

A day in the life of a Media Manager



Chris Melvin is a Media & PR Manager for the University of Bath. After completing a degree in biology with industrial experience at Manchester he realised that life in the lab wasn't for him and trained as a newspaper journalist. He worked on local newspapers for several years, covering all manner of stories, before deciding to make the switch to PR to use both his journalistic and scientific training. Before joining the University of Bath, Chris worked for the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC). In his current role he has responsibility for providing PR support to the Faculty of Science. Lorenza Giannella (Training Manager, Biochemical Society) spoke to him about his work.

Can you describe a typical day?

One of things I like most about my job is that there isn't really a typical day; at any point you can get an email or phone call that's a great media opportunity, or a potential crisis, and that will blow all your plans out the window. The variety also extends to the type of work we do, so not only am I lucky enough to work on wide-ranging stories from across the Faculty of Science at the University, but we get to do interesting and creative things, like shoot videos, make infographics, deliver media training, and of course write press releases and pitch to journalists.

What's the most interesting project you've worked on?

There are lots of really fascinating projects going on here, from developing a new way to store and transport vaccines without refrigeration, to growing meat in the lab, to inventing medical devices such as burns dressings that change colour if an infection is developing.

I think the most interesting story I've worked on was

when a research team here managed to fertilise non-egg cells with sperm, which resulted in litters of healthy mice. It was the first time this had ever been done, and we knew it could be a big story, but also potentially very controversial and it was incredibly complicated science. We worked really hard on a press release, held a press conference with the Science Media Centre (SMC) and opened up our animal research facility to media to give the best chance for the coverage to be accurate. Although the research did get some criticism, the coverage was generally well-reported and it was a massive story, thanks to the collective efforts of the media team, scientists and others around the University as well as SMC.

What is your advice for someone who would like to pursue a career in science communication?

My route into science communication came through a science degree and then qualifying and working as a journalist. To be honest, it's not something that was planned out years in advance. I know there are lots

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of ways to do it and I was just lucky enough to find a science communication role when I decided I'd had enough of newspapers.

A science degree, in my case biology, has been very useful but I wouldn't say that it's essential. That might sound strange, but what's really important is having the genuine curiosity to understand what you're trying to communicate, and to make sure you're talking in language your intended audience will respond to.

What do most people not realize about your job?

I can't just ring up journalists and tell them what to cover!

What inspires you about your job?

I'm inspired by the people I work with. The scientists are driven, intellectually curious and often working on discoveries and solutions that will make a real difference to people's lives. Often communications are a route to help push their research further, and I get inspired by the opportunity to make a contribution in that way.

I'm also inspired by my colleagues in our award-winning media team, who are talented, creative, passionate and great fun. I'm lucky to be part of it. ■

Job Profile – Media Manager

A media manager helps deliver an organizational media strategy to increase visibility, develop brand awareness, engage important audiences and key stakeholders, and defend and enhance the organization's reputation.

Qualifications and key skills

Most employers will require candidates to have a degree. Qualifications in media and communications, marketing and public relations may be beneficial, as well as a background in the subject area your organization works in (e.g. Chris works for the Faculty of Science and holds a biology degree). Postgraduate qualifications in Science Communication are increasingly common for those working in the field.

Additional competencies include excellent communication skills, including writing and editing content, creativity, a good understanding of social media platforms and working to deadlines.

Responsibilities

Media managers write articles, blog posts and press releases, and handle PR crisis management. They advise on media strategy—helping to place stories in the right publications to reach the right audiences to make them think, feel and do specific things.

They can oversee social media platforms, creating multimedia content and planning its delivery, and they monitor, facilitate and report on online community engagement and social media performance.

Salary and career development

Typical salaries are between £25,000 and £40,000, and, with substantial experience, can increase to £60,000 or more. Media managers can work towards professional qualifications through professional bodies, such as the Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR), Chartered Institute of Marketing (CIM) and the Institute of Direct and Digital Marketing (IDM).



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