

THE NEW PR PLAYBOOK FOR THE POST-COVID NEWSROOM

A **DEMOCRACY**[™] Insights report



“

IN A DIGITALLY FRAGMENTED WORLD, PUBLIC RELATIONS CONTINUES TO BE REDEFINED.

THE ROLE OF JOURNALISTS AND THE ROLE OF INFLUENCERS ARE MERGING AND THE ABILITY TO TELL A COMPELLING STORY HAS NEVER BEEN MORE IMPORTANT.

PR PROS MUST CURATE AN AUTHENTIC, CONSISTENT STORY ACROSS ALL DIGITAL TOUCHPOINTS TO INSPIRE BRAND CONFIDENCE AND **BUILD LASTING BRAND TRUST.**

JENNIFER O'GRADY, HEAD OF AGENCY

”

DEMOCRACY[™]



“
**CORONAVIRUS IS THE DEFINING
STORY OF OUR AGE.**

IT'S LIKE COVERING A WORLD WAR.
IT'S BIGGER THAN DIANA. IT'S BIGGER
THAN 9/11. IT HAS TAKEN OVER EVERY
ASPECT OF OUR LIVES.

JOHN STURGIS, FORMER NEWS EDITOR OF THE SUN

”

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report has been developed by the research and insight team at Democracy using extensive off-the-record contributions from senior figures in the nation's newsrooms.

As we begin to return to our old ways of working and living, this report explores how newsrooms have changed over the last year and will inform brands on how to adapt their PR strategy and engagement tactics for future operations.

The past 12 months have been the most turbulent in the history of the UK press. In the face of a global health threat, the desire for credible news has led to a surge in demand for respected journalism, but how we consume this has changed forever.

Locked in our homes since March 2020, we have devoured news like never before. Broadcast viewing has soared and online news sites have proved essential reading with their minute-by-minute coverage of breaking developments. Without people on the move, the printed newspaper has declined. The metropolitan free dailies are the hardest hit and regional print is in danger of extinction.

Covid fast tracked a painful transformation process that was already underway. Today the newsroom is being reshaped beyond recognition, hundreds of jobs have been lost and outdated ways of working replaced.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Now, newspapers are truly digital first. Editors monitor traffic to sites continually, using analytics to identify online spikes in conversation and track surges in regional news partner sites and trade press to generate and amplify potential story hooks.

Journalists work to hourly content targets, in a never ending churn of news, evaluated by the traffic each story brings.

Readers act in pursuit of the information they desire, no longer loyal to a publication. A first position result for a breaking story on Facebook or Google is more desirable than a tantalising front page in the newsstands of old.

For some journalists this poses a conflict of interest - do they stick to tried and tested topics that drive clicks? Or do they investigate, hold our public figures to account, take risks to reveal truths we need to learn? Some journalists are opting out, using digital platforms to publish their opinions, becoming influencers with power and respect, and finding new ways to make a living.

Meanwhile, with a nation still working from home, news broadcasts and daytime programming have surged as an entirely different audience tunes in during the day to break the solitude of homeworking. Media houses have been quick to respond, with new daytime programming commissioned.

Now, the role of PR must do what it has always done. Find ways to shape the reputation of the companies and brands it serves by working with the changing priorities of journalists and digital influencers. As always we need to find the stories that will make a meaningful difference and create the assets that smooth the path to publication. We must create content that resonates, creating a lasting digital footprint for our stakeholders - both now and in the future.

COVID MEDIA TRENDS

Daily consumption is 102 minutes, a rise of 38% YOY. ITV's lunchtime bulletin audience is up 63% YOY

BBC news output online now reaches 80m daily. Visits to the site bbc.co.uk up 43% YOY

theguardian.com has seen the biggest increase in online readers YOY up 32%.
thesun.co.uk is up 10%
dailymail.co.uk is up 8%

30% of readers now access their news via a news app on a mobile or tablet device

[NYtimes.co.uk](http://nytimes.co.uk), CNN, [Foxnews.com](http://foxnews.com), Washington Post, CNBC all feature in the top 10 online news sites

Listenership up from 27% to 33

businessinsider up 10% YOY

BROADCAST

BBC

ONLINE NEWS

APPLICATIONS

NEWS FROM ABROAD

PODCASTS

BUSINESS NEWS

RADIO

PRINTED NEWS

THE CITY

REGIONAL PRINT

Commercial radio stations and BBC stations both experienced declines. Down 4% and 7% respectively YOY. (Source - YouGov report)

The Metro (down 45%) and the Evening Standard (down 38%) have seen the greatest drop in readership

The Financial Times has also suffered a 35% decline

Circulation of all regional newspapers has declined. With the Manchester Evening News dropping by 53% - fuelled by their inability to distribute free copies

THE CHANGING BUSINESS OF NEWS

It's a tough time to be in the news business. As it accelerates towards a digital future, there have been mass restructures of both people and resources at a time when advertising spend has been in steady decline.

In 2020, print media was one of the worst-hit sectors, Press Gazette believes that the decline in advertising spend will top out at 23% – although it's predicted that it will rebound by 13% in 2021, fuelled by increasing government spend.

Publishers have had no choice but to cut jobs and change operational techniques, asking much more of the people who have been left behind. Editorial operations have been centralised removing duplication and bringing national and regional teams across print and digital together.

Publishers Reach PLC, owners of the Daily Mirror, the Daily Express and the largest owner of regional newspapers, have stripped away much of its local journalism resource, syndicating news as well as feature content to fill pages with less resources. They retain a foothold in the regions, putting them in a strong position to identify the regional stories that are getting cut through and being the first to bring them to a national audience.

Job losses across the industry...

Reach

550

The Guardian

180

dmg::media

200

BBC
NEWS

950

A DAY IN THE LIFE

Newsrooms now operate at warp speed. Planning meetings start taking place from 8am and continue at regular intervals throughout the day. Journalists are expected to both write and generate story ideas for up to a dozen pieces of online content each day.

On top of this, there are performance targets reporters are required to meet. The success of their stories is measured by engagement and reach. Through analytics, senior editors can not only track how each piece of content performs - but how individual reporters are performing - leading to ever more competition among editorial staff.

Lifestyle journalists who once curated a daily page in a single newspaper are now editing multiple pages across newspaper publication groups, doing the job of several journalists and dramatically cutting back the time they have to consider options, speak to contacts or attend events.

Unsurprisingly, increasing pressure to meet targets in the modern newsroom is creating a real sense of disillusionment amongst reporters. Many resent feeling chained to their desks - turning round stories at breakneck speed when they would rather be on the road doing their own original reporting and un-earthing scoops.

Many of these journalists are making a move into freelancing or are carving out a career as a digital influencer in their own right and often their audience follows them. This is unleashing a new wave of powerful journalist influencers across the internet who are just as willing to hold brands and businesses to account.

INSIDE STORY

The ring-in has always been the lifeblood of a newsdesk. A member of the public calling with a tantalising tip. The right snippet of info and then the full might of Fleet Street swings into action.

Reporters are dispatched to doorsteps, photographers are briefed, pages are drawn up, headlines are written - all in pursuit of the ultimate prize - an exclusive - a story your competitors haven't had a sniff at.

That was then...

Now though, one leading Sunday newsdesk has so few staff on a Saturday that they can no longer routinely answer their phones - leading to the very real prospect of agenda-setting splashes being missed.



“
**THE BEATING HEART IS
BEING SQUEEZED OUT OF
NEWSROOMS BY ENDLESS
COST-CUTTING**
”

SENIOR FLEET STREET FIGURE

TRADE MEDIA

The first lockdown forced the initial closure of many merchants making it difficult for decorators to pick up a copy of their preferred trade magazine.

This hit in circulation created a perfect storm for trade publishers, many of whom had been slow to invest in their online platform and communities and were unable to reach their readers.

Initially some trade print titles halted production which they took stock of the situation. Professional Painter and Decorator, Professional Housebuilder, Property Developer and Architect, Builder, Contractor and Developer all scaled back the number of issues in 2020.

Without the usual access to printed content, the trade audience flocked online to gather the sector specific information they needed. Searching for content offering practical support and advice that would get them back to work in a safe way.

The Decorator, the official publication of the Painting & Decorating Association was one of the first titles to pivot. They scaled back print issues and launched a website to offer their members an authoritative news source, keeping their news site well updated with the changing Covid guidance. The Decorator has since scaled back up print production in 2021 and the website now appears to be a copy of the magazine.

Others increasingly consumed their news via social media, flocking to the newer digital trade platforms including On the Tools and the Decorators Forum.



Active forums became the daily barometer for the industry, with opinions shared on everything from new products to on the job challenges and packed full of the kind of banter they've been missing onsite. Single posts can generate hundreds of comments demonstrating just how connected this community has become.

Online trade titles expanded their social following to drive traffic to their website. Painting and Decorating News doubled Facebook followers between December 2019 and March 2021 and now posts linking to articles generate over 100 engagements.



INNOVATION

As the weeks turned into months, some trade titles began to innovate. Painting & Decorating News created an online version of their annual Painting & Decorating Show (usually held at the Ricoh Arena in November). Hosted throughout October, it welcomed 3,000 decorators through its virtual doors. Brands demonstrating support for the initiative and showcasing their offer to the decorators included Dulux Academy, Mirka, Graco and Brewers.

Online-only platform Trade Decorator capitalised by launching the Virtual Trade Decorator Festival which saw over 34,500 decorators engage with live demos, Q&As and competitions over a two week period. It's back with two events in 2021, happening in February and October.

Architects Journal and Dezeen expanded their online offering, including the launch of a new Dezeen sustainability section - a clear indication of where they see the opportunity for growth in 2021 and beyond.



ON THE TOOLS

Now the largest online platform for the construction industry with over 3.5m follows across social platforms and claims a 10k community growth each week across its multiple platforms

FIX RADIO

The made for the trade radio station that broadcasts in London and Manchester claims that listenership doubled between Q4 2019 and Q3 2020. The upweight in listeners has allowed the station to invest in programming including the relaunch of the weekly Painting & Decorating Show

PROFESSIONAL BUILDERS

Average circulation increased by 28.96% in April 2020. This was due to an increase in digital copies

PAINTING & DECORATING NEWS

This online platform saw an uplift, with engagement on Facebook doubling since 2019



DECORATING MATTERS

The magazine of the Scottish Decorators Federation, stopped printing for H2 2020 and are yet to recommence publication

APPRENTICE BUILDER

Folded in early 2020

HOMES AND INTERIORS LIFESTYLE MAGAZINE

Throughout lockdown the consumer hunger for DIY content meant that homes & interior lifestyle publications had the perfect opportunity to grab a slice of the digital media growth.

New opportunities for brands emerged with a growing desire for expert tutorial style content from authoritative sources to help DIYers tackle everything from upcycling furniture to weekend room makeovers.

Publishers explored new ways to attract new audiences and investments from brands. Both The Times and Real Homes created their own content series on Instagram packed with original content in association with brand partners.

Despite the rising desire for homes and interior content, journalists working in this space have been subjected to the same job cuts. At Reach (publishers of OK! magazine, New! and the glossy supplements in the Mirror, Express and Star) one journalist now does the job of three, acting as gatekeeper to both homes and interiors and food and drink across all of the national homes and interiors pages and online.

To bridge the gap, editors are working with freelance journalists to contribute to these pages which represents both a challenge and opportunity to brands. Freelancers, usually difficult for brands to build lasting relationships with due to the versatility of their role, are increasingly building authority in their chosen field of expertise online using Instagram. This allows brands to identify and cultivate an authentic relationship with the freelancer between their paid gigs, helping put them in the strongest position for editorial pick up further down the line.

For example, former Red journalist Alexandra Stedman is one of the many staffers who has emerged as a credible influencer with her blog and Instagram brand The Frugality.



UP

- Homes & Interior media have relied heavily on subscribers to maintain print levels with the likes of Homestyle growing its subscribers by 30%
- Gardening media has been performing well with Garden Answers growing its circulation by 35%, BBC Gardeners' World by 31%, Landscape by 28%, and Garden News by 18%
- Futurenet launched gardening website Gardeningetc
- House and Garden recorded an increase of 1% in circulation, despite a cover price increase to £4.95 in May. Its digital monthly average readership also increased by 23%
- Country Living subscriptions grew by 62%, while Good Housekeeping saw a rise of 46% in subscriptions

WATCH THIS SPACE

- The Times launched Instagram series under #MakerMonday, to support small designer and craftspeople across the UK - very timely as 83% of users say they use Instagram to discover new products while 80% decide on their purchase through the platform
- Over time, small businesses and startups have been continuously favoured in gift and product roundups by national home writers such as Metro
- Closer magazine circulation fell 32%, however, subscriptions were up 40% and digital consumption was up 40% YoY

Source: Press Gazette December 2020,
YouGov Global Media Consumption
Report 21



DOWN

- Essential Kitchen Bathroom Bedroom magazine was suspended from publication. The magazine closure is permanent and the website is no longer updated
- Good Homes went digital only in the first lockdown and is yet to return to a print edition (March 21). Despite being capable of instant publication, they still work to a 3-5 months lead time and stick to monthly digital editions
- Home magazines who reported a decline in circulation YoY: Ideal Home: - 5%, House Beautiful: -4%, Your Home: -7%, Homes & Gardens: -18%, HomeStyle: -12%, Elle Decoration: -13%

IS IT TIME TO PAY TO PLAY?

Even before the pandemic, paid media was becoming an increasingly significant part of the digitisation strategy for news publishers - especially trade press, niche media and the regionals.

Statista research into the use of ad blockers suggested that 36% of respondents used an ad blocker in 2020. Although this figure is down 5% on 2018, it remains the case that almost a third of online readers are not seeing paid advertising campaigns.

With less money coming in from print advertising and a third of readers switching digital adverts off, journalists need to find ways to increase paid content on their sites and are increasingly looking to PR to collaborate on content that meets the needs of both the brand and the reader in an authentic and credible way.

Although important to a consumer space, brands also need to consider the value in keeping their trade press alive and thriving as they have an important role to play in giving their industry a voice.

Alternative partnership models could include shared news campaigns, brand-backed initiatives, investment in their online proposition and commitment to both real world and online events.

Paid partnerships (or advertorials) offer brands enhanced analysis to track the performance of content demonstrating even greater insight.

Commercial content, driven by PR storytelling, is set to play a big role in 2021 with PR agencies helping brands to reach hyper-targeted audiences and get in-depth content analysis to drive success and future strategy.





“

**THINK SOCIAL:
NEWSFEEDS ARE A
VITAL BATTLEGROUND
FOR READERS. IF YOU
WOULDN'T SHARE
THE STORY YOU'RE
ISSUING THEN GO
BACK TO THE
DRAWING BOARD.**

DAILY MIRROR EXECUTIVE

THE BATTLE FOR OUR ATTENTION

With more than 30% of readers accessing their news via a social network, the race to get a national breaking news story on to Facebook's newsfeed has become a battleground for rival news platforms.

Newspapers leverage their long understanding of our emotional triggers to create stories they know will make us click - hate, anger, jealousy, love, pride - are all high performing triggers that drive traffic back to their website.

On social, it is the human news stories that perform best and often the ones that feature a solid case study.

Brands can take advantage of this by layering their news stories with case studies that illustrate how their actions are having a positive impact on the stakeholders involved - from customers and communities to employees and investors.

FRENEMIES: FACEBOOK AND JOURNALISTS

After years of stripping the value of news stories, Facebook is making a move to pay for content with publishers Reach PLC, Daily Mail Group and Sky News all taking part in the scheme.

The Facebook News section will feature content and breaking news curated by journalists but comes as the social media giant is facing regulation, accused by news publishers of hoovering up online ad revenue.

A Facebook spokesperson said: "The product puts original journalism in front of new audiences and provides publishers with more advertising and subscription opportunities to build sustainable businesses for the future."

This follows the recent launch of The Facebook Journalism Project - a £230 million initiative designed "to support the whole news ecosystem through grants, programmes, partnerships with newsrooms and non-profits".

The Project is working with publishers around the world to strengthen the connection between journalists and the communities they serve and many of the biggest news organisations are now part of the programme.



THE RISE OF THE NEWS APP

News publishers are reclaiming some of the power from their social rivals by encouraging downloads of their own news applications, putting a direct link between themselves and their audiences once again and inspiring loyalty.

According to YouGov, access of news via a mobile news app increased from 25% to 30% during lockdown.

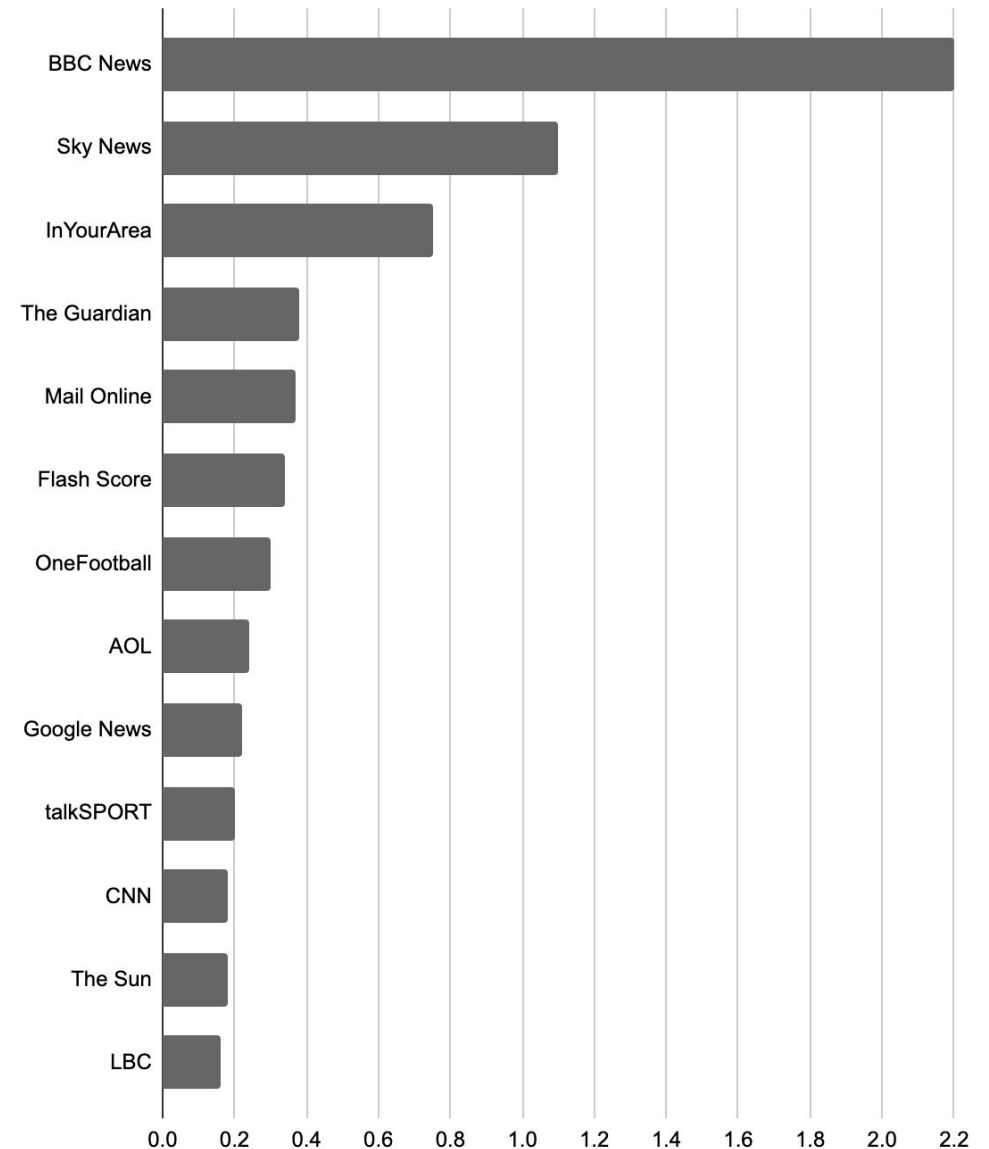
These highly personalised applications can act as an aggregator of the national, local and sport news readers are interested in - and when accessed using a tablet, often gives the opportunity to view the traditional newspaper layout in a digital form.

In 2020, the BBC News app was downloaded 2.2 million times - making it the most popular newly installed news app in the UK during the year.

In third place was Reach's local news aggregator In Your Area.

Not included in this list is the Apple News app, which comes pre-installed on iPhones, data around this app is inaccessible due to Apple security rules.

Top UK News Apps by Number of Downloads in 2020 (m)





HOW BRANDS NEED TO RESPOND

Although we've changed HOW we consume our news, the amount of news we consume has not changed - nor our appetite for it.

It has become clear in today's landscape that when talking to journalists in digital news, broadcast and social channels, words on their own are simply not enough. To allow a story the very best chance of being picked up, brands must create compelling assets that support your story in a visual form.

With so much importance placed on capturing and keeping the attention of readers to meet publishers' demands, journalists are under pressure to incorporate the most engaging content. This means that assets must be tailored to the platform they will be present on to ensure the greatest level of engagement.

THE GOLD STANDARD FOR EVERY STORY

- Clear, concise **press copy**
- **A linkable asset** (PR led SEO)
- **Spokesperson bio and headshot** - if pitching a broadcast opportunity include soundbites and links to previous radio / tv slots
- **Gallery** of appropriately sized (1mb-5mb) images (minimum five)
- **Video** link (30 seconds - 1 min max)
- **A case study** that brings the impact of the story to life

WHAT THE ROADMAP MEANS FOR THE FUTURE OF DIGITAL PR LED COMMS

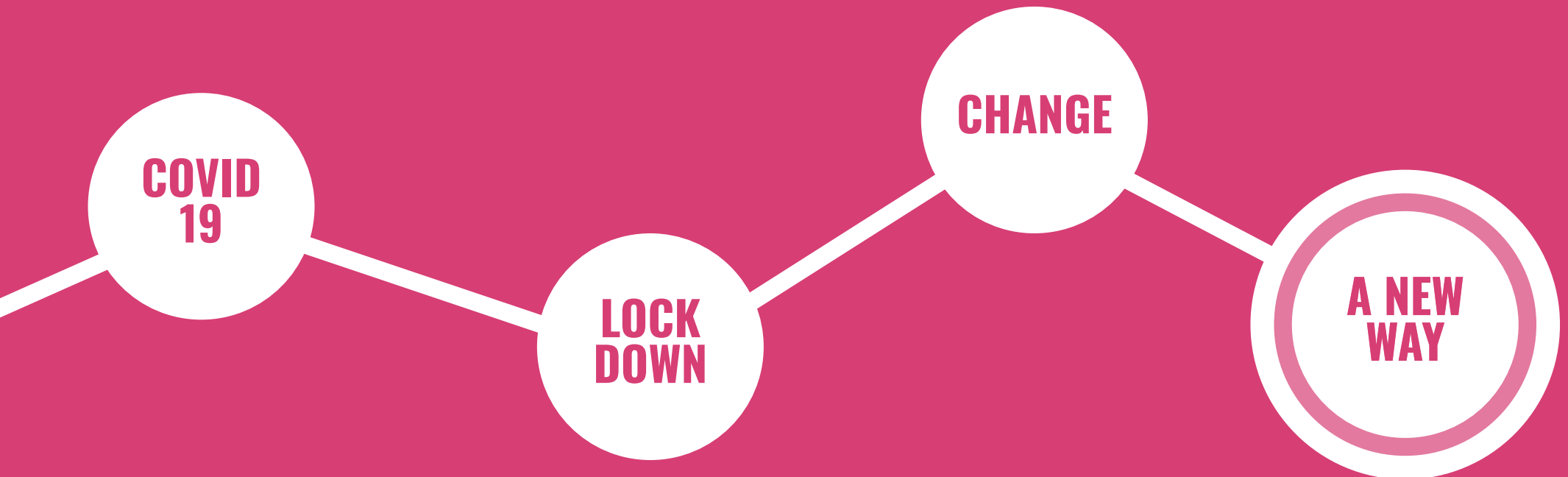
As we exit lockdown for (hopefully) the final time, it's clear that many of the habits we've embraced are set to continue. According to YouGov, a third of all Brits believe they will work from home a lot more, suggesting that our digital news consumption is here to stay.

During Covid, PR as a discipline came to the fore. It moved quickly to shape comms, helping customers and employees understand how brands were facing up to the Covid challenge, assessing how messages were landing and adapting to fit the changing narratives.

It's more important than ever in this tidal shift that PR agencies are attuned to the needs of each side, meeting the evolving needs of the reader, the brand and the publisher.

Leveraging their understanding of news and the strength of their relationships with journalists and influencers to create content that is effective and relevant, cultivating a consistent digital footprint that supports every stage of the stakeholder journey - building brand salience and trust.

Source: YouGov Global Media Consumption Report 2021



CASE STUDY: DULUX COLOUR OF THE YEAR

For our client Dulux, Colour of the Year is one of the most newsworthy activations in their calendar. Always an immersive media event, Covid 19 forced the team at Democracy to reimagine the launch of Colour of the Year 2021 - Brave Ground™.

Our launch needed to transform a real world occasion into a digital one, conveying the luxury and desirability of something as tactile as paint and showcasing the transformative power of colour.

Without the limitations of a central London venue, we were able to launch the Dulux Colour of the Year to a mass audience in one go - 163 attendees across three launch webcasts each targeted to a specific audience, decorator trade press to specifier media and consumer journalists and influencers.

Leveraging the growing digital audience we beat every single one of our annual KPIs (all based on a benchmark of 2019 results - so no easy feat in this new world).

Dulux Brave Ground organic search increased in line with key PR coverage results with pieces in Sunday Times and Daily Telegraph causing an uplift in the launch month.

Launching the seasonal palette generated a further search uplift driven by a double page feature in Bella magazine reaching our target female DIYer audience.

41

NATIONAL PRINT, ONLINE AND SOCIAL PIECES OF COVERAGE

126

INFLUENCER PIECES

5M

PEOPLE ACROSS SOCIAL PLATFORMS

46

HOMES AND INTERIORS PIECES OF COVERAGE

CONTACT US

Whether the coronavirus has created new business opportunities, or present a real challenge to how you do business, paying attention to your communications right now will shape your future success.

Our team of senior strategists are available by videolink to talk you through your situation, to offer insight and guidance, and to sense check your current communications plan.

To arrange a **FREE** hour long consultation call, please contact either **Jennifer O'Grady** or **Caroline Aspinall**.



Jennifer O'Grady
0161 881 5941
07515 810451
jennifer@democracypr.com



Caroline Aspinall
0161 881 5941
07951 763757
caroline@democracypr.com

DEMOCRACYTM

WEAREDEMOCRACY.CO.UK

0161 881 5941