Bauer freelances make some small gains

THE FREELANCE copyright and legal indemnity uproar at Bauer mags, Kerrang!, Mojo and Q is over. The outcome means it’s more difficult for freelance music writers and photographers to make a living.

The struggle began back in February when the company issued contracts demanding copyright assignment and dumping sole legal liability on the freelance. In response to a “sign here or no more work” ultimatum, more than 200 freelances started petitions rejecting the contracts and requesting negotiations. (See www.londonfreelance.org.uk/1007baue.html for more on the dispute and its background.)

Bauer followed with two different, revised contracts. “Tier 1,” offered to maybe two dozen major contributors a fair-reaching license for free re-use rather than copyright transfer. Tier 2 remained all rights. Most freelances still said no. Bauer then added legally binding addenda to the contracts – this restricted legal liability to cases where freelances had acted negligently or maliciously.

Worn out by the disputes and with livelihoods threatened as the company finally enforced the “no contract, no commissions” ultimatum, the freelances ended their campaign.

Many regular contributors, including this writer, will not sign the contracts offered, losing work we love doing – and income. Beyond Bauer, there are other outlets whose nasty contracts are rarely non-negotiable. Publishers will continue to depend on a body of self-employed content providers who cover their own business risks, office and equipment costs, holiday and sick pay. As creative workers we’re worth it, from independent journalists to cash on the barrelhead.

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For the small proportion of Bauer music magazine contributors in the campaign who are NUJ members, the union’s National Executive Council voted a £5000 hardship fund for those whose income has suffered as a result of the rights grab and subsequent dispute.

Local heroes: new models in local journalism


About fifty people attended, in addition to the speakers. Most were in regional or local journalism, and there were quite a few academics from the host university.

Key impressions/messages:

• There is a great appetite for local news in local communities – the readers are there.
• Publishers are using a range of different models from traditional weekly local papers to hyper-local community websites.
• Some of the models dispense with editorial staff but many, probably most working in regional and local journalism recognise the importance of professional journalists.

William Perrins, the ultra-local www.kingscrossenvironment.org and similar sites cover detail local papers miss. But they don’t generate advertising revenue – he earns his living training local communities to set up similar sites for Channel 4. He argued that low start-up costs and the wealth of volunteer labour among the community make such ultra-local sites very viable.

James Hatts, “just about” earns a living from hyper-local London SE1, a community website which accompanies a monthly print publication, covering the areas in and around Borough. Half his income comes via Google Adsense, and the other half from the commission local restaurants and bars pay for bookings made through the site.

Shelia Riphel, editor of www.Fulhamsw6.com, part of the local news network Neighbour Net, said that growth was incremental but that a new site could over time pay for an editor. Neighbour Net’s flagship site Chiswick4W.com generates six figures.

Mike Dickerson of Community Times, a UK-wide network of 150 local magazines with an annual turnover of over £2 million, said the keys to success were direct marketing, relevance and asset ownership – all editors own their own businesses, paying CT a management fee.

James Mawer from media buying agency Oxbury Media Services pointed out there is a market for advertising in hyper-local magazines such as parish magazines. The annual spend by national advertisers is over £30 million a year.

James Morrison, senior lecturer at Kingston University, described how councils were becoming less transparent due to the decline in the independent reporting of their activities. 98 per cent of English councils now publish their own newspaper, paying salaries that can attract quality staff – a starting salary for a reporter on Hammersmith and Fulham is £33,994, compared to an average of £12,000 on a local paper.

Tony Johnston, director of training at the Press Association, talked about the PA’s pilot project in subsidised public service reporting. They would be looking for rational funding once the pilot had run and been evaluated, he said.

Eric Gordon, Camden New Journal, editor said (in addition to what he said at the LBF conference), there were limits to citizen journalism. They took trained journeymen to “test the material”.

In a rousing Churchillian speech, Sir Ray Tindle, proprietor of Tindle Newspapers, said he had not lost a paper or a journalist since launching his first title in 1955.

Nigel Lowther described how he launched a new independent weekly, The Chestertons Chronicle in the teeth of the recession, and was now heading for a decent profit.

Betty Drummond, managing director of Champion Media, told a similarly inspiring tale of how her company had used the recession as an opportunity for expansion rather than contraction. It now has advertising revenues up 11 per cent year on year.

David Parkin of www.thebusinessdesk.com described his “premium” (free and premium) model as he did at the LBF event in January.

Wanja Oberhoff from Berlin described how he pioneered Niliu, a personalised daily newspaper which now has nearly 5000 subscribers.

The publication relies entirely on software to put together a digest of print and online sources, dispensing with journalists altogether.

Darren Thwaites, editor of the Evening Gazette describes how his network of ultra local websites covers its patch using both free community bloggers and a team of professional journalists.

Adam Westbrook, multi-media journalist talked about his dos and don’ts of using video for local news.

Like a lot of other attendees, I didn’t have any brain space left for a heated debate...