

November 2008

**“Journalists: How can the PR industry  
communicate better?”**

A survey of journalists conducted by WDG Research

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## INTRODUCTION

If you are trying to understand the future of PR and what needs to be done to build a stronger more efficient PR team then this report will give you some good answers.

This report presents findings from a survey conducted by WDG Research amongst UK journalists and was commissioned by Glide Technologies - developer of integrated Press Office Software.

## OBJECTIVES

Now in its 5<sup>th</sup> year, this survey aims to investigate the importance of online communication by asking journalists about their needs, frustrations and online behaviours.

## METHODOLOGY

Unless otherwise indicated, all results are based on the total sample of respondents comprised of 100 telephone interviews across a range of sectors from national press to trade publications, broadcast and online.

The interviews were conducted in July 2008 by WDG Research, an independent research company.

In addition to the telephone research WDG also carried out a piece of qualitative research amongst a small sample of journalists. This involved four 1 ½ to 2 ½ hour in-depth interviews with journalists from a cross section of backgrounds.

The interviews included the following people:

- Ms Kate Shipp - Journalist - A National Review Magazine
- Tom Edwards - Sub Editor (Sports) - The Independent
- Ms Charlotte Edwards - Fine Arts and Features editor - World of Interiors
- Ms Huma Qureshi - Finance and Consumer Features journalist - The Observer/Guardian

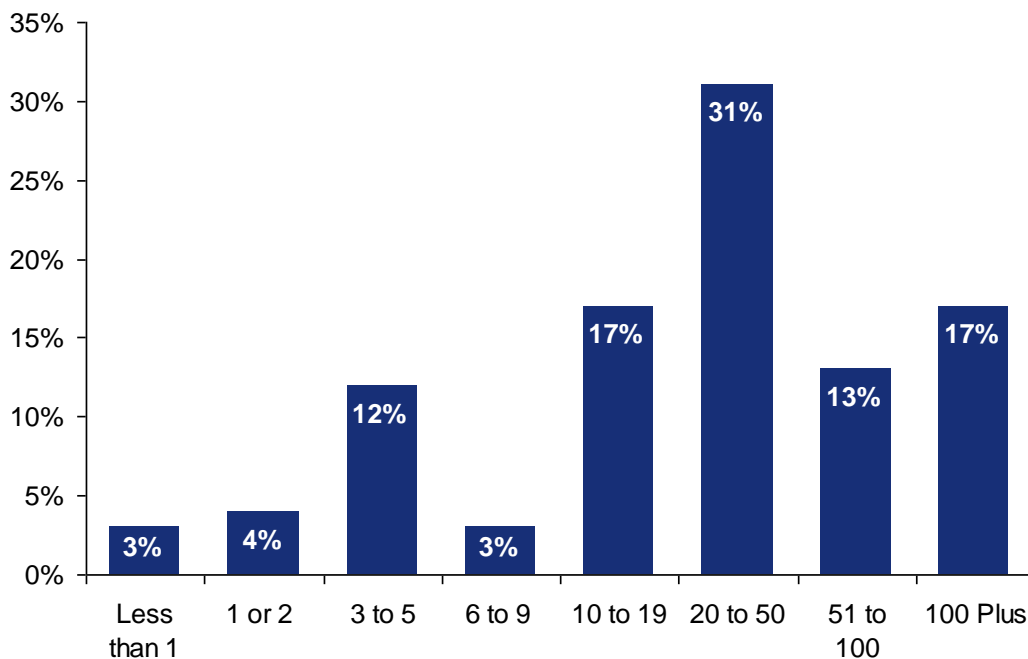
## EMAIL COMMUNICATIONS

### Summary of findings

- Volume of emails are increasing
- Email filtering tools are having an impact
- Support emails by phone calls
- RSS increasing in popularity
- Large attachments create problems and negative impact
- The Glide Format - Consistency Counts
- It's not just about images!

### *Q How many press releases do you receive on email on the average day?*

The majority of journalists (61%) claim to receive over 20 press release emails per day with 17% receiving more than 100 press release emails. The amount of press release emails received appears to have increased slightly from last year (57% receiving 20+ emails in 2007 vs. 61% in 2008).



## Support emails by phone calls

According to our qualitative research, journalists expect the good PROs to support their emailing and mailing of information by a phone call.

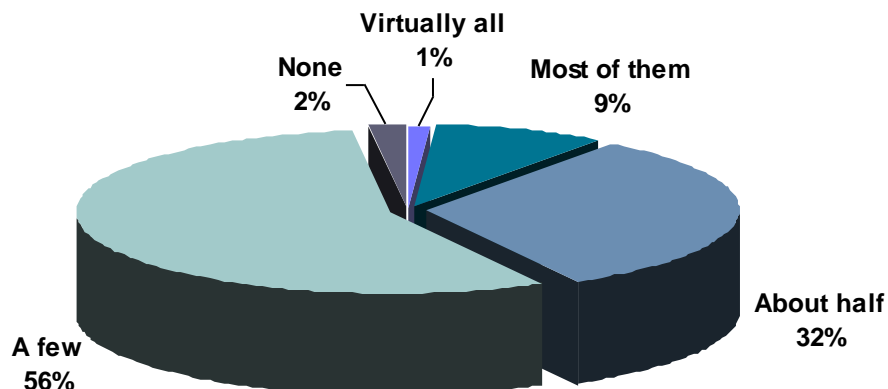
*“Some people will follow up over the phone, especially if they are a bit more IT savvy they’ll say that we sent you a link or we sent you a press release and then when they phone you can dig it out and look at it”*

*Tom Edwards, The Independent*

## RSS increasing in popularity

3 out of the 4 of the journalists involved in the qualitative interviews are now using RSS feeds to keep themselves abreast of news stories and developments. The technology is used to ensure that they receive the most relevant and up-to-date press releases and is seen as an invaluable tool which has been a great time saver since its introduction.

### Q How many of the press releases you receive come with large attachments?



Nearly all (98%) of the journalists said that they had experience of receiving large email attachments with 42% claiming that over half the press releases they received during the working week were guilty of this. Emails with large attachments can have a very negative impact on the relationship between the journalist and the PR professional with inboxes being blocked and valuable time being taken up with downloading hefty attachments that may or may not be of interest. Worse still, many publication houses impose limits on journalist inboxes. A journalist who receives 3 or 4 emails with medium sized attachments can reach this limit easily, thereby actually preventing them from being able to receive emails and do their job properly.

### *Q Has receiving large attachments caused problems with your email systems at work?*

In addition over half (58%) of the respondents reported having problems with their e-mail system as a direct result of these large attachments. This represents an increase from last year (53%) and may be a consequence of the growing demand for print and web ready images. Most organisations have not found a way to tackle the problem issue of getting assets to the media without sending large, irritating attachments.



### *The Glide format - consistency counts*

The idea of receiving press releases which guide people to content and assets via links within the email is felt to be vastly superior to the 'amateurish' way that some companies just send enormous email attachments all the time. Respondents were shown an example of a Glide multi-media press release and it was liked for bringing everything together and being easy to use. The emails included:

- HTML format with print ready images included as links
- Clearly shown PR contact information
- Personalised messages (no BCC)
- Full details of the press release with links to other information
- Supported by website for further information
- Ability to unsubscribe or tailor profile

*"That's actually pretty good, you can just get the copy and it is quite usable plus you have other online stuff there on the release..."*

**Tom Edwards, The Independent**

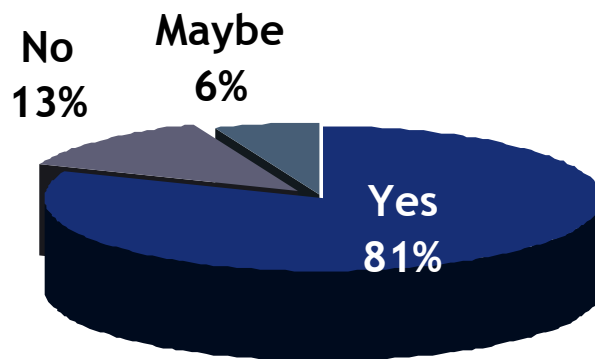
*"Often that sort of thing doesn't get handed to you on a plate because when you go to the press offices normally there is a place for you to go for the press releases, a place for press enquiries, a place to arrange a visit and a place for the images - not very convenient. This multi dimension press release format of Glide's is much better."*

**Charlotte Edwards, World of Interiors**

## TARGETING PRESS RELEASES

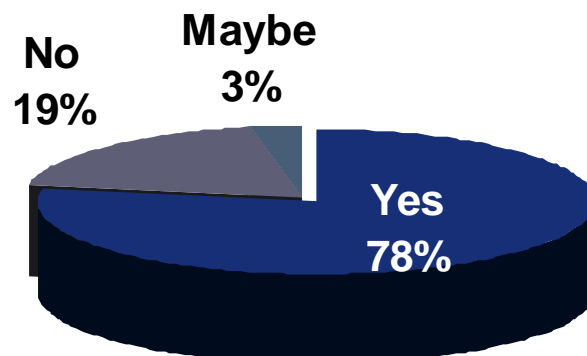
*Q Does it create a negative impression of an organisation if you receive unhelpful or poorly targeted information?*

Poorly targeted releases are not only a waste of time; they seriously risk damaging a company's reputation with the journalist. Of those asked, 81% stated that they are left with a negative impression when irrelevant information is sent to them.



Worse still, the respondents stated that this could seriously damage the relationship between them and the organisation with nearly four fifths (78%) inclined to ignore future press releases. This is becoming more of an issue as last year only 68% claimed they would ignore future press releases.

*Q Would it lead you to reject, ignore or simply be less inclined to read future releases from such an organisation (i.e. deleting emails without opening them if you are busy)?*

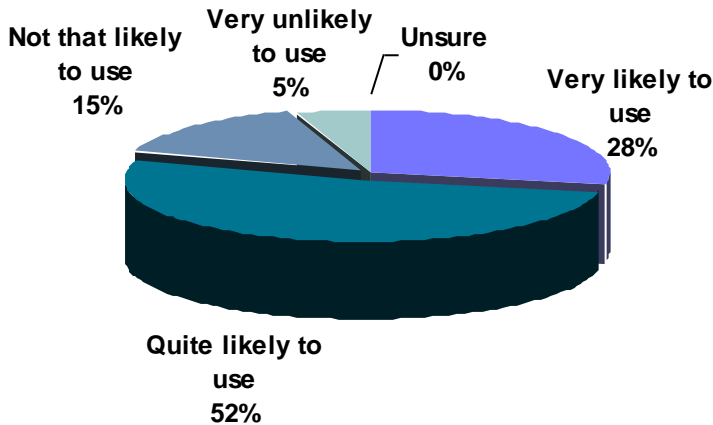


MULTI MEDIA PRESS RELEASES

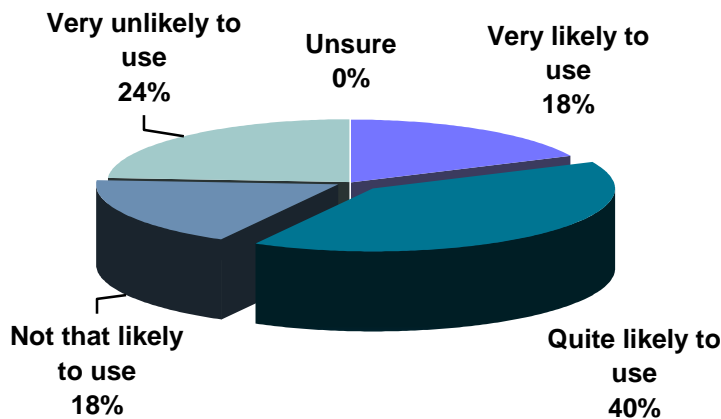
“80% of journalists are more likely to use multimedia press releases with images”

More technologically advanced e-mail press releases which include direct links to photographs, diagrams, video or sound clips are more likely to be used than the more traditional text only press release.

*Q In preference to traditional text press releases, how likely are you to use a multimedia press release such as email with direct links to photography or diagrams?*



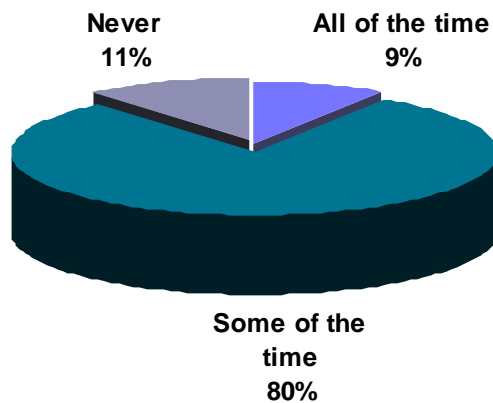
*Q In preference to traditional text press releases, how likely are you to use a multimedia press release I.E. an email with direct links to video and sound clips?*



## USAGE OF IMAGES

“89% of journalists use images sent with press releases some of the time”

*Q How often do you use the images which are sent within press releases?*



When an image is not available with a press release, opinion is divided as to what the next course of action should be. Journalists are more likely to return to the source to get the image if it can be done at the click of a button, rather than trying to request it over the phone and potentially having to call more than once or rely on leaving messages.

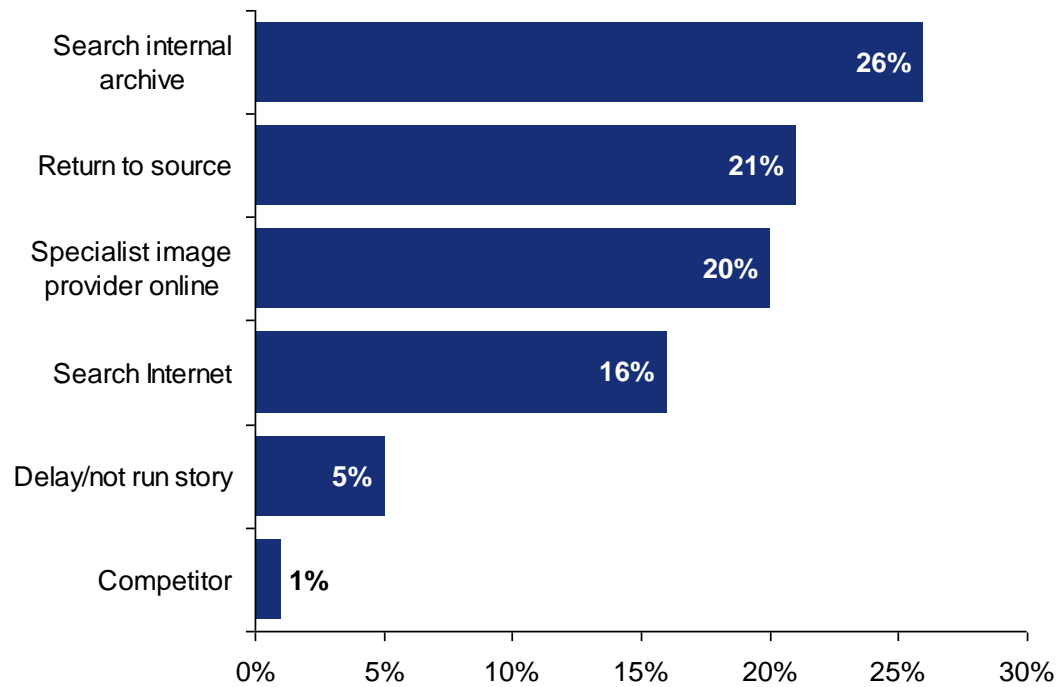
If an image is going to get used by the journalist, it needs to be high quality, easy to access and tailored to the story.

There is also a growing need for video imaging as organisations start to use blogs and social networking sites more to draw/gauge opinion. The greater demand for images and video imaging can also be attributed to journalists increasingly writing for online outlets which have more interactive and visual formats.

The use of diagrams was discussed in the qualitative research and it was clear that diagrams of a process, theory or subject would be very useful on some occasions. Respondents said an improvement would be to send diagrams which can be adapted to suit the publication's style or to be adapted to fit the article.

## Glide Journalist Research 2008

*Q Imagine that you need an image to complete your article but one has not been sent with in the press release. Which of the following would you do?*



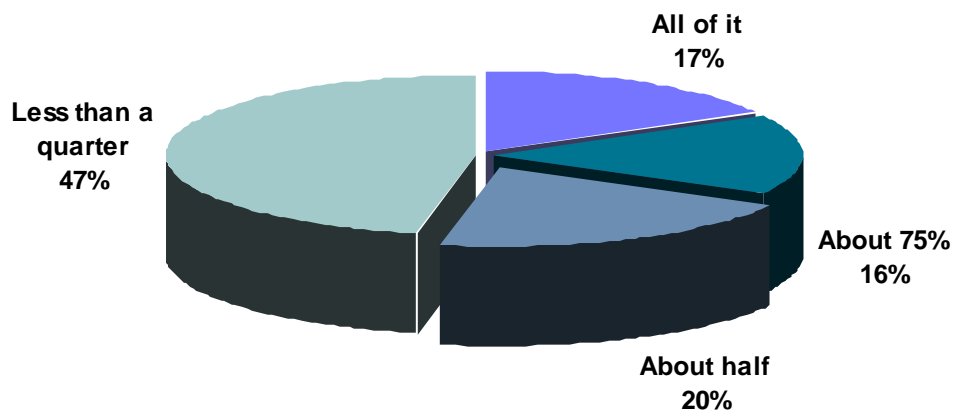
Either way, if the organisation does not make good quality assets immediately available they loose a considerable amount of control over the eventual story.

## ONLINE COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

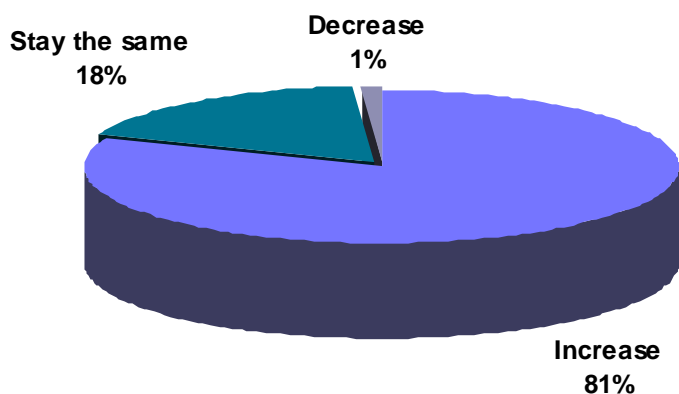
### “83% of journalists write online articles”

Of the journalists who wrote for online outlets 53% of them stated that this accounted for more than half of their total output and 81% said that they thought this would increase.

*Q You mentioned that you write some online articles. What proportion of your work would you say is for online content?*



*Q And in the future do you think that the amount of online articles you will write will remain the same, increase or decrease?*

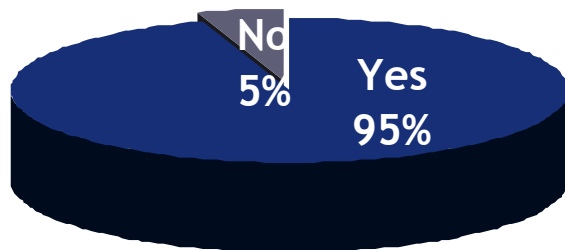


Because of this, there is a strong demand from journalists for additional features such as downloadable images, pictures and video which can be used to make online pages far more engaging. In addition the 24/7 online culture makes the need for a good quality online press office even greater. Journalists need to access information and assets immediately in or out of office hours.

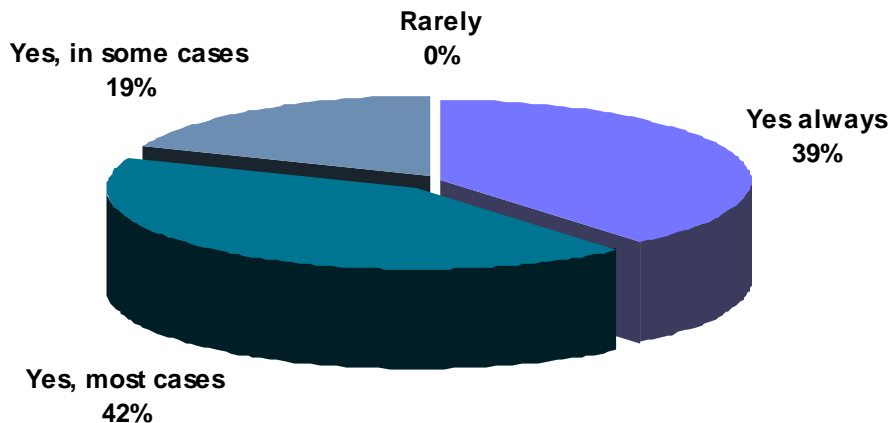
## ONLINE PRESS OFFICES

**“81% of Journalists will visit a company’s website when writing about them”**

Q Given the 24/7 culture and the need for up-to-date online news, has the need for good quality information on websites increased?



Q If you were to research a story about a company or an organisation, would you visit their website for information?

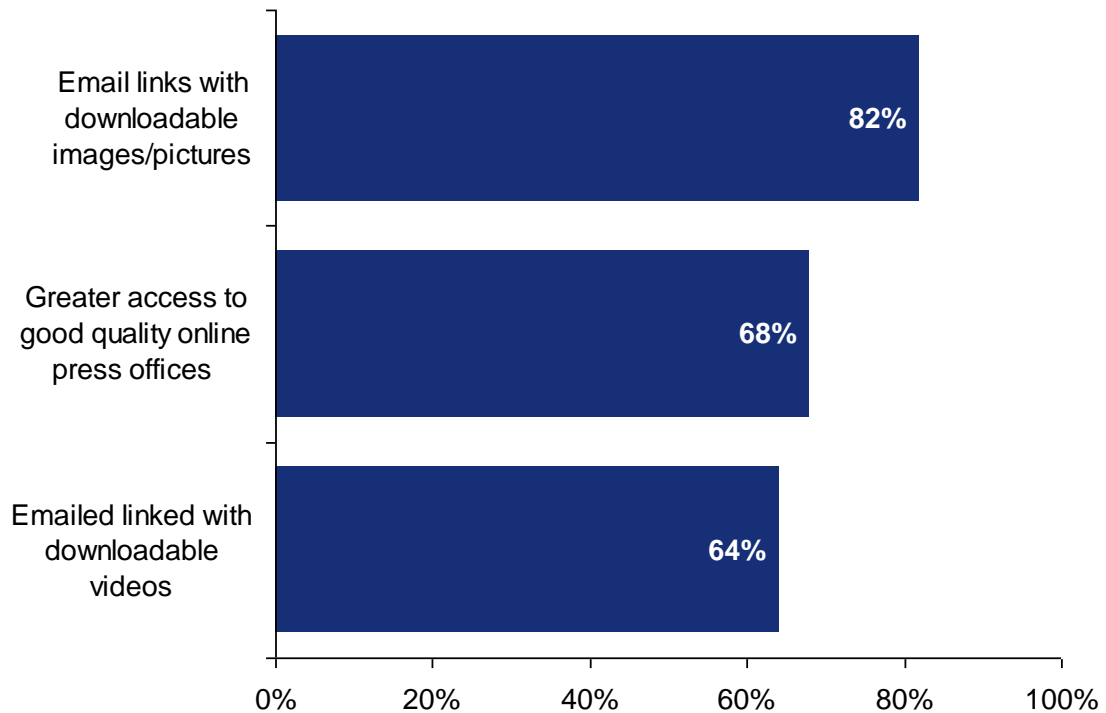


It seems that it is routine for journalists to check out a company’s website when writing about them with (81%) saying that they would do this most of the time. This highlights the crucial value of providing up-to-date information to satisfy the needs of the 24/7 news culture.

Given the importance of an organisation’s website to a journalist when researching a story, it is good to know that the general quality level of information provided has improved over the last few years. The online press office is a constantly used tool, especially if it has an alert system.

### “68% of journalists think there is a greater need for good quality online press offices”

*Q Specifically thinking about writing online articles do you think that there is a greater need for any of the following?*



Online press offices need to raise their game. Shrinking deadlines and increased journalist expectations for up-to-the minute information means that press offices are under pressure to deliver even more. Journalists expressed the view that whilst press offices were quite often “up to the hour” they were seldom “up to the minute”.

*“In the last 5 years video and TV has changed. Quite often you’ll have an interview and you think I can’t believe he said that, and straight away you will be able to get onto BBC, Setanta or Sky and ask for transcripts or videos. If there has been a controversial incident for example we will use screen grab pictures, so the immediacy of that has changed dramatically. The speed in which you can turn things around and the willingness to provide the information is much better...”*

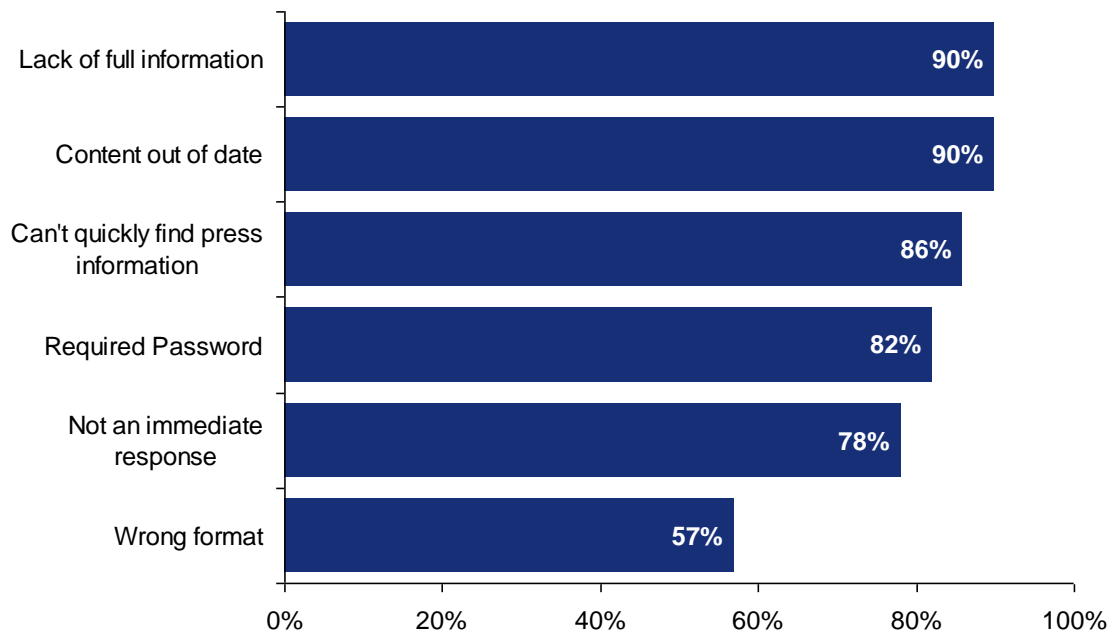
**Tom Edwards, The Independent**

### “Nine out of ten Journalists express dissatisfaction with the lack of information and out of date content available on press offices”

Despite the fact that the overall quality of online press offices has increased, there is still considerable frustration amongst the press.

Nine out of ten Journalists express dissatisfaction with the lack of information on a given website and the fact that its content is out of date. Another concern is that they cannot find press information from the home page quickly enough. Related to this is that they do not get an immediate response when they email a request.

*Q If you need to refer to a website for any reason, which of the following scenarios do you find irritating, and would you encounter frequently enough for it to be a significant source of frustration?*



Speed is important to a journalist and anything that slows the process (such as working hard to find information or having to register) can be a major irritant. Inability to get to the press office is a bugbear for some. Certain sites almost hide their Online Press Office and unless journalists have the exact link they can be difficult to find and access.

The format of information sent to journalists via email and the speed at which this is delivered is also crucial. Information needs to be easy to find and quick to download. Journalists are working to tight deadlines and cannot afford to waste time looking for the one piece of information they need to complete a story.

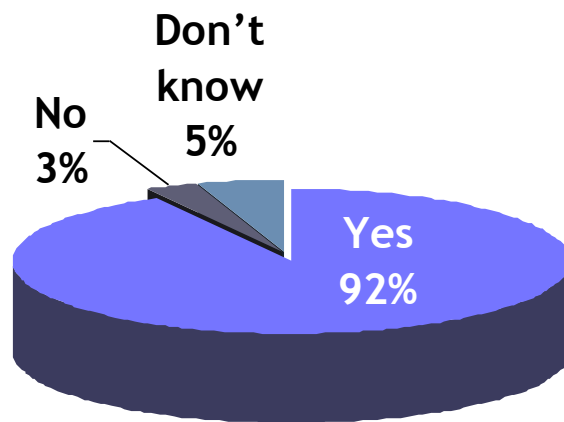
*“You are always after things that will speed up the process; you want speed, clarity and comprehensiveness”*

*Tom Edwards, The Independent*

## “92% of journalists say that an online press office is important when an organisation is in crisis”

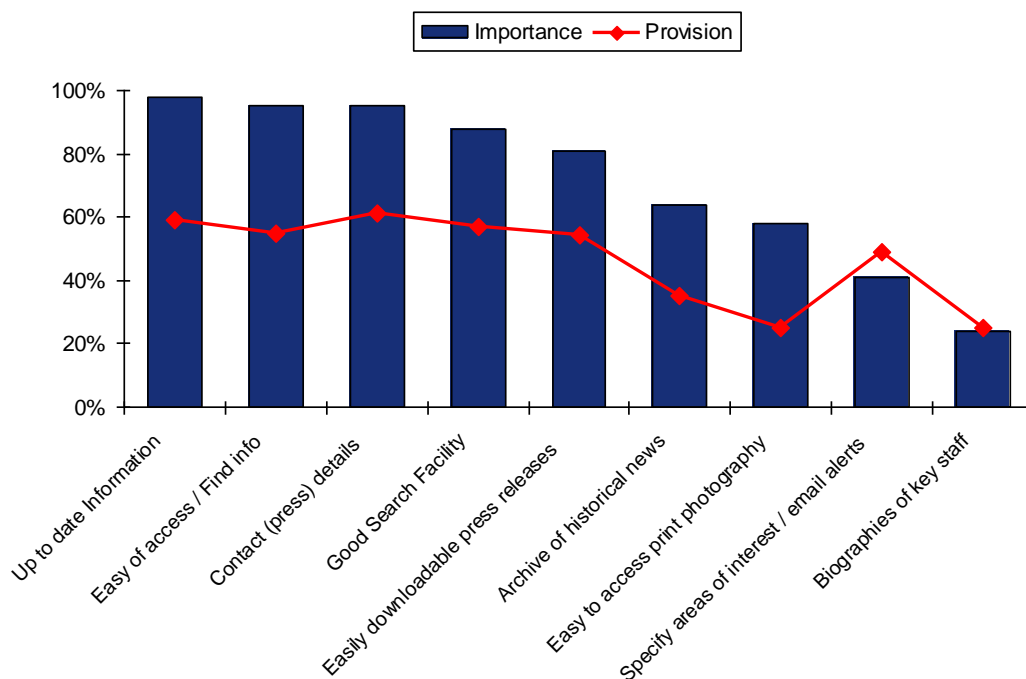
Another indicator of how important the organisation’s website is for journalists is that nearly all (92%) express the view that it is vital source of information when the organisation is in a crisis situation. This has increased since last year (vs. 84% in 2007).

*Q Is a good quality website/media centre important when an organisation is in a crisis situation?*



## ONLINE PRESS OFFICE - WHAT JOURNALISTS WANT ....AND WHAT THEY GET.

Journalists were asked about a number of online press offices services. In each case they were asked how important those services are and then they were asked to rate the quality of the current level of provision of those services. In almost every area, there is a clear gap in the expectations of journalists and the reality of what they have encountered in their practical day to day experience.



### Easy to access / find information

When looking at good examples in the research, provided by Glide clients, the qualitative respondents praised the excellent layout, the ease of navigation, the lack of clutter on the home page. The clarity of contact opportunities and the names and even direct lines is excellent.

*“PayPal - the fast facts pages is the kind of thing that is useful. Good press release archive and easy to find PR phone numbers”*

**Huma Qureshi, Observer/Guardian**

### Frequently updated

Another strong like is the ease of finding news which is relevant to the immediate enquiry and also the frequency of updates. If there is detail from earlier the same day (within hours) of the day before then it is seen to be a more active press office

### *Background information and contact details*

A good site will provide reasonable background information for the journalist to cut and paste into articles as well as the breaking news and further details surrounding the news. A lack of information and a lack of contact details mean more work for the journalist forcing them to then send a request or call the PR team for a list of key facts rather than simply calling to confirm a few points.

### *Depth of content is a real time saver*

One of the main issues with calling a Press Office with long requests is that everybody will be doing the same thing and so it will be very difficult or impossible to actually speak to anyone, especially if it is only one person in the company press office. This is a deterrent for journalists who are time-poor so online press offices that provide depth of information are at an advantage.

### *Quality, efficiency and consistency increases trust*

The quality of the information, the efficiency of the layout etc all adds to the trust of the organisation however the opposite is also true and if people think that information is hard to find then they start to mistrust the content and the authors.

### *Exclusive and tailored information*

Companies that switch to an online press office for the provision of their media information need to be aware that journalists are after unique and tailored information. Whilst updated content, the provision of background information, images, contacts and other resources are fantastic time savers for journalists, they still need an angle and a story to write about. The online press office that can combine ease of access with tailored information will be onto a winner.

## RESEARCH SOURCES - BLOGS, WIKIS & THE WEB

### 44% of journalists use blogs or wikis as a research source

All journalists have set processes to research their chosen subject. Many use news alerts, such as Google News Alert, to keep them informed and to help them organise the receipt of press information. News alerts generated by online press offices containing links to images and further information were seen to be very useful.

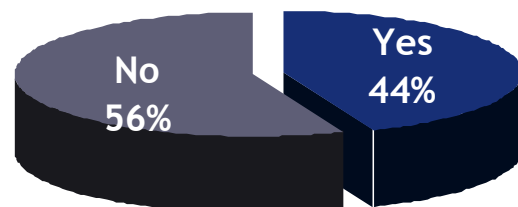
*"It just means that rather than getting lots of email alerts sent through to your email account they can just put it all on one page, and you can target them to the specific areas you want"*

*Kate Shipp, A National Review Magazine*

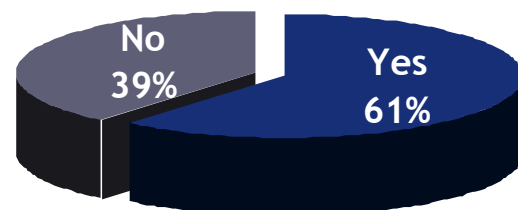
Many journalists in fast moving dailies will keep a number of these sources and feeds open on their desktop all day to ensure that they cover all angles. It is therefore felt that organisations should make more noise about RSS and encourage journalists to register automatically when visiting their site.

However, almost two thirds (61%) admitted that they found it hard to qualify the credibility of the source. Just over a quarter (27%) had themselves contributed to these sources.

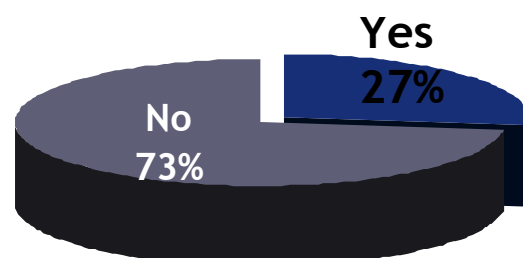
*Q When researching stories do you ever use blogs / wikis?*



*Q Do you find it difficult to qualify the credibility of these sources?*

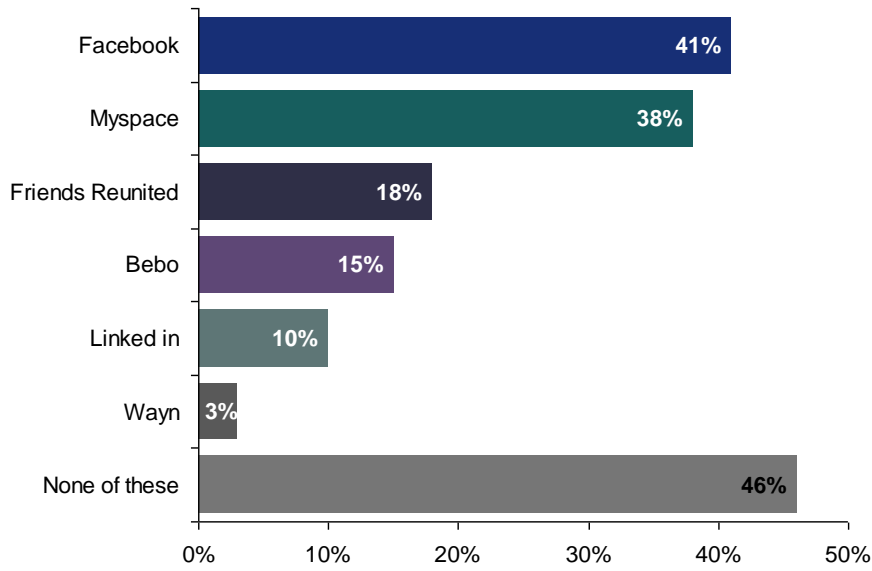


*Q Have you ever contributed to these sources yourself?*



## RESEARCH SOURCES - SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES

*Q Do you currently use, or have you used in the past, any of the following social network sites for carrying out research?*



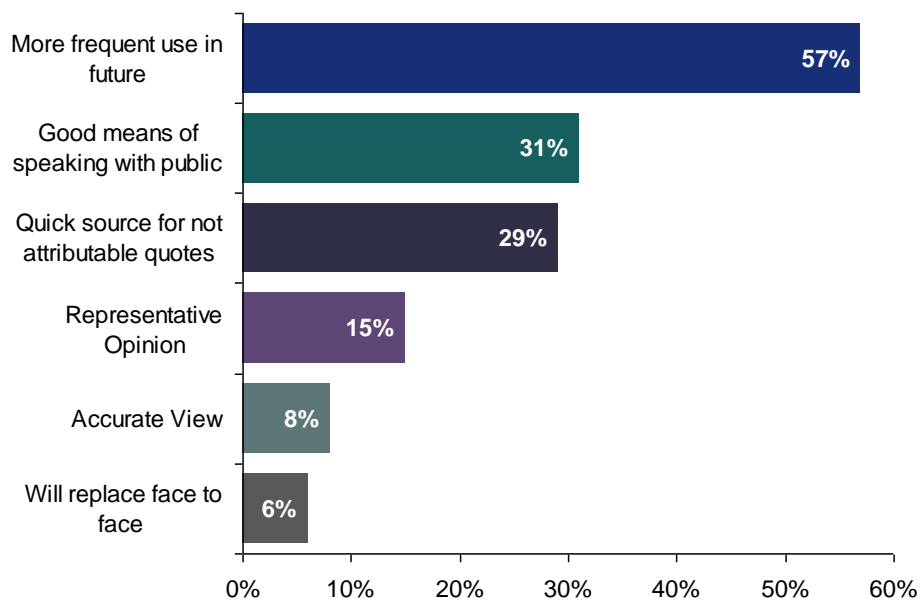
Similar to blogs, social networking sites have become an important source of material for journalists with more than half (54%) claiming to use or have used one for carrying out research. Facebook and Myspace are the most popular, with Friends Reunited, Bebo and Linked-In making up the second tier.

It seems that there may be greater use of social networking sites in the future, as over half (57%) of journalists said it was something that will be more frequently used. The main advantages of these sites appear to be as 'a good way of talking to the general public' and as 'a source of non attributable quotes'.

However, despite these advantages there are some caveats for its wider use, as the channel is not thought to offer a representative opinion or to be entirely accurate. Most journalists did not believe that the use of social networking sites would replace face to face interviewing in the future.

## Glide Journalist Research 2008

*Q Thinking about social networking sites, which of the following statements do you agree/disagree with?*



*“There are so many social networking sites; we are being steered into getting involved with reader oriented sites in particular”*

*Tom Edwards, The Independent*

### *New research tools including blogs*

It is clear that online blog and social media sources can provide some of the information required, possibly background information and an angle, but the majority claim that they always have to go to the primary source to verify data. Do they prefer to do this online?

*“We try and caution people away from Wikipedia, it can be useful to get basic facts and to double check things but it’s hard to have guarantees.”*

*Tom Edwards, The Independent*

Interestingly, the qualitative research showed that usage of the tools varies by subject matter and publication type. Where the subject is factual and fast moving then the opinion based sources like Blog sites and relatively opinion lead and historic sources like Wikipedia may be used to look for an angle, but not for the main facts.

*“We do use some of the forums and I’ve done pieces on young people and teenagers and a lot of the case studies I got were through contacting them on those forums, you email them and post a message to them.... It’s quite exciting doing it that way”*

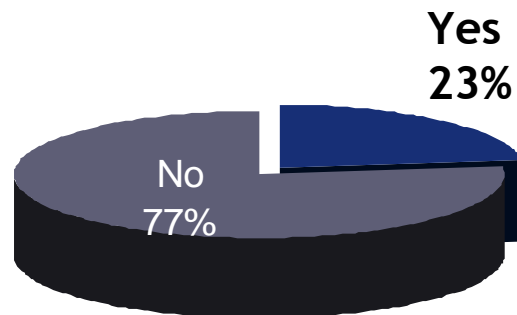
*Huma Qureshi, Observer/Guardian*

Many will have 2 or 3 ports of call - their own press contacts, direct links to manufacturers or suppliers through internal press offices and secondary sources as those mentioned above or external PR agencies.

*“What you would always like to do is get the research that they haven’t given to everyone else. It’s much better than just lifting the information to get a little bit extra, .....if you can’t get hold of them you just use what you have.”*

Huma Qureshi, *Observer/Guardian*

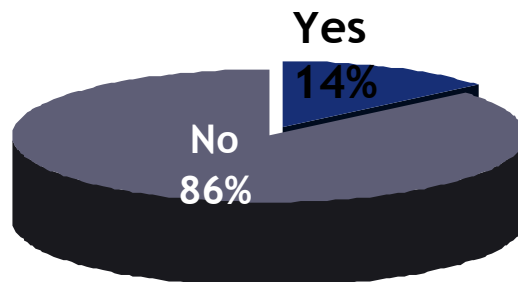
*Q Do you write your own blog?*



This year’s survey sees the growing popularity of blogs with almost a quarter (23%) of journalists writing their own blog. This is a big increase on last year’s results where only 11% wrote their own blog.

What of the potential for blogs to take audiences away from more traditional publications? Only a minority (14%) of our sample said they thought that blogs were a potential threat to their current role.

*Q Do you see blogs as a potential threat to your current role i.e. taking audience away from the publications you write for?*

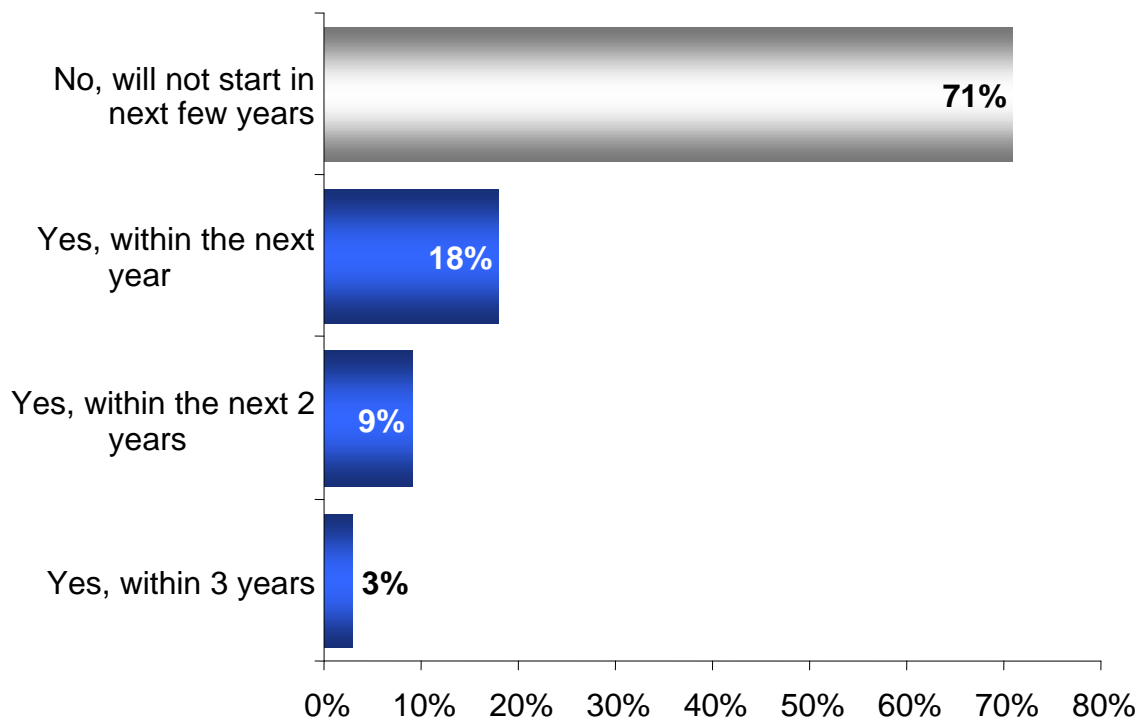


## Glide Journalist Research 2008

### *Q Do you think you are likely to start your own blog in the next few years?*

Of those that use blogs but do not currently write their own, although based on a low sample size (34 respondents), a sizeable proportion (29%) are considering starting a Blog in the short to medium term.

Interestingly, blogs are now being used by publications to generate news content by inviting the feedback and opinions of their readers via their own blogs. These views can then be used to form the basis of a story or can be used to illustrate an existing or developing story.



Blogs are sometimes used to request information from experts, companies and other interested parties. Many publications are said to be taking a look at the creation and use of them.

There seems to be a growing trend towards magazines and newspapers setting up their own blogs just to keep up with competition!

User groups are visited relatively frequently to obtain first impressions on new products and to ascertain problem areas etc.

*"I would go to user groups for technology products in particular because sometimes it is helpful to see what peoples' first impressions are...are people excited about it etc..."*

**Kate Shipp, A National Review Magazine**

### CONCLUSION

As the findings from the 2007 survey concluded, journalists are clearly besotted with the Internet and what it has done for their lives. They are however aware that it has also brought with it greater risks of mistakes due to the speed that news is communicated and also a degree of competition to their personal output.

It appears that PRs and the tools they use are starting to become more efficient and relevant when relaying their missives to journalists. Although, even today, there are still a great deal of generic press releases blunder bussed out to a journalist population who, despite the policing tools in place, receive an inordinate amount of emails every day.

It appears that there is still an inconsistency in the way that PRs communicate to the hungry journalist audience.

The problem which many have is determining what is relevant, interesting and useful to them. All organisations have processes in place to try to ensure that they do not miss the jewel in the crown of stories or of facts about stories they are working on.

All of them recall tales of pieces which they missed because the press release was filtered into a general file or spammed. This is also true of the traditional methods of approach like telephone or post and although all claim to be open to telephone calls they do pass incoming calls around when they are busy and do miss occasionally the prime source on a story.

There is still a negative feeling created by emails with large attachments (58% saying that this causes problems with their system) and 81% say that it leaves a negative impression of the organisation that sends it. This leads to 78% saying that they would reject or ignore emails from that organisation the next time.

There appears to be more usage of visuals - both still and video this year. Organisations are using them both on paper and on their internet communications (website and blogs).

More journalists are writing articles for online use and this is felt to be on the increase by 81% of the journalists.

The new social internet tools are starting to hit peoples' radar and many organisations are using them for secondary information. They are not used by any as a primary source of information due to the difficulty in qualifying the information (61%). Blogs however are now being used by many as a feature/story in their own right and replacing readers' write/letters columns.

Interestingly more journalists are now writing their own blogs (23%).

## Glide Journalist Research 2008

Social networking sites are starting to become relevant to many journalists with Facebook (41%) and MySpace (38%) the most popular. The usage is expected to grow even more amongst journalists in the future (57%).

Many journalists like to create their own series of alerts and links and expect to receive press releases from all relevant parties. They do also expect to be called by or to speak to organisation's press offices for verification. They prefer to obtain the majority of information in advance and to call to confirm. They still expect PRs to use traditional methods to guide them towards new information.

Whilst the provision of good quality online press offices has increased, so too have journalist expectations.

The gap between what journalists expect from an online press office and what they actually encounter seems to be widening, suggesting that the bar has been raised in terms of what companies are expected to produce for journalists on their websites. Sites that journalists may have previously expressed satisfaction with may now be considered below-par when compared with the level of provision they are receiving from other online press offices.

Companies must assess their own offering and look at raising their game by providing accessible and easy to use online press offices supported by tailored, targeted email communications. The advantages are numerous including an improved image, greater efficiency and a reduction in time consuming, low value enquiries (thereby freeing up more time for the value add activities).

In terms of journalists receiving information, a well thought out RSS service together with more professional email communications with links rather than attachments would be a major advantage.

Although this will make the journalist's life easier it is still important to follow up such releases with a telephone call to key people or an email as journalists do seem to have a hard job working through the many unsolicited missives which create a diversion from what they really need and want to see.

Well designed, web-enabled, press releases which provide links to all other possible facts and tools are clearly far more professional than the many variations of press release sent by company PR's and PR agencies currently.