

# Make journalism pay

THE NEW Ways to Make Journalism Pay conference organised by London Freelance Branch in January was a great success. There's already been a report-back meeting in Birmingham, and similar gatherings in other parts of the UK are planned, with follow-up training initiatives – see bottom right. Conference instigator Alex Klaushofer noted that it was a chance to learn from “people who've made attempts to do something about the failure of the traditional model” of the media.

Former *Yorkshire Post* business editor David Parkin, prompted by a “terrible foreboding that the industry was dying”, launched Yorkshire business news website [www.thebusinessdesk.com](http://www.thebusinessdesk.com). The site's small scale made it more sure-footed than giants like Reuters – one reader was able to tell his bank manager what the new interest rate was, thanks to an email sent to registered users within two minutes of the rate being made public.

The founder of Indus Delta – the micro-niche website for the welfare-to-work industry's community – says he started up the site to serve a new industry for which there was “a lack of history – nobody knew what was going on”, which meant the industry remained a “top-down thing, the official line coming down from government tended to be taken as gospel.” Indus Delta gradually acquired 3000 subscribers to its (free) weekly email newsletter, attracting advertising from recruiters and suppliers. The likes of Haymarket publishers seem not to have noticed Indus Delta, which means that now Daniel has “a monopoly on welfare to work.”

Paul Staines makes a living writing as Tory blogger Guido Fawkes, now followed by more readers than the *Spectator* and the *New Statesman*. Paul is also co-founder of Message Space, a home for political bloggers of many different persuasions. Political blogging doesn't bring in enough to make a living on its own, cautions Paul. “We find people who are doing political blogs, approach them, agree to split advertising revenue.” His advertising team attract mostly political campaigns and NGOs to advertise on the blogs. If you can get readers to sign up to your email alerts, “advertisers value what they call ‘qualified leads’ – email addresses, (whether) male, female, how much they earn. It's important data.”

Most of Paul's Guido Fawkes income is on the back of the publicity generated by the blog. He sells front page exclusives to the tabloids for five-figure sums, and then there's media punditry and lucrative consultancies.

NUJ London Freelance Branch member Conrad Quilty-Harper joined the Union as its first member to describe his occupation as “blogger”. He has worked for techie blogs such as Engadget, starting at US \$6 a post, up to \$15 a post by the time he left. When he joined Engadget there was a gap in serious coverage of gadgets. Conrad said the secret of the blog's success was in building a strong community, which meant it could get manufacturers to sponsor events at which advertisers could meet readers face-to-face.

The big corporate media groups are apparently abandoning local

news. But could we as journalists start local news media enterprises of our own? Eric Gordon, together with colleagues founded the *Camden New Journal* (CNJ) free newspaper after a two-year strike at the *Camden Journal* in 1982, and is still its managing editor. Eric attributes the CNJ's survival to having “no shareholders”.

Ian Reeves of *Press Gazette* described American examples of “crowdfunding” for journalists, some of whom have turned the readers of their blogs into “micropatrons”, raising up to \$40,000 to keep their reporting going. Gavin McFadyen, director of the Centre for Investigative Journalism, says some 60 NGOs such as Greenpeace and Amnesty now employ journalists. Gavin is also co-founder of the Bureau for Investigative Journalism, which has now set up in the UK, with a budget of £2 million raised from non-profit foundations. “This has not been done before,” say Gavin, “there are no models for this.”

● There's a much longer report at [www.londonfreelance.org/fl/1002ways.html](http://www.londonfreelance.org/fl/1002ways.html), including links, more detail on “saving local media”, video and audio extracts.

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A sign of the times – and why the conference was called: a closed newspaper office in North London

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## From journo to NGO

THERE'S increasing demand for journalists to work with international NGOs in their projects abroad. LFB's own Pennie Quinton told the February Branch meeting how this sector works. “Think about the contract when working for an NGO,” she advised. There are clear advantages to such jobs, which can be in almost any country, but you need to check on aspects of the contract such as what's covered in their health insurance. A lot of policies will not cover pregnancy, for example. While some contracts let employees take their family, and pay school fees and children's health insurance, you'll often be expected to do a “minimum service period” of anything up to two years before the NGO will pay for flights back.

NGOs need journalists for their video and writing skills, and roles in-

clude press officer, research, database construction, interviewing and evidence-gathering and website editing roles. Youth, health and poverty are some of the main areas that NGOs cover.

The Middle East and especially the West Bank, Gaza and Yemen have a lot of vacancies right now. Work environments will be “pretty grim,” warns Pennie. In Tajikistan, for example, one NGO worker noted that “in the winter it's minus 40 and they have an energy crisis.” There's always a chance you could end up working “in the middle of nowhere filling in funding forms”. But the rewards for NGO work can be considerably more than today's falling rates for mainstream media.

Frustratingly, there will be “a lot of political things you see in front of you, which you cannot report on

[as] you have an allegiance to your NGO,” says Pennie. The Bond website [www.bond.org.uk](http://www.bond.org.uk) has ads for NGO jobs which call for journalistic skills. See more at [www.londonfreelance.org/fl/1003ngo.html](http://www.londonfreelance.org/fl/1003ngo.html) and a report of the rest of the meeting at [1003coop.html](http://1003coop.html).

### Watch for Johnston strikes

NUJ members across Johnston Press titles are balloting on strike action against job cuts following the imposition of an ATEX content management system. Those in Blackpool have already voted to strike. Freelances should see [www.nuj.org.uk](http://www.nuj.org.uk) for announcements of days on which they may find they are unavailable to work.

## Entrepreneur journals?

FOLLOWING LFB's highly successful New Ways To Make Journalism Pay conference (see this page) a branch working party has been beaver away to set up follow-up events. The plan is to run practical, workshop-based sessions for groups of journalists planning to set up their own business, or for journalists confronting the prospect of working for themselves for whatever reason. Two strands are being developed: traditional entrepreneurial approaches and mutual or co-operative models. We're working informally with Co-operatives UK – interest is rising in the wake of successful trading by the John Lewis Partnership and the Co-Operative Group, plus the growing number of football supporter groups taking over the running of their stricken clubs.