

# The wanted ads

**Keith Donaldson**, Newspaper Society, outlines the key findings from a study that shows clearly the value of regional papers in the UK media landscape

**T**HE NEWSPAPER SOCIETY'S ongoing dialogue with advertisers and agencies recognises a clear need to identify the position that local newspapers occupy within the evolving media landscape. The regional press has never before presented greater opportunities for advertisers, enabling them to reach a wide range of audiences across different life-stages through different platforms, from the traditional newspaper to highly-specific niche magazines and websites.

It is well documented and widely accepted that the media landscape is changing: as media options continue to diversify, audiences fragment, and as the number of commercial messages increases, consumers are becoming more savvy - and cynical.

Consequently, advertising avoidance has become a real issue for advertisers - new recording technology allows TV ad breaks to be skipped, while internet pop-ups can be blocked. It was against this background that the Newspaper Society commissioned GfK NOP Media to embark on a consumer study to give advertisers fresh insights about how different media channels are used by

people in their daily lives: in particular, how they accrue information and respond to advertising.

The strength of the local press in delivering large audiences who are actively engaged with editorial and advertising has been recognised.

Undertaken in autumn/winter 2005, the research study - *the wanted ads*, previously known by its working title of the Media Context Project - combined the following:

**The key insight from a media planning point of view is that advertising forms an integral part of the reader proposition within regional press'**



> Qualitative research conducted through a series of six focus groups each lasting an hour and a half in three locations (Leeds, Wolverhampton and Guildford). Each group comprised six to eight participants.

> Quantitative interviews with 5083 people, each lasting 20 minutes (1576 face-to-face computer-assisted personal interviews and 3507 online computer-assisted self-completion surveys).

Both samples were nationally representative of adults aged 16-65 across the UK.

## Qualitative insights

The purpose of the qualitative stage was to explore the relationship people have with media and to develop the framework for the quantitative stage. From the focus groups we obtained the following insights.

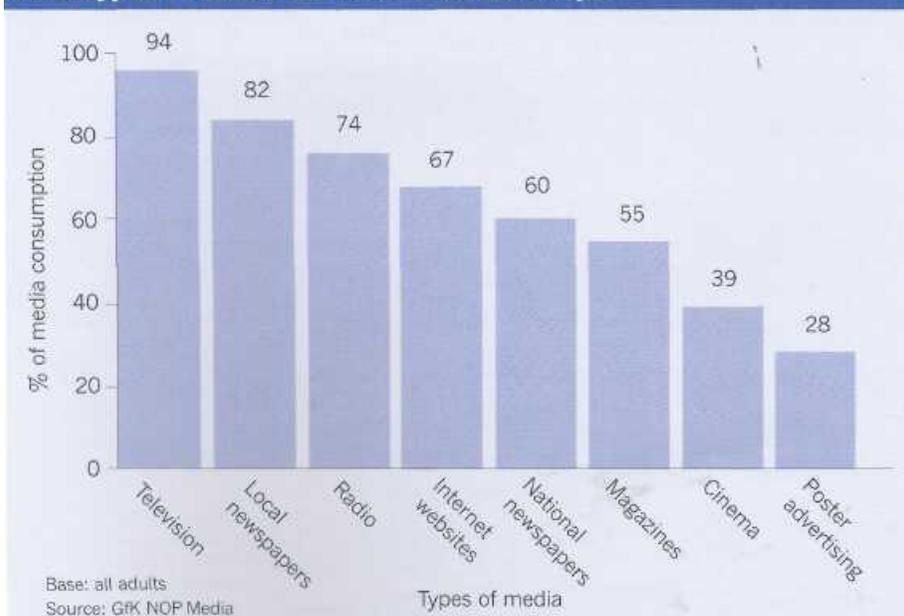
> Local newspapers fulfil a role that is not adequately met by local television and radio. There is an overwhelming perception that local newspapers have greater resources and provide not just local reporting but more analysis.

> Readers perceive that regional newspapers are story-led rather than sales-led.

> Regional newspapers have greater integrity than national titles: a few of the group participants had met local journalists or lived near to them. If national newspapers covered a story it was felt that they did not have the same degree of empathy with the area.

> Perhaps one of the most powerful insights was the legitimacy of national brands appearing in their local >

**FIGURE 1**  
**What types of media are consumed nowadays?**



## Locality verbatim from the focus groups

'Local papers are completely different from national papers. They keep you aware of what's going on around you.'

'Some of the journalists live here. I've met one or two and liked them. Nice people. Trustworthy.'

'It's the only way to follow through those really local stories that you don't hear about otherwise.'

newspaper. People were asked to bring examples to the focus groups of local newspaper advertisements they had noticed and liked. It was apparent from the examples that national brands had much greater resonance with consumers in the regional press than previously thought. Brands featuring in these advertisements included Miele, Argos, NHS, Telewest, British Airways, Burger King, Hewlett-Packard and Virgin Trains. Participants did not feel that these brands were 'out of place' in a local newspaper environment: in fact they positively welcomed their presence.

## Adding the numbers

Following on from the qualitative stage we were able to develop key areas to explore for the quantitative stage of the research. The output highlighted four key strengths or building blocks for the regional press: scale, locality, involvement and avoidance. These led to a crucial fifth element for the medium and gave it a unique positioning among mainstream media.

## Scale

The regional press industry's range and depth of product offering is enormous, and it became apparent that the level of reach across a wide range of demographics and life-stages was consistently high. It is the second-highest medium in terms of reach, after TV. Local newspapers are read by four out of five people across the UK and this reach is just as high among younger age groups: 79% of 16-24 year olds and 81% of 25-34 year olds read a

local newspaper (see Figure 1).

## Locality

Previous research projects by the Newspaper Society (Consumer Choice and Recruitment Choice) had both highlighted that people live their lives very locally. We wanted to test that this was still the case. For many in the advertising and marketing industry in London this may come as a surprise, but the research proved that for the vast majority of the UK population, life remains very local:

- > 82% of people spend half or more of their time within five miles of home

- > 78% of people spend half or more of their money within five miles of home.

This local lifestyle is overwhelmingly represented by local newspapers. The level of detail and the connection with the readers creates a unique bond with the audience. Local newspapers were cited by 65% of respondents as being the best at representing their local area; the next-closest medium was radio at just 13%.

The research highlighted five main essential beliefs about the regional press:

- > 48% of people agreed or strongly agreed that local newspapers help them

The regional press has never before presented greater opportunities for advertisers to reach a wide range of audiences across different life-stages and different platforms'

to feel part of the community.

- > 49% of people agreed or strongly agreed that local newspapers help them get the best out of where they live.

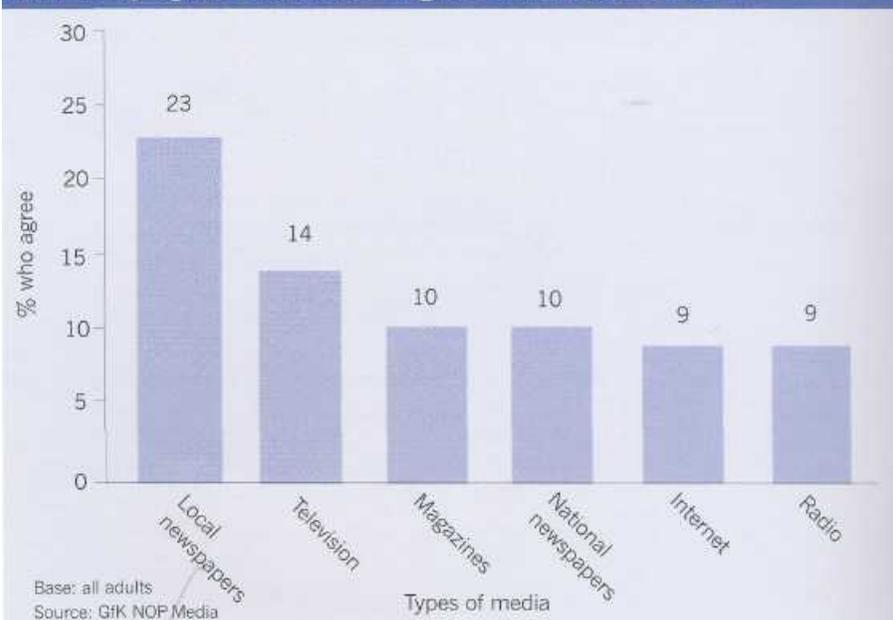
- > 49% of people agreed or strongly agreed that local newspapers are honest and believable.

- > 49% of people agreed or strongly agreed that they rely on local newspapers for news they cannot get elsewhere.

- > 34% of people agreed or strongly

FIGURE 2

## How many agree that advertising is relevant and useful?





**Keith Donaldson** is head of research and insight at the Newspaper Society the UK organisation providing national and local newspaper information.

agreed that local newspapers are more accurate and reliable than other media.

### Involvement

These essential beliefs are translated into involvement, which manifests itself in terms of the advertising contained within local newspapers (see Figure 2).

> Advertising content in local newspapers is noticed by 64% of all adults, close to the level of those reading the editorial content (78%).

> Regional newspaper advertising is noticed more than TV, magazine, national newspaper, internet and radio advertising.

> Regional and local newspapers received the top score for the relevance and usefulness of their advertising, followed by television.

### Avoidance

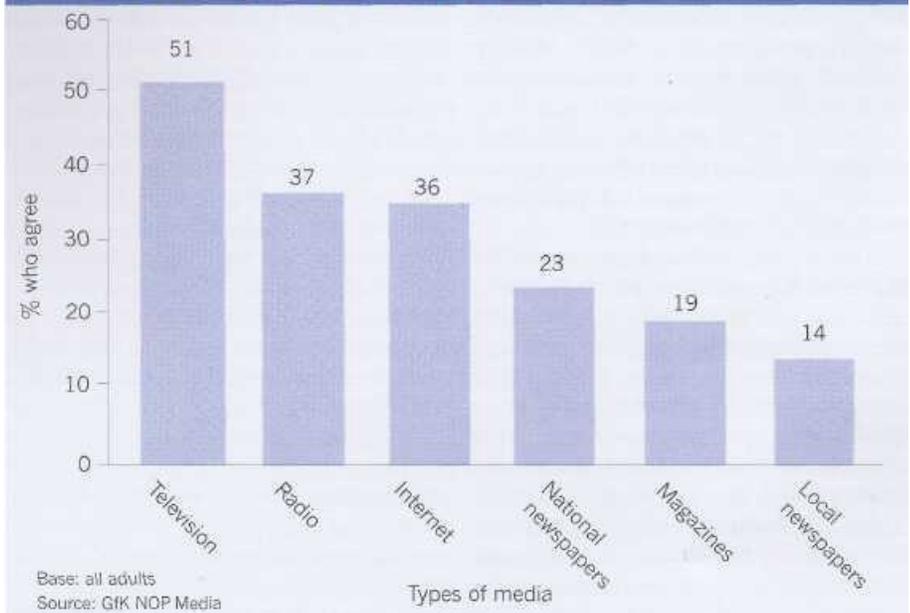
Advertising avoidance remains a major strategic issue for advertisers.

> When respondents were asked if they skipped or avoided advertising, avoidance was most common with TV (47%), followed by national newspapers (27%), the internet (25%) and magazines (23%). Local newspaper and radio ads were avoided by only 17% of respondents.

> The regional press is the medium that consumers are least likely to prefer without advertising. Over half of all respondents said they would prefer it if there were no ads on TV and 37% said they would prefer it if there were no ads on the radio. Just 14% of people said they would prefer it if their local newspaper

FIGURE 3

### How many would prefer no advertising?



did not contain any advertising.

> Ad avoidance simply is not a major issue for the local press, where readers positively welcome advertising messages (see Figure 3).

These four key building blocks, scale, locality, high involvement and low advertising avoidance - create a unique and powerful environment for advertisers to place their commercial messages. This leads to the final insight and the most valuable: advertising in regional press generates a response.

### Generating response

> 83% of people who regularly read local newspapers have taken action as a result of the advertising within them. This falls to 78% among respondents who only occasionally read local newspapers.

> Over half (51%) of all respondents had visited a store or used a coupon as a result of a local newspaper ad.

> 56% of people have visited a store or retail outlet as a result of advertising in a local newspaper.

> Regional press advertising is acted upon, across all income levels and all ages. There is virtually the same level of action among the £14-28k income group as in the £62k+

income group (75% as opposed to 76%).

> Over two-thirds of 16-24 year olds have acted upon advertising in their local newspaper.

### Clear, unique position

The research has helped the Newspaper Society to create a clear and unique position for the regional press as a communications channel. Some of the findings from the research are not new, but they do allow us to benchmark the position of regional press, as well as confirm its relevance in the current media landscape. The key insight from a media planning point of view is that advertising forms an integral part of the reader proposition within regional press and this leads to a low level of avoidance and real customer action.

The Newspaper Society hopes that the research will encourage media strategists to reappraise the value of local newspapers as an important communication channel. It demonstrates the continued strength of local media in the community and offers a proposition that no other mainstream medium can match.

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### Avoidance and action: verbatim from the focus groups

'You don't avoid reading the ads in the local.'

'It's good to have adverts in my local paper.'

'In local papers you get big advertisers.'