



A MEDIA FIRST GUIDE TO TELLING MEDIA FRIENDLY STORIES

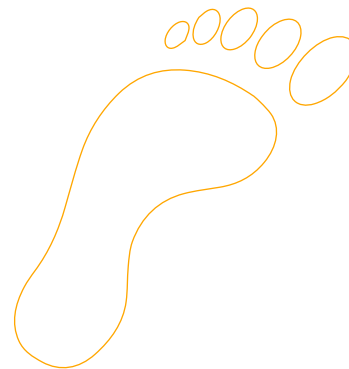


INTRODUCTION

Every business, no matter how big or small, has a story to tell.

That may sound simple, but the big problem is that not every organisation has good storytellers who can produce something which is meaningful, engaging and resonates with the audience.

Good stories are memorable because they trigger an emotional response. They can be incredibly powerful and humans have been communicating through them for more than 200,000 years.



INTRODUCTION

In business terms a compelling story needs to show you understand who your customers are, the problems they face, and how you can make their lives better.

So how can your organisation get more media coverage and become better at telling its story?

Those that have been on our [bespoke media training](#) courses know that there are many answers to that question. But in this eBook we're going to focus on truly understanding your audience by putting yourself in their shoes and learning to think like a journalist to better engage the media.



GET TO KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE

It may sound obvious but before you tell your story and engage with the media you need to know who you want to tell it to. Without knowing who your audience is your message will fail and you will not succeed.

Think about who you want to hear and see your message. It will likely be different people for different areas of your work. Then put yourself in their shoes to gain an insight into what they need to know about you and what they want to hear from you.



GET TO KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE

Here is a chart to help you think about your different audiences and the channels and media which will help you reach them:

Area of business	Headline message	Target audience	Target channels in order of priority	Relevant media	Key journalists
Media training	The importance of bespoke training	Comms / media teams	eShots, Website / blogs, Industry magazines / events, Social media	Industry magazines and websites	Refer to 'trade contacts database'
Social media	Using social media to gain the headlines you want	Social media managers Comms / media teams	eShots, Website / blogs, Industry magazines / events, Social media	Industry magazines / websites Forums	Refer to trade 'SM contacts database'

GET TO KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE

To help you get started it will help to look at who the audiences of the UK media are.

In the following pages of analysis, we'll focus on television channels, radio and national newspapers. This will help you begin to identify the media which is most appropriate for your audience.



WORDS AND PICTURES: THE FIGURES BEHIND TV NEWS

When it comes to news consumption, television is still the most widely used media platform, according to figures published by Ofcom.

70 per cent of adults in the UK report using TV as a source of news. And it increased to 75 per cent when on-demand content is included.

TV news is less popular among younger people (age 16-24), with fewer than half reporting that they use TV to access news - they are far more likely to use social media.

BBC news remains the most used news source, followed by ITV. Facebook takes third spot.

One in five adults also name BBC One as their 'most important' news source.

RADIO – ON YOUR WAVELENGTH

Radio doesn't have the glamour of TV or the funkiness of the internet and neither does it often create the storms a strident newspaper headline or opinion piece can generate.

And yet, it can grab people's attention like nothing else.

Who hasn't stopped still in the kitchen because of something striking and perhaps moving that they've heard on the radio?

Or waited in their car that little bit longer before going into the house or office to hear the rest of an interview? As we say, the best pictures are on radio.

And more people are listening to radio than ever before. According to RAJAR – the organisation measuring UK radio audiences - 50 million adults tune into the radio each week. That works out as 89 per cent of the UK adult population.

Additionally, the average listener tunes into more than 20 hours of live radio a week.

Most radio stations only provide short bulletins once an hour. But it is worth noting that both BBC Radio 1 and BBC Radio 2 – mainstream music stations – feature in the top 20 sources of news, according to Ofcom.

Flagship news programmes continue to perform well. Radio 4's Today programme has 5.6 million listeners a week. Nick Ferrari's LBC breakfast show has 1.4 million weekly listeners. For Radio 5 Live's breakfast programme, the figure is more than 1.2 million people.

But BBC local radio, where regional content has been cut back, has seen a 10 per cent decline in its weekly reach year-on-year. That figure now stands at 4.8 million people.

The statistics also show that 33 per cent of adults listen to podcasts at least once a month, again highlighting the growing importance of the format. Global's The News Agents podcast, fronted by three former BBC journalists, surpassed 24 million downloads in 2023.

BLACK, WHITE AND STILL READ ALL OVER?

Print interviews continue to be a crucial component of our media training courses.

But do people still read newspapers? When was the last time you bought a paper?

Has print become a niche medium serving a rapidly shrinking audience?

Circulations have fallen and have been steadily declining for years.

But rather than dying out, newspapers have evolved and attract millions of readers online – alongside those who still want a newspaper in their hands - where their trust and prestige continue to appeal.

More than 24 million people read UK news brands – a term used to reflect how newspapers now reach their audiences – every day. That number swells to 39 million every week and 45 million every month.

And news brands appeal to the young, with 24 per cent of 18-34-year-olds consuming them daily.

So, there is still plenty of life in the old dog.

One of the things we notice during our courses is that it can be easy to put all newspapers – and their digital versions - into one basket.

But their readerships are different, and this may impact who you target and who might cover your story.

BLACK, WHITE AND READ ALL OVER – A GUIDE TO UK NEWSPAPER AUDIENCES



THE SUN

The Sun was the country's best-selling newspaper for 40 years. That changed in 2020 when it was overtaken by the Daily Mail amid changes in how newspapers report their circulations. The paper's owners have opted to make its circulation figures private. But before that decision, it had similar figures to the new market leader. The Sun says it reaches more than 31 million people across digital and print every month. A common misconception about The Sun is that it is the paper of choice for 'white van man'. But 32 per cent of its readers are from the ABC1 socio-economic group - the group made up of people with more education and better-paid jobs. And more than 400,000 readers have a family income of over £50,000.

THE DAILY MAIL

A paper that is controversial and popular in equal measure. It is now the country's best-selling paper. Like all newspapers, its circulation was hit by the pandemic. In March 2024, its circulation was just over 700,000. Circulation on Saturdays swells to over a million. Its digital version, Mail Plus, has a monthly average of more than 80,000 "actively viewed" copies. The Mail's website continues to be a big draw, with its mix of news and entertainment ensuring it has 24.7m monthly unique visitors. It is also the only national newspaper with more female readers than male (a 54 to 46 per cent split). The average age of a Mail reader is 56. And more than 80 per cent of Mail readers are believed to be homeowners, with 69 per cent owning their homes outright. The Mail also owns the popular This Is Money website.

BLACK, WHITE AND READ ALL OVER – A GUIDE TO UK NEWSPAPER AUDIENCES

METRO

This free morning newspaper had the largest distribution of any UK newspaper before the pandemic struck. With fewer people travelling to work, it has taken time to rebuild those figures. In March 2024, it has an average circulation of 950,000. There is success online, with more than 18 million unique visitors a month. The publication remains uniquely neutral on the big political issues and has no leading articles, opinion pieces or a Westminster reporter.

DAILY MIRROR

The workers' paper and the Labour party's most loyal supporter, the Daily Mirror was overtaken by The Daily Mail several years ago. And it has long since stopped being competitive with its old rival. Its circulation is now around 230,000. The picture is better online, with the website reaching more than 20 million people a month.

EVENING STANDARD

The iconic London title has fallen on hard times and its owners have announced plans to drop its daily print edition and go weekly later in 2024. The paper had become free of charge in 2009. But its circulation has dropped from 850,000 to 275,000 in the past five years, and it has lost £84.5m over the latest six years. Twelve million people access the Standard's digital platforms every month, with half of that traffic coming from outside London and overseas. In September 2024 the paper ceased its daily publication and became a weekly title.

THE TELEGRAPH

Telegraph readers are more likely to be Conservative, male and wealthy. YouGov research carried out in 2023 said 69 per cent of the paper's readership is male and that more than a fifth are affluent. It also says that almost half the readership (49 per cent) identify as Conservative Party voters. It is another publication that now chooses not to publish its circulation figures. But the last public figure, in December 2019, was 317,000. The paper's focus is now on paid subscribers, and in 2023 it exceeded its target of reaching one million subscriptions.

BLACK, WHITE AND READ ALL OVER – A GUIDE TO UK NEWSPAPER AUDIENCES

THE FINANCIAL TIMES

The 'pink 'un' was one of the first newspapers to introduce a paywall. And it hit a milestone in 2019, announcing it has one million paying readers, with digital subscribers now accounting for more than three-quarters of its circulation. Print circulation is now just over 100,000. But the publication says it reaches more than 22 million readers every month – seven million in the UK. Despite the complexity of some issues it covers, the FT has a reading age of around 12-14. Men make up an astonishing 81 per cent of its readership. More than 30 per cent of its readers are C-suite executives, and 75 per cent of readers work for international companies. The average reader income is £221,000.

THE GUARDIAN

The paper of choice for the intellectual left, healthcare workers and those in local government. It made its circulation private in 2021 when it had fallen to 105,000. Press Gazette estimates that if it followed industry trends, print circulation would now be 60,000. According to PAMCo – the audience measurement for publishers - The Guardian is the most-read quality news brand in the UK, cross-platform, with an average of 22.4 million unique visitors monthly.

THE TIMES

It is more than a decade since The Times put its online content behind a paywall. Now, The Times and The Sunday Times have more than 500,000 digital-only subscribers. While it has not revealed its print circulation figures since 2020, the paper says it reaches 840,000 readers Monday to Saturday. According to the British Business Survey, The Times is the number one daily newspaper for business readers and reaches 50 per cent more decision-makers than the Financial Times or the Daily Telegraph. Millennials make up a healthy fifth of its readership. Times readers have a mean family income of £55,885.

THE EXPRESS

A paper with a seemingly endless supply of Princess Diana and health-scare stories (it is sometimes referred to as the Daily Diana Express), the once-mighty tabloid continues to be a fading force. Circulation has now dropped to around 150,000. Its remaining audience is elderly and is mainly based in the north. It is still right-wing and Eurosceptic in its outlook. Migrants, pensions and the weather continue to be regularly covered stories.

BLACK, WHITE AND READ ALL OVER – A GUIDE TO UK NEWSPAPER AUDIENCES

DAILY STAR

The paper that takes a lighter-hearted look at the news and looks to lift the gloom from the news agenda. It describes itself as not being anti-Conservative or anti-Labour, but “anti-idiot”. The paper has a circulation of more than 130,000, and screengrabs of its eye-catching front pages often go viral on social media. The paper achieved great success with its ‘who will last longer’ comparison between Liz Truss and a lettuce – a battle won by the lettuce.

CITY AM

Launched in 2006, City AM covers the latest financial, business and political news and had a circulation of around 85,000. Before the pandemic, it was distributed from 400 commuter hubs around London and the home counties and at more than 500 offices in the City and Canary Wharf areas. Its print operations returned as people came back to the office, and it now has a circulation of around 68,000. It reports its daily readership is just under 400,000. That readership is dominated by men, with a 60/40 male and female split. Readers have an average income of £85,000. More than 65 per cent of its readers are under 55.

i NEWS

Still the new kid on the block – as the short-lived New Day quickly passed into newspaper history – its circulation is around 125,000. The paper started life as The Independent’s little sister but is now owned by the owner of the Daily Mail, who bought it for £49.6m in 2019. It is aimed at readers with limited time and attracts younger, metropolitan types, including students and those in their first job. Its website has more than nine million monthly visits.

INDEPENDENT

The UK’s first national newspaper to give up print and go online-only, The Independent attracts more than 22 million monthly UK website visitors. It received more than two billion page views in 2023. Its bold move away from print has returned it to profitability as it has removed the costs of print plants and paper distribution. It has now recorded six years of profit in a row. It also runs the Indy100 website.

WHAT ABOUT THE SUNDAY PAPERS?

THE SUNDAY TIMES

Like most Sunday newspapers, The Mail on Sunday relies on a mix of exposés and publicist-placed celebrity stories. Features about health and beauty are also prominent. Its current circulation is 600,000 – about half of where it was in October 2017. But it remains powerful and its coverage can often set the agenda for the week.

THE MAIL ON SUNDAY

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THE SUN ON SUNDAY

The phoenix that arose from the ashes of the News of the World, The Sun on Sunday has seamlessly inherited the older, London-based male audience of its predecessor. It no longer makes its circulation figures available, but the last published statistics showed a readership of just over one million. Press Gazette estimates that the figure would now be 600,000. Celebrities, exposés and football are still very much the order of the day.

THE OBSERVER

Stories about social injustice feature prominently in The Observer alongside extensive arts coverage. Its last published circulation was 136,000 in July 2021. It is estimated that if its readership followed the trends of the rest of the industry, that figure would now be 80,000.

WHAT ABOUT THE SUNDAY PAPERS?

THE SUNDAY TELEGRAPH

With a reputation for being more conservative than its weekly counterpart, it is perhaps not surprising that almost half of the Sunday Telegraph's readers are in the 65 and over age bracket. Its most recent circulation figures, published in December 2019, stood at 244,000. It is estimated that the figure would now be 125,000. Alongside investigative stories are features about the countryside and issues affecting the middle classes. Its business coverage is well respected. And its comment pages are favoured by the intellectual right.

THE SUNDAY MIRROR

The Sunday Mirror is another title with a worrying circulation fall, now standing at 175,000, falling below 200,000 for the first time in 2023. In 2000, it had a circulation of two million.

SUNDAY PEOPLE

Founded in 1881, the Sunday People is one of Britain's oldest Sunday newspapers. But its circulation has now fallen to 57,000, which is below that of City AM in London. The paper also now shares the same editor as the Sunday Mirror. And the two publications share the same content, with only front pages and pages four and five changing.

ONLINE NEWS

As you can see from our newspaper guide, while circulations are dropping, there is massive demand for news online.

In fact, figures from Ofcom show online sources are the second most used platforms for news behind broadcast TV and are used by two-thirds of UK adults.

And more than 80 per cent of 16-24 year-olds consume news online. They tend to find that news via social media rather than going directly to websites.

Related to this, TikTok has been growing in popularity as a source of news, reaching 10 per cent of UK adults.

The BBC website has the highest reach among those using online sources for news, according to Ofcom.

Press Gazette lists Reuters and Forbes as the UK's most popular websites for business news, reaching 3.8 and 3.4 million people respectively.

They are followed by The Financial Times. Insider Inc (2.9m), Bloomberg (1.8m) and Investing (1.2m) also rank highly.

Are they media outlets you target?



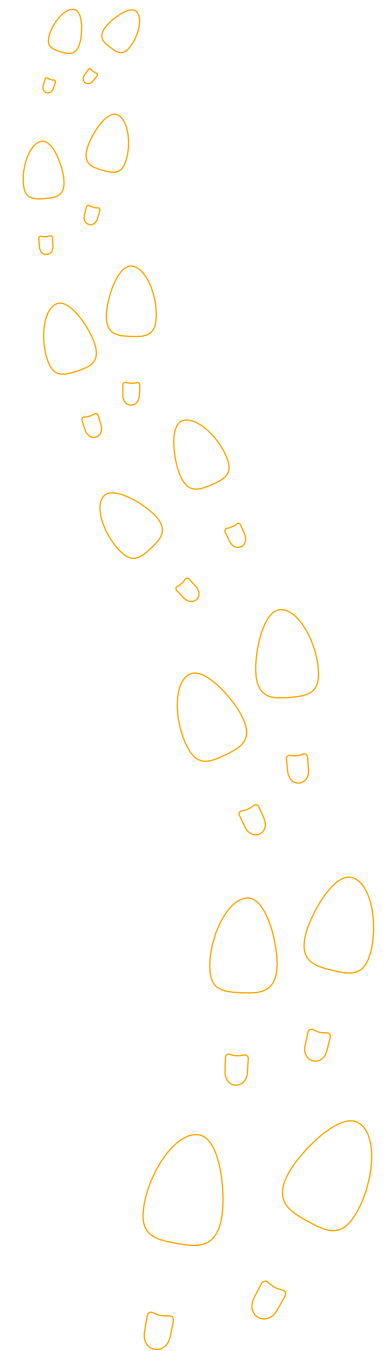
DON'T FORGET TRADE PUBLICATIONS

Our analysis has not focused on trade media but that does not mean you should ignore them.

Trade publications may not have the mass audience appeal of television, radio and national newspapers, but they have the power to position your organisation as an industry expert to a specific, targeted and focused audience – your customers. They will cover your sector in far greater depth than mainstream media and they are a trusted source of information, with loyal readerships.

They will also be read by the decision makers in your field who are keen to stay abreast of the news in the industry.

During our [media training](#) it's often really obvious which clients have invested time briefing their spokespeople to manage both trade and consumer based media.



PUT YOURSELF IN A JOURNALIST'S SHOES TO MAKE A COMPELLING STORY

Journalists are looking for something which is:

- T** topical, of the moment, and something people are talking about
- R** relevant to a specific audience
- U** unusual. Not what people already know or expect
- T** trouble. Show how you are solving a problem. Or, if your story is not strong enough, a journalist will look for their own trouble angle
- H** human interest. What is in it for people? What impact will it have on your customers and the journalist's audience?

If a story includes at least four of the five elements of TRUTH, you have the basis of something which could attract the interest of the media and become impactful.



PUT YOURSELF IN A JOURNALIST'S SHOES TO MAKE A COMPELLING STORY

The human aspect is absolutely crucial. The most common phrase you will hear in a newsroom is 'so what?' Journalists will look at a potential news item and ask 'so what does this mean for my audience?'

At the very least they will want to know who the people are behind the story. Take a look at any newspaper, news website or news programme and you will find all the stories have a human angle.

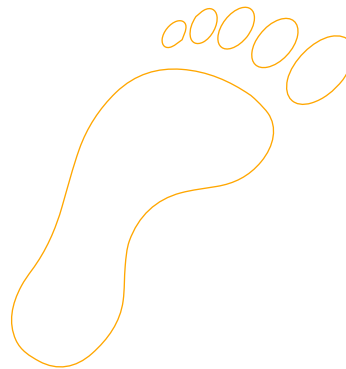


PUT YOURSELF IN A JOURNALIST'S SHOES TO MAKE A COMPELLING STORY

The reason is simple – people are fascinated by stories about people, not policies, initiatives and protocols. So try to include the human factor in your story and, if you can't, consider how what you are saying will impact your customers.

Facts and figures are also vital. They help to illustrate and strengthen your points.

Once you have T.R.U.T.H in place you need to carefully consider how you are going to tell your story. The key here is to use simple language. Using jargon or 'corporate speak' with phrases like 'service users', 'best practice' or 'synergies' will infuriate journalists and ensure your message does not get heard by your audience.

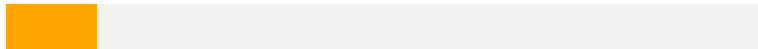


PUT YOURSELF IN A JOURNALIST'S SHOES TO MAKE A COMPELLING STORY

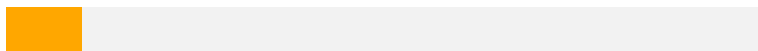
Here are the full results from our most hated jargon poll we carried out

VOTE FOR THE WORST JARGON EVER

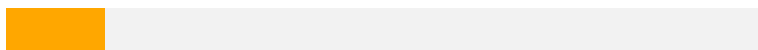
Journey 12% (33)



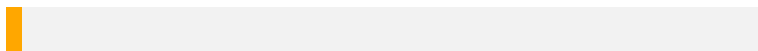
Stakeholder 10% (29)



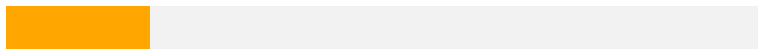
Holistic 13% (37)



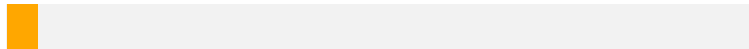
Solution 2% (7)



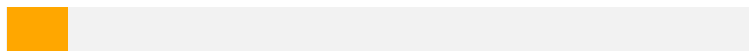
Moving forwards 19% (52)



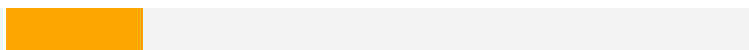
Best practice 4% (11)



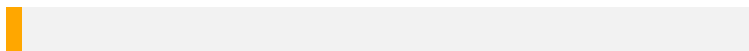
Traction 8% (23)



Synergy 18% (50)



Robust 2% (5)



Other 12% (34)



TOTAL VOTES: 281 VOTERS:210

IDENTIFYING THE RIGHT SPOKESPERSON

Organisations often assume it will be the chief executive or company chairman who will front their media activity.

But they may not always be the best person to be put in front of the media.

You need someone who is compelling and enigmatic who will be able to connect with the audience. We often find on the [courses](#) we run that it is not the most senior or confident member of the team who performs best in front of the cameras and microphones – sometimes the rising stars of the organisation can be the most captivating.

The spokesperson you choose needs to have a detailed understanding of the organisation and its sector and it is essential they have had recent practical media training with [current working journalist tutors](#).



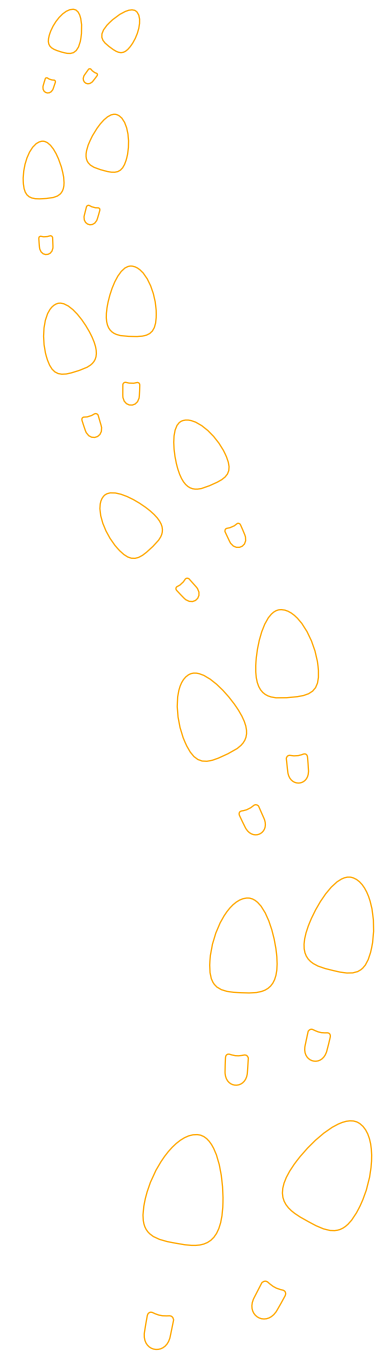
IDENTIFYING THE RIGHT SPOKESPERSON

Strong body language and a professional appearance are also important.

You may find that you need to identify more than one spokesperson, particularly if you are planning to undertake a prolonged strategy of media engagement.

Additionally, if you operate across multiple sites you may need to look at identifying different spokespeople in each location, particularly if you are targeting regional media.

Regional spokespeople help you engage and win the trust of the audience and show a commitment to the area and people who live there. That's why journalists love spokespeople who have accents – it shows you, and to an extent they, are not London centric.



IDENTIFYING THE RIGHT SPOKESPERSON

Here is a checklist to help you identify your spokespeople for a crisis:

Spokesperson	Previous media experience	Recent media training	Delivery style	Topic	Understanding of issue	Location	Availability
A							
B							
C							
D							
E							

NEVER STOP PRACTICING

There is no substitute for your spokesperson getting stuck into interviews as soon as they have been [media trained](#).

However, if your organisation is not immediately in the media spotlight it's vital your spokespeople continue to develop their skills.

Make sure they review any written feedback they received following media training and ensure they watch any recordings they have of their performance.

Encourage them to watch and listen to interviews on the news and think about what the spokesperson did well and where they could have improved.

Put them to the test by becoming the interviewer. You could record them on your smartphone (both audio and videos), put them through a telephone interview or even one conducted through Zoom or Teams if you think that is a realistic possibility.

You can also practice interviews with our new AI-powered training companion [Thirty Seven](#), which allows you to privately practice and get instant feedback on your interview skills with an AI journalist.



DON'T STOP PRACTICING

Additionally make sure they are familiar with your messages and examples you would want to include in media interviews. The more they use them in these mock situations, the more familiar they will become and the more composed they will be about delivering them when the cameras are rolling.

While it may seem daunting, particularly if they are senior, it is important you give your spokesperson feedback on their practice and real interviews. One way you could make this easier is by asking rather than telling.

Use probing questions to discover what they think and feel.

Here are a few examples of probing questions that might help:

- How do you think the interview went?
- What do you think worked well?
- What would you do differently?
- Where there any parts you think could have gone better?



FINAL THOUGHTS

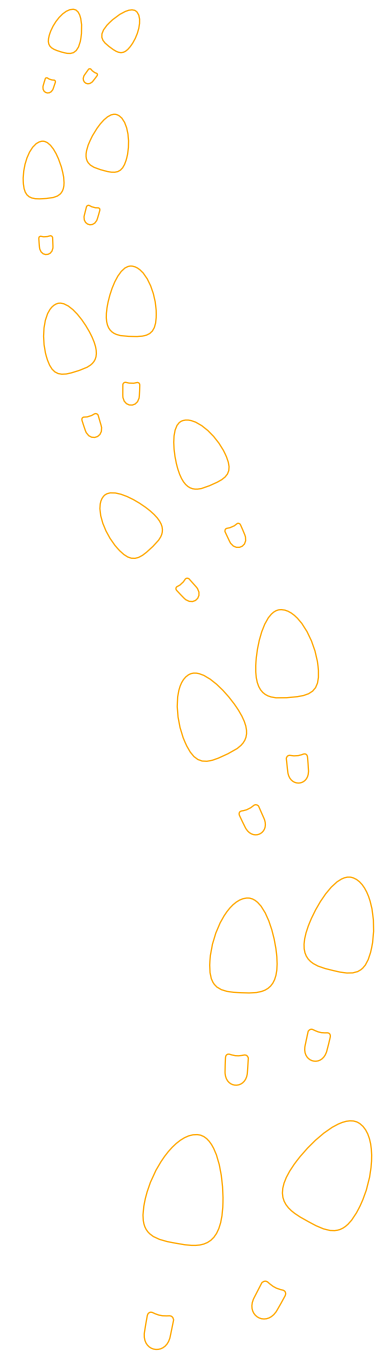
Every business, regardless of size, has a story to tell. Get it right and you win hearts, captivate minds, evoke emotions about your brand and attract potential new customers.

Whether you have a fully developed media strategy in place or are at the early stages of launching your media profile, [media training](#) will help.

During training we often find that different strategies, messages and approaches emerge as our training is delivered by working journalists and television presenters who have a unique understanding of what makes an audience tick.

Some organisations are still cautious about engaging with the media. The key is to remember they are not the enemy. They are absolutely vital in making sure that your story is heard by as large an audience as possible. Engage with them and think like them by putting yourself in their shoes.

Think of it as a mutually beneficial relationship. The media needs stories to fill space in newspapers and airtime on television and radio; you need the media as a facilitator to get your message out to your audience.



ABOUT US

Media First has been delivering bespoke media, presentations and communication training for more than 40 years.

In that time we have delivered and developed a range of practical media training techniques and courses that use experienced professionals, such as practicing journalists, to explain how the media works and to allow individuals to cope with its demands. We have worked with press and communication teams alongside their spokespeople in over forty different sectors.

Our media training courses work because they are realistic and authentic.

If you would like to find out more about our media training courses, please get in touch on 0118 918 0530, hello@mediafirst.co.uk or visit www.mediafirst.co.uk.

