

Bristol Sound – Question and Answer (non-confidential)

Please could you provide more information on the relationship with the SWNS.

Our relationship with Bristol based SWNS – South West News Service - is designed to bring the best possible local radio news service to listeners in Bristol.

We have established a close relationship with SWNS – one of the UK's leading news agencies - and have agreed commercial terms for premises that they own, adjacent to their offices, in the north of Bristol at Filton. This will enable us to attend their morning and afternoon editorial meetings and to be fully across the day's new agenda in Bristol. Access to such a significant local journalistic resource would, ordinarily, be out of reach of a local radio operator.

SWNS compiles a daily newswire/prospects list of all the stories they have available for Bristol, as well as a broader national list of stories. This briefing will be available to our news and programming team who will then decide on what stories are used and which ones are chased for further programme content/interviews. Whilst we will always retain control over the editorial ordering of bulletins, our relationship with SWNS allows us to offer listeners a vastly increased number of local stories every day, taken from a large overall pool of stories.

SWNS is the largest regional news and picture service in the UK, with over 100 editorial staff working in offices across the country and US. SWNS began life as South West News Service in a small office near the crown court in Bristol, UK, in the 1970s. The business initially covered mainly criminal trials and a bit of breaking news for local media. Today, on a daily basis, SWNS has grown to produce a newswire service comprising over 100 original pieces of copy and 1000 photographs and videos. This newswire provides one of the single largest sources of content for the major news media in the UK.

Our relationship with SWNS will enable us to provide a better and more relevant local news service than the incumbent.

Specifically, our content monitoring research demonstrated that the current news service from The Breeze does not adequately serve Bristol listeners. It showed a failure to update stories regularly and a lack of Bristol related news. Our qualitative research confirmed local listeners are most interested in news from Bristol – not Weston-super-Mare, Bath or West Wiltshire, as is heard daily on The Breeze. We found plenty of such “out of area” news being broadcast on The Breeze - content that is plainly outside the natural editorial affinity and listener demands of a radio station for Bristol. This is because The Breeze is a “regionalised” service, with the same news carried across multiple licence areas and transmitters. The clear difference is that Bristol Sound is proposing a bespoke service for Bristol.

We further identified that The Breeze's news bulletins were short in length, and would not allow for the range and variety of local stories that Bristol Sound will offer. We consider that news bulletins will need to be significantly longer in duration to offer listeners the local news they want. Having operated local radio stations for many years, it is increasingly clear that, whilst news readers remain readily available, reporters with the necessary newsgathering skills are harder to attract and retain. SWNS offers us the largest and most respected newsgathering resource in Bristol.

Many local radio stations now rely on just IRN and, whilst we are a subscriber to its service, we believe it is not good enough as the sole provider if a radio station wants to primarily serve local news to its listeners. In confidence, for the forthcoming launch of our new service for Glasgow and West central Scotland, we are talking to Glasgow based news agencies and existing large scale news

media owners about similar partnership models so that we can bring the same benefits to listeners in Scotland.