall's Top Tip



Before you put finger to keyboard...

Take command of the material

The Universal Journalist

Composition

Short words (2 or 3 syllables)

Short sentences (10 words)

Simple syntax (no parentheses)

Short paragraphs (2 or 3 sentences)

X-heads every 2 or 3 paragraphs

Short-form: a single thread

Long-form: write in chunks

Format

Dateline: place and date
Embargo/Immediate (*note*)
Boilerplate/Notes to Editors
Pictures, clips, background
Source references
Word-count
Contact details

Content

Facts and figures (news)

Proof-points for claims

Quotations

Examples, verbal illustrations

Back-story/context

Consequences

References

The human angle makes any B2B story stand out

The human factor



Rolls-Royce Trent turbofan

Story-telling



'Sales have been very encouraging in the third quarter compared on a like-for-like basis with 2018. We are confident that our full-year revenues will be extremely satisfactory'

Story-telling

'You're asking about sales so far this year? Well, here's an example. I went down to our outlet in Rijeka last Saturday and it took me fifteen minutes to get into the car-park. Inside, the place was jam-packed. Clothes were flying off the shelves and the staff were going mental. I think we're going to report a banner year in December'



The Dark Side



'I am always looking for conflict, drama and setbacks – and especially mean-spirited ideas about your competitors'

Dennis Kneale

Former editor WSJ

Key messages

Distinctive	different, original, unusual
Simple	short, everyday words
Few	three is ideal
Relevant	why does this matter to me?
Consistent	at least three times
Attractive	pleasing, warm, human

All our media writing should convey the key messages

Quotations

Direct and indirect speech makes up half of every story

But most corporate quotes are wooden, robotic, unusable

'I sometimes wonder if PR people exist because executives have lost the capacity to speak in plain language'

Philip Delves Broughton, Telegraph

'Companies that understand the force of straight talking are so rare that we are astonished when we find them'

Simon Caulkin, Financial Times

Vivid quotes

Fix a time to talk to the source
Let them ramble
What is really exciting them?
Use short, sharp, vivid words
Call back and read out your quote



Our media customers hate boilerplate quotes. It is worth going to any lengths to secure quotes that stand out

Style

Enemies of clarity

Industrial tribalism

jargon, obscurity

Haste

errors, over-length

Information overload

quantity v quality

Committee editing

corporate gibberish

Avoiding cliches



'If I read *upcoming* again in the Wall Street Journal I will be *downcoming* and someone will be *outgoing*'

Bernard Kilgore
Managing Editor, WSJ

Self-editing

Turn off spellcheck

Print out story

Pause and return

The lead – do *you* want to read on?

Message – a single thread or point?

Trim length by 10 per cent

Direct speech – dynamic

Read aloud, read backwards

Ask a colleague

Structure – para breaks, x-heads

Return to headline

The best English B2B writing

The International New York Times

The Financial Times

The Guardian

Fortune Magazine

The New Yorker

Scientific American

Pitching stories to B2B media

Call first – avoid 'spray and pray'
Research a hook for each writer
Research writer's last 3 months
Homework – be ready with answers
Prepare elevator pitch beforehand
If 'no', thanks and goodbye
If 'maybe' what can we offer?
Be available 24x7x52
Think about TYL after publication

The Last Word



'I fear three newspapers more than a hundred thousand bayonets'
