

The Voluntary Action Media Unit

CULTURE CLASH?

AN INVESTIGATION OF THE RELATIONSHIP
BETWEEN CHARITIES, THE MEDIA AND
COMMERCIAL PR AGENCIES

October 2005



CONTENTS

	Page Number
Background to VAMU	2
Summary of key findings and conclusions	4
Research with Charity Personnel about the media	9
Interviews with Media Personnel about Charities	17
Interviews with Commercial PR companies about both sectors	32
Dealing with the media	40
Third Sector article	53
Appendix	54
1 Questionnaire for voluntary sector: analysis of responses	
2 Article from 3 rd Sector	
3 List of Charity interviewees	
4 List of Media interviewees	
5 List of PR interviewees	

Background to VAMU

The Voluntary Action Media Unit is a three year project funded by the Big Lottery Fund. The project was conceived by and is now managed by TimeBank. TimeBank's partners in the project are the Media Trust and the Institute for Volunteering Research.

VAMU aims to investigate the relationship between the voluntary sector and the media. Through this research VAMU hopes to develop strategies that will radically change the voluntary sector's media profile and the effectiveness of its volunteer recruitment campaigns.

For more information about VAMU visit www.vamu.org.uk.

If you have any questions or comments about this research please e-mail P.Gibbs@vamu.org.uk or call Penelope Gibbs on 0207 785 6391.

Background to VAMU's Research Study

The Voluntary Action Media Unit started work in January 2005. For the next six months, members of the team conducted research with professionals in the charity, media and PR sectors about the relationship between these sectors. The research concentrated on those at middle/junior levels because VAMU wished to gain an in-depth understanding of issues at the "coal face". Nearly all those canvassed were either directly responsible for charity communications or for content in a media outlet. Details of respondents are in the appendix.

Summary of key findings in our Study of the Relationship between the Media, the Voluntary Sector and Commercial PR Agencies who have Charity Accounts

The Nature of the Relationship as Perceived

Many of those who work in charities have positive experiences of working with the individual journalists and producers. But there is also some hostility to and distrust of the media. This attitude is more prevalent amongst charity personnel who do not deal with the media day to day. Where it exists, this hostility is inspired by a number of factors

- a belief that media values are anti-pathetic to those of the voluntary sector
- negative experiences of media dealings with their charity
- a belief that the media is hostile to charities and unwilling to help them
- a feeling that the media is ignorant about the voluntary/NGO sector as a whole

There is also considerable frustration at the power imbalance in the relationship. This is prevalent amongst voluntary sector PRs. They feel that the media possesses huge power and that a small charity has little possibility of affecting the news agenda.

The media professionals we interviewed had no idea that they inspired negative feelings in the voluntary sector. No-one we interviewed was hostile to the sector as a whole, and very seldom to individual charities. Media professionals were aware that charities had access to good stories and were keen to exploit them. If media interviewees did feel negativity towards charities it was frustration – frustration that charities had so little understanding of their agenda, frustration that charities were cautious.

The relationship at its worst is characterised by a lack of understanding and mutual respect. The lack of personal relationships between those in charities and the media (whether in a professional capacity or through media personnel volunteering) contributes to the perpetuation of this culture clash.

The Nature of the Unwritten Contract between Charities and the Media

Many of the problems that occur in the dealings between charities and the media arise from a lack of mutual understanding of why charities engage with the media. Charities seek media coverage

- to promote awareness of the charity and its activities
- to raise money
- to campaign for a particular message/cause

- to recruit volunteers
- to promote a company/organisation which has sponsored them

Charities frequently have very few resources to devote to seeking media coverage and satisfying media requests, and thus any experience of dealing with the media which does not satisfy one of the above aims may be viewed as a negative experience.

The media wants good stories, good quotes to illustrate news stories and great human interest case studies. They understand that charities have the potential to help them access these and thus contact charities/respond to their contacts.

Most media professionals have no idea how limited many charity's resources are, nor how much work can be involved in servicing media requests. Some media professionals feel they are under little obligation to credit charities (and that to do so would compromise their editorial integrity), and charities often feel powerless to get what they need from the exchange. This problem is compounded by some charities' lack of understanding of the realities of media life. When stories set up for the media by charities never materialise, when promised credits or name-checks are missing, when case studies are supplied but never used; it is these experiences which charities see as signs of the media's high-handedness. For the media these are simply unfortunate occurrences. Because of this difference in perception, these negative experiences threaten the relationship between charities and the media and can prompt charities to refuse media requests for case studies.

One of the greatest criticisms the voluntary sector has of the media is that they take their help for granted and do not acknowledge time and effort expended by charities for no reward.

One of the commonest criticisms the media makes of charities is that they are not helpful enough.

Fear of Risk

At the root of many of the problems in the relationship between media and charities is a fear of taking risks on the part of charities – a fear which is justified on their part by the likely results.

Media professionals complain that charities are reluctant to give them access to clients and volunteers ie to the raw material of those human interest stories they so often seek. In frustration, media professionals resort to other methods of finding the interviewees they need and one features writer told us she found it easier to get good interviewees through friendly solicitors than through charities.

Charity PRs told us that when they did give media professionals access to case studies the professionals concerned often

- dropped the story before or after interview
- asked insensitive and intrusive questions.
- Refused/omitted to give the charity a namecheck when they featured the interviewee the charity had provided

It is the medium/small charities who feel most at risk of wasting resources. Many of the big charities only answer some of the media requests they get – they can be deluged with requests and have other opportunities to gain coverage.

Charity PRs frequently find it hard to judge the risks involved in particular media contacts and belong to organisations who are institutionally risk averse. They find it hard to judge which media requests are most likely to result in positive coverage for the charity. And to take the rough with the smooth in terms of stories and interviews dropped.

Media Strategy

We did not ask voluntary sector organisations specifically whether they had a media strategy but it is implicit in many of the findings, and from the testimony of PR companies, that many charities do not have a media strategy. This means that they seek media coverage on an ad hoc basis, often to publicise events. This also means that they are unsure how to deal with media requests.

Targeting and Presentation

Media professionals are critical of the way some charities promote their agenda and say that many would get more coverage if they refined their methods.

All our research indicates that charity PRs tend to use generic press releases as their main means of communicating stories. This press release is usually e-mailed in the same form to all recipients, with the only personalisation being the name of the journalist/producer at the top. It is used to convey news of events, campaigns and reaction to breaking news.

Many charity PRs like using the generic press release because it offers a means of reaching hundreds of media contacts at the touch of a button. They also favour the press release because they and their managers can agree together the wording together. It allows those who feel nervous about the media, to feel they have some control.

The problem with generic press releases is that very few media professionals like them yet they are inundated by them. By its very nature, the generic press release cannot meet the diverse needs of different media outlets. To derive a story from a generic press release, most media professionals have to do extra work/be creative and they simply don't have time. Particularly when they are inundated with other story ideas.

In an ideal world media professionals want each story to be tailored to the needs of their outlet/agenda. They want the person targeting the story to have read their magazine/listened to their programme, and to offer them an exclusive idea. Clearly many generic press releases do lead to media coverage but many are ignored.

Media Used

When we talked about the media, voluntary sector interviewees instinctively focussed on the news media, whether local or national. Voluntary sector PRs target most of their effort at news outlets and the trade press. They have most success in getting coverage in local/regional press and in trade press. Some charities target features pages and a few have tried to get stories into women's magazines. In the case of non news media, charity PRs frequently say they don't know how to present their stories and who to contact.

Some of the non news media professionals we interviewed said they were seldom contacted by charities. Many welcomed more contact – particularly if charities understood what kind of stories they were looking for. There are some media outlets like FHM and easyJet magazine which are not crying out for charity stories, but are happy to look at them.

The best relationship between charities and media professionals appears to be between local charities and local press. Here there are often personal relationships, and journalists who are both sympathetic to the charity agenda and less critical of the way in which the stories are presented.

This research suggests that there are huge areas of the media that are under exploited by charities. However voluntary sector PRs have indicated that they are unsure how to target non-news media and some are not convinced of the value of so doing.

Accessibility of Charities to the Media

A key criticism of charities by the media is that they are not always easy to contact and that it is difficult to find out about small specialist charities. Most journalists and producers can only name a handful of charities – usually the biggest ones. If they want to contact a charity for whatever reason they usually go for a name they know/one that's already in their contact book. They are often frustrated by the process of getting hold of media officers – trying to find relevant contacts, phones/e-mails not answered, a lack of timely response to requests. They complain that charities do not understand media deadlines.

In turn medium and small charities complain that media professionals tend to give coverage to the big charities and ignore stories from unfamiliar charities. And when they do contact them, they expect charities to deliver within unrealistic deadlines.

Volunteering

There is no overall resistance to volunteering stories amongst media professionals. If a charity/organisation has the right story for them, media professionals are willing to place it. In the case of volunteering, they want good case studies and personal stories.

The image media professionals have of volunteers is not negative though many do feel that volunteering as an activity must take a lot of time. Media professionals tend to think of about volunteering in relatively narrow terms as for instance working in a charity shop or for VSO. Consequently many do not realise that pro bono work, trusteeship or being a magistrate are counted as volunteering..

Very few media professionals volunteer themselves. They say they don't have time.

Research with charity personnel about the media

The Research

We sent an online questionnaire to 238 people responsible for media relations in their organisation. 126 responded though some did not answer all the questions. The respondents represented a range of charities big and small. Some did not class themselves as communications staff. Some of the questions were open and others closed. The results of the online survey were received in March 2005.

In addition to the online survey the VAMU team have conducted in depth interviews with

- 1) five of the respondents who answered the online survey
- 2) others in the sector responsible for voluntary sector PR

These interviews were conducted to gain more in depth understanding of some of the issues referred to in the online survey.

In addition we have used the responses received to an article in Third Sector. This article was written by Penelope Gibbs and encouraged those in the sector to e-mail her with their views.

The Structure of Voluntary Sector/NGO PR

Most charities have no dedicated media officer. Media and communications issues are often dealt with by the Chief Executive or by someone who has other communications responsibilities.

Our on-line survey predominantly reflected the views of charities which do have a media office. Even so, offices were small. Over half the respondents said they had 2-4 in their communications team and a third had one. Only 6% of respondents had 11 to 20 communications staff.

Very few charities in our survey outsourced all their communications work though nearly half outsourced some of it.

Media officers were frequently part of wider communications departments. In some cases, the departments concerned had responsibility for fundraising, marketing and media relations. In other charities, marketing sat with fundraising and the media office was separate.

The Media and Coverage

We asked respondents to our online survey in which kinds of media they would like to get most coverage. They most wanted coverage in the news sections of national newspapers, on national TV, and in the features sections of national newspapers in that order. These ambitions were not overall

satisfied since the media they got most coverage in were regional and local print, trade press and national news sections in that order.

All the charities interviewed aim to build public awareness through gaining media coverage. They feel public awareness of the charity's name and aims facilitates fundraising and campaigning. For Vitalise and the British Eye Research Foundation, the issue is particularly pertinent because both charities have recently changed their names and have limited media resources. Even in the case of Mencap, which is one of the biggest charities, building awareness is an issue. While people know the name, many are not sure what Mencap does and what "learning difficulties" means. The charity least interested in building name awareness is the NSPCC – because awareness is already very high. Keith Bradbrook of NSPCC said 95% of journalists would accept a phone call from them simply because they were the NSPCC. And if it's "about a child" the media comes to the NSPCC for comments. Though brand awareness is not a key issue for the NSPCC, they are very interested in building awareness of child abuse and the ways parents/carers can avoid becoming abusers.

In our survey, voluntary sector PRs felt they were primarily proactive in their media work ie they spent more time pushing their organisation's media agenda than in reacting to media requests/breaking news. Many organisations were contacted relatively infrequently by the media 61 respondents said they were contacted less than once a week. And seven respondents said their organisations were never contacted. Our in depth interviews supported this finding. In the case of Vitalise (formerly Winged Fellowship), the charity is most often contacted by the disability and care sector press, but seldom contacted by the mainstream press. In the case of the British Eye Research Foundation, media requests seldom come through.

Richard Garside, Director of the Crime and Society Foundation felt that charities should be careful about spending too much time reacting to media requests. When he was Head of Communications at NACRO, the charity was frequently flooded with requests for quotes on crime issues. Richard had limited staff resources and did not feel that answering every media request was the best use of them. He said some of the time could be more valuably spent forging new contacts with media professionals and campaigning.

Case Studies/Human Interest Stories

All the charities we interviewed acknowledged that one of the most effective means of publicising a story/campaign was to offer journalists and media professionals good case studies or real life stories. But Julian Simpson, who has worked in both the media and the voluntary sectors, feels that charities are generally too protective of their clients: "I think the sector is frankly paranoid when it comes to engaging with the media".

Andrew Hogg, Head of Media for the Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture, wants to give the media access to victims of torture – he feels it's by far the most powerful means to promote the work of the charity.

However the charity's clients are frequently vulnerable and likely to be in long term therapeutic treatment programmes. Andrew has worked hard to persuade the medical staff at the Foundation to let him interview current clients. Now he has gained the trust of many of the medical staff – because clients have had positive experiences of media liaison. Andrew has also encountered opposition from lawyers, concerned that media exposure will jeopardise asylum seekers' cases. Andrew is careful to screen each potential interviewee himself – to check their story holds and that they are strong enough to be interviewed.

Lorna Grounsell, Communications Manager for Centre 33 (a regional charity which offers counselling to young people) does not allow media access to current clients. If the media wants to interview teenagers who have used the centre's services, she contacts previous users of the services who now volunteer for the charity.

Francesca Deakin at Mencap provides case studies when she can but is sometimes frustrated by just how restrictive the journalist's brief can be. She says some case studies are very difficult to track down. In order to campaign against means testing the disabled facilities grant, Mencap needed to find a family with a disabled child who weren't dependent on benefit and who were willing to disclose their family finances to the media. She succeeded but it took time.

Michael Roberts, Chief Executive of the British Eye Research Foundation finds it hard to get good case studies because the doctors who work on eye research are the gatekeepers. Media coverage is not a high priority for them and they don't let him know about potential interviewees. He does not have the resources in his organisation to track down good case studies.

David Stables works for A-CET a tiny charity with no PR budget. The charity supports further and higher education in Africa. A-CET sponsors a student who, 20 years ago, was one of the starving children featured at Live Aid. "This girl is a very shy unworldly 23 year old struggling at Agriculture College in Northern Ethiopia....Invitations to the UK and the US are both administratively and logistically time consuming and can be potentially intrusive...Our experience of the media has been as varied as the personalities and organisations we have dealt with. Some are undoubtedly opportunistic, insensitive, and take advantage. Some sensationalise, edit out meaning, misquote or misreport...Yet others have been superb, producing accurate, sensitive reportage and links to support our work". At the Live 8 concert in Hyde Park the girl appeared on stage with Madonna and illustrated that good stories can come out of Africa.

Monica Kimche has worked as Director of Communications for Home-Start, a charity which offers support to parents of young children. "Whenever any one in the media wanted a family under stress with under 5s, they would contact us and expect us to be waiting to supply them with appropriate people off the shelf. This attitude of the media (mostly amongst the nationals) (is) that charities have nothing better to do than act as the suppliers of people to

represent whatever cause is needed without due consideration to the needs, confidentiality and sensitivities of the client group...The attitude of the journalists when they wanted something was always guaranteed to put our backs up as everything was about their deadlines and always 'I have to have this now/tomorrow etc' with all the stress that that brings to at least six people involved".

Madeline Reiss is the part-time media officer for Emmaus, a charity working for homeless people. Having been a freelance journalist for fourteen years, she understands media needs. But she has recently been frustrated by them. "A researcher for Panorama recently contacted me because they were putting together a programme about the effects of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder on ex service people and she had read that 25% of the residents who were once homeless and who now live in our communities once served in the forces. An initial chat with myself and my director was followed by requests for case studies. I agreed to contact all of our (11) communities and ask each of them whether they had any residents willing to talk on camera. For obvious reasons, some residents are wary of putting themselves in the public eye, but after much phoning, I lined up a couple of people prepared to do so. The researcher visited the Community in question (a visit that had to be set up by me) but decided the case studies were not exactly what she was looking for. I spent further time trying to find her others and also set up possible times when the Panorama team might come to the office to film our director (himself ex-army). By this time, quite a lot of time had been expended on behalf of Panorama. I heard nothing more despite emailing the researcher in question to find out if she was still interested. While I appreciate that such programmes have to cast their nets wide in order to find good case studies, this story illustrates the difficulties that charities sometimes experience whilst trying to be cooperative and responsive to the needs of the media. I work a twenty hour week. Panorama probably took up a full working day".

Our research suggests that dealing with requests for case studies is one of the most time-consuming and difficult aspects of charity PR's jobs.

Media Unreliability

This is a subject which cropped up in the interview with Andrew Hogg and which has arisen in other interviews with voluntary sector PRs. Andrew Hogg has put a lot of his own and other people's time into setting up items/interviews which are subsequently dropped. He helped a BBC TV producer with an undercover film about detention centres for asylum seekers. Andrew facilitated a whole day's filming but when the programme was screened that footage had been cut out and the Foundation got no mention or credit. The producer apologised after transmission. Andrew is pretty philosophical about such events. He acknowledges that this is how the media works. But if people within the organisation learn that the media has dropped an interview, he is concerned that their negative feelings about the media may be reinforced.

Monica Kimche worked for Home-Start. She had in the main “very negative experience of trying to place stories with the broadsheets. They would often appear to take up a story, our PR officer would then arrange a number of interviews with families or volunteers anywhere in England, only to find that they did not, in the end, run with the story, with the resultant negative impact on all involved”.

The Head of Communications of a major charity told of problems with GMTV. Time and again GMTV set up interviews with personnel from the charity only to let them down at the last minute. The charity was let down four times in five and was considering withdrawing co-operation from the programme.

Media Misrepresentation

Keith Bradbrook of NSPCC lives with but is frustrated by inaccurate reporting. He sees this as particularly prevalent in newspaper journalism and is often fuelled by a particular political agenda. NSPCC is part of the End Child Poverty Coalition. Another charity which is a member of the coalition published a report calling for the abolition of grammar schools. This had nothing to do with the NSPCC and they had not seen the report before publication. But the Daily Telegraph still ran a critical leader saying that the NSPCC had called for grammar schools to be abolished. The Telegraph had not checked the story with the NSPCC.

Negative Coverage

The majority of respondents to our survey said they had been on the receiving end of negative coverage. Most had responded to this negative coverage by putting forward a spokesperson for interview or trying to place a positive story to counteract.

The Media's Agenda

Many of the interviewees felt that the agenda and work of charities and that of the media were mismatched. While they see the media as dominated by sensationalism, the work of charities is often painstaking and gradual.

Francesca Deakin feels people with learning difficulties are not a “sexy” subject for the media and that puts the onus on Mencap to be very creative in their PR, and to capitalise on celebrities.

Lorna Grounsell says Centre 33 plugs away at “unglamorous” work. She really fights “to emphasise and flag up vital work which is not sensational” but is resigned to the fact she cannot control the media agenda.

Michael Roberts says it's difficult to publicise eye research. It's a challenge to present it in “lay terms” and it seldom leads to radical breakthroughs. Yet discoveries and breakthroughs are the stories which get into medical and national press.

Media Contacts

9 in 10 of the respondents to our survey felt that the most important factor in fostering strong relationships with media organisations was personal contacts between the communications team and journalists/producers. The second most important factor was that a “relationship has built up because an outlet has been receptive to our stories”. Least important as one of the factors listed were personal contacts between media senior management and the charity’s senior management – possibly because they don’t exist, or because they exist but are not beneficial.

The bigger charities tended to have more contacts with individual journalists/media professionals. The British Eye Research Foundation has no on-going relationships with individual journalists. But Lorna Grounsell at Centre 33 has a number of contacts with local radio stations. They began phoning her soon after she started in post and she responded. She is willing to take part in discussions/be interviewed about teenage issues, and flexible about her availability.

Francesca Deakin (Mencap) and Andrew Hogg (Medical Foundation for the Victims of Torture) have many media contacts, but they tend to be concentrated in the newspaper world. In the case of all the charities, contact with other sectors, eg women’s magazines, is sporadic and focussed on particular campaigns. There are some sectors, like contract magazines, in which there appears to be almost no contact between these charities and the sector.

Francesca was keen to find better ways of tracking which journalists/media professionals her staff had been in touch with. At the moment they rely on handwritten notes. She is investigating computer based relationship management tools like Vocus. But she is put off by the cost – she thinks Vocus costs approx £4000 per user pa.

The NSPCC has many media contacts but one of the strongest is their relationship with the Sun. They have an “on-going presence” in the tabloid and generally positive coverage. Keith says it’s not a co-incidence that the Sun is supportive of the charity. Rebekah Wade is passionate about children and their welfare - hence her support for the NSPCC and the Sun anti-paedophile campaign. Keith Bradbrook and his team have had to overcome some prejudice within their organisation against tabloid journalism and its tendency to paint issues in black and white. But Keith believes the benefits of positive tabloid coverage far outweigh some simplistic reporting.

All the interviewees acknowledged the importance of personal relationships with media professionals and were keen to develop them.

Media Successes

Both Vitalise and Mencap have run photographic competitions which yielded fantastic press coverage particularly in regional media. Vitalise had asked people to enter holiday photos and reserved one category for photos of disabled people on holiday. Mencap asked for photos of children and adults with learning difficulties, with their stories. Prizes were given for both the photo and the story. Both charities managed to get exhibitions of the photos – Mencap’s Exhibition was at the V&A.

Photos, because they reflect human interest stories, make for good copy in newspapers, particularly regional/local ones. At the same time as running the competition, Vitalise asked celebrities to send them their holiday photos. A number did and these were used to get publicity in the national press.

The NSPCC’s recent successes are in gaining some control of the media agenda itself. They have launched a contract magazine “Your Family” which is being distributed by Woolworths. The magazine is produced by Redwood and is aimed at parents. It is subtly branded NSPCC and has some messages about good parenting. But in every other way it looks like a mainstream women’s magazine and the NSPCC are hoping it will become self funding.

Barriers to Better Working with the Media

All the charities with whom we conducted in depth interviews cited limited resources as a restriction in gaining media coverage. This was particularly the case for the smaller charities. Michael Roberts has no staff except himself with responsibility for PR. Lorna Grounsell has to juggle her PR role with other responsibilities for outreach and participation. She also identified a need for training. Having never had a PR role before, she’s doing a lot of stuff by instinct.

In our survey we asked respondents what would most help them in their dealings with the media. Many wanted media training “to recognise news, stories build relationships with local media and recognise what would be a bigger news story that could go regional or national”. Others wanted the media to adopt a different agenda being more open to “good news stories”.

Volunteer Recruitment

In our survey of voluntary sector PRs, 24% of charities said their main aim in approaching the media was to increase volunteers. Respondents felt that the media image of a volunteer was of a “middle aged, middle class do-gooder” but they would like the media to imply that opportunities are available for people of any background, age and ethnicity. In the experience of respondents, personal case histories of volunteers have been most successful in increasing volunteers.

Some of the charities have used the media to help recruit volunteers namely Vitalise and Mencap. Vitalise always needs volunteers to provide companionship to disabled holiday-makers staying at their centres. Each volunteer needs to give up a week of their time and to submit to a CRB check. Vitalise tried to recruit volunteers by getting features in newspapers and magazines. Emma Ward offered real stories of volunteers in order to get coverage. She also wrote letters to the Editors of national and local newspapers. The letter was an appeal for volunteers and was published in local press.

Mencap have recently run a media recruitment campaign for volunteers to help learning disabled children take part in mainstream after school activities. The recruitment campaign was funded by a Blue Peter appeal. Francesca's team has used regional and local newspapers to get volunteers and this has been successful. They also had a letter published in the Daily Mail, appealing for volunteers.

Interviews with media professionals about charities

We conducted 30 interviews with media professionals. Our aim was to interview media professionals who had some responsibility for content, across all media sectors including contract magazines, commercial radio and free newspapers. Amongst others, we interviewed freelance writers, TV development producers and news journalists. Having developed a list of the sectors we wanted to cover, we approached potential respondents by e-mail. Around 20% of those we e-mailed agreed to be interviewed. Many of the interviews were conducted in person while some were done on the phone. Interviews were conducted by Penelope Gibbs, Flora Jenkins, Steve Palmer and Roy Addison. All interviewees were asked the same questions. Where possible we have named sources though some interviewees wished to remain anonymous. A list of interviewees are contained in the appendix.

How often and how do charities contact the media?

There were big contrasts in how often our media interviewees were contacted by charities. Those who worked in local/national newspapers/BBC local radio/broadcast news were contacted frequently while anyone outside these sectors was contacted very little. The two interviewees who worked in TV development (one on BBC factual programmes, the other Head of Development for a medium size independent production company) were contacted by charities once in a blue moon.

The Head of Development for an independent production company had been approached by the charity Mental Health Media a couple of years back. The charity had wanted to help develop non-stigmatising programmes about mental health issues. The two organisations worked in partnership but the ideas were not commissioned.

Other who were contacted very seldom were: Helen Maher, Deputy Editor of Tesco magazine “hardly ever”; Antonia Blyth of Mizz “not often”; Katie Ross, feature writer for a Scottish news agency; the Community Affairs Correspondent of a major broadcaster; Deborah Sherwood, Deputy Features Editor, Sunday Mirror “maybe once every two months”. Nick Machin, Acting News Editor of the South Wales Echo said the newspaper received around 3000 e-mail press releases a day, of which around a tiny proportion were from the voluntary sector.

Even Alison Benjamin Deputy Editor of Society Guardian felt that she was missing out on some good charity news stories because the relevant charities did not contact her.

All those who said they were contacted very little by charities were absolutely open to being contacted more often. They couldn't guarantee that contact would result in coverage for the charity, but said if the story was good and timely they had a strong chance.

How the voluntary sector approaches the media

It's clear from our interviews that the e-mailed generic press release (sometimes followed up with a phone call) still dominates Voluntary Sector PR communication. This suits some media outlets but is a waste of time for others. Each press release appears to be sent to a long list of journalists and producers. But interviewees like Antonia Blyth who work on magazines implied that they skim read many of the e-mails that came in because they were of no use to them. Jane Flynn, Planning Producer on Five News thought that only 10% of the press releases she receives from charities are of any relevance to their programme output.

Richard and Judy's forward planning desk also pointed out that, "We get a lot of information sent to us from charities - most of which doesn't get very far. One of the reasons being Ofcom regulations". They interpret these regulations as meaning that the programme can't focus solely on one charity's campaign. As a result, to maintain unbiased coverage, they always try to include three charities in one package or list three issue-related charities together on the show's website.

What approach would Media professionals like?

Here the only rule is horses for courses. While those who work in news quite like to receive e-mail press releases, others feel an e-mail must be followed up with a phone call to have impact. But the timing of the call is key. Many media professionals would rather not be called very soon after the release has been sent. Others don't want a generic press release at all. They want a personalised e-mail or phone call from the PR, with an idea/suggestion particular to them.

Succinctness in conveying the story is essential. Orion Ray Jones of EasyJet magazine says "if they don't provide what we want in the first three sentences – written or verbal – than that's the end of it. Most phone calls end in about thirty seconds". Hanne Knudsen, a producer at LBC, spends five seconds scanning each press release. The Community Affairs Correspondent for a national broadcaster also goes for the first few lines rule – if his attention is not caught by the first paragraph, he bins the release.

Jane Barnes, Deputy Editor of Sun Woman does want to see good press releases but does not want her inbox clogged up with jpps. She wanted to know when the event is happening – if it's in three months time, they can diary it anyway, if its for the next day, she clearly needs to know.

Timing is key to Alison Benjamin. She is Deputy Editor of Society Guardian which came out every Wednesday in the G2 section. She does not want to be approached on a Monday about an event/announcement which is happening two days later. It's unlikely to get covered because they will already have planned the whole of the relevant Guardian Society and don't have time to prepare a good feature in a day. Ideally they want a couple of weeks notice.

Similarly Mike Pearce of FHM wants people to say in the first two sentences why their idea would make a fantastic FHM feature.

An ITV daytime producer found that too often charity press releases had a confusing and convoluted message. He also wanted charities to be ready to offer up several good case studies – they wouldn't run a story without access to a case study.

In the case of some media outlets, power over content is shared between different people and the way the system works, it may make more sense for the PR to contact the provider rather than the commissioner.

Take a Break magazine is reliant on real life stories. Though the magazine does look at press releases and ideas that are sent to them, most of their real life stories come from news agencies, freelance journalists or from the readers themselves.

Adam McDonald, Commissioning Editor for daytime on Channel 4, said it was not appropriate for charities to approach him direct. He was keen on seeing ideas on community/voluntary themes, but those ideas had to come to him from independent production companies.

Anne-Marie Minhall, News Editor of Classic FM, said the content of Classic FM news was supplied by Independent Radio News (part of ITN) and thus she had no flexibility to add her own stories.

Phone/e-mail Contacts

Few people in the sector have an extensive database of voluntary sector contacts. Very few, except those writing on social affairs, or those in the regional press, had personal relationships with charity PRs. Though many recommended to charities that they should build up such contacts. The Community Affairs Correspondent said he wanted a personal relationship with someone he trusted – he wasn't interested in purely e-mail contact.

Mike Pearce of FHM said he had no key charity contacts. If they needed to contact a charity they would start with "someone famous like Oxfam". The features editor of a Sunday newspaper magazine said she only had really good contacts for cancer charities.

Duncan Walker of BBC Online thinks good targeting is about forging personal relationships. This is supported by Nick Machin of the South Wales Echo who said that Help the Aged used to have local press officer who had lots of friends on the paper and so found it easier to get coverage. If the weather got really cold, the paper would approach this contact for a case study and some information about how older people were coping.

Targeting

Many of those we spoke to were extremely critical of the way voluntary sectors PRs target them – both the mechanism by which they were approached and the content. Though many in news did look at press releases, they frequently had limited power over the news agenda for their organisation. This was set according to the wires, the editorial meeting, and their media organisation's forward planning diary. If a charity can get their announcement/event in a news diary or on the wires, they are almost guaranteed coverage. If they send the same press release directly to a programme, they may get coverage but it will be more difficult to get their message noticed.

For those outside the news arena, the generic press release is of limited, if any, use. All those involved in features, whether on newspapers or magazines, want to be doing exclusives. Ideally they want to publish stories and feature interviewees which are in no other rival publication. So, when they receive a generic press release, they will only "use" it if they can think of a way of getting an exclusive feature out of it. Not surprisingly, many writers and editors cannot be bothered to do this with most of the press releases they receive. If something in it sparks their interest they may pursue the sender via e-mail or phone. Mike Pearce says that only 0.01% of stories in FHM come out of press releases.

It's too simplistic to suggest feature writers/producers are lazy and want everything on a plate. But most of them are inundated with press releases (some get 300 every day) and ideas and need some kind of filter. They will dismiss press releases and any other written communications unless they can see the relevance to their publication/programme within the first few seconds.

What all media professionals say they would like and hardly ever get, particularly from voluntary sector PRs, are original, exclusive ideas tailor-made for their media outlet.

They don't really expect PRs to approach them with these ready-made ideas, but they would like to feel that the pitcher has an understanding of their programme/publication. In reality they are often approached by people who seem to know nothing at all about the magazine/programme they're contacting. Whatever programme/website/newspaper they work for, media professionals have some pride in their work. They are flattered by those who understand their outlet and resigned to/alienated by the many who don't. Anne-Marie Minhall, head of News for Classic FM radio often gets called by PRs who say "I'm sure it'll be of interest to your viewers". Its not a good start.

Deborah Docherty of Take a Break says lots of PRs approach her with stories relating to celebrities. But Take a Break only runs real life stories – they don't ever feature celebrities.

Antonia Blyth is a feature writer for Mizz magazine. Her magazine is targeted at 10-14 year old girls and is in a competitive market. All ideas pitched to her

must appeal to this particular target – ie they must either feature girls of this age or appeal to their interests. Lots of the press releases Mizz receives do not have a teenage angle. Many of the approaches are about fundraising – these are irrelevant to Mizz. Antonia contrasts commercial PRs with their voluntary sector counterparts. In general the former are more professional, generous and imaginative.

Mike Pearce of FHM says most charity ideas “fall on deaf ears” for two reasons: because they pitch the same idea to many magazines, yet all FHM ideas have to be exclusive; and because the “treatments are not thought through by charities”. An exception to this is a children’s charity who pitched a story about African child soldiers and their re-habilitation. The story was exclusive and Mike felt that the charity had really understood FHM’s needs.

The Editor of a Sunday Newspaper Magazine said she does not want the content of an article to be just an advertorial for a charity. They want their stories to be different from everyone else’s and thus tend to avoid “weeks” just in case their competitors are covering the same.

This was a point repeated by a member of the forward planning desk on Richard and Judy. They stressed that they were a news reactive programme and, in their opinion, awareness weeks were not part of the news agenda. Yet they receive up to ten releases a week from charities asking them to cover different awareness weeks.

Rik Martin of Century 105 FM said too many e-mails they receive are about trivial events like charity abseils. Rik thinks targeting should involve more quality, less quantity. Charities should not think that because they send out an e-mail every week, they are more likely to get coverage. Most e-mails are ignored.

Few of those who contact Hanne Knudsen of LBC appear to understand the constraints of her programme. The Nick Ferrari Show is a phone-in which features three “talking points” per programme. Each talking point must be topical – based on that day’s or a news event from the day before. All set up interviews are with “real people”. Frequently Hanne is offered interviews with chief executives or sent press releases. None of these are much use to her. She would love voluntary sector PRs to ring up suggesting topical ideas for the programme, or case studies which relate to the day’s news.

Jayne Atherton of Metro North West says charities frequently get their targeting of Metro wrong because they don’t understand that Metro does not have any roving reporters. It gets all its stories from wires/press releases. But many press releases are about an event/happening which Metro has no ability to cover. She thinks PRs miss a trick in not thinking harder about targeting features desks. The latter are always looking for good human interest stories while news desks are not. Charities could be more savvy about exploiting existing news stories and offer more “reactive” press releases with good quotes.

Orion Ray-Jones, who publishes three contract magazines including the easyJet magazine, is particularly critical of PRs, whether from the voluntary sector or commercial sector: “What irritates me...is that so many people who contact us seeking to place stories have not done their research. They don’t seem to have read our magazines, or our websites which would tell them what kind of stories we write, what angles we look for – the website goes back with archive stories for over a year, so there’s no excuse. It’s as if they have picked the name of the magazine out of the hat, without really checking what we are or what our readership is about”. Orion feels that PRs from the voluntary sector have an added problem “they think because their cause is a good one – and it often is – that that’s all that is needed. They don’t seem to realise that journalists have hearts of stone when a deadline is threatening and they don’t understand that what they have is not what we need”.

A BBC local radio breakfast show producer says voluntary sector PRs are very variable. Their biggest mistake is to think events like a fundraising carwash are newsworthy. They aren’t.

Even Alison Benjamin, Deputy Editor of Society Guardian felt that charities could target her better. Frequently they just send in their latest press release without suggesting how it might be used. Society Guardian featured certain regular slots, like Public Inquiry and Grassroots, but charities seldom call to suggest a story/interviewee to fill one of those slots. The only slot they do target is the interview slot. But Society Guardian does not interview Chief Executives just because of their position. There has to be a peg or an over-riding reason for that person to be interviewed.

Nicholas Helen (then Social Affairs Correspondent of the Sunday Times) felt that charities should not target news journalists with “propaganda”. Newspapers are not lobbying tools. If charities want to lobby they should lobby the government and civil servants and fund legal test cases. Newspapers want journalistic stories and he ignores the vast majority of the press releases he gets because they are not real stories.

Regionality

For those who work in regional/local media, good pitching has an extra dimension. Though a fabulous national story might make it onto their agenda on merit, the vast majority of stories must have a local angle. That angle may just be a statistic which applies to that area, or a local case study. But many charities appear not to include either in the communications they send.

Hanne Knudsen of LBC says charities often offer her interviewees who do not live in the London area. She can technically use them but she wouldn’t.

Nick Machin of the South Wales Echo said localness really made a difference. They are much more likely to use a press release if it has a Cardiff slant.

In contrast Jayne Atherton, News Editor of Metro North West, says they are often offered minor regional stories which are inappropriate to them. They are a national newspaper with a regional slant, not a regional newspaper.

Contacting Charities

The key reason for contacting charities is to ask for a particular interviewee or case study. Nowadays the trend is for all feature articles and many news ones too, to be fully illustrated with quotes and interviews with the people who have experienced/been effected by that event/condition. The appetite for contacts/case studies is immense and the voluntary sector is seen as a potential source of them.

Another important reason for contacting charities is to get a quote from/interview with the charity's spokesperson/Chief Executive on a breaking news story. For example, Richard and Judy's planning desk tend to only approach charities when they need to call in an expert to discuss a news story and provide the facts and figures.

The third main reason for contacting charities is to find out/check a piece of information, if it can't be found on the charity's website. Again this is mainly relevant to news.

How helpful do they find charities when they contact them?

Nearly all our interviewees were critical of charities' response when contacted. The key concerns were

- 1) Availability. Many media outlets do not work a 9 to 5 day. Any programmes/publications with a news bent need to get hold of PR staff in the evening, during the night and in the early hours. They frequently can't. They ring the main charity number and can't get hold of the press office, or ring the press office and get an answer phone message with no mobile phone details on the message. Even when they do get hold of someone from the charity they often say they can't help out of hours. This issue aggravated Hanne Knudsen of LBC. Her programme starts at 7 am and attempts to be topical. The main ideas for the programme and the interviewees are set up the previous afternoon and evening and in the small hours of the morning. Frequently Hanne or her researcher call organisations including charities out of hours. Most of the time Hanne does not already have mobile numbers. She rings a press office/main office phone number if she can get hold of one. If the voicemail has no further contact details, Hanne will not leave a message. She used to try leaving a message, but it hardly ever got returned in time for her to meet her deadline. So now the charity which gets coverage is the one she can get hold of directly. Michael Wilson of Five News says if a charity wants coverage on their bulletins they should provide footage and photos and be available and amenable to being interviewed at the convenience of the

news team in the location the producers choose. They cannot sit in their office and say they will only be interviewed there on the phone.

- 2) Speed of response. Media professionals complain of charities coming back to them weeks after they put a request in. As they point out, unless it's there by the deadline, a case study/piece of information is useless. Jayne Atherton of Metro NW complained of this. She said charity PRs don't seem to understand deadlines. And they are slowed down by the bureaucracy of their organisations. Many don't seem to be able to issue a statement/give a quote without having to check it with others. A Senior Broadcast Journalist for BBC online says that he has left calls on the answer-machines of charity PRs and waited 2 days for the call to be returned. By which time, of course, it is too late. The producer on an ITV daytime programme, who contacts charities regularly, often found that no one at the charity knew anything about the press release he was calling about and simply didn't respond to his requests.
- 3) Confidentiality. This is a big issue with journalists and producers. When they interview people for articles/programmes their ideal is for that person to be named, and their identity to be clear ie in camera not pixillated/using their real voice in the case of radio. A consistent gripe about charities is that they are too protective of their clients. Either they don't want to give any access to their clients or they want their identities to be hidden, or their interview to be monitored by a charity "minder". (See below for more detail).
- 4) Stance vis a vis government policy. A complaint of some news journalists is that charities are now too close to the government. Many charities receive government funds. Journalists feel that this makes charities unwilling to be openly critical of government policy, even when they are so "off the record".
- 5) Lack of case studies. It's very difficult for most publications to use press releases "wholesale". But they can use a case study associated with the press release. Some journalists complain that when they ring up in response to a press release, the charity frequently has no case studies to offer or says it will take a couple of days to get them. For a busy journalist this immediately "kills" the story. Shani Ryan, Breakfast Producer for BBC Radio Essex was sent a press release about a group who were dispensing hot chocolate on a Friday night in an attempt to stop yobbery in the town centre. Once the station asked them for interviewees, the organisation would not put forward anyone to speak. The Community Affairs Correspondent of a major broadcaster was working on a story about illegal immigrants who had been abused by gangmasters. He contacted Refugee Action and the Red Cross. Both charities said they knew no such cases. He felt frustrated because he was convinced illegal immigrants had been abused and felt the charities should have this information.

- 6) Fear of certain sectors of the media. Jane Barnes, Deputy Editor, Sun Woman said some charities she phones are startled and appear to think that the Sun is out to get them. She's not and is really interested in good human interest stories. If the Sun runs a charity story they she thinks they have amazing power to effect change – they ran a piece on adoption which led to an increase in adoption applications in the UK
- 7) Poor subject knowledge. Jane Flynn, News Planning Producer, Five News found that external PR agencies often didn't know enough about the charity they were representing and didn't have the relevant facts and figures to hand. She found this frustrating when rushing to get a package together for a news bulletin. On the whole she felt that charities with (responsive) in-house PRs had better contacts and subject knowledge.

Caution around Interviews/Filming/Recording

This is the biggest bone of contention for many media professionals. People in the voluntary sector are gatekeepers to clients and others who often have fantastic human interest stories. For many media professionals, access to these clients is essential if they are to feature the charity concerned. No access, no coverage. Equally, when given access, the conditions imposed are frequently unacceptable/onorous for the media. It is against BBC editorial policy for interviewees to be allowed to be anonymous without strong reasons. Other media guidelines are less strict though all media professionals would prefer an interviewee to be identified.

Many of the media professionals we interviewed complained that access was unnecessarily restricted. Katy Ross who writes features for Capital News Agency in Edinburgh said that she was frequently rebuffed by charities when she asked for fairly straightforward case studies. The charities often just say that the person concerned would not want to speak about their experience eg about having breast cancer. But Katy suspects that they are double guessing their client's feelings rather than actually asking them. This makes Katy reluctant to contact charities to ask for case studies. She find solicitors far readier to put her in touch with potential interviewees. She regularly calls her solicitor contacts. If the solicitor has a client who has a promising story, the solicitor contacts that client to ask whether they are interested in being interviewed and leaves it to the client to persue the opportunity as they wish.

A BBC TV producer recounted a frustrating experience when making a film about domestic violence. She wanted to film a call centre run by a charity. The call centre took calls from victims and potential victims of domestic violence. When she and the crew got there, they were told that they could not film any of the telephone counsellors taking a real call for fear of revealing something about the call being made. The producer suggested that the material would be edited such that the caller could not possibly be identified

but the charity still refused to let them film “real” action. In the end the team reluctantly filmed a mocked up call. This footage was later dropped from the programme because it looked false. The producer was exasperated by the attitude of the charity and felt that their caution was misplaced. She saw herself as a responsible programme maker who would have ensured that the footage did not lead to the identification of the caller. However she had a good and contrasting experience with another charity. This charity provided therapy for the perpetrators of domestic violence and were happy for the crew to film a group discussion – for real. The producer also found the police easy to deal with and understanding of the need for open access when filming.

The producer on an ITV daytime show felt that too often, the largest charities imposed too many rules and regulations regarding filming. He found that the size of these organisations often made them slow to make decisions and it was difficult to get final sign off on broadcast projects. This led him to seek and work with smaller, responsive, “more amenable” charities.

Antonia Blyth of Mizz has been frustrated when trying to find case studies. She wanted to interview a young girl refugee. Antonia contacted the Refugee Council, but they never provided her with an interviewee. In the end she found the right interviewee through an article in the Guardian. She often gets hold of case studies through other journalists - they will nearly always pass on contact details to other journalists. She also uses news agencies to find particular case studies. If they provide her with contact details of the kind of interviewee she wants, they get a small fee.

Exclusivity

Nearly all journalists want to write or at least cover issues as originally as possible. It's a competitive world and they need to offer their readers/viewers/listeners something distinctive. Even news journalists are affected by this. Though there is a news agenda, and no journalist can ignore big events and announcements, they want to find an exclusive angle/quote/interviewee to make their treatment stand out. Ideally they want to find good new stories.

This desire for exclusivity and an original angle means that the charity PR approach – the generic press release – is often in opposition to media needs. The generic press release is, by definition, the same story sent to every media professional. Many media professionals do get stories out of them, but most would rather others were not also running the same story.

For some media professionals exclusivity is essential. Those in TV development cannot propose ideas for programmes that have been done before. Woman's Hour is not allowed to interview the same people as have been on that day's Today.

Magazines like Take a Break do not feature any real life stories that have been in other magazines. The deputy features of Take a Break said many

charities did not seem to understand this basic requirement – that anything featured by the magazine had to be exclusive.

The Community Affairs correspondent of a national broadcaster was very proud of his record in investigating original stories. He was dismissive of the news diaries and the way programmes tended to follow them. If he was asked to do a particular story he would, but he prefers chasing original leads. So charities sending him press releases just annoy him and they all go in the bin. If, on the other hand, a charity wanted to call him to discuss a great news story to which they wanted to give him exclusive access, he would jump at it.

Guardian Society is only out once a week. Many people buy the Guardian on Wednesday in order to read that section. The other day a charity contacted Alison Benjamin asking her to cover a story the following week – it was embargoed till the Wednesday the section was to come out. The story was good, the relevant people were interviewed and the article written. The Sunday before the article was due to appear, she saw the story in the Observer – sister newspaper to the Guardian. Guardian's Society's article had to be pulled and a new story found from scratch. Alison Benjamin was irritated by this. The charity had broken their own embargo and did not understand that both stories could not run.

Examples of Charities the Media felt had a good PR Operation

Alison Benjamin is impressed by the NSPCC. A media officer from the charity often called her, suggesting ideas for one of her regular slots. Alison felt this PR understood the section and put work and creativity into pitching.

The Editor of a Sunday Newspaper Magazine admired the PR operation of breast cancer charities and said support from Estee Lauder has been helpful to all magazines.

Hanne Knudsen of LBC was impressed by the British Psychological Society. They have a great database of psychologists specialising in different subjects and are always available.

Jayne Atherton of Metro NW rated the Aids/HIV charities like the Terence Higgins Trust because they are good at exploiting the news agenda. As soon as Chris Smith announced he was HIV positive they were on the phone offering their own comments.

Antonia Blyth of Mizz mentioned the PR for PETA – People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals. The PR wanted Mizz to run an article on wearing fur. She was helpful and incredibly persistent. She rang up again and again until Mizz agreed to do the feature. In the end Antonia wrote a feature on wearing fur – for and against.

Nick Machin of the South Wales Echo had struck up a good relationship with the RNLI Welsh branch. They had come in to meet the team and the newspaper has agreed to do a media training workshop for them.

Perry Austin-Clarke of Newsquest Bradford rated the local fundraiser for Marie-Curie. This fundraiser apparently understands what makes a great story and engages in a dialogue with journalists about how he can help them.

Michael Wilson of FIVE news cited Sane as a truly professional charity media operation. When a relevant news story breaks, the Sane office rings up all the news desks offering Marjorie Wallace as an interviewee. She is then happy to go to Millbank and do a string of interviews/discussions for different outlets. She delivers.

Katy Ross felt one PR had the right idea. She sent a press release about a new centre that had opened up for people who needed cataract operations. The PR sent a generic press release but followed it up with a phone call to ask whether Katy was interested. Katy said she needed an exclusive interviewee who had had a cataract operation and the PR provided her with a great young woman who had.

Volunteers and Volunteering

Did the media volunteer?

Only two of our interviewees volunteered themselves, though some had done in the past and a few had colleagues who did. Perry Austin-Clarke of Bradford Newsquest sat on the local Common Purpose board. Alison Benjamin helped children in a local primary school with their reading. Alison said that the Guardian Group encouraged all its employees to volunteer and organised volunteer placements for them. Many of our interviewees were not opposed to the idea of volunteering in principle but said they were way too busy to do it. Michael Wilson, Head of Newsgathering for FIVE news said Sky (his employer) had an excellent employee volunteering scheme but that “journalists aren’t the kind of people who do volunteering”. Indeed most of those working in broadcast felt their shifts prohibited them from volunteering.

A senior web news journalist said he didn’t volunteer but members of his staff worked for the Samaritans or mentored teenagers on a nearby estate. “They definitely bring back experiences to feed into editorial meetings”.

It’s clear that if staff volunteer, the experience does sometimes give them ideas for articles/programmes. The Editor of a Sunday Newspaper Magazine was involved in a charity which helped children with reading. She brought an idea based on this to a planning meeting and an article was generated as a result

What was their image of volunteers and volunteering?

Our media interviewees had a range of very different images of volunteers. They ranged from “middle class and middle aged” (Antonia Blyth), to “low paid, well educated sorts slumming it, ex teachers, anti-capitalists” (Deborah Sherwood). “I suppose I think they are either 20 somethings or older retired people”. Many felt that the image of the volunteer had improved. The Deputy Editor of a Sunday Newspaper Magazine said “the sandal-wearing image has gone...Now the volunteer is likely to be in their twenties or retired”. One ITV producer knew a lot about volunteering as a result of his extensive experience of working with charities on his programme: “Volunteering isn’t all do-goodery. It’s also about what you can get out of it...Now you can even volunteer without leaving your home”

But perhaps the strongest association media professionals had with volunteering is that it would take up a lot of time. This came out in their reasons for not doing it themselves and in their assumptions as to whether their readers/listeners would be interested in volunteering.

Did they think their readers/listeners/viewers were interested in volunteering?

Again a mixed reaction and very much depending on the kind of volunteering story offered. Helen Maher said readers of Tesco magazine would only be

interested in it if “it’s for something close to their heart/their best mate died of it”. Antonia Blyth of Mizz would be interested in featuring girl volunteers aged 12-14 but not those outside this age group. For Mike Pearce, Features Editor of FHM, the possibility of readers being interested in volunteering was “always remote” but they had done a feature on men who did volunteered to get out of the rat race about four years ago.

Many of the journalists and editors we spoke to felt their readers/listeners wouldn’t be interested in volunteering because they had busy lives and wouldn’t have time.

One of the few national journalists to say the opposite was Jane Barnes, Deputy Editor of Sun Woman. She felt her readers were really interested in volunteering “especially young mums with time on their hands”.

Charities pitching volunteering stories?

All our interviewees were open to running/developing volunteering stories as long as it was the right story for them. Many had not been pitched to at all or very infrequently (*“We are contacted very rarely about this so you’d know better than me why they don’t. Maybe they just put adverts in papers and hope for the best”* Deborah Sherwood, Deputy Features Editor, Sunday Mirror). Many interviewees were very particular about the kind of stories they were interested in. The most restricted was Helen Maher of Tesco magazine, who said she could only run a volunteering story if it related to Tesco’s charity of the year - Help the Aged.

Alison Benjamin of the Guardian thought volunteering stories offered were generally dull and that there were too many similar volunteering initiatives - “that a bunch of lawyers go to volunteer in a school is not interesting”. They are happy to feature volunteers in the context of other stories but stories focussed on volunteering had to be truly new and different to succeed. She also had some doubts about the government’s drive to get more volunteers – should people in poor communities be encouraged to volunteer? Was there not a danger of exploitation?

The Deputy Editor of a Sunday Newspaper Magazine gets pitched to occasionally to run a volunteer story. She is particularly keen on celebrity related stories but others “are not targeted well and often the case studies are not appropriate”. Deborah Sherwood of the Sunday Mirror was also keen on celebrity related stories. She said that if someone like Kate Moss was photographed doing voluntary work it would probably be front-page news.

Hanne Knudsen, producer of LBC’s Nick Ferrari show said no one had recently tried to pitch her a Year of the Volunteer story but she was open to doing one – as long as the story was currently in the news.

Take A Break, who very seldom do charity related stories, had been successfully pitched to by CSV. CSV suggested that some of the magazine’s staff should volunteer themselves. Take a Break asked readers what the staff

should do, got only a handful of “unsuitable” suggestions, but set up the item anyway. CSV arranged for a group of journalists to help decorate a centre for children with behavioural difficulties and did a feature on this.

Katy Ross of Capital News Agency didn't think she had done any stories about volunteering in particular, but she had done an article about a woman who cares for a Iraqi with bad burns. The woman gets no money for her help so is technically an informal volunteer. Katy had never heard of the term informal volunteer.

Elizabeth Senior, Development Producer, is open to ideas/information about volunteers, as long as it is not “too worthy”. No one has tried to pitch to her about the subject.

Michael Wilson of FIVE news said too many stories about volunteering were parochial or trivial. If offered a great story about an individual which had a national impact, they'd be happy to run it. In January they did a couple of stories about people who had travelled East to help with the Tsunami.

The Community Affairs correspondent for a national broadcaster said he had no objection to volunteering stories in principle but in practice they often seemed to lack “an edge”. If he was given an exclusive on a volunteer who had done something truly amazing, he would do it.

Catherine Quinn, a freelance feature writer, was the only national journalist to have done a lot of stories on volunteering. She specialises in employment issues and has written about the value of volunteering in helping develop skills. She has been asked to do these stories by commissioning editors, and had found charities very helpful in supplying case studies etc.

The interviewees who felt they already did a lot about volunteering were those who worked for BBC local radio, or on regional and local newspapers. Perry Austin-Clarke of Bradford Newsquest said the Bradford Telegraph was a big supporter of two awards for local volunteers – the Lord Mayor's award for helping achieve community harmony and the Chantal Bleu award for Bradford's bravest. Shani Ryan of BBC Essex said she was inundated with requests to do volunteering stories and did a lot of stories about it – one that came to mind was a story on gap year volunteering. All these interviewees felt their clients were very interested in volunteering – both as a subject to read/hear about, but also as something they might do. Shani said her mum is 59 and semi-retired and she wants to volunteer to help those affected by the tsunami.

Interviews with Commercial PR Companies about both sectors

What services do PR agencies offer charities?

We interviewed ten external PR agencies. The services they offered varied greatly. Those agencies which specialised in the voluntary sector tended to offer a more complete, total communications service, developing long term media strategies. Those agencies who occasionally took on the odd charity account tended to concentrate on more focused, short term campaigns and events.

All those interviewed reported that charities arrived with a basic brief and that the agency's first job was to develop a more thorough, sophisticated brief, schedule and strategy. This meant identifying key aims, messages and target audiences. Many of the consultants interviewed felt that the voluntary sector had a poor understanding of the media and how to use it for optimum value.

As part of their work with charities, most consultants felt that they had provided media training, some formally (as part of a charged service) and others informally (free support offered on ad hoc basis). Patricia Orr, Chief Executive of Third Sector PR, found that many of her charity clients needed media education and help. One Account Director of another agency, specialising in voluntary sector accounts, felt that charities didn't understand "how precarious PR work is; they don't understand that we can't control journalists".

Others interviewees told us they often ended up training charity spokespeople and CEOs in the basics of how to deal with media enquiries and interviews. Fiona Fountain Associates, who works predominantly with charities, had trained one charity's local volunteers in media relations so that they could handle the charity's local press enquiries themselves.

Those agencies who worked almost entirely with charities tended to offer a more complete service. For one consultancy that meant that they began with a communications audit – looking at the charity's internal and external communications. Others spoke of defining "a mission and a vision", "establishing core values", "evaluating the charity's brand". One Associate Director stated that for a PR strategy to be truly successful, the charity's communications had to be integrated with other functions – such as fundraising and campaigning. Two of the agencies interviewed provided a service training in-house charity PR teams, establishing media strategies for them to manage independently.

Most of those agencies interviewed had had some contact with charity accounts through corporate social responsibility programmes. Either the PR agency had developed their own CSR scheme (as is the case with Weber Shandwick Worldwide) or they had come to work with the charity as a result of one of their corporate clients' CSR strategies. (Issues raised regarding CSR, PR agencies, charities and the media are reported later in this document)

Few of those interviewed had worked providing charity clients with a “crisis management” service. Those with PR crisis experience felt that the wrong approach was not to not respond and to issue “no comment”. Patricia Orr, Third Sector PR advised her clients to put out a reactive statement fast, “keep it short and sweet and focus on the facts”. She also made sure to put the charity CEO through a rehearsal of “worst case, Paxman-style questions”. Another Account Director felt that a crisis, if managed with “a robust rebuttal”, could create extensive, valuable media coverage and spark public debate.

Are charities paying for external PR agency services?

Half of the agencies interviewed charged charities a fee for their services. These tended to be the agencies which specialised in voluntary and public sector accounts. However they did operate a two-tier system with higher rates for commercial clients and reduced fees for the voluntary sector. All of these agencies also had one or two pro bono charity clients.

Those agencies which offered pro bono work to charities tended to be those who spent the majority of their time working on consumer and corporate accounts. Mostly these agencies took on pro bono accounts on an ad hoc basis.

One agency interviewed had established a system allowing employees to select one pro bono charity account each year. Another agency, Weber Shandwick, one of the largest international PR agencies, offers PR bursaries to small charities via a partnership with the Media Trust. This is part of the agency’s “corporate philanthropy” strategy.

In most cases these agencies had met the charities and had offered pro bono work because of an introduction from an agency employee or because a corporate client had asked the agency for a favour. One agency had taken on a pro bono account, as the charity could offer the agency (and its city clients) access to their royal patron. One consultant interviewed had worked on a paid project for a charity, had become involved in the charity’s work and had subsequently agreed to continue working for the organisation for free. Brendan May, Head of CSR at Weber Shandwick, found that even after each of their three month long charity PR projects had officially ended “a number of our staff pledged to continue to provide PR counsel on an ad hoc basis”.

Nearly all the agencies we interviewed had been approached by charities asking for free PR support. Charities were selected if one of the PR consultants were particularly interested in “the challenge”, “the issues” or if the charity was “news relevant”. The criteria for selection set by one agency was that a charity had to have no media relations function of its own. Weber Shandwick specified that “any charitable organisation without a dedicated member of staff in a communications role and an annual turnover of less than £2million” could apply for their bursary scheme.

Two of the agencies interviewed said that they took on pro bono charity accounts if there was a promise of paid work in the future. One agency were angry that they had worked hard for a charity for free on the promise of chargeable work in the near future, only to find that the charity moved on at the end of the project to find another agency willing to offer them pro bono work. They felt that their goodwill had been abused in this case.

How do external PR agencies find working with charities?

Most of the consultants interviewed found that charities had been eager to support their media strategies. Karolina Shaw, Senior Account Executive, Weber Shandwick had found that charities they'd worked with had "bent over backwards to help us".

But, as in our media professionals survey, many PRs also felt that charities could be slow to respond to requests, failed to understand the importance of media deadlines and could be reluctant to share contacts with journalists and broadcasters. Many who were interviewed felt that charities didn't respond fast enough to the news agenda. One consultant felt that charities were suspicious of PRs and didn't trust them to treat their case studies or issues sensitively enough.

All those consultants who spent the majority of their agency time working on commercial accounts found working on charity accounts to be a positive, enjoyable, rewarding experience. One freelance consultant felt that it had been "both rewarding and annoying" – she had enjoyed "making a real difference" but had found that some of the charity's working practices had been slow and frustrating.

Kat Byles of Authentic PR stressed that she had a background in "fast paced, commercial PR" but had found that Mel Young (founder of an international street soccer charity) had been as dynamic and energetic as her. As a result they trusted each other, worked together closely and had achieved plenty of media activity and support.

Some of the consultants felt that many charities didn't appreciate the value of PR. Xavier Adam, Managing Director of The Adam Media Consultancy said, "When you think that one advert for one day in one broadsheet can cost £50,000 to £60,000, PR really can be a very cost effective way of increasing awareness for a charity". Another Account Director described charities treating PR as a "country cousin". He went on to explain how it was still hard for charities to justify PR expenditure as there are never any guarantees of a return on that investment, in terms of securing media coverage.

All those interviewed refer to "managing expectations". They felt that most charities did not have a realistic expectation of what a PR strategy could achieve in the media. Fiona Fountain pointed out that "those charities with a fixed idea of the coverage they want, always end up disappointed". Another Senior Account Director felt that "charities think the aims of their particular charity will speak to all universally". Several interviewees felt that charities

were often too emotionally involved in the cause to have a realistic expectation of media interest.

Many agency representatives also felt that charities placed too much emphasis on some areas of the media – front pages, national press, soap storylines for example. One Associate Director found that “charities too often focus on column inches, not looking at who they are trying to reach”. Several consultants felt that there was real value in charities being willing to develop new PR avenues – be that concentrated trade press campaigns, putting speakers on the conference circuit, online presence, university seminars, focusing on local or regional media or setting up public lectures. “I tell every charity that there’s no quick fix. You just aren’t going to get a front page straight away. Getting a front page is not everything, there are other places to go” Patricia Orr, Chief Executive, Third Sector PR.

Those PR account managers that had worked with coalitions or groups of charities had found it difficult to bring everyone on board and get them “on message”. Many of the PRs found the relationships between charities “baffling”, “confusing” and demanding to work with. However one agency had found that after their particular project had ended, the group of charities involved had continued to communicate and work together.

One consultant felt that “the quality of staff in charity media departments is a big issue”. Another consultant found there was a notable difference in working alongside in-house PRs who had actually experienced working in the media. “They have to think like journalists”. Several found that in-house PRs were not willing to share their “PR assets” – be they media contacts, case studies or access to the charity’s celebrities.

Others had enjoyed working with in-house communications teams. Fiona Fountain had found working with in-house PR departments to be a very positive experience. The only problems she had encountered were with charity CEOs who had no media knowledge or experience.

How do PR agencies approach the media?

All the consultants interviewed stressed that they couldn’t rely on goodwill to achieve coverage for a charity. As Gilly Fox, Account Manager at Idea Generation (a young, medium-sized consumer PR agency) said, “Goodwill will get you nowhere, you need a good story”. Another consultant from a well-established corporate PR agency, with extensive experience of voluntary sector accounts said, “It’s all about getting the right story to the right person on the right publication”.

All those we spoke to relied on their own media contacts, a couple mentioned using Media Disc as a contacts guide. They either called these contacts with targeted stories or sent through a tailored press release. Very few of the consultants we spoke to ever sent out a generic press release. Most identified a particular journalist, a particular page of a newspaper or magazine section that they wanted to target. “You have to work your story and adapt it to

different places”. Most said that they offered exclusives, celebrity access or case studies up-front to grab the interest of the journalist or producer. The majority recognised how stiff competition was for media space and how difficult it could be to get journalists’ attention. Xavier Adam, The Adam Media Consultancy, “Journalists are overloaded with too much untargeted, irrelevant information...Do something different. I think the press are tired of themed issue days. Every day is someone or other’s awareness day.”

In terms of securing news coverage, most of the agencies we spoke to stressed that they had to wait for a news peg to get the media interested in their story – or otherwise they created a peg themselves. One example given was to issue a new report / survey or new statistics. The other key to coverage was timing – to give journalists proper lead time and to ensure that the charity’s story or event didn’t clash with other events on the news agenda. They all felt that celebrity involvement helped get coverage.

Many of those we spoke to stressed the importance of preparation before making any media approaches. Xavier Adam felt that the key was to have spokespeople ready to go, with a clear message as, “you only have one chance with broadcast coverage”. Others spoke of preparing case studies for media enquiries – explaining their rights to them and setting ground rules.

Two of the agencies we spoke to found that securing a newspaper partner could have a profound effect on a charity. They put in applications in October / November to be the newspaper’s Christmas charity. This guaranteed the charity a certain number of features in the paper, it developed contacts for the charity in the paper and it had potential to raise substantial donations.

Do PR consultants find the media responsive to charity stories?

None of those interviewed felt that the media had an agenda either for or against the voluntary sector. Many recognised that charities were not at the top of the list for journalists when they were looking for new stories. But all the consultants we spoke to felt that newspapers printed a good amount of charity stories and if a charity could respond quickly, TV news coverage could also be secured fairly easily.

Fiona Fountain found that “I always get the best response from local media. If you go to them with a local angle... you’ll always get better coverage”. Otherwise all the PRs felt confident in placing stories in trade publications such as the Charity Times and Third Sector.

Most of those we spoke to felt the real challenge and public benefit came from achieving coverage in unexpected places. They felt that tabloids were now open to charity stories. One consultant gave the example of getting an article discussing mental health issues on the sports pages of a tabloid (as part of Frank Bruno coverage) as a real breakthrough for the charities concerned – they had reached a new audience.

The Guardian, the Independent and Radio 4 were considered the natural home of charity stories. Some felt the Daily Mail was a good publication as it reached large numbers of female readers, and had several lifestyle and health pages which could be targeted by charities. Others however felt that the Daily Mail “couldn’t be trusted”, as the tone of articles or treatment of case studies was unpredictable. Certain journalists at The Times, The Daily Telegraph and The Mirror were singled out as good contacts. Though Kat Byles, Authentic PR, felt depressed that The Daily Mail and the Sun were celebrity obsessed and weren’t ever interested in the real story.

Apart from daily news programmes (on television and radio) only one consultant interviewed had approached the documentary and features department of the BBC with an idea for a TV programme.

The partner of one agency commented that charities should “always simplify their message for the media”. Many of those interviewed also felt that journalists were “lazy” and had little understanding of the voluntary sector. One leading Account Director felt that, “The media perception of charities is out of date”, another consultant felt that this led to charities receiving unfair criticism by the media. Several of those interviewed felt that charities needed to be “braver” in their approach to the media, “more transparent”, “ready with facts and figures”.

Many of those we spoke to felt that journalists were open to their calls most of the time, but some could be rude and blunt. They felt that being external agencies meant that they could be a buffer for the charity, protecting them for the worst of the media’s responses. Others said that they wished that they could get more feedback from journalists – rather than the phone being slammed down, one consultant in particular wanted to know from the journalist why they weren’t interested in that particular story. Then they could learn from their mistakes.

One consultant felt that many PR agencies had a poor understanding of the voluntary sector – of their issues, sensitivities and complexities. As a result she felt that these commercially-minded agencies failed to come up with creative, ambitious or successful media campaigns and did not provide a good service to charities. She felt that, on occasions, journalists were being given poor information by external PRs or the campaigns had the wrong tone and this could be damaging to charities.

One consultant brought up the problem of sponsored campaigns. Patricia Orr of Third Sector PR found that most newsrooms wouldn’t touch a commercially sponsored campaign story. She also spoke of some corporate sponsors’ strict media restrictions, which could hinder a charity’s PR work. Another consultant spoke of “brand clashes” between charities and their commercial sponsors. Both agreed that when partnerships went well they could however have real media / public awareness benefits.

Do members of the media contact PR agencies, proactively seeking charity stories and contacts?

The predominant response from those interviewed was that journalists did occasionally contact them. They were often seeking a case study, some facts and figures or a contact. Almost all those we spoke to felt that it was vital to share this information with journalists, to help them locate the right person for them to speak to. This was important in building relationships with journalists:

“I take the approach that I’m serving them... I share information with journalists – give them contacts who aren’t always connected to my clients. I’ll help them on their features and in return they take my calls” Kat Byles, Authentic PR

“I’ll ask for a charity name check in return for my help. But if that doesn’t happen I make sure that the journalist knows that they owe me” Patricia Orr, Third Sector PR

“Journalists think they’re god and you need to treat them as such!” Associate Director of a PR agency

Charities, Corporate Social Responsibility and Public Relations agencies

Many of the consultants we spoke to felt that CSR was a real growth area for them as the middlemen bringing charities and commercial clients together. One agency had successfully introduced one of their pro bono charity clients to one of their large corporate clients who were looking to develop their CSR strategy. In cases such as this, some consultants felt that PR agencies’ contacts from different sectors could be a valuable resource for the voluntary sector.

All agreed that partners needed to be selected carefully for CSR to be effective for all those concerned and to avoid any clash of interests.

Others spoke of a “third generation of CSR” which needed to expand beyond financial donations. The consultants we spoke to were unclear as to what exactly the future of CSR was for PR agencies and their commercial clients.

What do PR consultants believe would improve the relationship of the media and charities?

The key responses from our interviewees were:

- Trust – Most of the PR consultants we spoke to felt that charities were too fearful of the media and this damaged their relationship with journalists.
- Access – Charities should be more transparent and open to media / public access.

- Charities should broaden their horizons – Many thought that charities should look beyond traditional media, look at different routes and paths to accessing the public and key decision makers.
- Charities need to move PR and media strategy up their priority list and integrate it with their other functions (such as Policy and Fundraising)
- Journalists need to behave better too. Several consultants noted that the media needed to be more generous in giving charities and their PRs constructive feedback. Journalists needed to have a better understanding of the time and resources involved in dealing with media enquiries and managing case studies.

What image do PR professionals have of a volunteer?

Most of our interviewees described volunteers as “students”, “someone with too much time on their hands”, “retired people”, “mums”, “someone with a bobble hat”, “enthusiastic, but misguided”.

Others, who specialised in working with charities, felt that there had been a significant change and development in the image of the volunteer. Fiona Fountain felt that they were too “diverse” to define as a single type.

Three of the consultants interviewed mentioned the Year of the Volunteer in response to this question.

Are PR consultants involved in volunteering?

Almost half of the consultants interviewed volunteered as a trustee for a charity. They had taken on the role of the trustee following their professional PR work on a charity account or they were driven to volunteer by their personal interest in the charity’s work.

Four of the interviewees offered their PR skills to charities for free (outside any agency programme). They appeared to consider this form of professional, skilled volunteering as different to being a “volunteer”. Although proud of their voluntary work, they associated volunteering with negative terms such as “unskilled” or “misguided”.

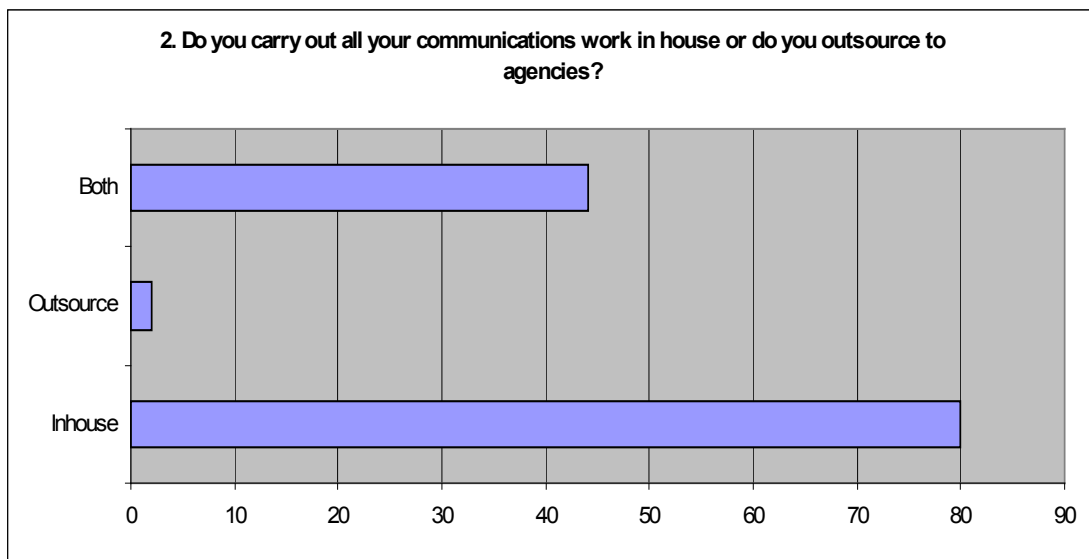
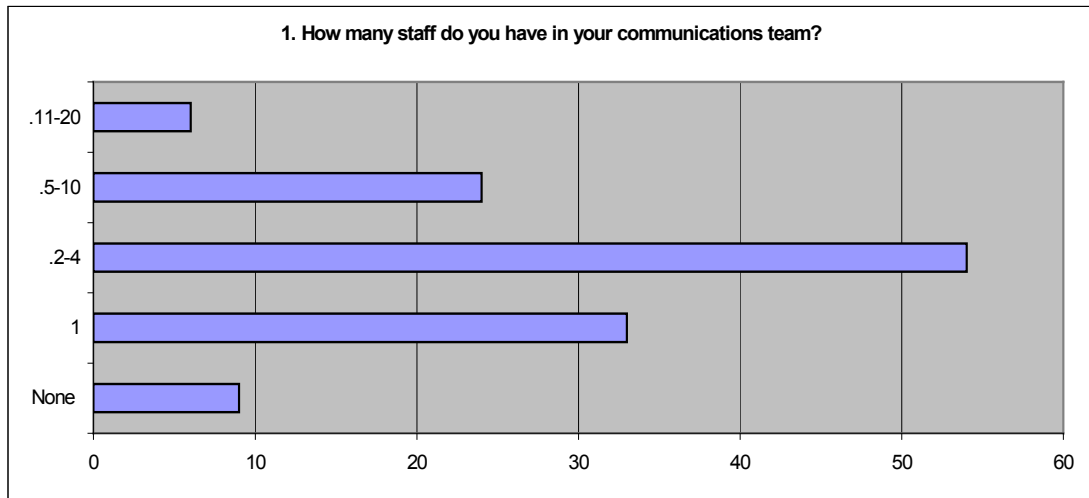
Those who had worked with charities (as a volunteer or as pro bono client) all felt that it had been a very positive experience: “rewarding”, “made a difference” and “challenging” were descriptions used.

Four of the agencies offered employees some amount of paid time off for voluntary work. This varied from six paid days a year in one agency, to volunteering time off being allocated on a more ad hoc basis in others. The remaining consultants interviewed had no volunteering schemes in place at their agencies to their knowledge.

Of the consultants interviewed, four did not volunteer at all. The main reasons given for not volunteering: “I’m too knackered after work”, “I give money already” and “not enough time”.

Dealing with the Media (126 responses to online survey)

Please note all horizontal axis are the number of respondents.



3. In which kinds of media would you like to get most coverage (name top three in order of importance)?

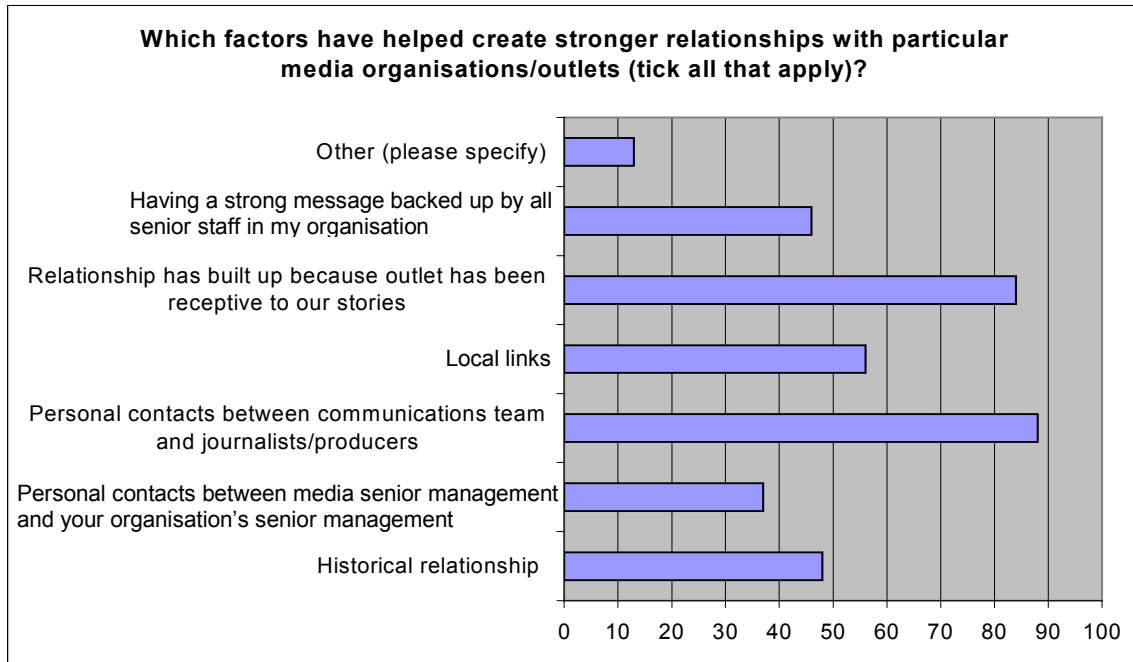
	1	2	3	Response Average
National Print News	37	20	12	1.64
National Print Features	23	25	9	1.75
Regional/local print	16	13	16	2
Consumer Magazines	2	10	13	2.44
Trade Press	9	6	15	2.2
National Radio	4	10	21	2.49
Local/Regional Radio	1	14	7	2.27
National TV	26	21	9	1.7
Regional TV	4	4	13	2.43
News/Info web-site	1	1	6	2.63
Other	2	0	0	1

Other: Specialist learned publications
Christian press

4. In which kinds of media do you actually get most media coverage (tick top three with 1 being the outlet in which you get most coverage)?

	1	2	3	Response Average
National Print News	13	12	15	2.05
National Print Features	1	3	6	2.5
Regional/local print	78	19	8	1.33
Consumer Magazines	4	8	11	2.3
Trade Press	22	27	12	1.84
National Radio	0	5	1	2.17
Local/National Radio	3	30	23	2.36
National TV	1	4	9	2.57
Regional TV	1	3	9	2.62
News/Info web-site	8	10	11	2.1
Other	3	1	4	2.13

Other: National Letter pages
Religious newspapers
Dedicated newsletters
Voluntary sector publications



Other:

a) Good spokesman – 2

“Good spokespeople”; “Being prepared to respond to journalists with facts & figures and background information”

b) Preparation – 1

“Staff able to comment on topical issues”

c) Strong campaign – 2

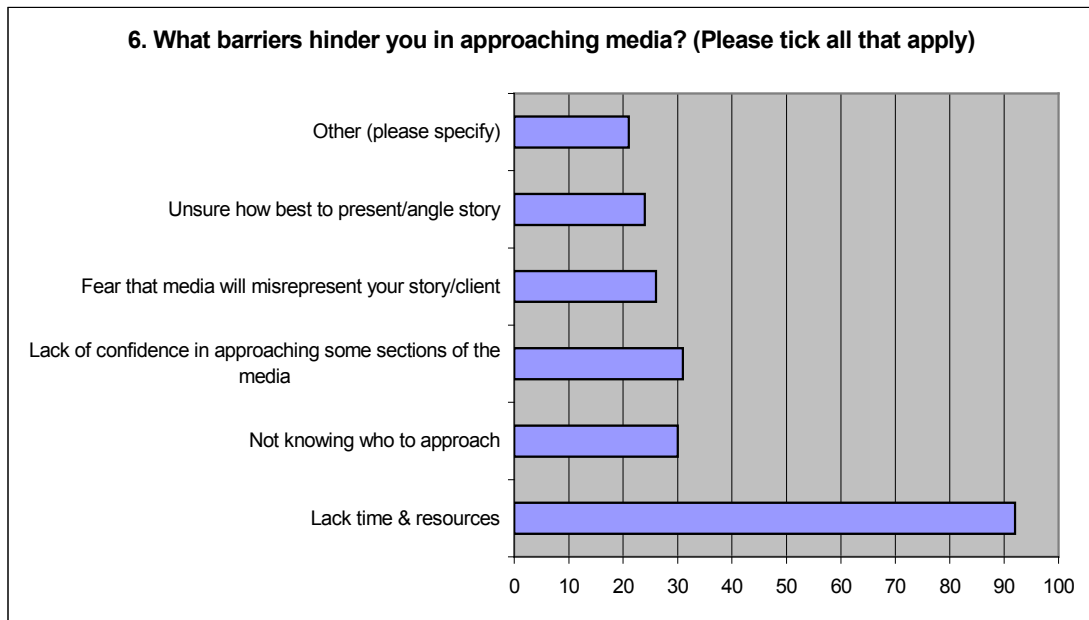
“Having one strong campaign, with lots of cases studies willing to be interviewed”

d) Strong stories – 2

“Strong stories”

e) Miscellaneous

“Been to see our work overseas. Journalist personally interested in our work”;
 “unique organisation working on a media-friendly topic”



Other:

a) Stories not strong enough? – 11

“Not always strong, newsworthy or topical stories to sell”; “Not always have a strong story, therefore less reasons for communicating with the relevant media”.

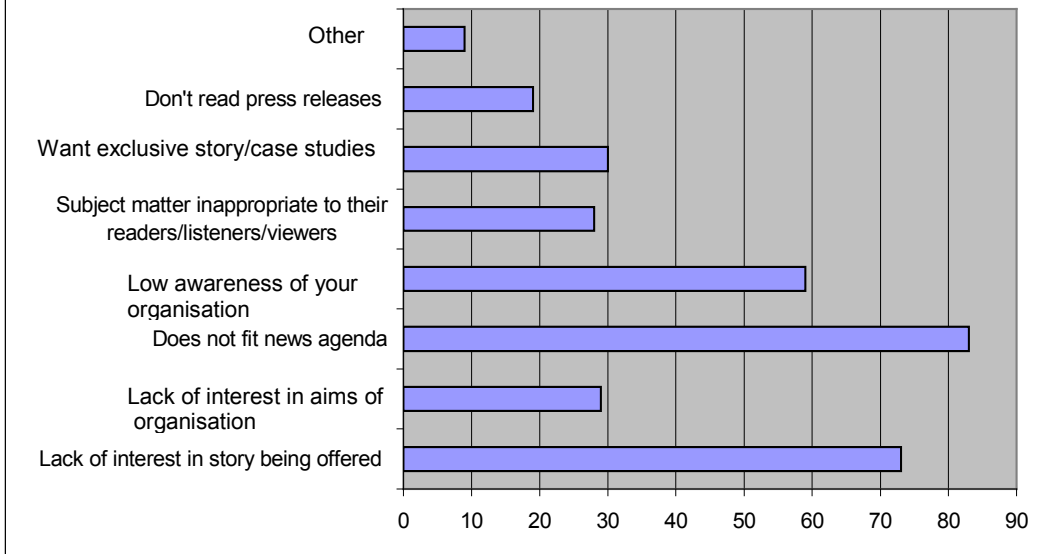
b) Internal communication problems – 4

“Lack of understanding or support from within organisation”; “lack of clear organisational messages”

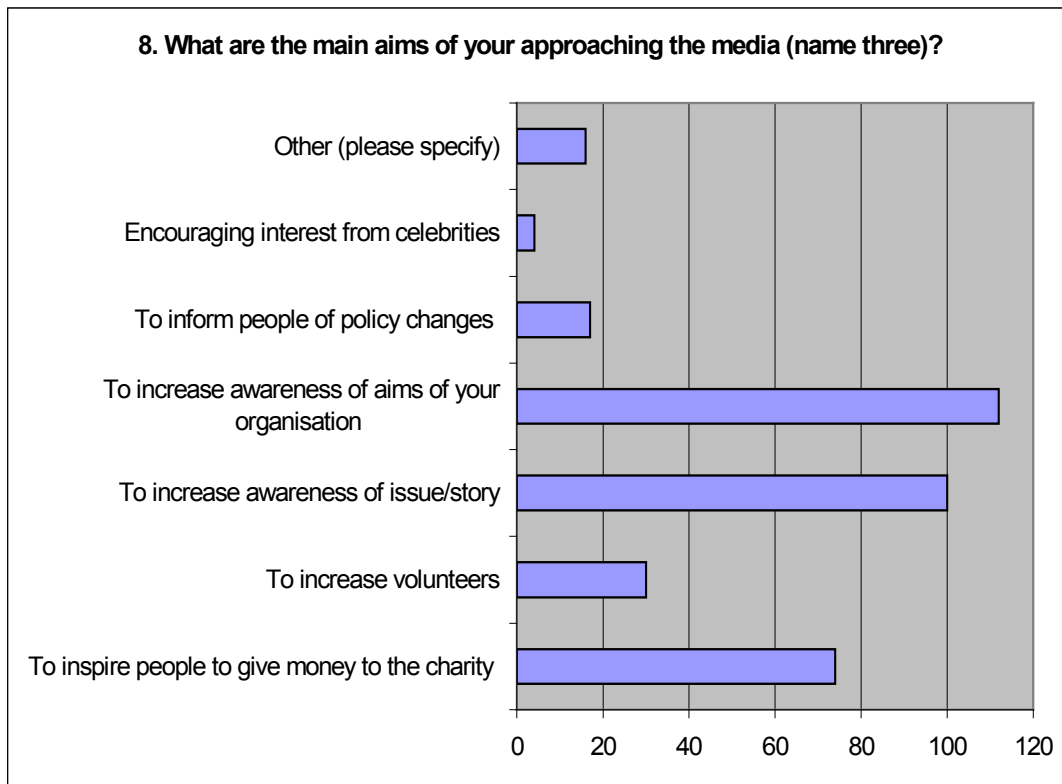
c) Miscellaneous

“Really don’t have much that would ever interest media, and if we did, or do contrive stunts, do not have enough man hours to devote to media relations.”; “For us, it’s a concern that some media misrepresent some of our views – and that much of the media is offender-focused”.

7. Why do you think some outlets have ignored/not used your stories/interviewees (please tick all that apply)?



Other: “Black media have been hard to reach for THT because of prejudice against HIV gay men, who in the past were our main client group”; “I have approached national media several times to try and generate interest in our overseas work and have been told we would have to meet journalist’s travel expenses. We cannot afford to do this either financially or ethically. Even if we were to agree, we could ourselves the victims of a very negative story, as this is not the type of thing charities should be spending their donations on”; “are pro hunt”; “often news is too SOFT for nationals and not “Local” enough for local/regionals”; “sometimes lack of local (enough) angle, competing with other charity stories”; “our organisation is not exactly sex on legs”; “disability isn’t a high priority/of interest for their readers or restricted views of editor. Despite there being 10 million disabled people in the UK”.



Other aims in approaching the media:

a) Encourage policy changes – 5

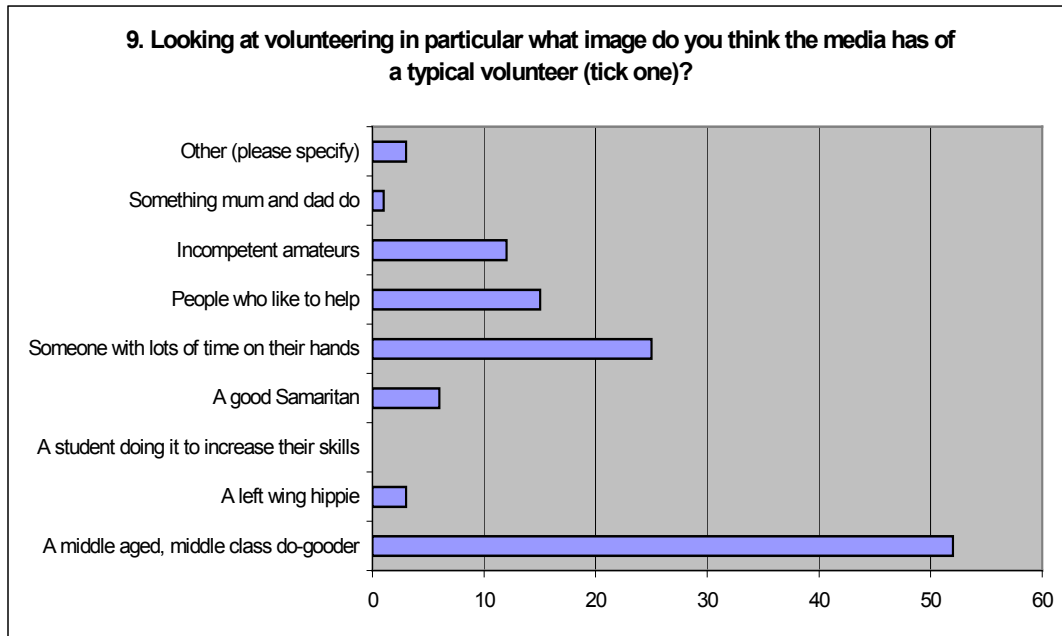
“To persuade people that policy changes are necessary”; “Influencing key stakeholders and government legislation”

b) Make local links - 2

“To make local links and inspire loyalty in supporters”; “To forge links between our local projects and the communities they are trying to engage with”

c) Increase membership base - 2

“Increasing membership base”



Other: “It’s hard to say, as our organisation doesn’t rely on volunteers. But with all the volunteering initiatives available now, I think there’s a broader perception of volunteers than previously”; “I actually have no idea what the media think on this topic. I do not have time to research generalities. Stories appealing for volunteers sometimes get covered, but rarely produce results”.

10. – What image of volunteering would you like the media to portray?

a) Opportunities are available for people of any background, age, ethnicity - 48

“Volunteering is for everyone, everyone has something to offer and that there are opportunities available that will suit all”; “The diverse range of people who volunteer, including all ages, sexes, ethnic and educational backgrounds, and levels of experience”

b) An activity that benefits the volunteer – 5

“ Volunteering as a two way exchange of skills, not just doing good/helping out”

c) Committed/passionate – 14

“Very committed people, passionate about the cause”; “Someone who has a strong commitment to putting something back into society and an essential part of the world we live in”

d) Professional/skilled – 15

“A force of skilled, professional individuals”

e) Social cohesion/fosters community spirit/active citizens – 10

“ Active citizens that tackle the issues that affect their respective communities”

f) Limited time is not a problem – 9

“...as much or as little time as they can give”; “...volunteering opportunities for those with lots of time and commitment, and also those who have limited time and commitment”.

g) Develops skills, enrich your life and increase employability – 14

“Something that can add value to your own life”; “...can grow your skills and increase your circle of friends.”; “those who volunteer lead a happier, more fulfilled and balanced life”

h) People that want to help and make a positive contribution to society – 15

“...people with an interest in helping local community”; “people who like to help”

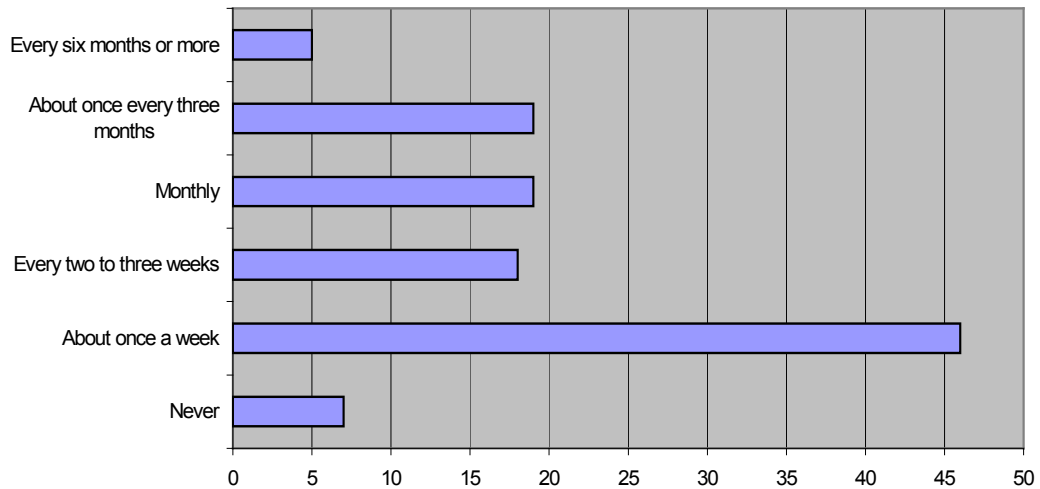
i) Miscellaneous

“...volunteers are the backbone of most charities”; Volunteers are a bridge between communities and professionals”; “Its not what you think”.

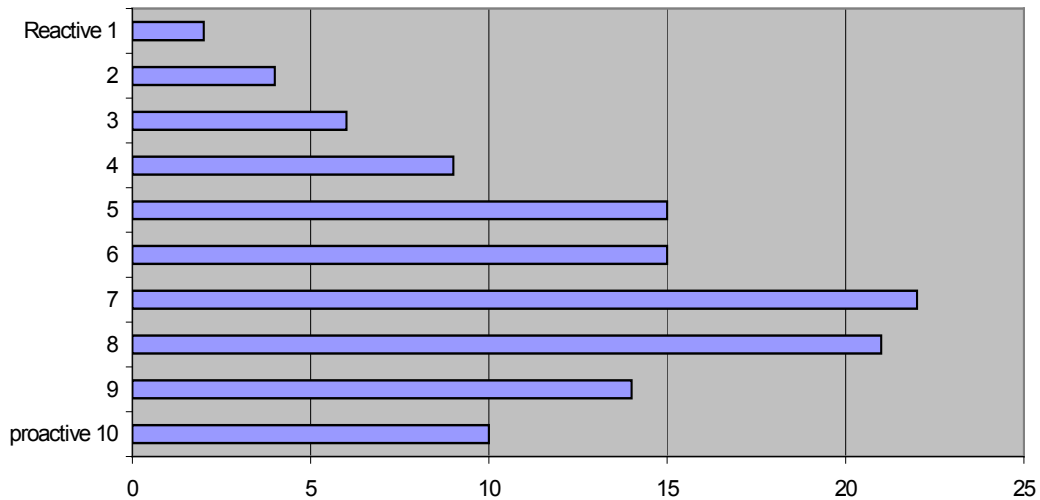
11. In your experience, what kind of media treatments do you think have been most successful in increasing volunteers?

	Very successful	Successful	Not successful	Don't know	Have not tried
Particular campaigns	17	42	5	14	22
Personal case histories of volunteers	29	39	3	14	17
Case histories of those who benefit from volunteers	14	50	3	12	17
General information about the organisation	2	47	23	18	10
Stories related to celebrities	6	26	6	25	34
Results of surveys/statistics	10	16	8	32	26
Placing stories in reaction to news events	10	32	10	20	23
Other	2	4	1	7	12

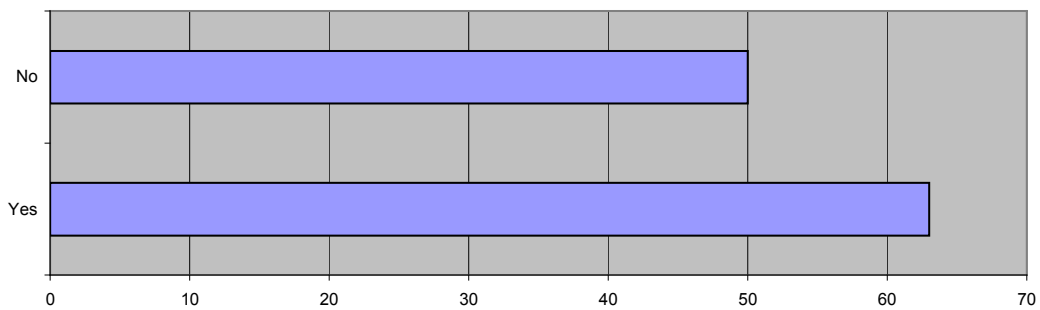
12 - How often does the media contact you for a quote/interview on a breaking news story?

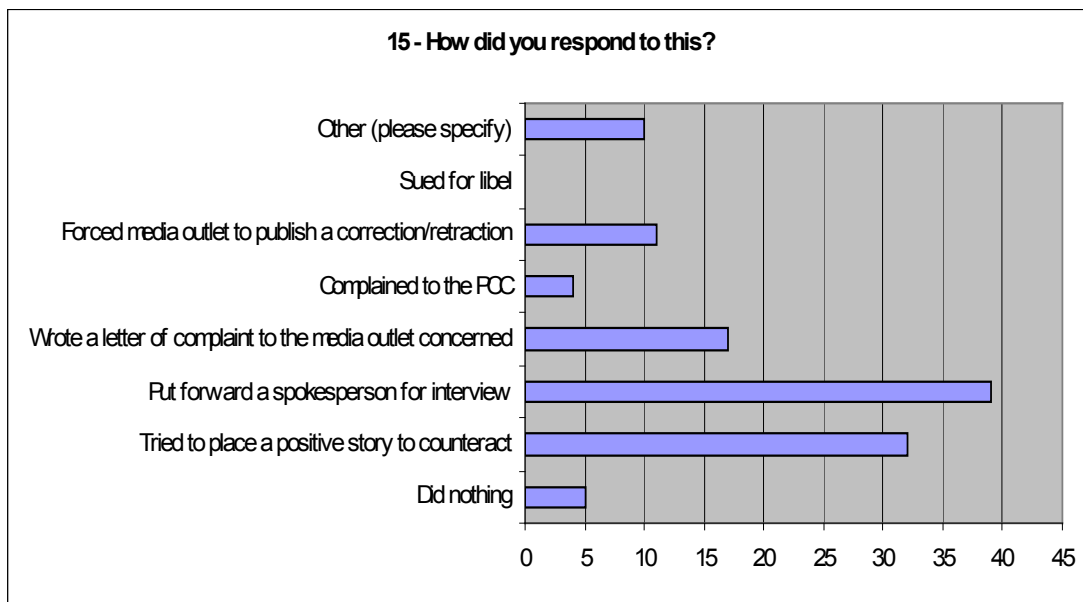


13 - In general are you primarily proactive or reactive in your media work, i.e. do you spend more time reacting to breaking news or pushing your organisation's media agenda?



14 - Have you been on the receiving end of negative coverage?





Other response

a) Letter/statement published – 3

“Put together a reactive statement to minimise further negative coverage and ensure any coverage is accurate”

b) Journalist was reassured – 1

“ a negative story was averted in national tabloid by a swift response, helpful response, helpful research, and a knowledgeable person who reassured the news journalist about the organisation and our policies”.

c) Kept relationship open – 1

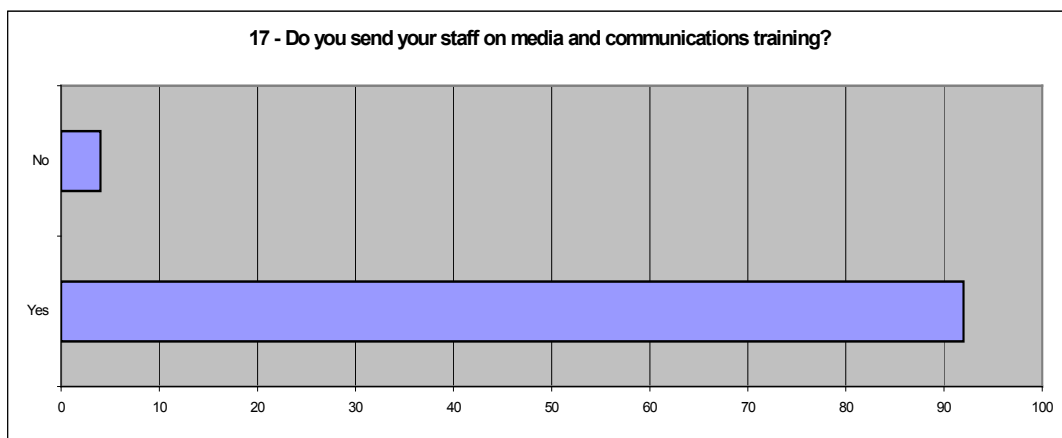
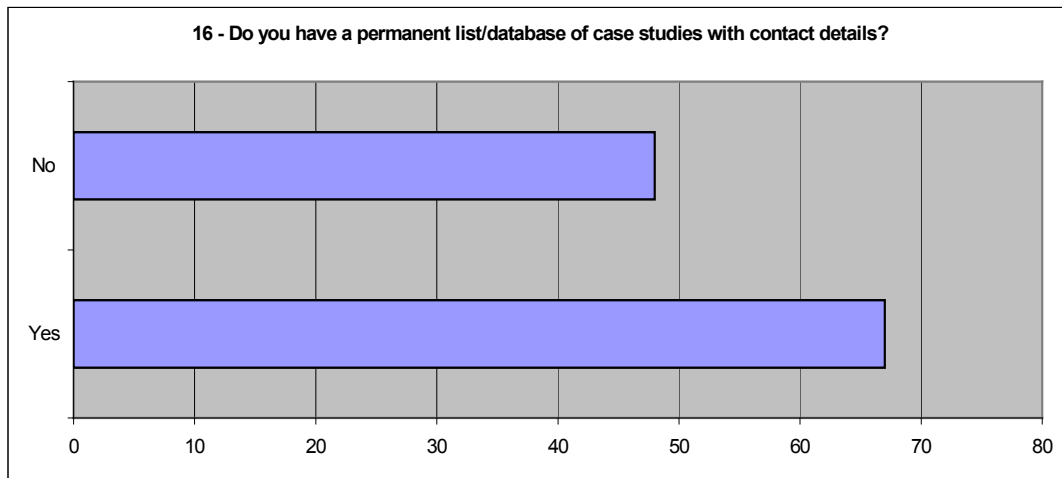
“Kept relationship open with the paper in question”

d) Investigation – 2

“ Accusations were made which were investigated by the Charity Commission....we were completely exonerated by the investigation ...discovered to our cost that the impact was negative regardless of our innocence”

e) Miscellaneous

“Depending on the nature of the negative coverage”



If no, why not?

a) Budget /lack of funding - 8

“Financial restraints”; “Too expensive”; “Unfortunately through lack of funding”

b) Have staff previously trained who deal with the media – 5

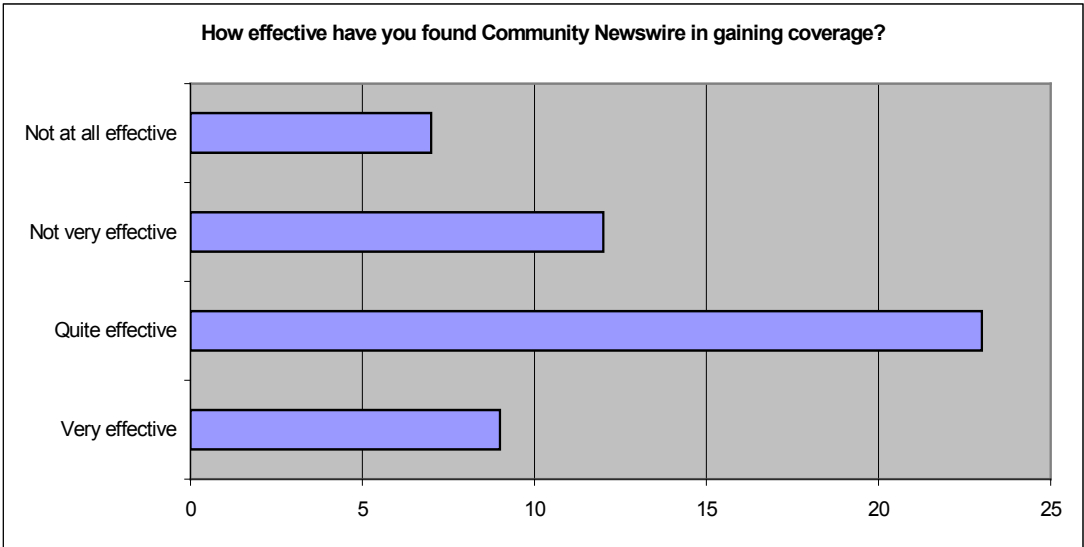
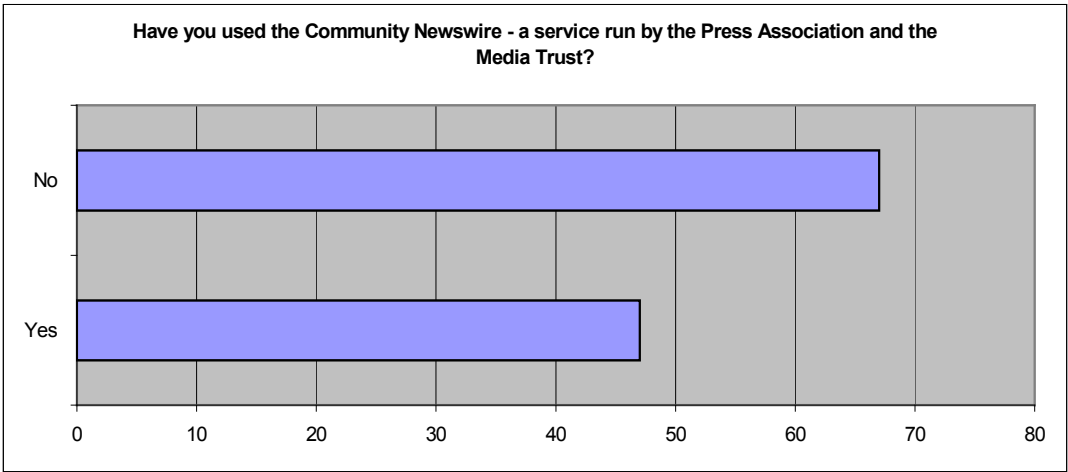
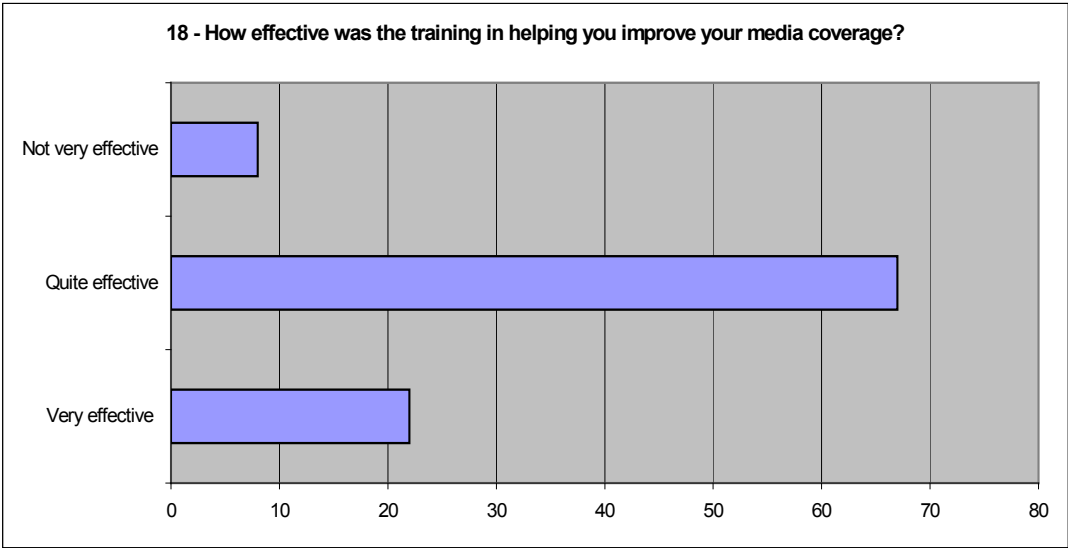
“PR professional is a trustee and with other PR pros give free advice”; “Chief executive and selected representative boffins are already quite media savvy”

c) Organisation too small – 2

“...the organisation is too small to consider media skills high enough up the training needs hierarchy to get a look in”

d) Miscellaneous

“Lack of structure and vision in team”; “key staff have already done this. Focus on development/sharing experience opportunities e.g. Fifth Estate events”.



Q – What, apart from increased financial resources/extra staff, would most help you/your organisation in its dealings with the media?

a) Media training – 16

“Training...to recognise news, stories build relationships with local media and recognise what would be a bigger news story that could go regional or national”; “More advice and guidance on dealing with different aspects of the media, to include print and broadcast media”.

b) Media being more receptive to news stories – 9

“the media being more open to “good news” stories rather than just “froth”; “Evoking a greater interest in stories of our work; getting the media to address positive stories as well as the negatives”.

c) Knowing who to contact – 11

“Knowing who to contact and how to contact them”; “Knowing who exactly to contact/pitch a story at. Being able to build-up a relationship with key members of the media”.

d) Regular consistent contact with media people – 13

“Dedicated, consistent reporter to contact each time. Having to deal with different reporters at the same newspaper leads to the need for repeating info each time, can lead to mistakes and confusion.”; “Regular one to ones with media people to develop ideas and relationships”

e) Time to raise awareness – 2

“Time to raise more awareness of the work we do, and use case studies to demonstrate this”

f) Clearer internal communication – 3

“Clearer message/objective from senior management”; “Better internal communications”

g) My organisation having a stronger understanding of the media – 13

“Help from other parts of the organisation to generate stories”; “Getting senior management and the media to understand how they can work together”.

h) Knowing more about the media’s needs in advance – 11

“knowing in advance their features subject so that we can try and contribute too. Have more information for planning purposes”; “Lists of forward features planned by various media”.

i) Miscellaneous

“Case study file”; “Greater awareness from the media of the voluntary sector, less sneering and aloofness from journalists”; “Trustees/supporters working within the national news media. Change in news agenda to cover more”.

Article from Third Sector – 15th June 2005

Opinion: Third Voice - Charity and the media make uncertain bedfellows

Penelope Gibbs is director of the Voluntary Action Media Unit and a former producer at the BBC

When it comes to the media, does the voluntary sector cut off its nose to spite its face?

Some years ago, I was producing Woman's Hour and decided to make a programme on children in care. No charity had contacted me - I was simply interested in focusing on the care system and its results.

I wanted to feature teenagers who had spent time being 'looked after', because personal testimony is always powerful. I contacted a charity to ask if it could put me in touch with 17 to 19 year-olds who would be willing to talk about their life in care.

The charity said setting up these interviews would take two weeks. It added that a worker from the charity would have to sit in on the interview and that it would expect payment. So I gave up with the charity, which thereby lost the opportunity to give young adults a chance to say what being in care was really like and to associate itself with a high-profile programme.

I'm now a part of the voluntary sector, researching its relationship with the media. The hostility to the media shown by that charity is not uncommon, and I do understand it - the media can be rude and unreliable. But it is certainly not out to get charities, and in most cases doesn't deserve the level of mistrust it inspires.

My colleagues and I have interviewed 30 media professionals from newspapers, magazines, radio, TV and online, and not one of them has shown a prejudice against charities. However, neither do any of them feel obliged to help charities promote their own individual agendas. The truth is that it's the story that counts - if it fits, they'll use it.

But nearly every media interviewee complained that charities were neither proactive nor understanding of media needs. Orion Ray-Jones, editor of easyJet magazine, said those who pitched ideas to him "don't seem to have read our magazines or our websites, which would tell them what kind of stories we write and what angles we look for. It's as if they have picked the name of the magazine out of a hat."

If there's one overall conclusion to our research, it's not that the media is set against the sector, but that there is often a mismatch between what the media wants and what it is offered.

- Do you agree? Whether you are involved with a charity or the media, I'm interested in your views and experiences - email me at p.gibbs@vamu.org.uk.

Appendix

Voluntary Sector: Qualitative interviews with some respondents to our online Survey

Francesca Deakin, Head of PR and Marketing, Mencap. Background in mainstream PR. Has 6-7 staff.

Andrew Hogg, Head of Press for the Medical Foundation for the Care of the Victims of Torture. His background was as a journalist and news editor in national newspapers. The Medical Foundation is the only charity he has worked for. Press team is him and one other

Emma Ward, Media Relations Executive, Vitalise. Vitalise used to be called the Winged Fellowship. It offers holidays for disabled people who are normally cared for at home. She was the main press officer

Lorna Grounsell, PR officer Centre 33. The charity offers counselling services to teenagers and young people in Cambridgeshire. Lorna combines her PR role with other responsibilities.

Michael Roberts, Chief Executive of the British Eye Research Foundation. The charity is tiny and Michael has responsibility for PR. He is helped by a PR agency.

Other Voluntary Sector Interviewees:

Keith Bradbrook, Deputy Director Communications, NSPCC

Richard Garside, Director of the Crime and Society Foundation, a social policy and criminal justice think-tank.

Julian Simpson, Policy and Development Director, VONNE

David Stables, CEO and Chairman of A-CET, the African Children's Educational Trust

Monica Kimche, Director, Leicestershire Cares

Madeline Reiss, Media Officer, Emmaus

Media Interviewees

Anonymous, Community Affairs Correspondent, National Television News

Anonymous, Senior Broadcast Journalist, Internet

Shani Ryan, Producer, BBC Local Radio

Elizabeth Senior, Senior Broadcast Journalist, BBC News

Katy Ross, Features Editor, Capital Press Agency

Catherine Quinn, Freelance Print Journalist,

Rik Martin, News Editor, Radio

Adam McDonald, Commissioning Editor, Daytime, Channel 4

Andy Peck, Editor, Christianity

Anne-Marie Minhall, News Editor, Classic FM

Orion-Ray Jones, Editor, easyJet magazine

Mike Peake, Features Director, FHM Magazine

Michael Wilson, Head of Newsgathering, Channel 5, BSkyB

Alison Benjamin, Deputy Editor, Society Guardian

Hanne Knudsen, Senior Producer, Nick Ferrari Show, LBC

Mark Charlton, News Editor, Newspaper

Nick Machin, Acting News Editor, South Wales Echo

Jane Atherton, News Editor, Metro North-West

Antonia Blyth, Senior Features Writer, Mizz Magazine

Perry Austin-Clarke, Group Director, Newsquest Bradford

Anonymous, Deputy Features Editor, a Sunday newspaper

Deborah Doherty, Features Editor, Take a Break Magazine

Helen Maher, Deputy Editor, Tesco Magazine

Jane Barnes, Deputy Editor, Sun Woman

Gavin Rota, Head of Development, Wall to Wall Independent TV Company

Nicholas Helen, Social Affairs Editor, the Sunday Times

Mark Charlton, News Editor, the Leicester Mercury

Gareth Jones, Head of Forward Planning, Richard & Judy, Cactus TV

Will Runcon, Special Projects Producer, GMTV

Jane Flynn, News Planning Producer, Channel 5 News, BskyB

Commercial PR Interviewees

Senior Account Director, a leading City communications consultancy

Karolina Shaw, Senior Account Executive, Weber Shandwick Worldwide

Becky Wegener, Account Manager, GolinHarris

Associate Director, a leading PR consultancy (specialising in voluntary and public sector)

Partner, an influential communications agency (specialising in advocacy)

Account Director, a leading International commercial PR agency

A freelance PR consultant

Fiona Fountain, Partner, Fiona Fountain Associates

Account Manager, medium sized PR agency

Account Executive, Idea Generation

Kat Byles, Director, Authentic PR

Patricia Orr, Chief Executive, Third Sector PR

Account Director, leading communications agency (specialising in voluntary and public sector)

Xavier Adam, Managing Director, The Adam Media Consultancy

