

# Regional survey reveals why 70% of press releases go unpublished

The corporate communications industry in the Middle East and northern head of Africa needs to become more targeted and sharpen up the way it deals with the media, according to the results of a survey published today.



The online poll, conducted jointly by Insight and MediaSource, canvassed the opinions of 139 journalists working for Arabic and English-language newspapers and magazines in the UAE, Lebanon, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, covering topics ranging from press releases, press conferences, PR practice, the sources journalists use for stories, and the current state of journalism in the region.

The findings provide a revealing insight to the true state of the working relationship between journalists and corporate communications professionals, and makes stark, yet essential, reading for the region's PR community.

"We set out to discover the main pressures bearing on journalists throughout the region, and to find out how successfully organisations from all sectors are communicating with them," explained James Mullan, joint managing partner of media training consultancy, Insight.

"While some of the journalists are highly critical of the region's 'PR machine', there is a great deal of constructive criticism and occasional praise, which will help agencies and corporate communications departments better understand the day-to-day concerns and frustrations of the journalists they deal with."

## Among the key findings of the survey are:

- Nearly two thirds of journalists receive up to 20 press releases a day, yet 55% say they actually use less than 10% of the releases they receive. Asked to rate the importance of press releases as a news source, 74% of the Arabic-language media believe them to be either 'very' or 'somewhat' important, compared with just 56% of the English-language media.
- 80% of English-language journalists admit to either 'often' or 'sometimes' deleting emails from PR agencies without actually reading them, while a more 'forgiving' 60% of Arabic media confess to the same practice.
- 'On the record' briefings are the most significant source of stories for the region's journalists, with 85% of all respondents rating them as either 'very' or 'somewhat' important.
- When asked whether they would be more likely to use a press release if it came with a gift, 41% of Arabic-language journalists and 19% of English-language journalists replied 'yes' or 'maybe'.



Ben Smalley, managing director of MediaSource, which publishes the Middle East & North Africa Media Guide and represents global PR tool Mediadisk in the region, said: "When asked 'what is the most irritating practice that PR professionals engage in?', both the Arabic and English-language press were unanimous in the opinion that sending material which has no relevance to their publication was the single greatest annoyance.

"The 'scattergun' approach adopted by some PR practitioners of sending a release to everyone in the hope that those which find it relevant may use it, can be highly counterproductive – one editor even confesses to blocking the receipt of emails from PRs with a history of sending irrelevant releases 'despite the risk of missing out on genuinely good material'."

While the survey primarily focused on the relationship between journalists and the communications industry, the questions were also designed to reveal insights into regional journalism.

“When asked to comment on the current state of their own profession, the Arabic-language media have a brighter view than their English-language colleagues,” stated Oliver Blofeld, managing partner, Insight.

“More than half of the Arabic-language press (57%) rate the quality of journalism in the region as either being ‘very good’ or ‘fairly good’, but the majority of the English-language press (56%) believe it is only ‘okay’.

“Conversely, 80% of the English-language press believe standards of journalism are ‘improving’, while only 40% of the Arabic-language press feel the same, with 29% believing standards are ‘staying the same’ and 31% thinking they are ‘getting worse’.”

When it comes to the external pressures journalists feel when writing stories the way they want to, the majority of both the Arabic and English-language press (41%) felt they were under no external pressure, although a substantial minority (32%) found government rules and regulations to be a factor.

The full Insight/MediaSource Middle East Journalist Report 2007, which includes over 500 direct quotes from regional journalists, can be purchased online through the Middle East & North Africa Media Guide website – see [www.middleeastmediaguide.com](http://www.middleeastmediaguide.com) for more details.

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