



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 sales 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 paid-for, 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 2024 – so post-Covid. 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. Some circulations have been estimated.

The eight top daily titles in alphabetical order (by main word)

and their circulations in descending order (nearest 1,000)

Daily Express	736,000
i	700,000
Daily Mail	241,000
Daily Mirror	190,000
Daily Star	180,000
The Sun	153,000
The Daily Telegraph	133,000
The Times	126,000

Not making it into the top eight are: The Financial Times (but it only just misses it), 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 2024 but figures for The Sun, Times and Telegraph groups stopped publishing ABC (Audit Bureau of Circulations) figures early in 2020 and the Guardian 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. The one newspaper to show some growth has been the i from a low base. These figures do not show online web hits.

Now for the Sundays

The second list shows the top eight national Sunday newspapers, this time for January 2022 with some estimates based on February 2024. 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	784,000
The Mail on Sunday	600,000
Sunday Mirror	322,000
The Sunday People	266,000
Daily Star – Sunday	191,000
The Sun on Sunday	125,000
The Sunday Telegraph	110,000
The Sunday Times	98,000

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

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) and political bias that some papers clearly display, there is much to learn from how their staff 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.

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

Additional 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!*

John's resources are marked for filing categories of Leadership, Management, Structures, Planning, Communication, Administration. File TN9 under Communication.

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QUIZ ANSWERS

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

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The Times	180,000E
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Circulations are ABC (Audit Bureau of Circulations) figures for January 2024, with those marked E best estimates given for February 2024. Estimates are for papers that no longer report circulation figures.

Changes in these figures compared with pre-Covid are remarkable. Several have fallen by as much as 50%. But circulations were already falling before the pandemic. The equivalent range six years ago was 1,722,000 to 291,000.

The Sun used to have the highest circulation but has been overtaken in the last year or so by the Daily Mail (against, it has to be said, an estimate for The Sun).

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

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Circulations are ABC (Audit Bureau of Circulations) figures for January 2022, with those marked E best estimates given for February 2024 – so some disparity in dates here. Estimates are for papers that no longer report circulation figures.

As with the dailies, circulations have fallen quite significantly (the equivalent range six years ago was 1,476,000 to 271,000). Covid again appears to be a reason for this but circulations were already falling before the pandemic in an increasingly digital and visual age.