

Public Interest News Foundation

# Index

of Independent News Publishing in the UK

2023



**The PINF Index of Independent News  
Publishing in the UK, 2023**

May 2023

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# Foreword

**At the Public Interest News Foundation (PINF), we believe that everyone deserves to benefit from journalism that speaks to them, for them and with them.**

Unfortunately, the news industry isn't delivering on that vision. Millions of people don't have access to news that covers the places they live or the issues they care about. The advertising that once funded public interest journalism has migrated to digital platforms. Some commercial publishers have responded by cutting journalists' jobs and pushing out a high volume of attention-grabbing online content.

We fear that this marks a race to the bottom, where audiences will become ever less trusting of journalism and more likely to avoid the news altogether. However, public funding for journalism (in the form of advertising from local authorities and central government and a slice of the BBC licence fee) goes disproportionately to these publishers, providing little incentive for them to change.

So, how can we get from where we are to where we want to be?



**Jonathan Heawood,**  
Executive Director,  
Public Interest News Foundation

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At PINF, we believe that the path to a better future lies through the independent news publishing sector. Independent news organisations are often rooted among the people whose stories they cover. They are small non-profit or low profit organisations that aim to have a positive impact on these communities, not to extract huge revenues from them.

They aren't perfect, and they don't have all the answers. But, with the right support, independent publishers have the potential to cover the UK with journalism that commands trust and loyalty from its audiences.

We launched the annual PINF Index of Independent News Publishing three years ago to find out more about this sector. With 100 respondents to this year's survey, we've been able to create the richest edition of the Index so far. In this report, we guide you through the facts and figures to find out what's really going on.

For me, the big story here is one of growing professionalism. Independent news publishers are relying less on volunteers. The number of paid staff at the typical publisher has gone down slightly, but their hours have increased. Average revenue is up, from £74,000 to £89,000. (We have changed the way we calculate this figure – see the 'About' section for more details.) Other numbers are going up, too. Social media followers. Unique users. Email subscribers...

So, it's all good, then?

Well, not quite. Independent publishers still face huge challenges. Revenues may be on the rise, but so are costs. Publishers need to make savings – but, in the words of one respondent, 'there is nothing left to cut.' And there is still unhappiness in the sector about the advantages enjoyed by corporate publishers, who continue to receive the lion's share of public funding, whilst laying off journalists and closing newspaper titles.

All the same, there are reasons to be optimistic. This sector has a long way to go, but it has many of the skills and attributes it needs to do so. That's why, at PINF, we are determined to work with the independent publishers of today and tomorrow, so that they can sustainably inform and empower the communities they serve.

As ever, I am immensely grateful to Dr Clare Cook of the University of Central Lancashire and Dr Coral Milburn-Curtis of the University of Oxford for designing and analysing the survey on which the Index is built; my colleague Joe Mitchell, for drafting this report; and our designer, Tom Hampson of Reforma, for turning a mass of data into these clear and engaging pages.

We all sincerely appreciate the time and energy that so many publishers put into answering our questions. No-one enjoys filling in a survey, but everyone benefits from the detailed picture we are building of the state of independent news publishing in the UK.

# Headlines

The PINF Index 2023 is based on the responses of 100 UK-based news publishers with turnover of less than £2m to an online survey open from January to February 2023.

Below, we highlight nine headline findings. In the rest of the report, we comprehensively review the full survey findings, giving our most detailed picture of the state of the sector to date.

## 1. Publishers see themselves having more impact

- On a scale of 0-100 points, the average non-profit reported its impact at 72pts and the average for-profit at 63pts – a sector-wide lift of 15% compared with last year.
- When asked to pick one option to best describe their impact, the most popular answer was increased public debate and shifts in public opinion, followed by increased civil engagement.
- In publishers' impact stories, the top themes this year were around democracy, providing voice to underrepresented groups, housing and planning, the environment, local businesses and local economy, and public safety.

## 2. Publishers' social media followers have boomed

- The average number of followers per publisher is up significantly across virtually all social media platforms.

- This growth is particularly strong for non-profit publishers, with the average number of YouTube subscribers up 8x, Instagram followers up 5x, Twitter up 3x and Facebook up 2x on last year.
- Across the whole sector, average email subscribers now number 6,500, up from 2,000 last year. Again, growth is particularly strong for non-profits.
- More than one in ten publishers are on TikTok.
- Across web, social media and print, it is likely that a large majority of UK citizens are reading news from an independent publisher.

### 3. The sector's average revenue is up nearly 20%, but there is a divide between for-profits and non-profits

- The average revenue across the whole sector now rounds to £89,000, up from £74,000 last year, using a trimmed mean methodology.
- Non-profit publisher revenue is up 53%, while for-profit publisher revenue is down 14%.
- Newsrooms based in England average over three times the revenue of those based in Scotland.

### 4. Proportionally, advertising revenue is up, while grant revenue is down

- Advertising revenue now makes up 52% of revenue, compared with 45% last year. Some 60% of advertising revenue is via direct sales. Government advertising has fallen especially sharply, from 12% of advertising revenue last year to just 3% this year.
- Grant revenue makes up 20% of revenue, shrinking on last year. Government grants fell, perhaps as a result of the end of pandemic support.
- The sector relies heavily on individual donors, as opposed to trusts or foundations, who make up 53% of grant revenue, compared to 36% last year.

### 5. Revenue is strongly related to website user numbers and social media follower counts

- Website unique user numbers and user session numbers both correlate at a +0.85 rate with revenue.
- Social media followers are also correlated with revenue – especially Twitter followers.
- Training, consulting and events all positively correlate with revenue.



### **6. Inflation is biting and 'there is nothing left to cut'**

- For non-profits, average costs are higher than average revenue: publishers are drawing down reserves or borrowing. For-profits are in surplus.
- Staff costs are a higher proportion of overall costs this year, with office, admin and training costs a smaller proportion.
- Looking forward, many news publishers said they have no room for further cuts, and are worried about losing staff or having to stop a print edition.

### **7. Publishers are staffed by fewer numbers of people, working more hours**

- Data suggests non-profit publishers have increased staff hours, while reducing the total number of people employed. For-profits have reduced staff hours but reduced the total number of people employed even more, demonstrating a similar dynamic.
- Publishers report much less reliance on volunteers this year, and several report struggling to recruit volunteers.
- Some 22% of employees in the sector are women, with 19% of leadership roles held by women. An average of 4% of employees and 4% of leadership staff are from ethnic minority groups (including White minority groups).

### **8. There are reasons to be cheerful, if the funding can be found**

- Publishers report optimism about the state of the market. Local publishers perceive little competition when it comes to high quality news content.
- Publishers' biggest need is for sustainable funding. Their ideas for this include starting paid-for newsletters, expanding membership schemes and creating new areas of advertising sales.
- They are calling for fair access to government advertising on the same terms as bigger publishers.

### **9. Post-pandemic, independent publishers are returning to in-person events to connect with their communities**

- Publishers have big plans to get out into the community again, via in-person events, focus groups, community newsrooms, local training and workshops.
- They are also keen to connect with other publishers to share support and lessons in what works.

# The 'typical' publisher

From our sample of 100, we can describe a 'typical' independent news publisher.



The typical publisher began its work in 2011, so has been **running for 12 years**.



It is a limited company based in England, covering all general news topics with a **locally specific focus**.



It is a 'digital-only' publisher with a website that receives around **860,000 unique users** per year.

It has Twitter and Facebook accounts, both of which have around **22,000** followers. It has an Instagram account with around **6,000** followers and an email mailing list with around **6,500** subscribers.



In its 2022 financial year, the publisher brought in **£89,000** and the most important source of this was advertising. It had costs of **£90,500**, which were largely down to staffing: the title employs nearly **three** full-time equivalent staff.

# Findings

**This section includes the comprehensive findings from all of this year's Index data: from the sector's geographical scope to the content it provides, from a detailed review of its revenues and audiences to its impact. Along the way, we highlight the voices of independent publishers on subjects that matter to them, including in first-person perspectives.**

## 1. Geography

In terms of geographical scope, 66% of our sample focus on local news, 10% on regional news, 15% on national news and the remaining 9% take a global scope.

The spread of publishers by nation broadly reflects the spread of UK population, though with slightly fewer publishers based in England, and slightly more based in Scotland, than we might expect.

In the open question on the greatest opportunities that publishers face, there were several mentions of the power of 'local'. Publishers see opportunities to 'position ourselves as the leading media brand in our area', in 'expansion into new towns', in 'growing interest in local

news', in 'lots of areas that need local news publications' and 'to contribute to community development'.

## 2. Content

Only 6% of publishers focus on a single topic. The rest cover a broad range of 'general news' (74%) or several related topics (19%).

Acknowledging that news organisations serve a wide variety of functions, we asked publishers to pick their main coverage priority from: current news and events; investigative journalism; solutions journalism; data journalism or explanatory content; and analysis. Seven in ten chose to describe themselves as prioritising current news and events, while 11% chose solutions journalism, 11% chose explanatory content, and 6% chose investigative journalism. No publishers described themselves as prioritising data journalism.

Over 90% of this sector's original content is text-based, whether print or digital. The invite to the survey was to 'predominantly text-based news publishers'. The next most popular medium is video, before a very small amount of audio content. Around one per

cent of content is in 'other' mediums, which may refer to live events.

Most publishers make some effort to serve diverse audiences and one in four make 'considerable efforts' to do so. Just over one in ten titles publish in a language other than English. For context, 7% of the population of England and Wales – 4.1m people - do not speak English as a main language.

Publishers are proud of their content. Answers to the open question on 'opportunities' saw many mentions of the quality or values of the work, and 'the decline of the competition', the demand for 'non-clickbait news', the 'unique offer of indies getting stronger'. There was a sense that publishers were meeting an 'unmet need' – from 'applying new generative journalism techniques to work more closely with individuals and communities on content' to 'growing interest in European affairs', 'public wanting to engage with diverse news', and 'a new, inclusive model for local journalism'.

### 3. Organisation and regulation

Publishers are evenly divided into for-profit and non-profit legal entities. For-profits are mostly limited companies, but three in ten are sole traders. Among non-profits, the majority are companies limited by guarantee or community interest companies (CICs) with a handful of cooperatives and charities.

Two-thirds of publishers belong to membership organisations or trade bodies, the most popular of these being the Independent and Community News Network (48% are members) and Independent Media Association (16% are members). One-third do not belong to any such association.

In terms of regulation, 42% of publishers are regulated by Impress, 13% by IPSO (mostly for-profit publishers) and the rest are unregulated.

#### First-person



#### “AI is a threat to local news provision”

“ChatGPT is everywhere now. We tried it on a summary, and it is scarily good.

You can use prompts like 'Summarise the below in around 500 words using the Guardian style guide' or 'Act as a tabloid newspaper editor and give us five headlines for the below'. It will not be long before local content that is hoovered up by the big boys gets rewritten on the fly and republished.

The value of raw on-the-ground information collection and verification will remain key to feed the AI, but who will do it?”

Rob Taylor, [Wrexham.com](https://www.wrexham.com)

#### 4. Audience and distribution

The web is the primary distribution platform, and source of audience, for independent news publishers. The average number of unique users per publisher is 863,000 per year. Across the UK, therefore, with an estimated universe of independent publishers of between 200 and 400, it is likely that a large majority of UK citizens are reading news from an independent publisher.

The sector's digital audience appears to be 11% higher than last year. This figure disguises a significant difference between non-profit publishers, where unique user numbers are 2.8x higher than last year, and for-profit publishers, where user numbers are down one-third on last year.

In terms of social media, the most popular platforms for independent publishers are Twitter and Facebook (nearly two-thirds of publishers use each platform), followed by Instagram (48%), Youtube (36%) and TikTok (12%). Average follower counts reflect the sectors' presence on these platforms: Facebook – 22,300; Twitter – 22,400; Instagram – 6,600; YouTube – 2,200; TikTok – 4,700.

Again, publishers have significantly increased their follower or subscriber count on most of these social media platforms, with non-profit follower numbers booming. The only slide in follower numbers was for for-profit publishers on Facebook, which dropped 20% on last year. If we add up all

followers (ignoring the potential overlap where one user follows a publisher across several platforms) we see this year, for the first time, that non-profit publishers have significantly more followers than for-profit publishers.

The sector appears to have grown its email subscriber lists since the last survey. The average mailing list is now 6,400-strong, over three times last year's average. This may reflect new efforts to gain subscribers as a route to revenue, a model successfully demonstrated by publishers like The Mill in Greater Manchester. Again, while both for-profits and non-profits have grown their lists, it is the non-profit publishers who have led this charge.

In terms of print, only 27% of publishers report any print circulation, down from around half of all publishers last year. Those who do produce a print product report an average total annual circulation of 130,000.

We asked publishers an open-ended question about their new ideas for audience engagement this year. The strongest theme in the replies was around deepening connections with audiences, particularly through live, in-person public events after a period where that was severely limited. Publishers said they wanted to 'get closer to readers', 'get out and about more', 'run focus groups', 'host panel discussions', 'run community news cafes', 'run meet-the-team events' and 'open up editorial meetings'. There was also a popular theme of media or journalism training for the community or for community groups.

**First-person****“We built a community newsroom”**

“We launched The Community Newsroom in December. We got going with funding from a project between us and The Ferret, and a crowdfunder. We’ve held a mix of events: community conversations on local issues; journalism skills workshops; panel discussions and screenings. Some of them have fed into our articles or led to crowdsourced investigations. To pay for the space, we rent out desks. New collaborations are starting to form and project ideas have been developed out of conversations with community members dropping in. We’ve had a lot of positive feedback - not just from community members, but also from other journalists excited to see news return to the high street.”

**Rhiannon Davies, [Greater Govanhill Community Magazine](#)**

**5. Revenue**

We estimate the average revenue of independent news publishers at £89,000, using a new method of calculating averages. (See the About section below: in essence our bigger sample allows us to use a trimmed means method and state the average with more confidence.) Applying the same method to the last survey’s data gives an average revenue of £74,000, so revenues across the sector appear up 19%.

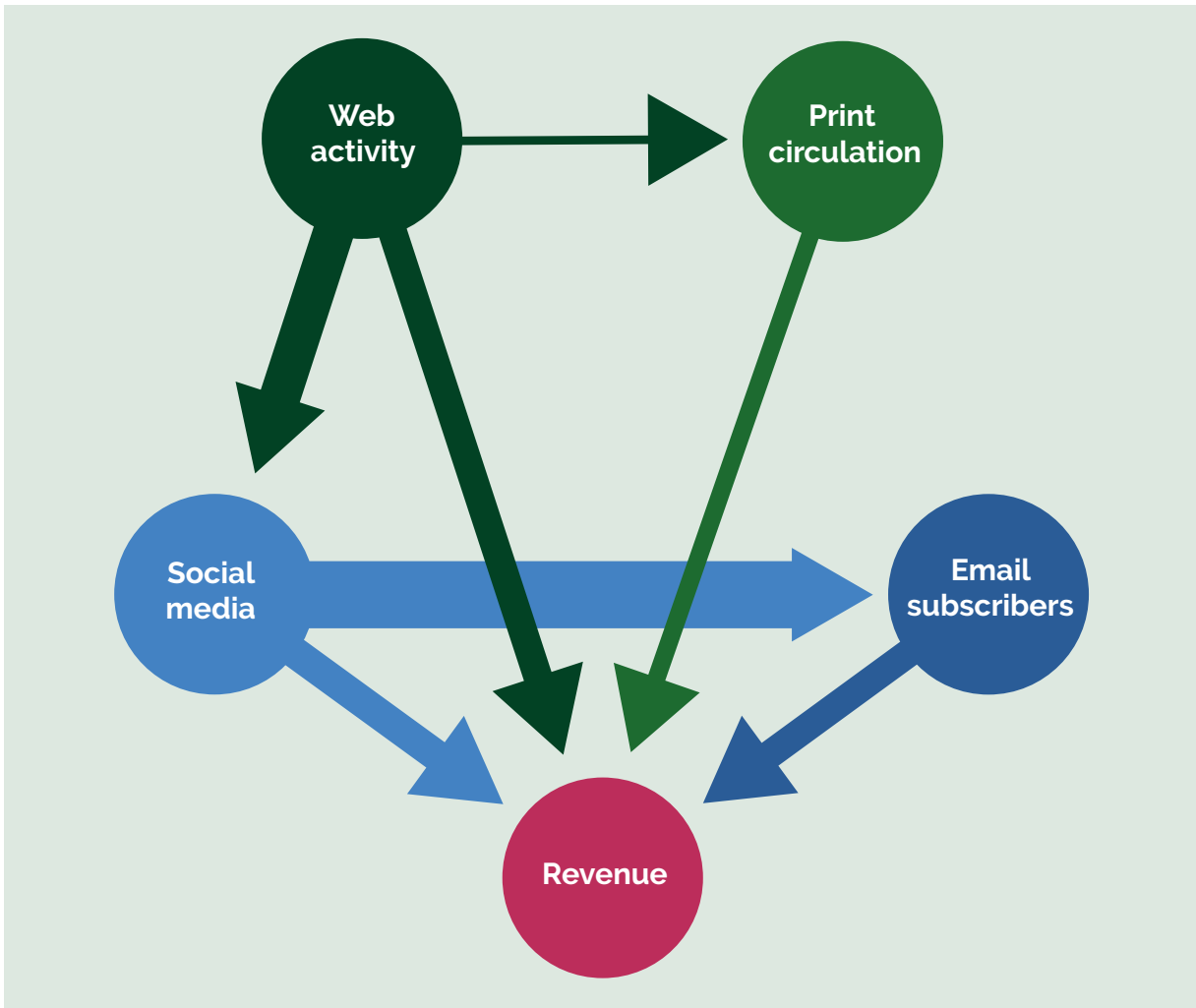
For comparison, if we use the method of median average revenues, these suggested last year that average revenue was £31,000; this year’s median figure is £35,000, suggesting a similar average revenue rise. In future Index reports, we aim to continue to use the trimmed mean methodology of calculating averages.

The overall sector average disguises significant differences within the sector:

non-profit revenues have risen 53% (to £97,000) according to this method, while for-profit revenues have fallen 14% (to £81,000). This is the first time the survey has recorded that average non-profit publishers’ revenue is higher than average for-profit publishers.

Publisher revenues continue to reflect their geographic scope: the largest are global in focus, the middle focus on nations and regions, and the smallest are locally focused. Also chiming with previous years’ findings is the link between revenue and the type of journalism: those focusing on ‘current news and events’ have lower revenue than those doing investigative, solutions or explanatory journalism.

Web activity, as in visits to, and use of, a publisher’s website, is strongly correlated with revenue. Social media follower count is both directly related to revenue and indirectly, via its strong relationship with email subscriber count, which is also related to revenue.



**Figure 1: What kinds of engagement lead to revenue?**

The relationships between different types of engagement and publishers' revenue are mapped above. The thickness of the line indicates the strength of the relationship.

If we break social media into its constituent parts, the data reveals the importance of Twitter in particular, as the number of Twitter followers has a strong positive correlation with revenue (+0.518).

The data also shows a relatively strong positive relationship between event ticket sales and revenue (+0.190).

## 6. Sources of revenue

Advertising is over 50% of the sector's revenue, higher than last year. The remainder is made up of reader revenue (22%), grants (20%) and 'other' (7%), which includes consulting, creation of unique content, training, syndication, events and merchandise.

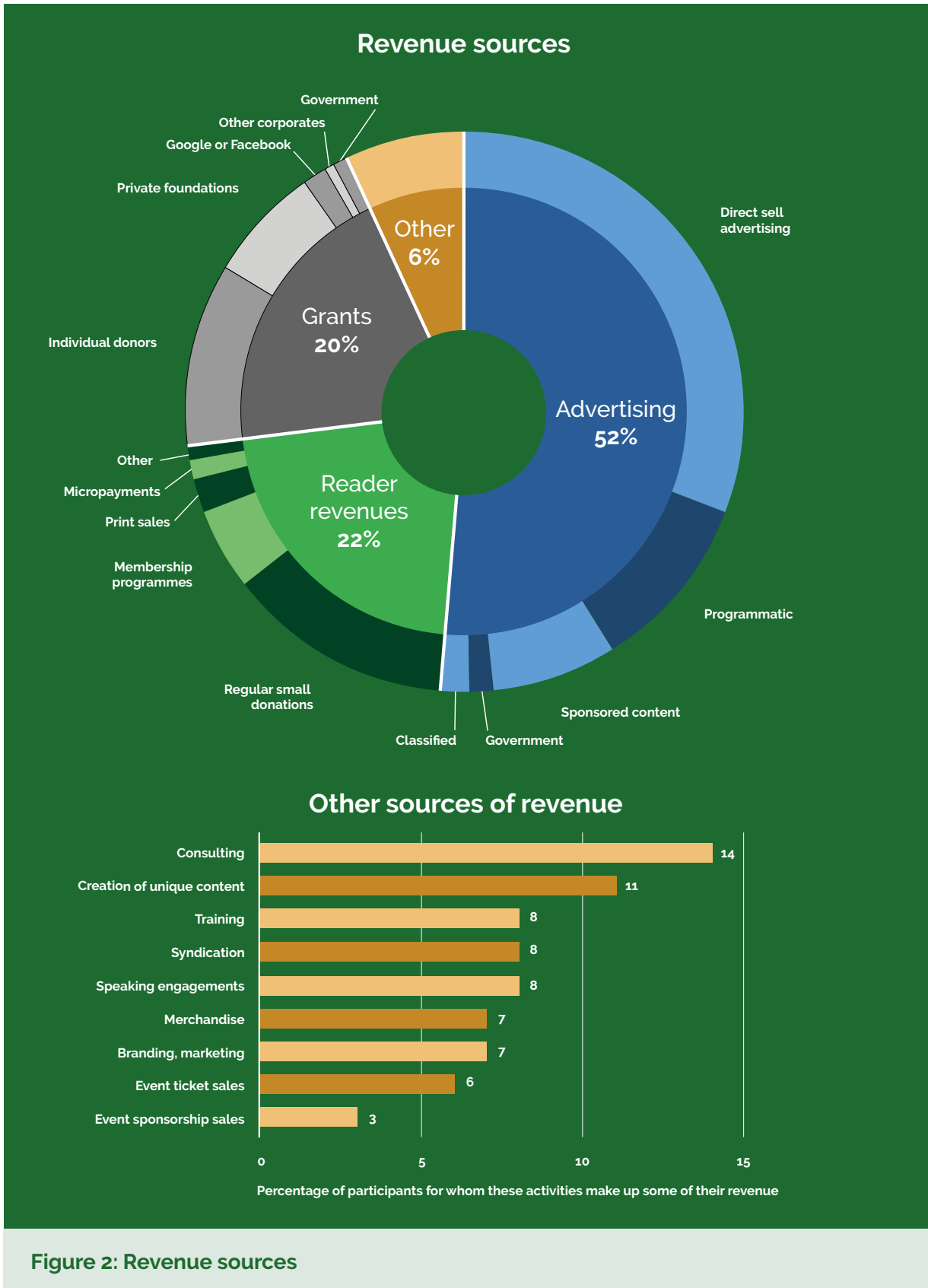


Figure 2: Revenue sources



The breakdown of advertising revenue reveals a large uptick in direct sell display advertising and large falls in government advertising and classified advertising, as well as a fall in programmatic advertising. Direct sell is now 60% of advertising, programmatic is 20%, sponsored content is 14%, government advertising is now just 3% (versus 12% last year), and classified advertises just 3% of total advertising revenue.

The breakdown of reader revenue shows the importance of 'regular small donations from readers', which make up 60% of this source. Another 22% of reader revenue is from membership programmes, 9% from print sales and 5% from micropayments.

The breakdown of grant revenue speaks to the importance of individual donors and the near disappearance of government grants. Individual donors provide 53% of grant revenue, private foundations provide 33%, Google and Facebook provide 8% (up on previous years) and government provides just 3%, down from 19% last year, perhaps a result of pandemic support ending in the period covered by last year's survey.

## 7. Costs, financial challenges and opportunities

The average operating costs in the sector are £91,000, but this disguises a difference between non-profits and for-profits.

Non-profit publishers spend an average of £126,000, suggesting they are spending down reserves or borrowing, because non-

profit average revenue is £97,000. For-profit publishers spend an average of £57,000, suggesting a surplus given their average revenue of £81,000.

Staffing is the biggest cost across the sector, representing 57% of the total expenses, up from 48% last year. This is followed by technology (28%), general administration (8%) and office costs (7%).

The dominant theme of answers to a question on the greatest challenges publishers face over the next five years was around financial viability. Several publishers simply answered the challenges question with words to the akin of 'surviving'. Those who did not explicitly mention an existential risk to their organisation instead mentioned the difficulties of 'the current climate' or 'current challenging financial situation in the local economy'.

In terms of revenue challenges, publishers saw difficulties 'attracting advertisers', 'growing revenue that allows for full-time staff team', 'hitting the ceiling of time/ability/money', 'increasing capacity to match our ambition' or that 'people will not voluntarily pay for news'. Others spoke of the fragility of their situation: 'a fall in donation or membership would be catastrophic' and of 'surviving on the goodwill of volunteers'.

In terms of cost challenges, publishers mentioned high inflation in print costs, and almost as many discussed cutting print runs entirely or partially. Several talked of the cost-of-living crisis and the difficulty in maintaining wages in line with inflation.

A few publishers said they would try to switch technology providers to cut costs. Two publishers said they were considering leaving their office space to work from home. One publisher mentioned that they were spending from reserves to invest in 'space, people and assets' and hoped to rebuild reserves again next year.

Publishers did see some revenue opportunities. Two clear themes were plans to boost reader revenue and advertising. Reader revenue ideas include paid-for newsletters as well as membership schemes. Advertising revenue ideas included job listings and public notices. There was a smaller, but still significant number of mentions of grant funding, especially in certain fields like climate journalism, or in running crowdfunding or fundraising drives.

One blended idea was around 'business patrons' - a quasi-advertising, quasi-membership scheme for local businesses to support the publisher. Two publishers mentioned ideas to sell merchandise and one hoped to boost its consultancy services.

## 8. People

The average full-time equivalent staffing in the sector is 2.9 people, up from 2.6 people in the last survey. The average total number of staff employed in any way fell to 3.6 people from 4.5 people last year.

In terms of staff demographics, the sector does not reflect the population

of the UK. Some 22% of employees are women, with little difference between non-profits and for-profits. Some 19% of leadership roles are held by women, and here the non-profits perform slightly better than for-profits. This is a smaller percentage than in our last survey. It also suggests that the independent news sector is underperforming against the large corporates in the sector: the Reuters Institute suggests that 35% of 'top editors' - and 40% of journalists - in the UK are women. However, it does mirror the finding of the UK Government's Small Business Survey, which reports that 19% of small businesses (1-249 staff) are women-led.

An average of 4% of employees (the same as our last survey) and 4% of leadership staff (a doubling since the last survey) are from ethnic minority groups including White minority groups. The for-profit sector has a slightly higher percentage of staff and leadership staff from minority groups. For comparison, 25% of the England and Wales population identifies as a being from an ethnic minority group including White minority groups.

The sector reports much less reliance on volunteers in this year's survey. We asked: 'How much do you rely on volunteers?' and respondents responded via a slider from 'Not at all' (0pts) to 'Very much so' (100pts). The average response last year was 65pts for non-profits and 30pts for for-profits. It is now 36pts and 13pts respectively - reliance has essentially halved.

We found that reliance on volunteers is negatively correlated with revenue.

## First-person



### Women in news leadership

"At NN Journal we do try to focus more on issues that affect women, covering domestic abuse and reporting rape statistics. I've been called a 'terrier' and told that I'm 'making mischief' - I find this patronising, and don't believe a man would be treated the same way.

As a woman, if you stand up for yourself in a newsroom, there's a risk you will be sidelined, seen as a nuisance. In the instance where I have worked in a team with male reporters, I've found the other men would usually provide tip offs to them than myself. And don't forget the class divide too! As a working class female reporter I have undoubtedly faced snobbery and an underestimation of my ability.

More broadly, the media reflects public life – a world of clubby or matey relationships – this works to maintain a gender divide in the media."

**Sarah Ward, Editor, [NN Journal](#)**

"We are part of a group of titles that bucks the trend with nine of ten titles led or co-led by women. Perhaps this is down to our lack of an active recruitment process. Perhaps when you simply wait for the best person to take the lead, they do, whereas if you expect people to "sell" themselves, it puts some people off.

We are also diverse in age, with a range of writers who are students, retirees or mid-career. Our focus now is on improving our ethnic diversity to better represent our communities.

We plan to pitch for funding for a diversity officer to address this specific point."

**Louise Houghton, Editor-in-Chief, [Yorkshire Bylines](#)**

Staffing issues – particularly around issues of fair pay and keeping hold of staff - came up regularly in responses to the overarching question on the greatest challenge faced by publishers, second only to mentions of funding.

In an open-ended question on staffing specifically, most mentions were of aims around recruitment, diversity, training and the struggle to find volunteers. Two publishers were considering 'succession planning' or 'transition of ownership'.

## First person



## “Volunteers are vital”

“We use volunteers for a myriad of tasks. This means I can spread the load out and not take on too much myself. Recruitment of volunteers has always been hit-and-miss.

Our last volunteer drive was in January and we got seven new pledges to help, from which two active volunteers have materialised. We are still struggling to recruit younger people. Publishers should be aware that more volunteers isn't always better.

I think some resources on the legal aspects might help, as well as how to manage volunteer mental health and ensure you're not placing too much pressure on them.”

Jon Cook, [A Little Bit of Stone](#)

## 9. Impact

The self-perceived social impact made by the independent news sector has risen significantly.

We asked: ‘To what extent does your organisation make a contribution to society?’. Publishers responded on a scale of ‘Not at all’ (0pts) to ‘Very much so’ (100pts). The average response was 68pts. As expected, non-profit publishers had a higher average than for-profits: 72pts versus 63pts. Both were significantly higher than last year.

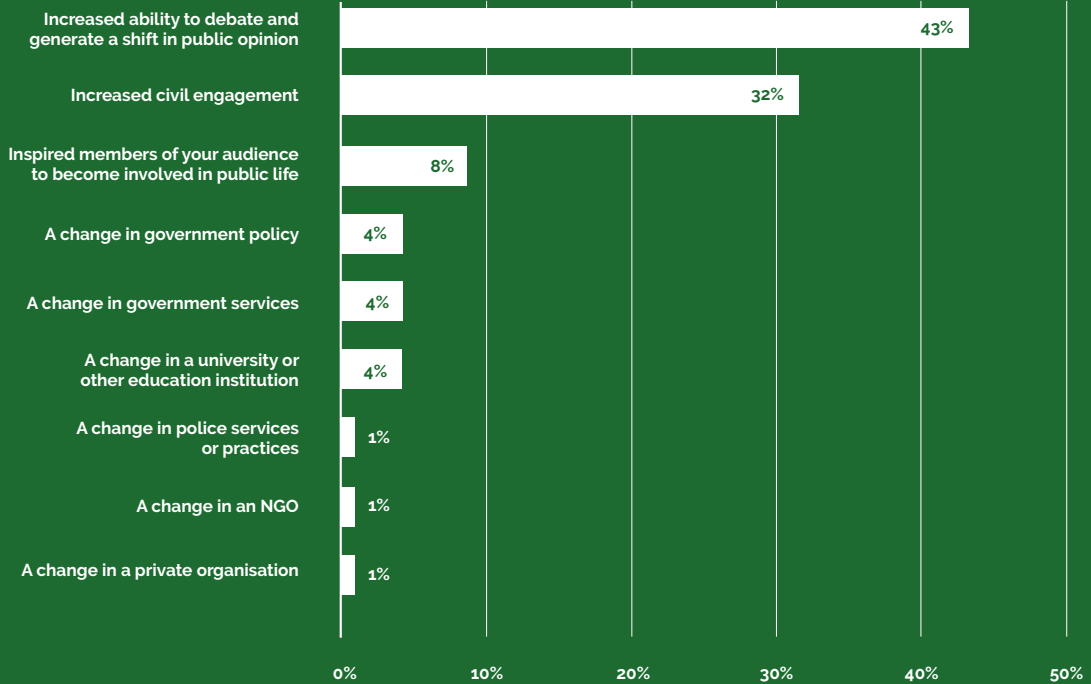
This might reflect the reality that publishers are making a greater difference

to their communities, or it may relate to the increased focus on impact from journalism-supporting organisations, particularly from the USA.

Either way, independent publishers are clearly taking more interest in the impact of their journalism on the communities they serve.

We asked publishers to choose one contribution that best described the change they are having in society, from a list provided. The most popular was an ‘*increased ability to debate and generate a shift in public opinion*’ before ‘*increased civil engagement*’ (23%) and ‘*inspired members of audience to become involved in public life*’ - see Figure 3.

### What contribution best describes the social change you are having?



### Contribution to society (0-100 points)



Figure 3: Social change

**First person**

The survey offers an opportunity for publishers to tell us their favourite story of impact over the last year. We include just a few of these, light edited for brevity and anonymity, on this spread.

The top themes are around:

- democracy, elections, transparency and accountability;
- providing voice to underrepresented groups;
- housing and planning; environmental issues;
- local businesses and local economy; and
- public safety.

"After running community journalism workshops with young people from under-represented backgrounds with zero journalism experience, several of them have gone on to get their work published elsewhere and are now training to be journalists."

"We have provided a platform for a heated and at times bitter public debate about female participation at a famous local event. This year, for the first time in history, women are allowed to participate. We contributed to creating significant pressure that led to change."

"Working with a peer mental health group we devised and delivered a citizen journalism digital film project to examine how the move towards 'digital by design' health services was impacting on the health inequalities of people in poorer communities."

"Our reporting on the idea of a rogue landlord database was cited by a local councillor as inspiring action on the idea. A motion was passed in early 2023 that commits the council to launching a rogue landlord database, if the proposed national one doesn't materialise."

"We received funding from the Centre for Investigative Journalism for a deep-dive investigation into social care funding, which an early-career journalist worked on. This told stories that the legacy local media are not in a position to cover and gave a voice to people whose problems would normally be glossed over by politicians. This is the kind of work we could do more of with more resources."

"Working with the local organisation for blind and partially sighted people to create an audio trail along the riverside."

"Helping a care leaver, transgender teen who was homeless to get rehoused. Getting the use of a local hotel for temporary accommodation shut down after highlighting improper behaviour by the manager and poor conditions."

"An article written by a local campaign group calling for changes at a local swimming pool - including reduced prices and more family swims - attracted a significant response, and shortly after publication the swimming pool managers implemented most of the campaign group's requests."

"A decision to close a local leisure centre was reversed and a commitment to build a new replacement was made following our discovery of the decision, in-depth coverage of the issue and promotion of the grass-roots public campaign to oppose the closure and secure the new facility."





# About

## About this survey

The PINF index is based on an online survey of UK news publishers, whose turnover is less than £2 million and who publish predominantly text-based content. The survey was not open to licensed broadcasters (including community radio stations) as these organisations operate in a distinct economic and regulatory environment. The survey was open in January and February 2023.

Using a purposive sampling strategy, the survey was promoted via social media, email newsletters, direct emails and telephone calls.

There were 100 participants this year, representing around 25% of the approximately 400 targeted organisations. We collected limited IDs so that we can continue to survey the same participants year-on-year if required. The consent document assured confidentiality to all participants, and personal details, if they were supplied, were separated from the dataset before analysis.

GDPR guidelines were followed and data were stored securely.

Our quantitative survey items covered nine aspects:

demographics; organisation, mission & scope; content; distribution; audience engagement; revenue; costs; staffing and diversity; and impact. Our research design therefore, was cross-sectional and explored relationships between the 57 survey items. Thus, we were able to conduct descriptive analysis, whilst also exploring patterns of association.

Qualitative questions further explored the theme of societal impact, as well as the challenges and obstacles that respondents were experiencing. The responses were thematically coded to facilitate analysis.

As all questions were optional, there were some missing data. However, missingness analysis (Little's Test) estimated that the levels and patterns of missingness were not likely to significantly disrupt the analysis.

Survey questions that asked participants to choose between multiple choice questions resulted in categorical variables. Items that asked participants to respond on a scale of 1 to 10 were used to create continuous variables. Normality tests were performed on these continuous variables, resulting in the detection of significant

numbers of outliers within the data. Therefore, we reported averages using the trimmed mean. The trimmed mean, otherwise known as the adjusted mean, is a way of averaging that removes outliers at the top and bottom end of the data, before calculating the mean. All 'averages' this year refer to the trimmed mean.

Inferential analyses reported both significance levels (p values) and effect sizes (r values, t statistics, chi square and odds ratios). Significance was indicated as a p value, such that p is the probability that this result could have been achieved by chance. Here, it is desirable to register a p value as small as possible. For example,  $p < .05$  means that for a particular analysis, there is a less than a 5% probability that this result could have been achieved by chance. All reported significances met the minimum cut-off of  $p < .05$ . Effect sizes, on the other hand, measured the magnitude of the result. Here, it is desirable to have an effect size as large as possible. For effect sizes which measure correlation, the standard cut-off criteria were  $r = .1$  (weak effect);  $r = .3$  (moderate effect);  $r > .5$  (strong effect). For effect sizes which measure the relationship between two groups (t statistics), the difference between the two

should be seen as significant if the p value is less than 0.05. Odds ratios measured the strength of association between two categorical variables. As this was a cross-sectional study, we do not confuse correlation with causation. None of our results are therefore perceived as predictive. Our year-on-year analysis uses time series methodology, where we explore relationships between whole cohorts of respondents from one year to the next (N = 100).

### About the authors

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### About the Public Interest News Foundation

The Public Interest News Foundation (PINF) is the first charity in the UK that exists to promote public interest news. We define public interest news as news which is produced and disseminated according to high standards of ethical conduct and best practice in journalism, and which enables members of the public to engage in their communities and their democracy.

We believe that everyone should be able to benefit from public interest news that speaks to, for and with them, wherever and whenever they are. We provide grants and leadership development opportunities for public interest news leaders and future leaders across the UK.

Our trustees are Jo Adetunji, Polly Curtis, Lord Inglewood, Isabelle Roughol, Patrick Swaffer and Julius Weinberg.

### Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the funders of the Public Interest News Foundation: the Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust, the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust, Luminate, the Tinsley Charitable Trust, the Neal and Dominique Gandhi Foundation, NewsNow, the Lankelly Chase Foundation, Reset and the Open Society Foundations.

We would also like to thank IMPRESS, ICNN and IMA for supporting this project by promoting the survey to their members. We are very glad to work in partnership with organisations that are so dedicated to public interest news in the UK.

We are also grateful for the support and cooperation of the Institute for Nonprofit News, one of the leading journalism support organisations in the world. Their ground-breaking Index of non-profit news inspired us to launch the PINF Index, and we continue to share ideas and we look forward to continuing our partnership over the years ahead.

Mostly, we are particularly grateful to the publishers who completed this year's Index. We know that completing surveys takes time and energy away from your core purpose of providing public interest news to communities up and down the UK. We are grateful to you for sharing so much data, and we hope that we can repay you by using this to design our own programmes, and to advise policymakers, philanthropists and social media platforms on how they can best support independent public interest news.

# What do you think?

Let us know what you think of the Public Interest News Foundation Index, 2023.

Please complete a quick survey via [this link](#) or by using the QR code on the right.



## Endnotes

- 1 According to 2021 estimates, see: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/bulletins/annualmidyearpopulationestimates/mid2021>
- 2 Language, England and Wales - Office for National Statistics. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/language/bulletins/languageenglandandwales/census2021#main-points>
- 3 'Web activity' here includes Page Views, Sessions and Unique Users. 'Social Media' here includes Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, Twitter and YouTube followers.
- 4 Women and leadership in the news media 2023: evidence from 12 markets, Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, via <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/women-and-leadership-news-media-2023-evidence-12-markets>
- 5 Longitudinal Small Business Survey: SME Employers (businesses with 1-249 employees) – BEIS, 2021, via Longitudinal Small Business Survey: SME Employers (businesses with 1-249 employees) – UK, 2021 ([publishing.service.gov.uk](https://publishing.service.gov.uk))
- 6 Population of England and Wales - [GOV.UK](https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/uk-population-by-ethnicity/national-and-regional-populations/population-of-england-and-wales/latest) Ethnicity facts and figures. <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/uk-population-by-ethnicity/national-and-regional-populations/population-of-england-and-wales/latest>
- 7  $r = -.303; p < .01$
- 8 See, e.g. Fathm/Solutions Journalism Network (2023) Impact Tracking Guide, available at [https://sjn-static.s3.amazonaws.com/ImpactTrackingGuide\\_SJN\\_Fathm.pdf](https://sjn-static.s3.amazonaws.com/ImpactTrackingGuide_SJN_Fathm.pdf), and the work of Impact Architects, among others.

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Tom Hampson, Reforma  
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