

Investigative journalism: how's that work?

JULY'S LONDON Freelance Branch meeting featured Tom Randall, a TV investigative journalist with Wiretap Productions; and Mark Watts, editor-in-chief of investigative website Exaro – www.exaronews.com – which commissions (and pays) freelancers.

Tom got his first job by pitching a story. That's unusual in TV – production companies have departments dedicated to coming up with ideas, and others to commissioning people to make them. "All that the people who run these companies do all day," he says, "is have meetings and talk about stories... so talk to them."

He's done six pieces for Channel 4's *Dispatches* – one undercover as a debt collector, and last year exposing a landlord who while running "a so-called charity" talked about how he enjoyed threatening people with baseball bats.

Tom finds the Channel 4 Indy Desk and *Newsnight* approachable – as are Brown Envelope films, run by former *Guardian* journalist David Hencke. He mentioned as a recent success the story of the man running the Student Loan Company who worked as a limited company

and paid very little tax – Mark Watts said "but that was an Exaro story."

The standard approach to a producer used to be a one-page proposal. Now some ask for video "tasters". It costs £100k – £200k for an hour's factual TV, so broadcasters may give you small amount of "development money" to film more stuff before they finally decide.

Mark Watts moved from newspapers to *World in Action*, and got axed from there, so recently launched www.exaronews.com – "I've always had a slight problem with the label 'Investigative Journalist,'" he said, "and would hope that all journalists would try to find out what's really going on rather than take the huff and guff..."

Now there's "an appetite for investigating all centres of power". There's been a backlash against the accountants: "They are the enemy, not lawyers".

Don't invest in a subject and spend a lot of time and money before you know there's a market, warns Mark. You need to find someone to fund development. In UK TV, there is some scope at C4 and *Newsnight*

where you don't have to be a big production house to get used. New models are arriving – such as www.fairpie.com which asks for a minimum £2 per watch.

Exaro has investment funding for three years. The site's aimed at city professionals: a broadsheet readership doesn't want to pay for information online, but actuaries and lawyers are used to paying for information for example from the *FT* and the Lexis-Nexis databases.

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• There's a longer version online.

US court un-protects sources

On 6 July the United States court of appeal in Boston, Massachusetts ruled that interviews given by participants in Northern Ireland's "Troubles" on strict condition of anonymity should be delivered by Boston College to the Police Service of Northern Ireland. The NUJ continues to support members Ed Moloney and Anthony McIntyre in protecting sources: see updates online.



Mark Watts, chair Dave Rotchelle and (standing) Tom Randall

Photo © Matt Salusbury

Gen Sec proposes NUJ recovery plan

THE NUJ Recovery Plan proposed by NUJ General Secretary Michelle Stanistreet is now online. At just under 3500 words, it outlines the financial crisis facing the Union – the result of the "pensions hole" facing most employers, and of a drop in membership in a shrinking industry.

The plan anticipates the point in September when the Union's National Executive Committee (NEC) has to formally confirm that they believe the NUJ is a "going concern". Proposals include a recruitment

drive; NUJ staff redundancies; a subscription increase of five per cent; holding Delegate Meetings every two years; and winding up NUJ Training, or putting it out to tender, or bringing it under the Federation of Entertainment Unions, which already organises some training for the NUJ.

London Freelance Branch may well end up taking on some of the functions currently carried out by NUJ Training. Some courses currently offered by NUJ Training started life as LFB courses.

Michelle came to July's LFB meeting to discuss the plan with members. Since then there has been a membership retention drive, with volunteer members calling recently-lapsed NUJ members to persuade them to consider rejoining. Freelance Organiser John Toner and Assistant Organiser Pamela Morton will remain in post, though John is now Wales Organiser as well. Please take the time to read the NUJ Recovery Plan in full: www.londonfreelance.org/fl/1207reco.html

Tax guide and a warning

Chartered Accountants HW Fisher & Company Ltd suggest that we pass on to you details of the tax guide for authors and freelance journalists that they have prepared. It's linked via www.londonfreelance.org/fl/1208tax.html and gives details of the new penalties for persistently late filing of returns, among other things. Remember that you now need to ask HMRC to send you a paper tax return form if you want one, as filing your tax return online has long been the default position. It can take an astonishing four weeks for your blank paper tax return to arrive. Then you have to get it in the post to arrive by 31 October. (The procedure is the same as for recent years: see www.londonfreelance.org/fl/1009tax2.html) Or you could file your tax return online, with a later – and easier to remember – deadline of 31 January 2013 (31/1/13).

New ways to make journalism pay 2

WONDERING whether freelance journalism has a future? Wondering whether you have a future in freelance journalism? Our second New Ways To Make Journalism Pay conference on **17 November** aims to give that future a good seeing-to and come up with some ideas on how we can find our way through the recession-cum-digi-economic jungle.

Diverse speakers already confirmed include *R4 Media Show* and *Guardian* expert Steve Hewlett, Exaro online investigative journalism site editor Mark Watts, co-editor of Belfast-based freelance-owned and launched social affairs magazine *VIEWdigital* Una Murphy, and freelance experts-by-experience on making a good living and/or surviving

while doing what you love and care about. They include Guy Smallman (photographer whose assignments include Afghanistan, Iraq and the Pakistan earthquake aftermath), Max Glaskin (B2B writer who's found clients around the world) and others on making it as a freelance in the post-2007 "perfect storm" and how to break the "BRIC" markets. We've even invited some bosses...

Half of each session will be dedicated to contributions from you, the audience, asking crucial questions, sharing good ideas on that key topic – how to do journalism while eating, keeping a roof over your head and suchlike.

• It's at the London Welsh Centre, 157-163 Gray's Inn Road, WC1 (10

minutes walk from King's Cross), 9.30am – 5pm on 17 November;

• Tickets are £10 for NUJ members and £30 for non-members;

• Please register with the Freelance Office, freelanceoffice@nuj.org.uk or 020 7843 3706 (ask for Pamela Morton or John Toner). Places will be allocated first-come, first-served. Please register by 2 November so we can book catering

Payment can be made by cheque payable to "NUJ" and posted to LFB New Ways Conference c/o Freelance Office, NUJ, 308-312 Gray's Inn Road, London WC1X 8DP. For credit card payments please phone Pamela Morton. And for updates see www.londonfreelance.org

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