

Alliance for consumer education event – 23 November 2006

Sofa discussion: the role of the media in developing consumer education

Contributors:

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Ian Davies, Director of Development, Archant

Malcolm Coles, Editor, Which?

Brian Jenkins, Head of Radio, Central Office of Information

This session was facilitated by Nadine Dereza.

Facilitator: We have four panellists contributing to this discussion. We have Alex Hunter from OFT, Ian Davies from Archant, Brian Jenkins from the Central Office of Information, also Malcolm Coles from *Which?* Online. Members of the audience will have an opportunity to take part towards the end of the panel discussion.

So why is it important to talk about the role of the media in developing consumer education? Well, the media on the one hand are an integral part of today's consumers' world. They are a principal source of information on products and services and advice, particularly when things go wrong. In fact, the media has played a critical role in developing some key consumer messages over the last two years: the London Fire Brigade and the Met Police and Transport for London made use of the London press after the July 7th bombings to get travel information out. And both local and the national press carry information about scams.

As the range of media delivery channels continues to grow, the potential for using the media as a consumer education tool increases. Now, developments such as podcasting and text messaging offer the possibility of direct, targeted access to consumers but at the moment these tools are underused. So while the potential offered by the media is widely recognised, consumer education initiatives have really failed to exploit the opportunities, either as a delivery channel to target specific audiences, or as a way of raising awareness of consumer education initiatives.

This panel discussion is going to explore the potential of the media in developing consumer education: on the one hand, how consumer education can engage with the media, and on the other hand, and just as important, to think about what the media need from consumer education practitioners to work with them effectively. I would

also like the panellists and, you the audience, to consider how consumer education can address the practical difficulties of engaging all the different media formats while maintaining the consistency and quality of the message.

First of all, welcome to Alex Hunter. Alex is Head of News at the Office of Fair Trading and has worked in communications and media relations for ten years. He has worked in the public, private and voluntary sectors advising MPs, government ministers and organisations on how to deal with the media. I know you have experience in targeting complex consumer issues for the media, what can you bring to this discussion today?

Alex Hunter: [Holding up a copy of the Daily Mirror] I want people to recognise how clever these things are. Every day these are written from scratch. They go nationwide overnight and are read by millions of people. In fact, the Sun is estimated to be looked at by 12 million people every day and in mainstreaming consumer education messages we have to get our stories into publications like this. Sometimes people allow their prejudices about certain publications to get in the way of their message. Just because we might read the Guardian or the Times does not mean it is the best place to get our messages out. The vast majority of people in this country who read newspapers will look at publications like these, which lead the news agenda.

Facilitator: Thank you, Alex. Ian Davies is currently Development Director for Archant, the UK's largest independently owned regional media business and owns regional and local newspapers in the south-east and south-west of England. It has a portfolio of titles in Scotland and also publishes glossy monthly local lifestyle magazines across the country. Now, I am interested in fragmentation of media which I know you have got a lot to say about. But what has your company, Archant, done to stay ahead of the game when it comes to media fragmentation?

Ian Davies: I wish I knew the answer to that. It is an increasingly difficult environment. To some extent, if you have got a fragmenting world all you can do is produce more products, so we have created more material, more products. The key point about those is relevance. What will work in an environment where people have lots of choice is that which is most relevant to them. We are all individuals and we need media which is right for what we want to do and if you have a choice of 200 television or radio channels, then you are going to alight on that which is most appropriate to your needs. I think the message for everybody here is: understand that range of opportunities, make your message as relevant as you can to the individuals you are trying to talk to. It sounds obvious but many people forget it.

Facilitator: Ian, thank you. And next to Ian is Brian Jenkins. Brian is the Head of Radio at the Central Office of Information, the COI, and he has been responsible for radio content for a wide range of government information campaigns. Brian has been at the COI since 1998 and in that time COI has consistently been the biggest advertiser on UK commercial radio. Brian, are people surprised that you are the biggest advertiser on UK commercial radio?

Brian Jenkins: If they think it is their money we are spending, yeah, maybe! Radio is important in government communications because we all know - most of us work in the public sector - that communication with the citizen is paramount. The citizen demands information, it demands to be told things, but the citizen does not make it very easy for us to reach them and I think at COI we found radio gives us a lot of flexibility. It is national, it is regional, it is local, audiences can be broken down into socio-economic group, to age, to taste in music. The challenge is to ensure it is the right message for the right channel. You are going to hear that a lot from us today.

Facilitator: What are you hoping to bring to the discussion today?

Brian Jenkins: I am a great and passionate advocate of radio. I think it is a terrific medium for some things. I think it is a lousy medium for other things. I would like people to understand what it is good for, what it is bad for and give people some tips and advice on how it can work for them effectively.

Facilitator: Thank you, Brian. Next to Brian is Malcolm Coles who is the Editor of *Which?* Online. He has worked at *Which?* for the last ten years and previously has been the editor of *Which?* magazine. Now, Malcolm, many people search online to find the answer to things now, don't they?

Malcolm Coles: They do indeed. The figures on internet usage, broadband, penetration and displacement of other media by the internet, all the graphs sort of do this [indicates line sharply rising]. The question I am most often asked at work is, 'Can this go on the website?' The answer I most commonly give is, 'No.' That is usually for two reasons. One, you really need to think about what you are going to put on the website. People take about two seconds to decide to stay on your site or go somewhere else. Secondly, people have got to find the website, you can't just put it up and assume people will flock to it. They will go down to the paper shop and pick up the paper. So today I hope you will get out of this how you can promote a website if you have one, which will possibly involve other media, and also how to do well in search engines. I put 'endowment misselling' into Google last night and I was pleased to see *Which?* came top but I was less pleased to see it surrounded by these

compensation companies that take a quarter of your compensation. It is very important to think about how to do well in search engines and get ahead of companies who do well on the same search terms but don't educate the consumer.

Facilitator: And often the online content which *Which?* do now is exclusive - it's over and above the magazine content - but do both have equal weighting, would you say?

Malcolm Coles: We tend to use them for different things, so the magazine will quite often have exclusives, case studies and investigations. We do a lot of product testing online first now, so the way we use the two different mediums internally is very different. And likewise when people come to us with stories or things to promote, how we will promote them, on paper or on the web, will depend on what they are.

Facilitator: Okay. If I can turn to Alex, how do we actually engage with the media?

Alex Hunter: Well, there is the million dollar question. One of the first things worth doing is (A) deciding what your message is and (B) ask the media what they want out of you. Journalists actually want to hear us ask them, 'What are you looking for?' And mainstreaming issues, which is really important - in organisations we tend to have rather lofty messages which we think are fascinating and we imagine that everybody else is going to be interested in. The vast majority of time, they are not. So speak to journalists and find ways to make the message interesting. So, for example, a scam in itself is not very interesting. But if you can go to a newspaper, TV show or a radio station and say we have got somebody who has been the victim of a scam, who is prepared to talk about it, all of a sudden it is on another level. You always have to think: what is your message? Why do you want to deliver it? And what mechanism will ensure that delivery works? Knocking out a press release to 600 different journalists ain't going to get you very much coverage. If you want a full page of coverage in a newspaper, you have to appeal to the readers of that newspaper, the viewers of that television programme, the people listening to that radio station. If you can do that, you are 90 per cent of the way there.

Facilitator: And in your experience have you found that a lot of organisations have gone to the press with minimal preparation and they have lost the opportunity?

Alex Hunter: It happens all the time. One of the first questions a journalist is likely to ask is, have you got a case study? We do not really want to hear your chief executive or expert talking. So often organisations do not have case studies prepared and if I am reading a newspaper or watching TV, I want to hear about people that relate to me in some way, so seeing somebody in a suit talking about something a bit

lofty, quite frankly, I am going to turn over. If you need to spend three weeks developing a media strategy and coming up with something interesting, it is worth doing rather than just deciding one day to issue a press release and getting nothing from it. Wherever possible try and offer exclusives because giving the same case study to all the newspapers and television programmes will lose people's interest. If you can ring a journalist and give them a 24 hour 'heads up', you are really at an advantage.

Facilitator: Brian, why and how can consumer educators use radio to reach people, whether it is advertising or delivering, say, a press release?

Brain Jenkins: I think the 'why' would be publicity. Radio is not good at detail, at hard information. As an example I give the Radio 4 weather forecast at three minutes to seven every morning. At seven I think, what the hell is the weather going to do today? But if I saw a map with a sun where I was going to be, I would understand it. Radio is good at making people aware of information - publicity. If you have a website, or event, radio can give instant awareness of that. The how is as Alex just said. Once you have decided radio is your answer, then look at your resources. Anyone in this room with a local trading standards department or any local or national initiative - advertising is a possibility for you. There are more media but none of us - or the public - has any more time. So you need to get people's attention.

Editorial on radio gives you one hit. Advertising can give lots of hits but it takes money. The how of using radio, you could also use sponsorship promotions. Once you have sorted out your resources, think about what the radio station's going to get out of you. You have got to give them a case study. They do not want it written, or a tape, they want a person. That is a challenge because you have to find somebody who is prepared to say they fell victim to a scam and, secondly, is prepared to be interviewed and, thirdly, able to talk about the subject. And you have got to give a unique interview to that radio station because they want it in their style. Each radio station has a unique style and their audience listens because of that. So if your case study interview is on that radio station, you are halfway there. Listeners want to hear your message because it is in their style.

Facilitator: So finding case studies willing to speak is very important?

Brian Jenkins: Absolutely and I would share with this room...chief execs like getting on the radio and TV sometimes. You have got to exercise restraint. I recommend that you be quite strong, because that person may be really keen to get on the radio but if they are as dull as ditch water, you are going to have a struggle.

Facilitator: Ian, case studies for newspapers... it might be easier to find people to talk as they do not actually have to speak out loud and can just be interviewed in private. And, if newspapers believe that they are there to inform the community, why don't they jump at offers to work with consumer education organisations?

Ian Davies: The first thing to say is, I think the panel are talking the same message. It is not a matter of whether newspapers are better than radio. It is about choosing the right thing at the right point and as with any marketing initiative - which essentially is what we are talking about. This message around a real story, real people, is probably one of the most valuable messages that will come out of today. Media companies generally are not interested in your organisation. They are interested in what happens at the consumer level.

Getting back to your question, I think the issue is: what impacts on a consumer? Look at the hamper business. What is it that grabbed hold on television, in newspapers? That there are people out there suffering who are going to have the worst Christmas ever. They are the people they want to talk to. That indicates clearly what the media want: people suffering. Not to promote people suffering but to try and work out how you can get round that, how you can make things better.

I take issue slightly with, why are newspapers not standing there with open arms saying come and talk to us? A bit of audience participation. Sorry to wake you up. Can you stick your hand in the air if you have sent out a press release in the last month? Be honest. Keep your hands in the air and look around you. This is a small sample of people in this country who have messages to communicate to the media at the moment. Each hand represents a piece of paper that has gone across the desk of a media company. Multiply that out to the whole country, how many pieces of paper are going across media company desks every morning? The reason that journalists are not saying, 'Oh, I have received your press release. Come and talk to me', is because they have thousands of pieces of paper going across their desk. And mostly those are 50 page press releases where the story is hidden around page 39. It comes back to: have a story, make it something that the newspapers or radio station want featured, and deliver that in the best way possible.

Facilitator: How about building up relationships with specific journalists? Do they tend to go to the same sources time and time again?

Ian Davies: Well, journalists are - and I was one - inherently lazy. They want people to go to them with stories because most newsrooms are desperately busy and do not have spare capacity. If they are offered a story on a plate they will listen and do

something with it. If they are offered constituent parts that they have to spend time piecing together, they will be less interested. It is about relationships, knowing that you can trust that person to provide a case study who can talk, with a story to tell.

Facilitator: Malcolm, it is all very well talking about radio, newspapers and television, but are we using these any more? Aren't we all using YouTube to find information?

Malcolm Coles: Obviously the media are fragmented and I saw a statistic the other day, like 86 per cent of people who have internet access now have broadband access. Many people now expect a video, for instance, as a matter of course. It is no longer a difficult thing to do on the internet. If you go to YouTube you can see millions of these things. Exactly what audience you are trying to reach is important. Obviously it is mostly young people who hang around on YouTube, but if you go to sites like this, you will actually find consumer education stuff. I found a video on how to fit a child car seat correctly that some bloke had put together at home. I have no idea whether it is correct or not so one important thing about using these sites is trust, I think. This is where the traditional media have an important role. If people see a video on YouTube they won't know whether it is accurate. If they have been linked to that site from a brand or an organisation that they trust, or that organisation itself is hosting the video, then they will have more trust in it. That is what people are looking for on the internet these days.

Facilitator: And YouTube and varieties of YouTube, is it a passing fad and we will go back to traditional media or is it something that is going to stay with us?

Malcolm Coles: It is YouTube today. No one had heard of it last year. Maybe it will be something else next year. You know, it's MySpace or Face Party, all these social networking sites. Which sites and format are going to do well is open to debate. But video, podcasting, audio files they're here to stay - they are increasingly a kind of entertainment - and if your way of reaching consumers is an old flat website with just text on, frankly they are not going to hang around.

Facilitator: Alex, the point about trust is critical, isn't it? If people on YouTube are offering information as practical guides and as authentic, then it might bring into question other sources of information so it throws up the issue of trust.

Alex Hunter: Yes, I think that is still to be tested. Yet people trust the BBC and, heaven forbid, the Sun. So ultimately people may tend to go back to more traditional channels for hearing about consumer education because of this trust issue. But as far as websites are concerned, the reality is we will only hear about it when things start

going wrong - say people are not able to fit their child safety seat safely because it is wrong on a website - then all of a sudden it will get coverage.

Facilitator: So whatever the format, it is about making sure you have got that consistency of message?

Alex Hunter: For any organisation, consistency of message is absolutely key. Without it you will be undone because people will be looking for inconsistency and you will get attacked. Any organisation must have consistent messaging at the centre of any media strategy. Otherwise your organisation will look silly.

Facilitator: Brian, at what stage should people should go to the media when they are thinking about developing a consumer education initiative? Is it the proposal stage, during development or with the finished project or resource?

Brian Jenkins: Can I address that in a second? I am a passionate user of the internet. Press and radio have been through stages where people have written us off. Radio was going to die in the 1950s when TV was invented. It did not happen. The internet is going to kill off radio, TV and the press. I bet it will not happen. If you want to reach five million people very efficiently, place an ad on ITV. But if you read the media you think that no-one is watching ITV. It is not true. We have to keep new media in perspective because budgets – for media owners and communicators - are not increasing accordingly. Otherwise we are all going to be pouring money and resources into podcasting which is incredibly valuable, but there are a billion hours of radio listening every week in the UK - that is the number of people multiplied by the number of hours they are listening. The number of hours listening to podcasts is probably in tens, if not hundreds of thousands. I think radio and the web and the press and the web can work extremely well together.

Facilitator: Ian, the irony is that with this increasing choice of media, then the opportunities to develop consumer education is greater. However, the impact of each opportunity is likely to be less, isn't it?

Ian Davies: It is. And that is why you cannot rule out traditional media because today, in any marketplace, it is getting to more people than anyone else, as it was five or ten years ago. It is still television, it is still newspapers. There is a basic truth here which is that most people live locally. So the local press is still the most dominant medium in the UK. And if you add together the circulation of all the local press across the UK, it is bigger than any other single media form. That is not to say

you should ignore the possibilities of the emerging media forums. I have a MySpace page. But the problem is that they are, by and large, very narrowly focused.

Facilitator: [asks audience] Who does not have a My Space page? [following show of hands] The majority of the audience.

Ian Davies: Who does not have a presence on Second Life? Why not? There is a community of two million people who are using Second Life. You can communicate the message you want to communicate. But it is highly fragmented. So using it is more difficult than using methods that reach the majority of people across the UK.

Facilitator: If I can go back now to Brian? At what stage in developing a consumer education initiative should we approach the media? Is it the proposal stage or during development?

Brain Jackson: I think it would depend on the experience and knowledge of the individual of the particular medium they want to use. If you are experienced at using and having a good relationship with a particular paper or local radio station, then you can probably float ideas past them at an early stage. If you're less experienced...radio and TV, local and national really do not have time, resources, people to develop stories. They may help you shape it, but you do need to go to them with a quite well developed proposition. But that depends on your relationship. What if you want to communicate about mobile phone contracts to the under-25s? Or maybe you want to connect up with your local commercial radio station. You have got to go to them with a fixed idea. So I do not think there is a set idea as to when you should approach the media. If you are thinking above the line in radio [paid for advertising], whether you are doing a small advertising campaign or a sponsorship campaign, again it depends on your experience. If you do not know what you are buying you may well be fleeced. If you want to get a lot of impact, reach a lot of people on a station which maybe does not carry a lot of speech, Galaxy, Kiss, a station which appeals to the under-25s, and you have resources, advertising is an efficient way of doing it. The same applies in the press. They will make your advert for you but be careful. You are spending quite a bit of money and you have got to know what you are doing.

Facilitator: Alex, in terms of approaching the media, how much advance preparation should you go to them with? Is it at the planning stage where you want to develop an idea, or are they looking for you to come up virtually with the finished article?

Alex Hunter: It depends on the relationship that you have with them. If you are experienced enough you will develop, I think it is fair to say, a nose for a story. So

you can leave it a bit later. But, if you have a relationship with a journalist, it is worth saying early on, 'This is something we are doing, would you be interested in it?' There is no point in spending a month on something that is not very interesting. If they are not that interested say, 'Well, if we want to get this story out, what can we say that would appeal to you as a journalist to make you use this story?' But you need to have all your ducks in a row basically, and once you have got a really great case study, the story will write itself. A lot of us do stuff around internet scams. You can issue press releases until the cows come home saying please be aware of internet scams and get little coverage. But there is a leading article in the Sun today about a lady who lost £70,000 through internet scamming - all of a sudden it becomes interesting and makes the warnings real! So when you have your hot case study, that is the point to go to the journalist.

Facilitator: And when you think about a consumer education initiative, how important is the media in the general scheme of things? They are one tool in the toolkit?

Alex Hunter: They are one tool but an important tool. The media essentially gives you journalistic third party endorsement. Anybody with enough money can pay for advertising - that is not to say advertising is not important, because it is. But if you want your message to be trusted - that trust issue - having endorsement from the journalist who wrote the story or presented the programme helps, because people trust advertising less, I think it is fair to say.

Ian Davies: We commissioned some research a year ago into radio marketing, which is placing messages, editorial, on radio stations. I watched a couple of focus groups in Birmingham – listeners to BBC WM - talking about a tax story. And these people, their relationship with that radio station, with that journalist, was incredibly strong. One of the guys said when the presenter comes on the radio he takes a note of interesting things and tells people about it, which was fascinating because the show does consumer stuff. What they were listening to were interviews which HM Revenue and Customs had paid to be placed there. HMRC had paid someone to be a spokesperson. We had created a story, put them on the radio station, WM did their own interview and the listeners felt this was someone that their friend had invited in to talk to them. They had no idea that this had been pushed, this was marketing. They understood about hype but the trust of the journalist was incredible.

Facilitator: I want to talk about assessing the audience now. Malcolm, it is really important, isn't it, to think about who you are targeting the message to?

Malcolm Coles: It is, yes. So the internet is the younger medium. *Which?* magazine itself is a much older readership than almost anyone else, apart from perhaps Saga. But it is important to think about who you want to reach and what the right tool for it is. So, young people are not going to subscribe to *Which?*. A story that we choose to run in the magazine will be influenced by who reads us. That is the same across whatever medium you are talking about. You need to think, who is going to be watching, listening, reading it? Only if they are the people that you want to reach, is it worth using. I just want to make one point and bore you about case studies again...at what stage you should involve the media. This is us making a cock-up, but we had a page in the magazine for this case study and we went to take their photo and found they had gone on a three-month cruise. Another common thing is that they agree but do not really understand – 'Oh no, I do not want my photo in the magazine. You can not use my name, people might read it.' Planning and being really clear about what you expect of them at the very beginning will stop embarrassment later.

Facilitator: Brian, it can be daunting if you want to embark on a special project. You think, what is the right medium for this? How about bringing in some experts that can help you with your communication strategy or advertising?

Brian Jenkins: It depends on your budget and on your target audience. If you are in a well defined area with one commercial radio station, they are not a bad place to start. You will have procurement rules depending on the amount of money you are spending. If you are new to it, advice is always useful. There are local, regional COI offices that can provide advice - for a cost - and media buying and strategic thinking. But it really depends on your resources.

Facilitator: And you think that is worth it? Obviously it is there for a reason and people use those facilities to get that regional knowledge?

Brian Jenkins: I would like to think so, yes.

Facilitator: Okay, it is your opportunity to express your opinion, to ask the panel a question. Please say your name and also state the organisation you represent.

Jill Stevens: Jill Stevens from Experian. We have been running a consumer education programme for ten years, telling people about the credit granting process - not many of them are terribly interested! We found one way that you can get a series of case studies offering themselves up - if you are prepared to do it - is live radio phone-ins. It has worked very well because we have got to real people with these problems and

often, the misconceptions that we are trying to put right. I wondered whether the panel feel that this is a good way of getting a message across?

Brian Jenkins: How do you receive the phone-ins? What do you go to the radio stations with?

Jill Stevens: Usually they get in touch with us because a listener who has been refused credit or been unfairly dealt with has got in touch with them. But we tend to target people. We start with sending a leaflet - I believe in leaflets as a starting point because they focus your message - to the radio station. But I will personally go to a local radio journalist who I know and say, 'Look, if you want somebody to come and do a live phone-in, we will do it.'

Brian Jenkins: The phone call, the personal relationship really works. Phone-ins are great. We got involved in one, doing publicity with NHS Direct who were concerned there could be some negative publicity from it. We used Dr Chris Steele who is on ITV. He was talking about NHS Direct. One caller came on and said, 'NHS Direct is a lifesaver, I have used it a few times and it is fantastic.' We could not have paid for that kind of publicity! It is quite a risky strategy: people are always going to look to the negative. You use the credit experience usefully: 'We are here to counteract some negative publicity.' Do not forget the media will also look for a negative side of the story so make sure you have the positive. But phone-ins can be great so long as you give the radio station the authority. The way that they do consumer matters on Jeremy Vine on Radio 2 is very good, they always get the expert to speak as well.

Ian Davies: Can I just add to that? As an ex-radio phone-in producer, it is really helpful to have a couple of people ready to give the radio station potential phone callers to get the thing moving. One of the things that I found, whenever we did a general phone-in of community problems, was typically the conversation was about dog crap on the pavement because the first two callers talked about it and then the rest would, too. The first two callers are the most important and will help move the programme in the direction you want. If you can, seed those with people whose point is relevant to the point that you want to make. Research in advance and give the radio station a couple of callers to start them off.

Facilitator: Thank you, Jill, for raising that.

Craig Cathcart: Hi, Craig Cathcart from Glasgow Caledonian University. Grateful for the insights from the panel. The need for precision in the consumer education message seems quite important to me and yet, once a message has gone from the

person supplying it, they lose control over how that message is spun or editorialised. An example is science stories where a very nuanced discovery becomes 'Brussels sprouts cure cancer' or something. How do you manage that relationship so your message is not distorted, the impact is right and precise and has longevity?

Alex Hunter: Again, that goes back to how your relationship is with the particular media outlet, to an extent. Generally, if it is a good story there comes a tipping point, when, if other journalists pick it up, you can lose control of your message. It becomes like Chinese whispers. So you have to be ready for that. One way to lose control of a message quickly is to send out 500 copies of a press release. Whereas if you are using specific journalists, briefing them well, and briefing your case studies or whoever is speaking on your behalf, it is much easier to keep a degree of control. Remember, journalists are never experts.

Facilitator: Malcolm, that comes back to the point of trust as well, doesn't it?

Malcolm Coles: Yes. I get probably 600 press releases a day in my inbox. I delete most of them on the headline. The tactic of sending 600 press releases out is not great. You run the risk that the person who does read it has an axe to grind, or there is a story running already slightly related to yours - they pick it up and do something else with it.

Facilitator: Malcolm, what would make a press release sit up for you?

Malcolm Coles: The headline and the first sentence. If you are not interested by then...occasionally you get emails that go on for feet of screen! Keep it under a page for paper and if it is an email try not to make anyone scroll. You have really got to think about the introduction if you want people to pay attention.

Facilitator: Brian, a quick comment?

Brain Jenkins: Yes, the problem the gentlemen touched on about journalists communicating the complexity...do not expect them to. The journalist is not interested in complexity because the public are not interested in it. Say you want to communicate a piece of complex consumer legislation, there are places for explaining that - the radio and newspaper are not those places. Keep it simple. If your message is regarding a scam - if it seems too good to be true, then it probably is - communicate that, because that is what people are going to remember.

Ian Davies: I would just add that we think a lot about what we want to communicate but we probably do not think enough about what we do not want communicated. So if you do not want someone to say, 'Brussels sprouts cure cancer', then do not give them those clues in your story. Look at your message, try and work out how somebody could misrepresent it, and go back and take out that option so that they do not misrepresent it. If you think about newspapers, a journalist writes a story. It goes to a subeditor who then tries to find a really interesting headline. That is where you get 'sprouts cure cancer'. Make sure they can not get to that. Your role is to influence so, if you hint to them what that headline might be, the direction you want it to go in, rather than the direction they are taking it in, you will do a lot better.

Martin Bruton: Hello, Martin Bruton from Trading Standards in Gloucestershire. I have a question about evaluation because reading, seeing and hearing is not the same as learning and we tend to assume that getting stuff out in the media is an end in itself. I want to ask about your views about how we can use the media to show that there has actually been some change and improvement in behaviour?

Facilitator: Interesting question. Alex?

Alex Hunter: Evaluation is one of the hardest things...we are in the job of changing people's attitudes and that is like playing a very long ball. Plucking the example of extended warranties out of the air...once upon a time people used buy a piece of electrical equipment and the shop would say, 'Do you want to pay - what was always a lot of money - for an extended warranty?' And people did. Now far fewer people pay for extended warranties because there was a whole raft of consumer education stuff around 'think before you buy an extended warranty'. So you can see it is a long process, but consumer attitudes have changed. There will be times when attitudes will change much faster and I think the media can help us achieve that through their own editorials. Often the OFT might not be able to speak about a particular issue because it is something we are looking into. But journalists will quite happily editorialise and give their own opinions about something. And you will find probably quite quickly that consumer attitudes might change. But evaluation is very difficult. Once upon a time you used to evaluate by column inches but I think that is rather a naff way of doing things. But I do think it is quite a slow process often.

Facilitator: Ian, it is a relentless challenge, isn't it?

Ian Davies: The simple answer is measurement. It is an easy answer but it is a very difficult thing to do because it costs. But if you are going to measure then make sure you are measuring the right thing, because if the job that you have been doing is

about awareness, then measure awareness. Do not go and measure changes in behaviour because you have not finished the job, there is a lot more to do be done. I would add that if there is real change in behaviour over a period of time, go back to the media you spoke to in the first place and let them know that. Tell them that they helped you change the world. That is a great story for them and it really builds up trust and that relationship you need for the future.

Malcolm Coles: One advantage of using your own website, of course, is that it is possible to measure how many people have gone to look at each page, gone from which page to which other one. The one thing I would say is, work out what success would look like at the start because somebody told me the other day that 130,000 people have downloaded our template on how to complain about bank charges. We went, 'brilliant'. Then we went, 'Is it brilliant?' Is that a lot or not out of 56 million?

Facilitator: One final comment from the audience?

Peter Shears: I am Peter Shears from the University of Plymouth and I am a self-asserting consumer affairs expert on three or four local radio stations. Despite what Brian said about the fact that radio is useless at detail, in my experience radio is good at detail provided you repeat it enough. And you are talking about complicated relevant cases and statutes. I have people come on saying, 'Well I went back to the shop and I told him that under section 14, subsection 2 he had to give me my money back and he did'. And I think that you need to take heart that it is possible to do consumer affairs phone-ins and it is possible to get a message across. Often you have to keep repeating the address of the mailing preference service but local radio, is enormously powerful and it does work.

Brian Jenkins: Yes, but do not forget that one person calls back and says that worked and there are 50,000 who did not call back. Radio is not great in an incredible amount of detail. It is a danger for phone-in programme producers to gear the programme towards the people who are phoning in, rather than people who are listening. It is a balance of both. So I take your point, but I would advise caution on incredible detail on radio.

Facilitator: Thank you for all your comments. Just one final thought from the panellists on dealing with the practical difficulties of engaging all the different media formats, while maintaining the quality and the consistency of the message. How are you going to do that?

Malcolm Coles: I think the important thing is to think about what you want from them, but equally importantly, think about what they are going to want from you. If you have got both things right, hopefully everything will go well.

Brain Jenkins: If you are dealing with radio, trust the programme makers to know their audience. If they did not know their audience they would not have an audience.

Ian Davies: I think that whilst the programme makers might know the audience, you need to know the audience as well. Be very clear about the message you want to communicate and go in with clarity when you are talking to the media owner.

Alex Hunter: Jerry Springer has a final thought but I am not tempted - we have not got bouncers here! It is all about people. If you spend a year on research around consumers, when you are trying to sell that story to the media, do not forget people are interested in other people, they are not interested in long, complex studies.

Facilitator: Thank you very much to our four panellists. You have seen and heard Alex Hunter from the OFT, Ian Davies from Archant, Brian Jenkins from the COI and also Malcolm Coles from *Which?* Online. Thank you very much to you [the audience] as well for all your comments and your participation. I hope that has been useful for you in thinking about how to engage the media, coming up with ideas and pondering the next steps you could take. Remember that the media is just one tool in your toolkit of armoury when you are delivering a consumer education initiative.