

**Building relationships with local media can help enormously in getting coverage of what your church or Christian organisation is doing. In this month's Top Tips Baptist journalists from the Reading Evening Post and BBC Radio Merseyside give advice on working with local papers and BBC local radio.**

### WORKING WITH LOCAL PAPERS

Your local newspaper is an important part of your community: it lets people know what's going on in their area. It's news that they can't find anywhere else – and that's why it's important that you keep in touch with your paper.

#### **FIND OUT WHAT KIND OF STORIES YOUR LOCAL PAPER LIKES TO COVER**

Every newspaper, just like our churches, has a personality of its own. Some really focus on pages of reports of the local flower arranging society, others will be excited by the cut and thrust of local politics. Find out what your newspaper is printing – and then send them relevant information. Will they print details of your youth clubs in its listings, what about service times? Be imaginative.

#### **GET TO KNOW YOUR DIRECT REPORTER**

Newspapers usually assign reporters to a patch: they then have a special responsibility for that area. Find out who covers the neighbourhood that your church is in and get in touch. Ask them what kind of information they'd want from you.

#### **PASTORS - GET TO KNOW YOUR EDITOR**

A newspaper editor once told me that they kept in regular contact with local Muslim leaders; but during their time at the paper the local parish priest had not even popped their head round the door. It's always a good idea, particularly if the paper's offices are within your neighbourhood, to introduce yourself to the editor and build good links up. Try and arrange a get to know you meeting, especially if you have just arrived at a pastorate.

#### **KNOW WHEN THE PAPER GOES TO PRESS - AND WHEN THE DEADLINE IS!**

Every paper gets more pressurised as they get closer to the deadline. Sending news and information over in good time is better than trying to get them to hold the front page just because your church is holding a gospel concert tomorrow and is it too late to get it in?

#### **DON'T BE AFRIAD OF HAVING A STORY TURNED DOWN**

Space is always a premium for newspapers. Sometimes you get lucky and get a page of coverage, other times the same story would be given three lines and at other times still it would be ignored altogether. Just because you get turned down once, it doesn't mean to say it will happen with the next event. Try, try and try again.

#### **ADVERTISING WORKS...**

Local newspapers not only tell the news, they also carry adverts for local businesses. If you can afford it, why not take out an advert for Alpha, or your Christmas services? If your churches clubbed together you might be able to buy a 'wrap' (that's the first two pages and back two pages) of your free newspaper. Here you can create a real splash telling people about what your church is up to.

## REMEMBER WHO READS THE PAPER

One thing about a local paper is that it unites a community. That means you'll have everyone from atheists to people from other faiths reading. Local newspapers try and present the news impartially, and that means they'll treat the Collinstone Model Train Society on the same level as Collinstone Baptist Church. Reporters will, to the best of their abilities, be objective in their coverage.

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## WORKING WITH BBC LOCAL RADIO

BBC local radio stations are hungry for news. They are also committed to having Sunday morning "Faith and Ethics" programmes and each one has a Religious Producer. By getting to know your local producer and recognising a strong story your church can be the talk of your town.

### GET TO KNOW YOUR PRODUCER

Make contact with your BBC station's Religious Producer (sometimes called Faith Producer). This person will be very busy so don't waste their time, but they do want to know what you're doing. Some producers also present the Sunday programme; other stations will have a separate presenter. Listen to their programme and find out what material they make use of.

### GET YOUR NEWS STORY OUT THERE

Make use of the "Writing a Press Release" top tips and get a brief press release to the local producer three weeks before your event. Give all the important information including a contact phone number, and say why this is a story that should be on the radio.

### WATCH OUT FOR GOOD FEATURE PIECES

Things that you might not consider "news" can still make gripping radio. Does someone have a good conversion story? Does someone run an ethical business? Do your young people have an unusual activity planned?

### JOIN THE VOLUNTEER TEAM

Find one of your best people with a passion for communicating and release them from other jobs so they can join the team at the radio station. Most BBC stations will gladly accept offers of volunteer help, as long as you're genuinely committed to the station and willing to start at the bottom.

### OFFER A STRONG THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Many BBC stations still have a Thought for the Day slot of some kind. Listen to what they do then send a sample Thought to your producer. Make sure it's not at all preachy, but make it relevant to a current local news story and try to use humour. Be available to write Thoughts at short notice.

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