

Roberta Doyle, Director of External Affairs, National Theatre of Scotland, Andrew Lockyer, Series Producer, BBC Scotland and Steve Mitchell, Picture Editor, Nottingham Post
Connecting with the media

Roberta Doyle is Director of External Affairs with the National Theatre of Scotland, having previously held the same role for Scottish Opera and the post of Director of Public Affairs with the National Galleries of Scotland. She has also been Director of Marketing at Scottish Ballet, Marketing and Press Manager with the Citizens' Theatre in Glasgow and Head of Marketing and Press with Glasgow City Council's Department of Performing Arts and Venues. She is a governor of Glasgow School of Art and has been a tutor on many of the TMA's residential marketing courses. She has lectured and given papers in the UK and abroad on a wider range of subjects.

Andrew Lockyer has been making arts programmes for the BBC for seventeen years, beginning as a researcher on *The Late Show*, moving on to *Edinburgh Nights* and as producer on *The Cinema Show* for BBC Four. For BBC Scotland, he has overseen eight series of ArtWorks Scotland documentaries, winning awards from BAFTA Scotland, the Celtic Media Festival and Prix Circom. Last year he produced a documentary for BBC One's Imagine Arts arts strand on the Simon Bolivar Youth Orchestra of Venezuela and is currently working on programmes about the Glasgow School of Art, the Big Noise (a music education project in Stirling), the artist Peter Howson and the latest work from choreographer Michael Clark.

Steve Mitchell, a former professional musician, moved into photography with NME. He spent 12 years at the Nottingham Evening Post before joining Empics Sports Agency for 6 years. He covered many international events including 32 Formula One Grand Prixes worldwide and nine European football finals. He moved back into regional press at Derby Evening Telegraph before returning as Picture Editor to the Nottingham Evening Post five years ago. Steve still performs as a musician/songwriter with The Shining Examples.

This session offered insights and tips on fostering good relations with the press, as well as encouraging debate and discussion of the challenges and opportunities involved.

Creating Ballyhoo

[Roberta Doyle began by referring to Andy Ryan's keynote, in which he mentions the word 'ballyhoo'] This came from the AMA Conference in 1999 in which a small group were fed up with the sessions being dominated by research, databases, etc, so they set up the first and only fringe meeting the AMA conference has ever had. They wanted to stake a claim to getting some excitement back into our work as we had forgotten about the more creative stuff. On that day, a Hollywood PR expert from the 1930s was quoted:

"Can we remember to create ballyhoo?"

This word has stuck in my mind. This introduction here is about remembering to revisit ballyhoo. My heart sank slightly, when I heard Diane's quote from the 1960s, because it seemed surely we should have moved on from there. Equally, my heart sank a little bit because surely we should have moved on from Edinburgh in 1999 as well.

Here's an example from our own time:

'The publicist's skill is to proactively find, tell and sell the stories that make the news and it's a skill that's more relevant now than ever.

The publicist should expose every single angle of the challenge to detailed scrutiny in order to promote stories that are media-friendly and which provide the hook on which a journalist will hang a news piece, feature item or photo opportunity.'

Mark Borkowski

This quote is taken from Mark Borkowski's book, called *The Fame Formula*. It is about publicists in the old-fashioned sense of the word, and how they created the concept of fame. He believes that fame and celebrity was created by the film industry in the 1920s - 1950s, and we have forgotten how to do this. It is worth highlighting the idea of drawing people in with a hook.

Connecting with the media: why don't we make the news?

There are a number of reasons why we don't make the news as much as we could or should:

- We concentrate on releases instead of relationships
- We are formulaic and churn out information - news is now more about emotional reaction than information
- We underestimate our power
- We are fragmented and don't act communally as an industry

How come there are other industries that are doing this better than the arts community?

One of my friends has just become the editor of a leading Scottish newspaper, but even when he was editor of the Edinburgh Evening Post, he would have a pile of press releases that were nearly as tall as him (and he's not a small man). It's even worse than that now with e-mail; if he doesn't recognise the name he bins it straight away.

We forget that we have a powerful position as advertisers, our classifieds, listings, etc must amount to millions of pounds' worth of advertising. However, do we even know how much we spend as advertisers? We might know as individual organisations, but do we know as an industry; in the same way that food or drink can pull out these figures? Would that be a useful piece of information or lobbying tool? We could act communally to achieve this.

What journalists think of us as an industry

Despite all the new social networking platforms, we are still led by newspapers for breaking stories. Steve will confirm this. Although Michael Jackson's death was broken by a website, that was unusual. We might then follow stories online, but we ignore newspapers and broadcasters at our peril.

When I agreed to do the session, I decided to set up an online survey with five questions and circulate it to thirty-five journalists, so I could find out what they thought of us. Their

responses were anonymised so that they could be as honest as they wanted. There were 33 responses out of 35. The five questions were:

- What's the reason that the arts/culture are not higher up the news agenda?
- How interested are your readers/viewers in arts/culture?
- How good are the arts/culture at press and PR?
- Are there other industries that the arts/culture could learn from?
- What does the future hold for specialist subject arts writers, critics and arts correspondents in the press and media?

What's the reason that the arts/culture are not higher up the news agenda?

- A feeling amongst news editors that the arts are not for everybody
- Arts stories are too subtle/complex to be reduced to sound bites
- There is still a "cringe" against/resistance to anything that smacks of elitism
- Because art provokes good discussion but doesn't necessarily produce news
- Because the arts are creative rather than destructive. The human psyche responds more urgently to threat and bad news than to creation and good news
- There's a number of reasons. The three most frustrating are:
 - *Inability to provide details quickly when we're working to a deadline*
 - *Lack of understanding of what constitutes a useable publicity image*
 - *Determination of press officers to force an official line which demonstrates a lack of knowledge of the publication concerned*

Stories are too subtle and complex, apparently, and this is why editors can feel it is not for their readers. Is this our fault? Do we communicate clearly enough? The arts make the news when it's a *bad* news story. Are we equipped to deal with crisis PR as an industry? Not on the whole. Nor do we have an industry body to pop up and make the case on our behalf.

How interested are your readers/viewers in arts/culture?

- More than newspaper editors give them credit for
- Research suggests our viewers/listeners are more interested than news desks think they are
- Very interested, as our dialogue with them confirms
- Very. Our newspaper did a survey three years ago that showed arts news and coverage was in the top five topics readers wanted
- Very, but they are interested in "their" culture which is popular - music, film, TV etc. Editors, for the most part, are not great enemies of culture. They are simply in a vicious and unrelenting numbers game
- In general, probably not a lot, despite our paper pitching itself as a quality rag, aimed at ABCs.

When journalists were asked if readers are interested in what arts organisations are doing for a living, they often said it was their editors who were Philistines. What is going wrong then: if readers are interested, but editors are not. Is this about some of the practical things within our organisations? It might be about how we are working rather than how they are working.

How good are the arts/culture at press and PR?

- They're good at what they do but could do more to generate news stories
- Most PR departments in arts organisations are bad at working with newspapers to get unique story lines
- Most are good, they just don't have vast amounts of experience
- This varies massively; dry, unimaginative PR and overly sensational PR are both problems
- Getting better, though there is still a tendency to say "we are putting on this show/exhibition etc" as if that was news enough in itself
- Some are excellent. Others dire. Very little middle ground

The general feeling was that we've all got our hearts in the right place but we don't have the right experience. Are we taking issues of professional development and training seriously enough? This needs to be tackled.

Are there other industries that the arts/culture could learn from?

- The fashion industry seems to have captured the public's imagination
- TV and publishing can be more proactive and certainly are up for helping us develop separate story lines for different publications
- You don't need to look far: learn from Harvey Goldsmith, Simon Cowell, Raymond Gubbay. These people are all within the arts world
- Perhaps look at some of the methods used by TV, film and music press offices
- Travel Lodge

Some of these suggestions are very obvious, others not so. Look at the Travel Lodge: they constantly have a presence in the news, because they publish little in-house surveys, about whether customers prefer feather or down pillows, or the most popular breakfast choice. All daft, little in-house things. But think about the arts, one of the most researched areas of the creative industries. Do we not have or publish internally all sorts of research on a local, regional and national basis, about our audiences, attendance patterns, and so on? Could we not learn from this kind of thing?

What does the future hold for specialist subject arts writers, critics and arts correspondents in the press and media?

- Depending on how good they are at selling/branding themselves either:
 1. Poverty and irrelevance or 2. Enjoyable careers as bloggers
- Ahhhh...what it is to be an endangered species
- Plenty of opportunities to write, almost zero opportunities to be paid for it
- I suspect we're probably doomed in the long-term
- Dark nights, storms, low pay and empty fridges....
- It's a shaky time in the media but I like to think specialism is the way forward
- Within the sector, specialists probably have a brighter future than many
- There will always be a need for informed, intelligent writers of all kinds
- So long as there is a vibrant arts scene, then there will always be the need for media to convey news about it.

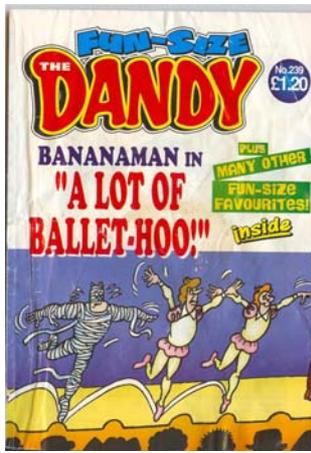
This question split the group: about half thought specialists were a dying breed, half that specialism, or creating a niche, was the way forward. Perhaps this is similar to specialisation

in sports writing. However, do we have a view, either as individual organisations or an industry, about where this discussion should go?

What's the future for the arts sector?

- Let's start taking press and pr more seriously inside our organisations
- This is about relationships, not releases
- The press are not the enemy
- Use your imagination and use your power
- Let's get together; maybe the AMA could act as a spokesperson for the industry

And maybe, as well as data, research, market intelligence, strategic marketing planning, reports, charts, Twitters and nings we also need.....



...ballyhoo

Working with Auntie

[Andrew took over the discussion to explain what he needs and how to develop a relationship with programme makers]

There are myriad ways to cover the arts on the BBC, ranging from short news items, deeper stories on Newsnight, relays like the Proms, Young Musician of the Year, opera, dance performances and occasional theatre as well as a smattering of arts award ceremonies. However, it is documentaries and magazine shows that especially draw people in and take them on journeys of discovery. There is as much an audience for these programmes as the news.

So what are we looking for? Similar things as many theatre and film directors; character and narrative. These are the things that attract and hold an audience for 30 or 60 minutes. Character means engaging artists, writers, directors, designers, musicians etc. BBC research indicates that what viewers want from programmes is narrative, as well as insight, so the story behind a play, film, actor, designer, etc can make a programme or series or item compelling and garner audiences. For example, David Hockney's recent programme was fascinating because he was prepared to reveal himself and his work.

However, the biggest barrier to achieving a happy marriage is that of access. It can be very difficult to gain access to the people and thus present the narratives and insights. It's like being a cat burglar, who has to sneak in, and when caught, is hustled away. Even trying to get inside the organisation can be difficult, and then when we are allowed in, there is outrage

if I suggest showing a rehearsal, workshop or the works being hung. And yet this insight, this window into an exclusive world, is exactly what people want to see – the process behind the work, the story. As a result, most arts programme makers cut out the arts organisation entirely, which is an awful admission to make and a sad state of affairs.

This is my dream scenario, the ideal partnership with an arts organisation:

- Receiving a phone call at the start of the project and being told about some great event, performance or celebration.
- Being invited to talk about the idea/project with the director, designer, composer, performers – not the press officer (no disrespect) – so that Andrew has a direct relationship with them.
- Sharing ideas and possibilities and working up a collaborative outline. Neither the BBC taking control, nor the arts organisation dictating the story.
- Being included in the process and updated regularly. For example, being invited to go in and see something interesting in progress, rather than having to constantly chase and then miss things.
- Being welcomed by everyone when the crew turns up to film, so the Stage Doorkeeper doesn't scowl, and there isn't a call from Equity on the voicemail later, complaining about our presence, and putting a stop to the filming.
- Understanding that a programme is not necessarily about 'selling' the show or exhibition being covered, but about uncovering the creative process and engendering enthusiasm in general. The gain for the arts organisation will be long-term, so they need to be relaxed about the date of transmission.
- Getting over the fear of exposure, either looking/sounding stupid, or coming across as awful. Generally speaking, people are very positive about those who are brave enough to appear on screen.
- Having trust and confidence in the programme team, based on having developed a relationship (see steps above). One reason I still hear for not letting TV crews into an organisation was *The House*, a fly-on-the-wall documentary about ROH at a time of great change and instability. The BBC did not set people up, or edit it carefully; the subjects knew the camera was there throughout. It was perceived as showing people up, behaving very badly, and showing the arts in a very poor way. On the other hand, people are *still* talking about a programme shown over ten years ago, and it *did* open up a window into a very unique world. The BBC makes these programmes for the love of the arts and generally speaking, the TV crews want other people to discover and share their enthusiasm.

[One person commented that it was usually technicians who put a block on things. Andrew said he had experienced this and it was quite often an issue of bringing around the person who was not keen. The cost used to be an issue, but contracts have mostly changed, so that people are paid an inclusive rate for all radio and TV appearances. In the past, it could cost up to £3000 for a 10 minute slot, which was just not effective.]

Local papers: solution or part of the problem?

[Steve Mitchell joined the conversation, commenting that he's not sure whether he's part of the problem or solution]

Local papers do not feel glamorous, like the nationals or even the BBC, but they play a crucial role. Most arts organisations are interested in attracting an audience and that audience will usually be local. So although local press may seem low in the pecking order, it is likely that your local paper is the one that you will be dealing with day-to-day.

My phone is generally the busiest in the building, because it's serving the sports department, the news department and the business department, for one of the most profitable newspapers in the Northcliffe Group. The Northcliffe Group has one of the healthiest regional circulation figures in the country, and is generally doing well, so it may surprise people that there is only seven photographers who serve the newspaper six days a week.

The demand on our resources is tight and we are getting requests from all sides within the organisation. When that telephone is ringing, a good percentage of the calls are from people who are competing to get to one of my photographers to come and take a picture of their event. Therefore arts organisations are often in that queue. The picture desk is in continual dialogue with all the other editors in the newspaper with two daily meetings. They sit in the hub, so they can hear what's going on and they're right in the mix.

So don't just try and get through to the news editor, you might have more success with the features editor, or even the picture editor. In that sense, picture editors are very much part of the solution; I am a great advocate of the importance of the arts in newspapers, because they can bring colour and life to a local newspaper. The things that make good pictures are the things that arts organisations are intrinsically involved with. There are three things that I am constantly dealing with:

1. The diary: booking photographers, making sure the huge range of events are covered
2. Telephone: people ringing up, all competing for space and coverage
3. The newsdesk: ensuring that stories are supported by vibrant and relevant pictures, ensuring photographers can cover breaking news

Understanding how the newsroom works is also helpful, so that people can see how their stories might fit in and how to achieve more coverage. The newsroom operates from 6am to 8pm, with one photographer also starting at 6am. Weekends are fully booked because of all the sports coverage. There's a conference in the morning and in the afternoon, to run through stories and get the paper ready. Everybody is on the lookout for stories that will lift the newspaper and the news out of the mundane. This is where arts organisations can pitch in, help papers and get their attention. Local papers are very willing to have input from arts organisations and make a vibrant, busy newspaper that people will find attractive to read (and buy). There's a lot more fire-fighting than forward planning in newspapers; they are driven by what is available to report.

The last gasp for printed newspapers?

Contrary to many recent, alarmist stories, newspapers are not breathing their last. They are no closer to dying than theatre, opera or classical music. It was interesting to hear Diane Ragsdale's comments this morning: just like arts organisations, papers are competing against a whole range of other people's demands. Papers are fighting a double whammy:

Whammy 1: new media. It took newspapers almost ten years to wake up to the internet. Those papers who are going to survive are the ones who have managed to claw back the ground that the industry has lost as a whole. It took papers a long time to realise that the Internet was going to be a key element of their development.

Whammy 2: the credit crunch. If someone's circumstances change and they're trying to save money, the first thing they do is stop buying their local paper. The effect of this is that some papers are going to the wall and some newspapers are reducing their pagination.

It's interesting to hear talk about the specialist writers. On *The Leicester Mercury*, the journalists have specialist areas but they are beginning to write pieces that go into the main part of the paper as well. There is also less space in the paper for pure arts coverage. That means more competition for arts organisations, trying to get your slice of the cake.

The other thing that is happening of course, is that papers are desperate to grab the reader's attention and there is a corresponding increase in competitions: the equivalent of the 'beautiful baby'. This is leading to a lowering of our sights in terms of what local papers start to consider as newsworthy.

Making friends with your local papers

- Ring the local picture editor; it does no harm to ring the news or features editor, but many people *don't* ring the picture editor. If it's not of direct interest to him or her, they will be speaking to the other editors and might pass it on.
- Ring up with a smile on your face, because it's very nice to speak to someone who is pleasant and has something to offer that will appeal.
- Ring up in plenty of time for the paper to react to what they are doing. The *Mercury's* six photographers have a job every half-hour, so there has to be plenty of notice.
- Get a relationship going, a dialogue. Picture editors don't have time for long discursive conversations, but they are usually happy and willing to bounce ideas. Especially if there is flexibility and they can see potential for an engaging story.

Tell your picture editor about events that will be happening; they will know what the paper wants. The key point is that arts events have to start moving away from the specialist, niche pages – which are all suffering reduced pagination – into the news pages, or as features. National and local papers are cutting down on supplements, and guides, and this is traditionally where arts coverage went. Picture editors have a different but wide set of experience and could make suggestions that an arts organisation wouldn't think of.

When this relationship is established, it can be very fruitful. For example, I often work with the local am-dram society, and we have now established a slick and streamlined process

and procedure to get coverage over a sustained period, prior to performances at the local theatre. And they get good audiences, who often say they read about it in the paper. It's about creating a win-win-win situation.

Questions

Is there a correlation between the advertising spend and the amount of coverage?

SM: I have never been aware of it on either of the two newspapers I've worked on.

Why can we never get touring coverage?

The touring shows with big names are not what you should be placing with local papers. It's local events, local events, local artists and how to get them onto the paper. The two things papers are looking for all the time are: local and people. Successful examples might be a touring company whose press office has contacted the paper and pointed out the local relationship with the town. So they have already explored whether there are any local connections. Any local connection, about the generation of the work, artists appearing, the history of the piece of work, immediately makes the idea more attractive to a local paper. Arts organisations that establish those conversations well in advance and organise photo calls or features ahead of it, will have more success in getting features run.

However, I have also worked out an idea with a theatre and presented it as a picture opportunity before now and it's been turned down because someone suspects it is a free plug for the show. It has to be more than just a plug; there has to be some connection or story attached. As soon as there is a whiff of a free advert, editors will fight shy of it. This doesn't mean dates, booking information and ticket prices can't be included, but it is easier to achieve if photo opportunities and features can avoid looking like a promotion. Think about this in advance.

It can be very hard to find outlets for new and emerging artists, or even for those artists who are established but perhaps operate at the riskier end of the spectrum.

SM: Much of that comes down to what Andrew was talking about earlier, the strength of the story and the narrative. If someone is telling you about what they're doing but that's what they've always been doing, there is nothing new, it's not so compelling. An extra narrative challenge where somebody is doing the same thing in a different way, or place, for example, might make people switch on or switch over. Programme makers are always thinking about what will keep people from switching over to the 500 other channels that are now available.

AL: I often ask myself how I can express in one line the essence of a programme so it will draw people in.

It's finding a way to express that which can be very difficult.

AL: Television is very susceptible to the 'next big thing'. Thankfully, I have so far failed to be seduced by anything that subsequently turned out to be a dud, nor have I turned down anyone that turned out to be The Beatles.

What about the person who isn't doing 'big things', but has an interesting story?

AL: Is it really an interesting story, and one which can be told on the news in two minutes? It is quite hard to have a big enough story to make 29 minutes of television, whereas two minutes on the news or about eight minutes on The Culture Show, for example, might be more realistic.

How do you find the right person to speak to? For example on a magazine show like the One Show? Do you pitch to the producer, or speak to a researcher?

AL: The *One Show* is a very good example, because the ratings are phenomenal. Some of it is made in Scotland, because the programme works by commissioning chunks of programming from independent companies. Find out where the programme is made, who's doing the culture stories and which presenter has been charged with that strand. Then find the producer of that strand. Research which company made the slot you think would be appropriate and home in on the right person. On the whole, it's better to start with the programme researchers rather than the producer.