

Comments on –

**A REVIEW OF GOVERNMENT ADVERTISING IN  
NORTHERN IRELAND (Draft Edition)**

As a major advertising vehicle in Northern Ireland, the Daily Mirror, fully embraces the review of Government Advertising in Northern Ireland. We resolutely believe that it is our responsibility to deliver cost-effective advertising solutions to our customers, and we have campaigned for years to draw agencies’ and clients’ attentions to the mounting premiums that have been attached to recruitment and public notice advertising in other papers.

With reference to the issues that necessitated comment, here are the objective opinions of Mirror Group Newspapers (N.I.) Ltd.:-

**Chapter 3 – 3.12:-**

The draft quotes, ‘Much of the legislation was written at a time when.....papers were the traditional form of communication.....’

Please take note of the following statistics outlining the reading of newspapers in Northern Ireland. *NITGI 2005*.

Table 1.

<i>NB. Figures in 000's</i>	<b>Population Total</b>	<b>Read a Newspaper</b>	<b>Read a Daily Newspaper</b>	<b>Read a Sunday Newspaper</b>	<b>Read a weekly Newspaper</b>
<b>All Adults</b>	1341	1065	871	740	231
<b>% of Population</b>	100	79	64	55	17

You can see from the above table that, for almost 80% of the N.I. population, reading a newspaper is still the traditional form of communication, with the majority of adults reading a daily newspaper.

**Para 3.15 of Chapter 3, on, Advertising and Government Communication:-**

- (1) A single rate for advertising should be secured across all government departments, regardless of whether classified or campaign advertising. (Volume discounts could be negotiated on campaign advertising). This single rate for all would cut down on confusion, overpricing and restore fluidity when planning ads. There is absolutely no reason that this should not be facilitated across all government advertising - classified or campaigns.

- (2) Internal management within Government departments should arrange education and information for those who procure advertising. This should be high on the agenda and would aid co-ordination, planning and communication within the departments. It would be certain that after the review has been completed many of us, in the industry, would be willing to help inform and educate those government persons associated with placing advertising.
- (3) Using a combination, of the tried-and-tested method, of placing ads in the paper aided by sign-posting to Government websites, to gather further information or for applications on line, will assist both reader and advertiser. This inevitably will cut down on time-consuming inquiries and administration costs. With the fragmentation of media, a commonsense approach would be to combine both press and internet to reach the desired target audience.

#### **Chapter 4 – 4.15:-**

- (1) **Increased Number Of Titles** – this factor should work in the Government’s favour.  
  
More titles = Press competition = competitive rates.  
More titles = Choice for readers
- (2) **Falling Readership And Circulation** – The report states that, ‘with the exception of the Irish News, there has been a significant decline in circulation figures’ – this is not correct. The Daily Mirror’s sales have increased in Northern Ireland from 54,000 in 1998 to 59,000\* today. The most recent ABC figures (Jan-Jun 2005), show that the Irish News sales figures have fallen by a greater number than the Mirror'. We have suffered fewer losses and dramatic declines than those competitors offering premium rates for recruitment and public sector advertisements.  
  
\* Sept. monthly ABC figure
- (3) **Media Cost Inflation** – The ‘monopoly-like’ hold that other publications have on certain sectors of the market i.e. recruitment, public notices, etc. would come to an end if one cost over all was introduced to eliminate inflationary rates.
- (4) **Cost Differential** – The Daily Mirror agrees that one rate across all sections of the paper is the way forward.
- (5) **Weekly Press** – Strong in their geographical area, however, not as cost-effective as using a national province-wide publication. Weekly press is considered a micro-market, parochial and highly saturated. From the Table 1 on pg. I, it shows only 17% of the population in N.I. will read a weekly newspaper.

- (6) **Audited Circulation** – There should be an ABC figure for all titles. However, figures can be misleading if they are not sourced properly when used, e.g. using Mon-Fri figures (instead of Mon-Sat), bulk sale figures, etc. Therefore guidance should be given to all departments to help them understand media currencies and research tools, e.g. ABC, RAJAR, BARB, share of viewing, NITGI, etc. It should be noted that All-Ireland ABC figures should not be used against N.I. ABC figures, e.g. Daily Ireland should have an individual ABC figure for NI only. Like-for-like in all statistics is vital. Research figures must also be up-to-date – in the Draft, figures are out of date.

### **Summary of Draft Recommendations:-**

#### **The Internet**

Partnering press with a website is the way forward. However, limited effectiveness of public notice and recruitment advertising will transpire if government departments do not consider all of their options, when placing these ads. Careful study of NITGI and other research tools will enable them to match up their needs with the publications on offer. It is imperative again those departments are trained to understand the strengths and weaknesses of various mediums – including the internet.

We would agree with the Report's analysis of the need for more diverse and flexible advertising mediums, particularly the use of the internet.

An on-line approach will still need to have to be marketed to draw readers, for example, to the site. The review underlines this in Chapter 6 – 6.1.7.

#### **Campaign Advertising**

Agencies who hold government campaigns should attest the message they intend to put out, reaches the right audience as well as being cost-effective. Giving consideration to each press title based, again, on its strengths and weaknesses, will ultimately achieve the Government's goal, by creating awareness and helping to change attitudes and behaviours. All titles should be given an opportunity to tender for campaigns based on above criteria.

A mechanism designed to attach or relate policy initiatives which underlie campaigns would ultimately make communication more effective.

### **Chapter 7 – 7.4**

***Assessment of impacts in relation to daily newspapers and consideration of measures which might mitigate any adverse impacts.***

- (1) Sex, age, religion and political opinion should be considered when placing certain ads or arranging campaigns. (Using appropriate statistical currencies, e.g. NITGI).An undermining of the effectiveness of the communications process is inevitable if the target audience is not considered.
- (2) Readers should be well-informed through features and responsiveness campaigns, which direct them to take action in various ways, e.g. change of lifestyle, use internet, new job, etc. Using press with internet seeks out to enhance campaigns and help bring understanding to diverse concerns.

### **Conclusion**

Based on the report's findings it is clear that incremental development of current government strategies would further complicate the issues highlighted by the review group. Therefore, a new comprehensive and uniform advertising formula is required by government, which could be applied to specific campaigns or strategies by various departments, each with their own agenda. This formula should contain policy instruments to maximise media vehicles to suit their own agenda and make their communication more effective, both in costs and results. Mirror Group Newspapers, Northern Ireland, is aware of the need to deliver value for money to advertisers – this remains our primary objective in today's market in Northern Ireland.

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