BVA GUIDE TO THE MEDIA FOR VETS
Promoting your work and our profession to local audiences

March 2019

A strong voice for vets
Vets and the local media

Local media coverage can be a great way to promote your practice and the valued role of vets within your local area – all for free.

Local media matters to you because local media is:

• **Trusted** - local media is nearly four times more trusted to provide relevant local information than commercial TV and radio*

• **Authoritative** - you can use your veterinary expertise to give useful advice to readers and listeners, while promoting your practice and your services

• **Popular** - the local press is the UK’s favourite print medium, read by three in four British adults; 42 million people a week**

• **Informative** - local press has the power to educate and promote positive change in the communities they serve

Find local media contacts at [https://media.info/uk](https://media.info/uk)

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*Local Media Works - [www.localmediauk.org/Consumer-Catalyst](http://www.localmediauk.org/Consumer-Catalyst)*
Our top three media tips for vets

1. Be prepared

If you receive an out-of-the-blue call or you’re put on the spot by a journalist, give yourself time. You do not need to respond immediately; be polite, get contact details, find out the journalist’s deadline and suggest that you’ll call them back in 5 minutes/30 minutes/1 hour, which gives you time to do your research and figure out what you’d like to say.

Keep up-to-date with the latest news and issues on our website www.bva.co.uk/news

2. Be proactive

Pick up the phone because journalists and editors will welcome local experts on local stories and want to hear from you; ‘Vets warn of dogs overheating in the summer’ can very easily become ‘Local vet warns Cornish owners of dogs overheating in the summer.’
3. Be the 5Cs – clear, concise, correct, conversational and Code compliant

Talk as if you are talking to a client because this is what the media and the audience wants from you – you use the 4Cs all the time in your practice, explaining complex conditions and issues in a clear, concise, correct and conversational way. Do not use too many statistics or you will lose your readers/listeners.

Know what the one thing is you would like your audience to take away, then say it clearly and concisely.

When talking to the media, make sure you comply with the RCVS Code of Professional Conduct for Veterinary Surgeons. The Code states that veterinary surgeons can make a “a worthwhile contribution to the promotion of animal welfare and responsible pet ownership by taking part in public life”, while also being clear that vets should distinguish between personal opinion, political belief and established facts and declare any conflicts of interest.

The Code also states that a veterinary surgeon or veterinary nurse should be careful not to express, or imply, that his or her view is shared by other veterinary surgeons or veterinary nurses or a professional organisation to which veterinary surgeons or veterinary nurses belong, unless previously authorised.

How do I get local press coverage?

There are several options for generating local media coverage.

Stories you ‘pitch’ to your local newspaper and/or TV/radio station

Content for these press releases can be generated in several ways:

- Interesting, informative, engaging stories from your own practice experience – **always get a client's permission to use their names and stories in a press release.** Where possible, include short, engaging quotes from the client mentioned in the story.
- Topical issues that will be of interest to your clients – for example, a useful warning to pet owners about seasonal hazards such as blue-green algae in summer or the danger of chocolate to dogs at Easter (see page 6 of this guide for more details).
- Events or campaigns organised by your practice (see page 6 of this guide for more details).

Comment by you as a local expert

There are two ways this could work for you:

- Become a known and trusted commentator, a ‘go-to’ person, for local media on animal health and welfare issues by calling or emailing local journalists and editors with your professional opinion on local news stories to build two-way relationships.
- Secure a regular column or radio slot in which you write about a topic of your choice or answer questions from readers/listeners – your chances of success will be higher if you’ve put in the ground work with local journalists and editors, as suggested above.
Ideas for promoting your practice to the local media

Campaigns

Campaigns can capture the local media and public’s imagination. Campaigns could include:

- Seasonal campaigns such as hot dogs in summer; chocolate poisoning at Easter; seasonal pasture myopathy in horses in autumn; winter hazards.
- Local angle on key BVA and national animal welfare campaigns such as an article on rabbit welfare, highlighting Rabbit Awareness Week’s key message and promoting any services the practice is offering rabbit owners at that time. Regional statistics from our Voice of the Veterinary Profession survey could help, see page 12 for more details.
- Regional-specific campaigns, such as keeping dogs on leads around livestock if your practice is based in a rural area; choosing a pet for city-living if your practice is based in an urban area.
Visits

Visits to your practice by local MPs or celebrities can boost the profile of the practice. Visits could include:

- Local MPs or councillors as a means of highlighting a particular animal welfare issues
- Local celebrities, like the town mayor, launching or helping with events and campaigns

Events

Events organised by your practice can be a great way of promoting what you do and the services on offer. Events could include:

- Charity pet shows for such organisations as the Animal Welfare Foundation
- Sponsored dog walks for local charities
- Pet picnics, where owners can picnic with pets and find out about pet nutrition
- School tours of local farms with a large animal vet
- Practice stands at local fairs or agricultural shows
- Practice open days
Supplying photos to the press

Local media love pictures of, and for, their readers.

Contact the local newspaper to ask if they would like to send a photographer along to your event or visit, briefly explaining the details of what will be happening on the day.

Make sure you have someone to take your own photographs in case the local media cannot attend the event and send those photographs to the newspaper, clearly labelled, afterwards.

Getting permission for your photos

If you are taking your own photographs and these photos include identifiable images of members of the public or animals, including your clients or their animals, you must have their permission to use their image. If the image is of a minor under 18 years of age, you must have the permission of their parent or legal guardian.

The RCVS Code outlines asking permission to use images of animals in paragraph 12.10.

If you are holding an event with members of the public attending, we recommend that you place prominent signs informing people that photography for the media is taking place and that they should speak to reception for further information. You can download a sign to print at www.bva.co.uk/media-guide

Promoting responsible imagery

BVA recommends that all animal imagery in marketing and communications materials depicts animals responsibly and respectfully with due consideration for their welfare needs. To help with this, BVA have produced Pets in Advertising: A social concern, good practice guidance for use of pet animals in advertising, and a summary of this guidance, to encourage consideration of five welfare needs when selecting images.

If you are submitting photos to the press, then you should bear these guidelines in mind. If a photographer or contributor is providing images, it may be worth asking for them to be run by you for your professional opinion before they are used. If you are unsure, or would like further guidance on this, please contact policy@bva.co.uk.
How to handle a broadcast interview

Broadcast interviews (radio and TV) can be a little nerve-wracking, particularly if they are live. The following tips will help you get your key messages across clearly, calmly and confidently.

1. Ask as much as possible about the format of the interview

   • When and where will it take place?
   • Will it be live or pre-recorded?
   • Is it one-to-one with the presenter, or head-to-head with another expert? Will there be a phone-in?
   • How long will it be?
   • Where has the story come from? For example, a news report, a Government announcement, a specific incident?
   • For live interviews ask what the first/likely questions will be. Don’t rely on the interviewer sticking to a set list of questions, but this information should offer a helpful guide.
2. Prepare yourself as much as possible

- Prepare your three key messages – write them out as bullet points and back them up with facts and evidence.
- Practise out loud – get a colleague or friend to ask you questions and answer using your bullets as an aid initially and then without looking at the bullets; try to be as natural and familiar with your material as possible.
- Don’t comment on cases you have not been involved with – what you can say is, “I cannot comment on that specific case but in general/what I see in my own practice…”
- Be prepared for traps and tricky interview questions – use the ABC technique (see page 11) and phone the BVA media office if you would like advice on 020 7908 6340.
Get your message across - ABC

ABC (acknowledge, bridge, control) can be particularly helpful when dealing with controversial issues and responding to challenging questions:

**Acknowledge**

Don’t ignore the elephant in the room. If there is public concern, acknowledge this upfront. For example, “We recognise the seriousness of antimicrobial resistance for human and animal health.”

**Bridge**

Once you acknowledge, make a bridge to your key message so you can talk about the solution rather than the problem. For example, “What matters to the public is what vets and other health professionals are doing to help combat this problem.”

**Control**

Once you have made a bridge you can control the conversation. For example, “Vets are professionals who are fully aware of their responsibilities in this area and should be trusted to make sound judgments about the prescription of antibiotics.”
Don’t forget about social media

Using social media for marketing is a great way to promote your work and practice, both locally and to the wider world.

BVA are creating a guide to social media for vets, which will contain in depth information and ideas on how you can use it to spread your messages and campaigns.

When available, it can be downloaded from the Workplace Guidance area on the BVA website, [www.bva.co.uk/guides](http://www.bva.co.uk/guides).
Support on offer from BVA

We provide resources to help our members generate local media coverage and promote their work locally.

Visit [www.bva.co.uk/media-guide](http://www.bva.co.uk/media-guide) to access our resources.

Local media press release templates

The media team are happy to provide local press release templates and advice on approaching your local media. We also provide press release templates using regional statistics from our Voice of the Veterinary Profession survey to members who take part in the survey. To join the survey panel, visit [www.bva.co.uk/voice](http://www.bva.co.uk/voice)

Media training courses

We run media training CPD courses specifically tailored for vets, which include sessions on key messages and live broadcast practice with feedback from experienced journalists.

You can find out more and view the current BVA CPD programme at [www.bva.co.uk/events](http://www.bva.co.uk/events)
Contact

Our media team is on hand to assist and offer advice on any media enquiries you may be handling. Please feel free to contact us:

Tel: 020 7908 6340
Email: media@bva.co.uk

For urgent media enquiries outside of office hours (9am – 5pm) please call our 24/7 press line on 07503 190247.