

Digital money

NOVEMBER'S London Freelance Branch meeting heard from Bill Goodwin, famous for protecting his sources when he was at the Engineer. Bill's now Premium Content Editor at *Computer Weekly* (CW). He attempted to cover "everything a freelance needs to know about digital journalism".

The internet has radically changed journalism, he began: "and not only for the best". Page lead rates for a Sunday paper are often less than the £500 they were when Bill started freelancing years ago. Some local newspapers have closed, and Newsweek has gone online-only. Many publishers made the mistake of assuming that advertising would follow print onto the web.

They were wrong. Google and Facebook are consuming a lot of the money that would otherwise have gone to newspapers and magazines. Advertising rates have fallen.

The model of making money by selling advertising on websites assumes "a sort of newswire approach": get a story up more quickly and you get more hits, and more money. This means pressure for "churnalism" and to go for the stories that generate the hits, rather than those that meet the needs of the target readership.

Another business model, the paywall, works well for the *Financial Times* – specialist, with most subscriptions paid on expenses by readers' employers. Who knows whether News International has a sustainable model for the *Times* or *Sun*?

Then there's "lead generation". Bill's publisher has a "Big Brother engine" behind the website – to find out what people read and what budgets they control. IBM will pay good money to email a company policy "white paper" to Chief Executives of pharmaceutical companies with a certain turnover... and the system

can tell IBM there are these six other people in one of the companies also downloading documents on the same subject.

According to Bill, the nature of the web is that it is infinite, there is no space limit, there are no deadlines – or rather the deadline is always now, there is no competition to get on the front page, and stories are rarely spiked – at the moment.

Now staff on CW have not only to file stories, but also source photos, check credits, "tag" for search engines and write the headlines.

And writers have to plug their own work on social media. Bill uses Twitter mostly to plug the latest story. LinkedIn can promote stories and contact people. CW pays some journalists to blog: rates depend on the "traffic" they draw. Top-performing bloggers get £300 a month for three to five pieces a week.

Advice to a young hack? Some freelancers have been successful plugging specialist skills – for example the ability to shoot and edit video. Having your own website and a blog are now compulsory – everyone hired on CW recently has had both.

Some of these emerging business models will be successful and once we've got through the fiscal crisis some interesting opportunities will emerge. Bill says we're "already seeing an upturn". CW is expanding: rates may even rise for the first time in 15 years. "While the web taketh away," Bill concludes, "the web also giveth."

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● More, as usual, online



Bill Goodwin tells it like it is: photo © hazel@hazeldunlop.com

Are you on a 'domestic extremists' database?

THE NUJ is playing its part in the Trades Union Congress's (TUC's) anti-blacklisting campaign, which is calling for a full public inquiry into the practice. A raid by the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) in 2009 revealed a blacklist held by the Consulting Association of many people working in the construction industry – including those known to be active members of a trade union, or even workers who had raised health and safety concerns. But some members of the NUJ have also found their names on that blacklist, including journalist Mark Thomas.

Mark also found, through a Data Protection Act request, that he appeared on a Metropolitan Police database of "domestic extremists" (a term that has – probably deliberate-

ly – never been properly defined.) His "domestic extremism" file contained over 80 intelligence reports including public lectures he'd given, events he's attended, even petitions he'd supported. Some of the data was inaccurate – it listed demos Mark hadn't been on. (For more see www.nuj.org.uk/news/help-the-nuj-expose-the-monitoring-of-journalists).

With NUJ support, Mark is taking legal action to have his "domestic extremism" data deleted as "disproportionate," and he is encouraging NUJ members to use the Data Protection Act to uncover any "domestic extremism" files held on them by police forces, and to have them deleted. His appeal, above, has a link to the ICO showing how to do it.

I join Mark in urging NUJ mem-

bers who cover protests to request data that the police may hold on them. My own name appeared on database of "domestic extremists" held by the National Coordinator Domestic Extremism database, now a unit of the Metropolitan Police, although the Met have since assured me that data including a record of a demo in Crawley I never attended, and a photo of my cycling past the venue for the G20 meeting in London in April 2009, have by now been deleted.

A Data Protection Act request also revealed a Metropolitan Police Forward Intelligence Team's "intelligence report" of a stop and search on me while covering the Dsei Arms Fair protests in 2007. The report includes the membership num-

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LFB meetings

13 January
Annual General
Meeting:
democracy time!

10 February

Reporting the NHS
(to be confirmed)

See back page &
www.twitter.com/LFB