

## Fourth lesson: Press campaigns

### Text: Campaigning Journalism: A Powerful Tool for Making an Impact

Any newspaper worth its salt in the modern age should know the key ingredients of a good campaign.” These words from a former deputy editor of the UK-based newspaper giant The Daily Mail should resound with all editors and journalists, whatever your thoughts on the Mail’s brand of journalism.

In an era characterized by the search for sustainable models for journalism and reader revenue, and the ever-deafening cacophony of the online space, media organizations are seeking to demonstrate their unique value and engage their audiences.

The current drive of many news organizations to show their impact was well captured in a [recent article posted on GIJN](#). Diana Lungu, who oversees grant impact for the European Journalism Centre, stated that these days, “You need to do more than journalists did when everyone read the paper. Nowadays, you need to take control over what happens to your story. You need a strategy to find and engage the right people who can make a difference.” Campaigning journalism, done well, is one such essential tool in efforts to show that journalism really matters.

There is no agreed definition of campaigning journalism, but I would characterize it as dogged reporting with a strong editorial line that seeks to make a powerful combination that can deliver tangible impact for readers and communities at large. We are not talking here about US-style “campaign coverage,” which is routine beat reporting on politicians running for office. In the US and other countries, campaigning journalism might be called advocacy or cause journalism.

In the United Kingdom, campaigning journalism has a long and honorable tradition. These include The Daily Mail’s long-running role in the campaign for justice for the [murder of Stephen Lawrence](#) and The Guardian’s 2015 [Keep It in the Ground](#) campaign on fossil fuel divestment, as well as many others. Particularly for media organizations committed to engaging those people “formerly known as the audience,” campaigns are a great way to connect with and build a meaningful relationship with communities.

#### *The Bristol Cable Approach*

[The Bristol Cable](#) is a 100% member-owned magazine in Bristol, England, a city of a half million about 200 km west of London. Backed by 2,000+ members who are legal shareholders, the publication produces high-quality public interest local journalism and engages its members in democratically steering the organization. Campaigning journalism provides a perfect opportunity to do so.

Having completed a successful campaign that saw the local government begin [publishing previously secret and controversial documents](#) regarding housing developments, we thought it important to consult our members on their thoughts on

campaigning journalism. At our annual general meeting in 2017, members voted to use the power of journalism to push for positive policy changes in the city.

Since then, we have run two editorial campaigns.

The first was a briefing to members of parliament and a series of investigations into the secretive and indiscriminate use of surveillance equipment by local police forces, known as IMSI catchers, or StingRays in the United States. Distinct from a regular editorial series, we made direct calls for transparency and accountability in their use. In collaboration with NGOs Liberty and Privacy International, as well as members of parliament, this campaign resulted in a legal victory that will force the police to disclose details of the equipment's use.

While the core of the surveillance state remains untouched, this campaign saw The Bristol Cable, a small local publisher, work with national partners to create significant impact.<sup>1</sup>

### Questions:

- What we need as a journalism campaign maker to do a great campaign?
- What are the basic rules on which the Bristol Cable approach is based?
- If you were the general manager of an electronic newspaper, what are the basic steps you would take to convince the public about the importance of your product?

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://giijn.org/stories/campaigning-journalism-a-powerful-tool-for-making-an-impact/>