

RIBA



Media Matters

Ideas and guidance

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The Regional Media

The regional media is expanding rapidly and is an excellent tool for architects to communicate with potential clients in their area.

The statistics offer overwhelming evidence of the importance of the regional media:

- There are at least 18 regional newspapers which have a daily circulation of over 100,000 and a further 50 newspapers which reach a readership of over 50,000 people
- Around 40 million people read a local paper at least once a week – that is nearly nine out of ten adults in the UK
- Advertisers recognise the worth of the regional media, spending over £2,250million a year with local papers, making local and regional newspapers the second biggest advertising medium after television
- In addition, the ever expanding network of regional radio stations has massive audiences, as do regional television broadcasters and an increasing number of local cable TV stations

All of these represent vehicles by which architecture and architects can be promoted effectively to a diverse audience.

Although there are often controversial local issues concerning buildings and planning about which journalists are keen to seek comment from architects, the regional media is much more likely to tell ‘good news stories’ than the national press. For example, a story about a residential project which has a human interest angle as well as good design theme would be very attractive for the lifestyle section of a larger regional paper or a feature in a smaller regional paper. This depends largely on you getting word about your projects out to them, rather than waiting for them to come to you.

Even smaller local papers can act as an effective means of publicity and can communicate architecture to a large audience with relatively little effort. Often these papers are part of a regional syndicate and the stories used in them will circulate to a much wider audience than might be initially imagined.

The Regional Media gets its news in a number of ways:

- Direct from source – that is from press releases sent out by local companies or PR agencies
- From the Press Association – the national news agency which supplies news and images from around the world to regional centres, regional media and Teletext services
- From local freelancers or stringers who also supply national newspapers - these people are watching and listening for stories which they can sell to newspapers large and small
- Through contacts who are regularly in touch with the journalist

You can tap into the first two ways very easily by writing effective press releases and making sure that the Press Association and your regional media receive them regularly. The Press Association is a particularly good source of information for the regional press and is a free service – if they think your press release gives them a good story they will run it on their wire. The second two ways will develop over time, as the PR reputation of your practice grows.

Making contact with the Regional Media

The first question is: **Who do you want to know about your work?**

With around 1,500 local weekly, daily, paid-for and free newspapers, as well as hundreds of local radio stations, it may seem daunting to find the right one for you and make effective contact with journalists there. Furthermore, the regional media structure is very complex, with newspapers working together in syndicates and groups, and trying to meet their needs can be immensely time consuming.

The first thing to do is work out who you want to know about your projects:

- Are you looking to get more clients? If so, it's probably not worth pursuing a youth radio station!
- Are you wanting to build a reputation as a local spokesperson? Then that youth radio station might offer a chance to take architecture to a new audience who would not otherwise hear about it.
- Are you trying to consolidate your business as a designer of commercial premises? Then the business pages of the biggest local newspaper and individual business directories for the area will serve this purpose.
- Are you trying to develop domestic clients? The life-style pages, even in the freebies, would be better for you.

This is all common sense, but it is worth thinking about carefully before you embark on your press campaign.

Next, find out which media cover your area. You might think that you have a good idea of this already, but it may be useful to do some further research – things change fast in media-land, especially with commercial radio stations, which spring up very quickly.

Targeting the strategy

Find out who is in your area by:

- Asking in your local library, who should have copies of all local newspapers, free and paid-for, and contact details for local broadcasters

- Looking at the web-sites at the end of this Guide – some of them give good guidance for finding local media
- Phoning your Regional RIBA office and asking them for details of the journalists who they work with most. Some Regional RIBA offices employ local PR firms who are happy to have a short conversation offering advice to local practices on how to use their local media
- Contacting the RIBA Press Office at 66 Portland Place. We can offer advice and contact details for your area

Once you know who you want to tell about your project, phone the publication or radio station and check the name of the best person to receive the press release, as well as the best way to get your information to the journalist – post, fax or email. They all have preferences.

Bear in mind that architecture is unlikely to be covered in its own section or column. This can prove to be advantageous. Local newspapers and to a lesser extent local talk based radio stations offer many platforms – health, lifestyle, fashion, food, fitness, sport, property and so on. If your building can even partly fall into any of these type of categories, it is worth trying to angle your approach accordingly.

Implementing the strategy

Once you have decided who you are going to approach, you need to decide what you are going to say. The easiest way to do this is with a press release. The next section deals with how to write an effective and attention grabbing press release.

How to write a press release

A press release has to say something interesting and news worthy, and it has to say it in the first line.

The outlook of the Regional Media is, in most cases, extremely parochial – that's the secret of its success. Unless you have a story that is really relevant to their patch, you will have little chance of getting coverage. So, make things local - emphasise the relevance to local people and local issues as often as you can.

Although local press often campaign fiercely for local issues, news reporters do not want to spend time getting to grips with a complicated story or issue – clarity and simplicity are essential. Indeed, a well written, concise press release with a strong local angle will often find its way intact into a newspaper or on to a radio bulletin.

Format

A press release should be written on headed paper, clearly identifying the name of the organisation and stating that it is a press release. The name, address and telephone number of the press officer or contact for further information must be given. If there is a different phone number for public callers please mark this clearly by putting beside the number **FOR PUBLICATION** or **NOT FOR PUBLICATION** as the case may be.

If there is a particular day when you want your news to be published or you are giving journalists classified information ahead of general release, you should embargo your press release. State clearly on the top of the Press Release:

EMBARGO: 12 noon Friday 19 September 2003

Otherwise, simply put the date of distribution.

If it is important that the journalist does not get in touch with the subject of the release, for example when announcing an award which the recipient does not know about, then the heading should read:

CONTACT EMBARGO: 12 noon Friday 19 September 2003

Press releases should always be 1½ or double spaced and on a single side of paper. Newspapers can then, if they wish, scan the text straight into the computer.

Indicate that there are further pages to follow by writing at the bottom of the page:

- more -

or

- more follows -

Always end the press release with

-ends-

to ensure that journalists are not left looking for further pages. Bear in mind that journalists cut from the *bottom*, so make sure that any vital information is near the beginning.

Content

The subject should be clearly outlined in a pithy sentence on the top of the release. Don't attempt to be clever – leave that for the sub-editor.

The first paragraph should sum up the whole press release, and preferably be written in a way that it could stand alone if the rest of the copy gets cut.

Therefore, ask yourself the **WHO, WHAT, WHERE, WHEN, WHY** questions. You can go into more detail in the rest of the release.

Try not to use specialist terms or purple prose which will make the editor reach straight for the dustbin. Cut out adjectives. The press release is a starting point – those who want to know more have the contact details for where they can come to find it. Always bear in mind who will be reading the Press Release. If you have decided to try and get coverage in the education section for your new school building, for example, get some quotes from teachers and children saying how much they love the building, rather than focusing on which materials you have chosen.

Never use acronyms, unless they have been clearly spelt out at the beginning of the release or you are targeting trade press who are familiar with the terms.

If more than one acronym is involved, be very careful not to confuse the information – this is a trap which it is only too easy to fall into in the architectural profession.

If you have specific instructions for editors, write a few short bullet points after the end of the text. For example:

- Marco Goldschmied is President of the RIBA and will be available for interview on Tuesday 2 May

Obviously, if you do state that you will be available for interview, make sure that you will be indeed be able to honour this! This sounds straightforward, but these things have been known to happen...

In conclusion:

- Be local
- Be clear
- Be concise
- Be strategic
- Be available

On the next page is an example press release.

News release

19 March 2002

Head of Press: Abigail Scott Paul 020 7307 3641 or abigail.scottspaul@inst.riba.org

Hardcore! show comes to town

Sexy, cool, hard and beautiful: concrete has shed its grimy image and transformed itself into the latest fashion accessory for funky homes and stunning buildings across the world. Love it or loathe it, a major new exhibition will give visitors a chance to judge for themselves whether the material of 60s tower blocks can re-brand itself for the 21st Century. *Hardcore! Concrete's rise from utility to luxury* opens at the RIBA Gallery on Tuesday 26 March and runs until Saturday 25 May.

Sarah Gaventa from Scarlet Projects, curator of the show said today,

"The *Hardcore!* exhibition is the first major celebration of concrete, which looks at its rise from an unfairly maligned material to one with huge versatility and potential for the future.

"*Hardcore!* will prove to even the sceptical public what a fabulous and luxurious material concrete really is."

The exhibition features a state-of-the-art installation by Block Architecture which guides visitors through the history of concrete from its use in ancient Rome to the weird and wonderful concrete made today. A domestic interior shows how the material has become an essential accessory for the contemporary home.

Projects from the world's leading architects such as Zaha Hadid and Herzog & de Meuron are featured highlighting how this material can make stunning architecture. Visitors can touch some of the most exciting developments in concrete such as flexible concrete and concrete designed for use on the moon.

-more-

The exhibition ends with an array of unique fantasy concrete designed by top architects such as Piers Gough, MUF, Fat and S333.

The main sponsors of the exhibition are: Lafarge Cement UK, Reinforced Concrete Council, Ready-mixed Concrete Bureau, CONSTRUCT, SpeCC, Structural Precast Association and Architectural Cladding Association.

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Notes to Editors

1. If you would like to film or review the exhibition contact Abigail Scott Paul in the RIBA Press Office on 020 7307 3641 or abigail.scottpaul@inst.riba.org
2. The RIBA Gallery is open Mon – Fri 10am – 6pm and on Sat 10am – 5pm.
Entrance is free.

For further information on the RIBA Gallery go to www.arch

Following Up

The Press Release is only the beginning.

Once you have sent out the Press Releases, preferably by fax or post, you should leave 24 hours and then phone and check that they have arrived. Things go astray very easily in newsrooms. You will undoubtedly be sending at least half of the mail shot a second time.

When you have the journalist on the phone, make sure you give them an accurate but intriguing account of the press release. This may whet their appetite. Also, check that they are the best person to be talking to – have they got a colleague who might be interested in the item for a feature, for example? Even if this is not appropriate on this occasion, this is useful information for the future.

Bribery invariably works too. Once you've had a piece published, write and thank the journalist and offer to take them out to lunch in order to discuss other projects you have on site and making sure that he or she remembers you for next time. Don't be shy about this – it is common practice.

Writing letters

Writing letters for publication to newspapers is another quick and often effective way of starting to develop a media presence for your practice.

If you wish to correct, clarify or add to an article in a newspaper first make sure that you have all your facts straight. There is no way better to antagonise journalists than by insisting that they print a response to a piece, only later to find out that it is inaccurate. Speed is of the essence, so make sure that you respond, preferably by email, on the same day as the publication appeared, wherever possible. This should improve the chances of publication considerably.

Newspapers are always on the look out for lively and witty spokespeople and a letter is an ideal way to sell your unique commentary services. A witty letter which offers hard information as well as an insight into your character goes down well with Editors who might subsequently set you aside as a local architectural pundit to return to when there are other architectural stories brewing.

Editors get fed up with publishing letters from the same people week after week. Fresh faces and names are much needed to keep the Letters' page up to date and you need to use this opportunity to spell out who you are, what you represent and where you are based. This will position your practice very well, both in terms with journalists and potential clients.

Photographs

Another excellent way of gaining good coverage with relatively little work is through photographs and images. Journalists are keen to give their readers a vivid impression of the subject they are writing about and simultaneously fill up some column inches.

In many cases you will find that the best images are kept on the publication's files and used over and over again in order to illustrate associated and related features. As long as the architect and the photographer are fully credited, this can act as excellent repeat publicity.

Most newspapers will want their images electronically and to fairly high resolution eg JPEGs at 300dpi. Take advice from the publication on their specific needs and try to act on this, if at all possible.

Which type of media is best for you?

Newspapers

Along with the myriad of benefits already mentioned, is the fact that local papers, in many cases, have a much longer shelf life than their national counterparts. Readers are much more likely to keep local papers and return to them, so there is more chance that your coverage will make an impact.

It sounds obvious but regional newspapers are closely consulted by people seeking local information – times, dates, classified adverts and so on. And because they are used as a source for specific information, they are trusted far more than their national counterparts.

Local people are not the only ones consulting their local press. The regional media is a fertile ground for stories for the national press and broadcast media. A good local story will often be picked up and turned into a case study or part of a larger national piece.

As well as stories moving from local to national newspapers, so do journalists. Forging relationships with good, ambitious local journalists can well lead to much larger benefits for you in the long term, as their careers develop. An easy way to exploit your relationship is to feed on their ambitions – make it easy for them to become the expert on their paper for all matters to do with architecture, planning and the built environment. They will be keen to keep in touch with you and see you as an ally in the development of their career.

Broadcast media: Radio

Local radio is listened to every day by about 27 million people. The majority of these tune in to commercial stations, but the BBC local radio stations attract around 8 million listeners, and have the advantage of being much more speech orientated.

The majority of local radio interviews will be done over the telephone, often at short notice. The majority will be recorded and edited, usually to less than 30 seconds, although they may also be live.

Broadcast media: Television

Securing TV coverage for your project is a huge bonus. On average, around 65% of the UK population watch their regional news programmes on a regular basis. A single two minute item can have a huge impact, and it is important to be able to pack as much attention grabbing and relevant information into a very short space of time, along with creating the impression of having a friendly and approachable manner. Only then will the journalist come back to you next time an architect is needed for comment.

In addition to network television there are increasing numbers of cable and satellite channels, some of them tackling local and regional issues, as well as the new phenomenon of community television. These have nowhere near the same audience figures, but can be useful practice for you in interview techniques, and are watched by the larger stations as a source for stories they might have missed.

How to do a radio or TV interview

Listen to and watch the programmes you want to target or have been invited to take part in. At best it is rude not to, at worst you will be badly caught out by taking a wrong approach

Don't be over-awed. You will certainly know more about the subject than the interviewer, otherwise you would not have been asked

Ask yourself if you should be doing it. Is there someone else who would be more appropriate/would do it better? You don't have to do it, but do consider the future implications if you turn it down. Journalists rarely come back to people who haven't been immediately enthusiastic.

Find out the rules of engagement. How long? Where? For what purpose? It would be very unusual if you were offered a fee of any description, but you might get expenses paid – be sure to get this information clear in your mind from the outset.

Ask “why me?” Have you made a statement about an issue recently? Has it been accurately reported? If you have been invited under a false premise that you have radical opinions to discuss, make sure that the journalists know your real views. This could prove to be embarrassing for all concerned.

Who else is taking part? The journalist is obliged to tell you but only if you ask. Do you know the other participants? Can you predict what they might say? If not, some research is necessary.

Will the piece be live or recorded? Sometimes live is better - you should be able to make sure you get your point across without distortion and the adrenalin may well improve your performance.

Where? The studio is the best venue because you will be face to face with your interviewer, you will be able to concentrate and the quality will be excellent.

Remote studios should be avoided unless you are very confident – you will have to push your own buttons and be facing a blank wall or camera. A radio car is second best, although you cannot see your interviewer. The phone is worst because you can be lulled into thinking you are just having a telephone chat and forget there is an audience out there. The quality will also be poorest. Finally, they may come to you, in which case it is probably not live, and you will have home advantage over your interviewer – make the most of it but don't be lulled. Take the opportunity to show what you are talking about as well as telling them.

Dress appropriately for television interview. Wear your normal working clothes, but try to avoid a lot of black – it doesn't look good on TV. Above all, be comfortable. Don't suddenly decide on a new look, which will distract you.

Prepare but don't over-prepare. The worst interviews are those where the interviewee is trying to get over a number of pre-prepared answers, irrespective of the questions. Think what the questions might be more than what the answers should be. Just think of two or three points you want to get across and think how you'd explain the subject to someone in a pub. You'll be lucky to get across more than one or if you do, the audience will only remember one – so make sure it's the most important point

Don't use jargon, ever, or acronyms – or if you must (even the RIBA) must be spelt out the first time you use it

Be interesting, even amusing if it's appropriate.

If the interviewer makes a mistake, decide if it's important and try to correct it, ideally later on. Doing so aggressively and immediately makes you sound priggish or silly. Your job title, for example, is very unlikely to matter.

Never start the aggression. Most interviews are likely to be seeking information rather than being confrontational. If they are confrontational, maybe you should have declined to take part in the first place

Remind yourself, it's only television or radio. It's a means to an end, a way of telling and showing people things. Use it to your best advantage.

In summary

- There is a lot of regional press out there – use it to your advantage
- Once you have found your feet, it will be easier to start to target national media as well as regional media
- Don't be over awed – architecture is your subject and you undoubtedly know more about it than the journalist
- But, don't be too technical – you want to win your audience round to your way of thinking, not baffle or confuse them
- Enjoy yourself – the press can create real opportunities for you, and also be a fun way to get coverage for your practice
- Don't be naïve – making off the cuff comments about other people's work or your local planners' whims might very well back fire on you
- Stick to what you know. Be direct and totally straight with journalists – only then will they trust you and start to come back to you for more stories

Useful contacts

<p>www.newspapersoc.org.uk</p>	<p>Useful site giving details of newspaper syndicates and statistics about readership. A subscriber only database gives much fuller information, but probably isn't necessary for most architects' needs</p>
<p>www.rab.co.uk</p>	<p>The Radio Advertising Bureau web-site is a mine of information about commercial radio stations across the country, giving access to contact details, station profiles and links to their own web-sites</p>
<p>www.mediainfo.co.uk</p>	<p>The site of the company responsible for the publication of the Editors' handbook series and the Mediadisk on-line database. Gives a background to the type of PR tools which are available</p>
<p>www.pressassociation.press.net PA News Centre 292 Vauxhall Bridge Road London SW1V 1AE</p>	<p>Gives details of all the Press Association bureaux around the country, as well as details of the services the PA provide for clients and media. Try to send your press release to your nearest bureau – the address on the left is the headquarters</p>
<p>www.architecture.com</p>	<p>The RIBA web-site, which gives lots of information about architecture and associated fields</p>