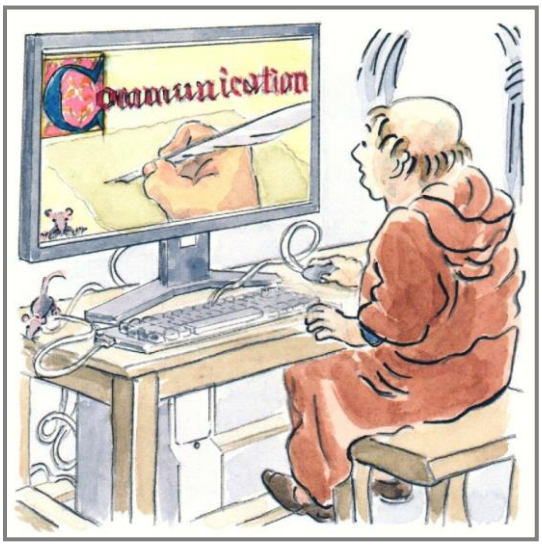
john truscott
church consultant and trainer



Which newspapers do people read?

TN9 Training Notes series: Communication

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If churches and Christian groups are to communicate effectively to the world today, it helps to be taught by professionals. There is much to learn from the secular press on how to catch people's attention and hold it, on the kind of news people want to read, and on how to present it well.

Each national newspaper knows exactly what kind of readership it is aiming for. But do you have any idea of how many people read each title? The results may surprise you. Try this light-hearted quiz to see how well you are aware of the circulation figures for both daily and Sunday national newspapers.

Here are two lists. The first gives the eight top-selling UK national newspapers in alphabetical order (by main word) as of January 2020 – before COVID-19 impacted these figures. Alongside you will find the equivalent list of their circulations but in descending order of size. All you have to do is to match each title with its correct circulation.

The eight top daily titles in alphabetical order (by main word)	**and their circulations in descending order** (nearest 1,000)
Daily Express	1,207,000
i	1,134,000
Daily Mail	442,000
Daily Mirror	360,000
Daily Star	318,000
The Sun	290,000
The Daily Telegraph*	275,000
The Times	216,000

*The Daily Telegraph opted out of the ABC circulation figures in January 2020 so the December 2019 figure is taken.

Not making it into the top eight are: The Financial Times, The Guardian, The Daily Record and The Scotsman. Regional and free papers are not included so the list does not show the Evening Standard and the Metro which would be well up the list otherwise (the Metro is top).

These figures relate to January 2020 and cannot be updated to 2022 (the date of this version of these Training Notes). This is because the Sun, Times and Telegraph groups stopped publishing ABC figures early in 2020 and the Guardian and Observer joined them in September 2021. However, the order by circulation does not change very much so this exercise is still valid.

Circulations are falling steadily and rapidly as people cut back on expenditure and access news through digital media. Most papers still publishing figures (apart from the i which is doing well from a low base) lost 10-20% of sales per year from 2021 to 2022. These figures do not show online web hits.

Now for the Sundays

The second list shows the top eight national Sunday newspapers. As before, their circulations are printed alongside them but not in the same order. Again, match the titles to their correct circulations.

The eight top Sunday titles in alphabetical order (by main word)	**and their circulations in descending order** (nearest 1,000)
Sunday Express	1,042,000
The Mail on Sunday	967,000
Sunday Mirror	645,000
The Observer	367,000
Daily Star – Sunday	253,000
The Sun on Sunday	248,000
The Sunday Telegraph*	162,000
The Sunday Times	156,000

*The Sunday Telegraph opted out of the ABC circulation figures in January 2020 so the December 2019 figure is taken.

Not making it into the top eight are: The Sunday Mail and The Sunday Post (in Scotland) and Sunday People. Circulations are, again, falling steadily. Figures here do not include online readerships.

Note

Figures shown are ABC (Audit Bureau of Circulations) figures for January 2020, other than the Telegraph Group as noted above where the December 2019 figures are shown. I explain above why it is no longer possible to compare all daily and Sunday newspapers circulations and January 2020 is the latest date for which this is possible.

Only read on if you have now tried the exercise above. See page 4 for the answers.

Some Christians argue against what I am trying to do here, saying that we should not be copying the secular press, especially some elements of it. But my point is that, even if we are uneasy about some of the values (or lack of them) that some papers clearly display, there is much to learn from how they go about their job.

I am not arguing for a cult of celebrity, one biased political view, the suppression of truth or questionable means of finding stories. But I am saying the professionals know how to get messages across and there is much we can and should learn from them.

Exercise

Ask your local newsagent how many copies of each of these titles he or she orders each day or week and see if there are any major differences in order from the national figures.

Then try an anonymous questionnaire on your congregation to discover how many regularly read each title and compare with the comparative figures in these notes and sales from your local shop. Any surprises?

Study different kinds of daily newspapers (by the market they are aimed at) to look in particular at how each communicates a story. Look at how many sentences per paragraph they average, the use of powerful adjectives and verbs in the so-called tabloids, the visuals used, etc.

Try it too with your local papers which of course seek to reach every sector of the population.

Questions

1 Consider those in your church who write or produce materials for those outside the church. Which newspapers do your writers read? How does this compare with the figures studied here? Anything to learn?

2 Which of the above national newspapers most closely match the style and content of any literature that your church produces for people who do not necessarily belong to any church?

3 What are the main differences in style of writing? How do the top-selling papers tell a story? What can we learn from them (even if we don't want to tell the same stories or focus on the same aspects of them!)?

4 Similarly, what are the main differences in presentation? What can we learn?

5 Should Christians read newspapers? If so, which ones should they read?

These notes are available at https://www.john-truscott.co.uk/Resources/Training-Notes-index then TN9. They cover one aspect of a possible training event on the media or on preparing materials for those who are not church members. For the concept of writing 'news' stories see also Training Notes TN39, *We've got news for you!* , TN63, *How not to write a newsletter,* TN75, *Writing for the media*, and TN89, *Hold the front page!*

Contact John if you would like to enquire about the possibility of his running an event for you on any aspect of communication in churches.

Cartoons are by Micki Hounslow for filing categories of Leadership, Management, Structures, Planning, Communication, Administration. File TN9 under Communication.

John Truscott, 69 Sandridge Road, St Albans, AL1 4AG
Tel: 01727 832176 Email: john@john-truscott.co.uk Web: https://www.john-truscott.co.uk

QUIZ ANSWERS

Top eight daily titles and their correct circulations (nearest 1,000)

The Sun	1,207,000
Daily Mail	1,134,000
Daily Mirror	442,000
The Times	360,000
The Daily Telegraph	318,000 (December 2019)
Daily Express	290,000
Daily Star	275,000
i	216,000

Change over 18 months earlier (the previous revision of these Training Notes): The Daily Express has overtaken the Daily Star but all others are in the same positions. All circulations have fallen quite significantly (the equivalent range four years ago was 1,722,000 to 291,000).

The COVID pandemic will have a further impact on figures. For example, for selected circulations which are known, the July 2022 figures for the Daily Mail is now 849,000 (a 9% drop in one year) and the Daily Mirror, 308,000 (a13% drop in one year).

Most people are aware that The Sun is the highest circulation daily newspaper, but not so many realise that the Daily Mail is right up close behind it and the gap is narrowing. The Daily Mail may well now be the leader of the pack. These two newspapers are way ahead of the rest of the field.

Top eight Sunday titles and their correct circulations (nearest 1,000)

The Sun on Sunday	1,042,000
The Mail on Sunday	967,000
The Sunday Times	645,000
Sunday Mirror	367,000
Sunday Express	253,000
The Sunday Telegraph	248,000 (December 2019)
Daily Star – Sunday	162,000
Observer	156,000

Change over 18 months earlier (the previous revision of these Training Notes): The Observer has come into the list and the Sunday People has dropped out but all others are in the same positions. All circulations have fallen quite significantly (the equivalent range four years ago was 1,476,000 to 271,000).

The COVID pandemic will have a further impact on figures. For example, for selected circulations which are known, the July 2022 figures for the Mail on Sunday is 720,000 (an 11% drop in one year) and the Sunday Mirror, 234,000 (a 17% drop in one year).