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CONFIRMATION of one of the reasons journalists at titles owned by Johnston Press are (re-)balloting over strike action is handily provided by the Bedford Times and Citizen:



Johnston has forced introduction of an Atex "content management system" with insufficient training. How could they be surprised, then, to find the free weekly appearing with the front-page headline "headline headghgh"? Meanwhile, the NUJ has referred Johnston Press to the Press Complaints Commission on the grounds that its new workflow rules for editors prevent them fulfilling their obligations to ensure the accuracy of the papers' content.

## Rex rides again

REX FEATURES, a photo agency with a bit of a "paparazzi" reputation but a huge archive of culturally important images, will stay independent. A proposal that mega-agency Getty would buy it was put out to consultation by the government's Office of Fair Trading and several third parties, including the NUJ, wrote to say that competition between agencies was rather important to the survival of photojournalism as a craft, given the tendency of a duopoly between Getty and Corbis to drive down prices. On 8 July the OFT announced that it was referring the merger to the Competition Commission "for further investigation". Getty immediately announced that it had "decided not to pursue this acquisition any further".

## SOME STORIES NOT IN THE PRINT EDITION

# Bauer freelances make some small gains

THE FREELANCE copyright and legal indemnity uproar at Bauer mags, *Kerrang!*, *Mojo* and *Q* is over. The outcome means it's more difficult for freelance music writers and photographers to make a living.

The struggle began back in February when the company issued contracts demanding copyright assignment and dumping sole legal liability on the freelance. In response to a "sign here or no more work" ultimatum, more than 200 freelancers started petitions rejecting the contracts and requesting negotiations. (See [www.londonfreelance.org/fi/1007baue.html](http://www.londonfreelance.org/fi/1007baue.html) for more on the dispute and its background.)

Bauer followed with two different, revised contracts. "Tier 1", offered to maybe two dozen major contributors a far-reaching license for free re-use rather than copyright transfer. Tier 2 remained all rights. Most freelancers still said no. Bauer then added legally binding addenda to the contracts – this restricted legal liability to cases where freelancers had acted negligently or maliciously. Worn out by the disputes tensions and with livelihoods threatened as the company finally enforced the "no contract, no commissions" ultimatum, the freelancers ended their campaign.

Many regular contributors, including this writer, will not sign the contracts offered, losing work we love doing – and income. Beyond Bauer, there are other outlets

whose nasty contracts are rarely non-negotiable. Publishers will continue to depend on a body of self-employed content providers who cover their own business risks, office and equipment costs, holiday and sick pay. As creative workers we're worth it, from independent journalistic voice to cash on the barrelhead.

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- For the small proportion of Bauer music magazine contributors in the campaign who are NUJ members, the union's National Executive Council voted a £5000 hardship fund for those whose income has suffered as a result of the rights grab and subsequent dispute.

# Local heroes: new models in local journalism

**Report from the Press Gazette and Kingston University "Local Heroes" conference, 14 May 2010**

ABOUT fifty people attended, in addition to the speakers. Most were in regional or local journalism, and there were quite a few academics from the host university.

Key impressions/messages:

- There is a great appetite for local news in local communities – the readers are there.
- Publishers are using a range of different models from traditional weekly local papers to hyper-local community websites.
- Some of the models dispense with editorial staff but many, probably most working in regional and local journalism recognise the importance of professional journalists.

**William Perrins** described how the ultra-local [www.kingscrossenvironment.org](http://www.kingscrossenvironment.org) and similar sites cover detail local papers miss. But they don't generate advertising revenue – he earns his living training local communities to set up similar sites for Channel 4. He argued that low start-up costs and the wealth of volunteer labour among the community make such ultra-local sites very viable.

**James Hatts** "just about" earns a living from hyper-local London SE1, a community website which accompanies a monthly print publication, covering the areas in and around Borough. Half his income comes via Google AdSense, and the other half from the commission local restaurants and bars pay for bookings made through the site.

**Sheila Prophet**, editor of [www.Fulhamsw6.com](http://www.Fulhamsw6.com), part of the

local news network Neighbour Net, said that growth was incremental but that a new site could over time pay for an editor. Neighbour Net's flagship site [ChiswickW4.com](http://ChiswickW4.com) generates six figures.

**Mike Dickerson** of Community Times, a UK-wide network of 150 local magazines with an annual turnover of over £2 million, said the keys to success were direct marketing, relevance and asset ownership – all editors own their own businesses, paying CT a management fee.

**James Mawer** from media buying agency Oxbury Media Services pointed out there is a market for advertising in hyper-local magazines such as parish magazines. The annual spend by national advertisers is over £30 million a year.

**James Morrison**, senior lecturer at Kingston University, described how councils were becoming less transparent due to the decline in the independent reporting of their activities. 98 per cent of English councils now publish their own newspaper, paying salaries that can attract quality staff – a starting salary for a reporter on Hammersmith and Fulham is £33,994, compared to an average £12,000 on a local paper.

**Tony Johnston**, director of training at the Press Association, talked about the PA's pilot project in subsidised public service reporting. They would be lobbying for national funding once the pilot had run and been evaluated, he said.

**Eric Gordon**, *Camden New Journal* editor, said (in addition to what he said at the LFB conference), there were limits to citizen journalism as it took trained journo's to "test the material".

In a rousing Churchillian speech, **Sir Ray Tindle**, proprietor of Tindle Newspapers, said he had not lost a paper or a journalist since launching his first title in 1945. He said the keys were keeping coverage absolutely local, and predicted that the tide was now turning for local papers.

**Nigel Lowther** described how he launched a new independent weekly, the *Cleethorpes Chronicle* in the teeth of the recession, and was now heading for a decent profit.

**Betty Drummond**, managing director of Champion Media, told a similarly inspiring tale of how her company had used the recession as an opportunity for expansion rather than contraction. It now has advertising revenues up 11 per cent year on year.

**David Parkin** of [www.thebusinessdesk.com](http://www.thebusinessdesk.com) described his "freemium" (free and premium) model as he did at the LFB event in January.

**Wanja Oberhof** from Berlin described how he pioneered Niiu, a personalised daily newspaper which now has nearly 5000 subscribers. The publication relies entirely on software to put together a digest of print and online sources, dispensing with journalists altogether.

**Darren Thwaites**, editor of the *Evening Gazette* describes how his network of ultra local websites covers its patch using both free community bloggers and a team of professional journalists.

**Adam Westbrook**, multi-media journalist talked about he dos and don'ts of using video for local news.

Like a lot of other attendees, I didn't have any brain space left for a heated debate...

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