

the7stars

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WHAT'S

HOT!!



Stop the Press: The Hidden Value of Local Journalism

When Sir Keir Starmer resigned as Holborn & St Pancras' MP after eleven years, four months, and seven Prime Ministers, it wasn't the BBC, or even The Guardian that broke the story. The former Prime Minister chose his local newspaper, a small North London outlet, with a circulation of fewer than 70,000.

Perhaps that is slightly facetious framing. After all, *The Camden New Journal* is a well-respected mainstay of local news. The independent publication is recognised amongst the UK's best local papers, captivating audiences with strong local reporting covering everything from investigations into unused properties in Kentish Town to the altruistic felines, ferrets and alpacas donating blood in Camden. The CNJ is an example of the power of local journalism: a space where trust, relevance, and community intersect.

Local journalism is an often-overlooked part of a print strategy. Local news titles reach over 77% of UK adults monthly across print and digital formats and 80% of UK adults trust the information they see in their local media. Local relevance and consumer trust together build credibility with audiences. Beyond buying reach, as Newsworks' *The Cultural Relevance Effect* highlights, brands investing in trusted news are associating with conversations and communities that matter to their consumers. This can also drive strong commercial outcomes, with cultural relevance contributing 15% to UK sales. This impact extends to digital editions of local news, with Reach finding that adverts placed on local news sites delivered higher feelings of trust and connection (+26%) when compared with other digital media.

By reputation, local news is often associated with clickbait sensationalism and petty gossip, making it easy to overlook as an advertising channel. Not all titles are created equal, but strong media planning can help advertisers identify titles that deliver genuine value. As a founding member of The News Alliance, the7stars champions advertising that can deliver effectiveness

and trust. Its four-point manifesto amplifies the role news environments play in the media ecosystem: support trusted journalism, invest in news environments, rethink outdated approaches to brand safety, and ensure blocklists do not inadvertently penalise quality news content.

Just four months before Starmer's *Camden New Journal* resignation, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport unveiled *Amplify: The Local Media Action Plan*, a timely £12M two-year fund to help local news publishers transition to online-first business models. Local media plays a vital role in informing communities, scrutinising public institutions, and reflecting local voices. But, as print circulations decline, local news has been the worst impacted. As cited by DCMS, 37 local authorities in the UK exist in 'News deserts', with no dedicated print, online, radio, or TV outlets. The *Camden New Journal* itself received a 'rescue' funding package of an undisclosed sum from green energy entrepreneur Dale Vince in September. This points to a new ownership structure, the CNJ having been owned co-operatively by its journalists since its founding in 1982. The title, which is currently loss-making, stated that whilst the investment is a lifeline, it still relies on advertising investment 'to secure its future'.

If advertisers want trusted news environments to exist tomorrow, we need to invest in them today. At a time when trust is increasingly scarce, supporting quality local news is an opportunity for brands to live their values while investing in environments that build relevance, credibility and connection with consumers.



The Good, the Bad, and the Hangover: Why More Brands Are Embracing Festival Media

We have just reached the end of festival season in the UK, a period in our calendar steeped in history. Music festivals and summer parties have been a staple of English culture since the late 1960s and have undergone a raft of changes to their make-up and style. In recent years, however, we've seen a proliferation of brands entering this space in an attempt to connect with consumers during moments of heightened positivity.

Brand partnerships with festivals aren't strictly new – many Millennials and Gen X still associate Carling [with Reading & Leeds](#), for example – but two things have changed: the type of brand partnerships and their visibility.

Those who attended All Points East this year may have felt that brand sponsorships and activations are becoming increasingly ubiquitous within the festival experience, with the return of Aperol's longstanding Aperidisco stage and the reappearance of Casa Bacardi. But festivalgoers would also have found House of Magnum offering personalised ice creams, American Express's VIP area and even Levi's manning a clothing stall. It was reported that core music stages [were exceeded](#) by the number of brand activations this year at the famous London multi-day event.

Although traditional festival sponsorship has supported these kinds of events for decades, what is proliferating now is a relatively new immersive advertising medium. So there is no consensus yet on whether these types of activations are effective. However, in an era beset by digital content and so-called 'AI slop', many brands view experiential marketing as a way [to connect](#) with consumers in the real world.

Equally, festivals have long been lauded as an escape from everyday reality, with [patchy phone signal](#) necessitating face-to-face conversations, but the emergence of brand partnerships could jar with that expectation. Some in adland agree, arguing that increasing presence could have a [negative impact](#) on brands if it clashes with the desired getaway mindset of a festival.

Brands can be effective though, as long as they take the time to carefully understand the diversity of festival-going audiences. Depending on where an activation is, brands might be talking to young London professionals or a mishmash of post-GCSE revellers from across the country. The activations that stick in the memory most positively will be those which actively make the experience better for these audiences.

Brands that add to or aid the experience may live longer in the memory; helping others, after all, activates the neural pathways linked directly to recall. By that criterion, while Levi's stall may fail the test – perhaps few would be expecting to purchase jeans on a hot and dusty summer's day – skincare brand CeraVe's activation at Cross the Tracks passes, giving out free sunscreen to festivalgoers on a day of soaring temperatures in the capital.

Immersive marketing can be a powerful asset, so long as brands take the time to understand the consumers they will reach and assess whether they will really add to the experience. Brands that create these meaningful experiences will be those that are played on repeat, rather than just fading into the background noise.



The Opportunity Cost of Inaccessible Media

ITV has announced that subtitling will become compulsory across all ads to run on its linear and streaming platforms from January 2027, following the introduction of a similar mandate by Channel 4 earlier this year.

The move is the latest in a series of milestones aimed at making broadcast content more accessible to all. From the introduction of experimental closed captioning in the 1980s, through to the first subtitling quotas in the 1990s and the Subtitle It! campaign of the 2010s that successfully fought for streaming services to face similar quotas to linear television, the road to accessibility has been hard fought. Today's progress has only been achieved at the cost of millions being unable to enjoy the same content while rules and regulations developed.

Yet, for all the recent momentum towards making broadcast content accessible to those in the d/Deaf and hard of hearing communities, progress within the media industry has been slow. The cost of subtitling has often been cited, particularly for smaller, newer advertisers for whom marketing budgets must truly account for every penny.

As recently as 2024, when Channel 4 announced its intention to make advertising around the Paralympics accessible, just one-quarter of ads submitted to C4's sales team were subtitle-ready. Though this goal was ultimately missed, significant progress was made and the ensuing attention led to the development of new, lower-cost tech alternatives to support SMEs and newer advertisers.

The opportunity cost of the thousands of viewers watching their favourite content, who may not be able to understand the advertising that supports it, is rarely cited. Those who require closed captioning, audio descriptions, or have other accessibility needs still interact with campaigns, develop relationships with brands and buy products as often as anyone else.

And while the needs of these communities should always be paramount in accessibility conversations, the

opportunity cost goes beyond such groups. Just as the content we consume is becoming increasingly digital and video-oriented, so too is the way audiences are choosing to engage. According to a Verizon study, a startling 92% of mobile video views occur with the sound off. Centrally positioned, kinetic captions are as native to TikTok as likes and comments were to Facebook some years ago. As platform users seek escapism from sensory overload, watching creators on mute has fast become a majority experience.

It was these changes in behaviour that prompted the7stars to release our *Power of Words* whitepaper last year, highlighting that closed captioning not only improved the advertising experience for d/Deaf communities, but also boosted brand sentiment among other consumers.

As such behaviour becomes commonplace, the question for advertisers should not be whether subtitling is an outlay worth making. Instead, brands should be asking which accessibility enhancements they can make to ensure everyone has the chance to connect with the campaign by consulting with those directly impacted. The opportunity cost of excluding these consumers is potentially vast.

Not sure this claim is substantiated in the article. The source appears to refer to mobile video views occurring with the sound off, rather than 92% of adults actively choosing to watch this way. Suggested edit: '92% of mobile video views occur with the sound off.'



The End of the Digital Wild West... Well, at Least from a Compliance Perspective

For years, digital and social media advertising have operated with far less scrutiny than highly regulated broadcast channels. With Clearcast bringing its broadcast-level compliance expertise into the digital space, the digital Wild West era may officially be over. Advertisers will increasingly need to treat YouTube, Meta ads, and other digital platforms with the same level of legal and regulatory rigour as an ITV primetime spot.

Clearcast, best known for pre-clearing TV & VOD advertising, recently announced its expansion into digital advertising through the launch of its own AI pre-screening tool and services for non-broadcast ads and non-linear campaigns, iClear and allClear. The news marks a big shift for advertisers, brands and agencies who operate across all kinds of platforms, as it will give some of them access to compliance support from Clearcast for the first time, beyond just TV and BVOD.

As Jake Ainsworth, Creative Account Director, puts it: 'It's going to level the playing field for brands advertising across platforms beyond TV and BVOD.'

The timing is notable. According to the Advertising Association, 2025 UK digital advertising spend reached £40.5 billion, demonstrating definitive dominance over the media landscape by commanding roughly 83% to 86% of the UK's total advertising market. Moreover, data from the IAB UK reveals that momentum is building further in 2026.

Digital ad spend reached £21.2 billion in the first half of 2026 alone, representing a 13% year-on-year increase. The total digital market is forecast to reach £44.7 billion by the end of 2026.

Given the scale, complexity and fragmentation of digital advertising today, there is a strong argument that compliance standards should evolve along with the market. Digital environments are becoming more heavily regulated, with new HFSS restrictions and the forthcoming social media ban for under-16s expected to come into force in spring 2027. Together, these developments signal a wider shift: the lawless nature of the digital landscape is diminishing.

Clearcast says the launch is rooted in helping advertisers protect brand reputation and ensure brand safety across an increasingly complex media ecosystem. But it also raises an interesting question: is this simply a natural evolution of advertising regulation, or another example of an organisation embracing AI to remain relevant in a rapidly changing market?



All Gas, No Brakes: The Power of Fandom in Brand Building

Oasis. Lily Allen. Legumes. What do these three things have in common?

Since the start of last year, all have embarked on a comeback of equally seismic proportions. For Oasis, it was the Live '25 tour, which shattered demand records both for tickets and stadium pints. For Lily Allen, it was the ultimate breakup album, her highest-charting record in over a decade. For legumes, it was beans. Lots and lots of beans.

For years, UK bean consumption has largely centred on the humble baked beans on toast. Despite their nutritional importance, the Food Foundation notes that 66% of Brits eat less than one portion per week, representing a plant diversity far weaker than other countries.

But, in the first half of 2026, bean sales grew rapidly, increasing by 7.3%, with sales of butter beans up 30.3%. This sudden dietary shift has many causes, cost-of-living pressures chief among them; while the price of meat has surged by 41% since 2020, legume prices have remained remarkably stable, leading many Brits to switch to plant-based proteins. However, the category's recent reversal in fortunes has been ably assisted by a brand that seeks to make beans sexy again.

That brand, Bold Bean Co., has taken those category tailwinds and applied full gas, capitalising on shifts in consumer behaviour while broadening the category's appeal. Enter one of the fastest-growing brands in the country, ranked 16th on the Sunday Times 100 for 2026, with a highly visible female founder and an army of loyal fans. The result is something of a case study for the importance of fandom to challenger brands.

Upending Category Norms

Until recently, legumes on British supermarket shelves were either dried or canned. This created a dynamic where beans and pulses were associated with being a cupboard filler; the type of product ready to be rationed when nothing fresh remains. Bold Bean Co. upended this by selling its products in vibrant jars with a premium feel.

Despite the much higher price point, consumers could now compare its products directly with meats and other proteins, rather than lower-cost canned goods.

This brand playbook has proved successful time and again for challenger brands, whether Liquid Death selling water in punk-themed cans to court responsible partygoers or Nespresso charging by the capsule to compete not with filter coffee, but with Starbucks.

Championing the Community

If other brands embrace their community only at arm's length, then Bold Bean Co has its fans in a bear hug. Branding them the 'Leguminati', the company's founder builds a connection with buyers through a shared obsession. This helps fans to feel part of a movement, not just stats on a company's bottom line.

Embrace the Shift

For consumers, being part of the first wave of a rising tide can be invigorating. Maintaining this authenticity while growing rapidly can prove challenging, but it need not be a nonstarter. Even longstanding brands, such as Vaseline or Stanley cups, have proven that heroing a community while leading a category is possible. The key is handing over control. Vaseline's Grand Prix-winning 'Verified campaign' demonstrates this: fans are amplified, not just paid lip service.

As culture evolves, category shifts are inevitable. Last year's fad can become tomorrow's icon, just as noughties' celebrities can become twenties' phenomena. The brands that successfully ride the tide will be those that let fans take control.