



**HOW MUCH OF YOUR DAILY NEWS IS PR?**

# **KEY FINDINGS**

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**A JOINT *crikey* -ACIJ INVESTIGATION**

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# Introduction: How much of your daily news is PR?

To answer this question, *Crikey* and the Australian Centre of Independent Journalism (ACIJ) at the University of Technology (UTS) Sydney recently teamed up for an investigation six months in the making.

Wendy Bacon, head of [ACIJ](#) and a Walkley Award-winning investigative journalist herself, led a group of more than 40 students who got up close and personal with the sticky end of the spin cycle.

They had to analyse, critique, question and then pick up the phone to ask the hard questions of the media and its reliance on public relations to drive news.

Hard questions, because this is what came out in the wash: after analysing a five-day working week in the media, across 10 hard-copy newspapers, ACIJ and *Crikey* found that nearly 55% of stories examined were driven by some form of public relations.

Given the grim state of some of these papers, and the deep cuts to their workforces of late, in some ways it's surprising that the figure isn't higher.

Which paper is the most bloated with pressers and pre-approved sound bites? And which newspaper should you read if you want your news unfiltered and imbued with the sweat of real journalists at work?

Read on for the grimy details.

Sophie Black, Editor

## Key Findings: half the news is PR driven

So you think you're getting original, thoroughly researched journalism in that daily newspaper you've just finished reading? Or perhaps you think newspapers are mostly disguised PR?

We now have the answer, at least for one week.

During five weekdays in September 2009, we examined the contents of the following newspapers: *The Australian*, *The Australian Financial Review*, *The Advertiser*, *The Courier-Mail*, *The Daily Telegraph*, *Herald Sun*, *The Mercury*, *The Age*, *Sydney Morning Herald* and *The West Australian*. Here's what we found:

- Nearly 55% of stories analysed were driven by some form of public relations — a media release, a public relations professional or some other form of promotion.
- Sydney's *Daily Telegraph* topped the week's study with 70% of stories analysed triggered by public relations. ACIJ student researchers identified media releases behind 44% of *The Daily Telegraph's* stories analysed. The least PR-driven publication for this week was its competitor *The Sydney Morning Herald* with only 42% PR driven stories.
- Melbourne, the only other Australian city to have two metropolitan newspapers, followed a similar pattern: stories analysed in *The Age* were 47% public relations driven compared to 65% in *The Herald Sun*.
- In this week, papers owned by News Ltd, which controls more than two-thirds of the Australian metropolitan print media market, were more PR driven than those owned by Fairfax Media.

- Articles were identified across the Australian print media in which journalists put their byline on stories that were republished press releases with little or no significant extra journalism work. Of 2,203 articles, more than 500 or 24% had no significant extra perspective, source or content added by reporters.
- News and feature stories were analysed across health, medicine, science, technology, business, politics, rural, arts, entertainment, environment and energy and motoring rounds. Different publications focus more heavily on different rounds so, for this reason, we did not have the same number of articles in each round or across each publication.
- The business and politics rounds had the lowest concentration of PR-driven journalism, with business coverage being 50% public relations driven and politics at 37%. The lower figures for politics may be because more public relations activity happens behind the scenes through journalists' relationships with politicians and their advisers and for that reason is harder to identify.
- The highest levels of PR content were found in the innovation /technology (77%) and police (71%) rounds.
- Other rounds were health/medicine/science (52%), education (63%), arts/entertainment (61.80%).
- Tabloid newspapers overall had more PR-influenced content than the broadsheets, suggesting that giving the audience what editors think it wants can also mean selling readers short on independent information.

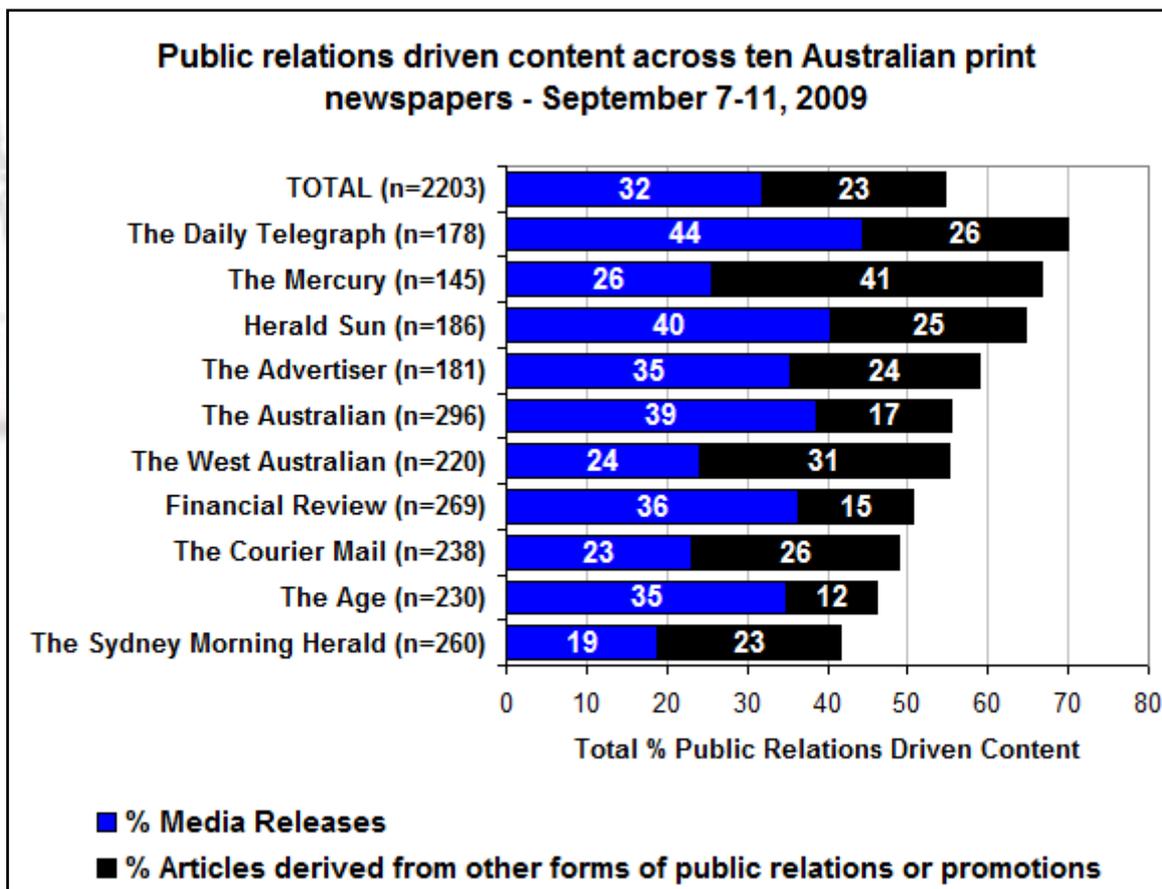
ACIJ's Wendy Bacon, Sasha Pavey, Michelle Loh and Alex Taylor

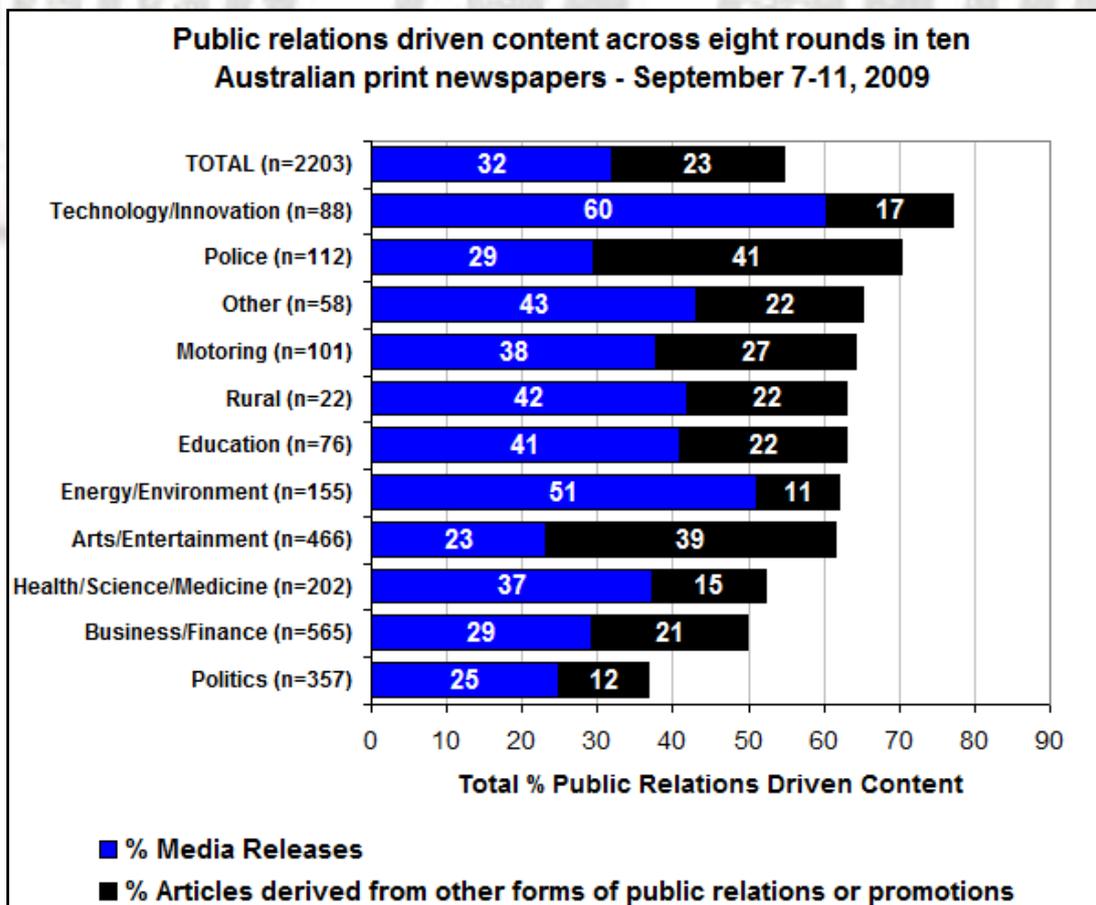
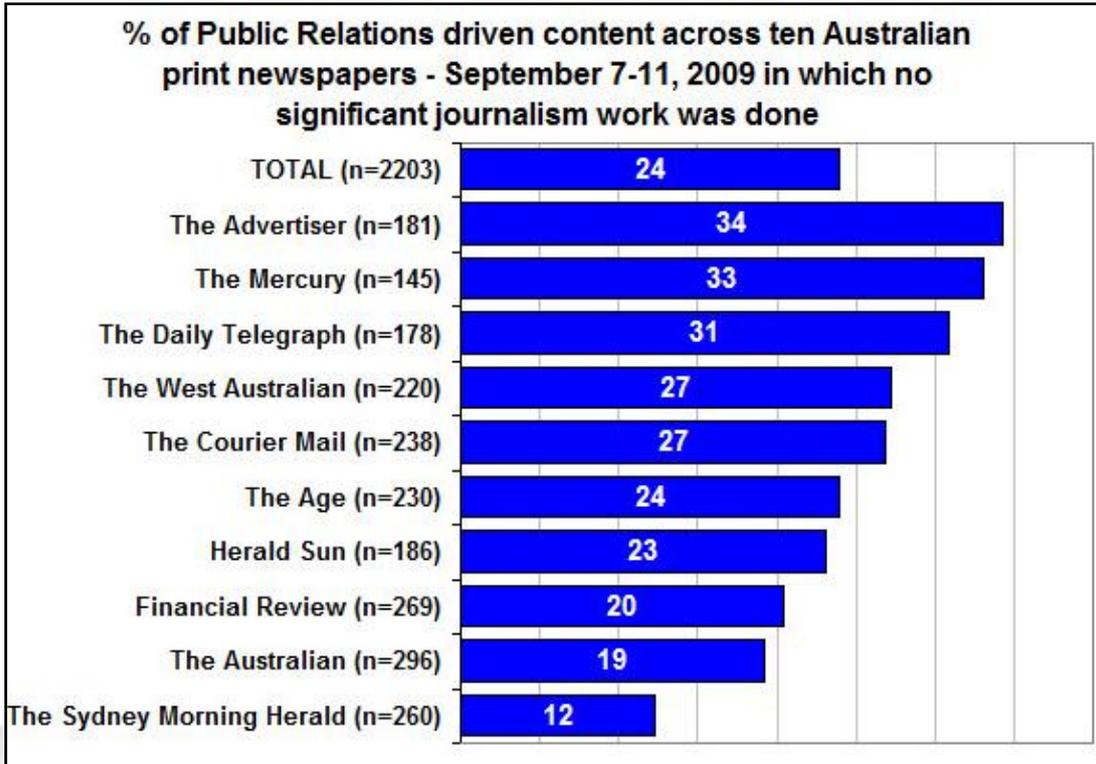
# The spin cycle: how your newspaper fared

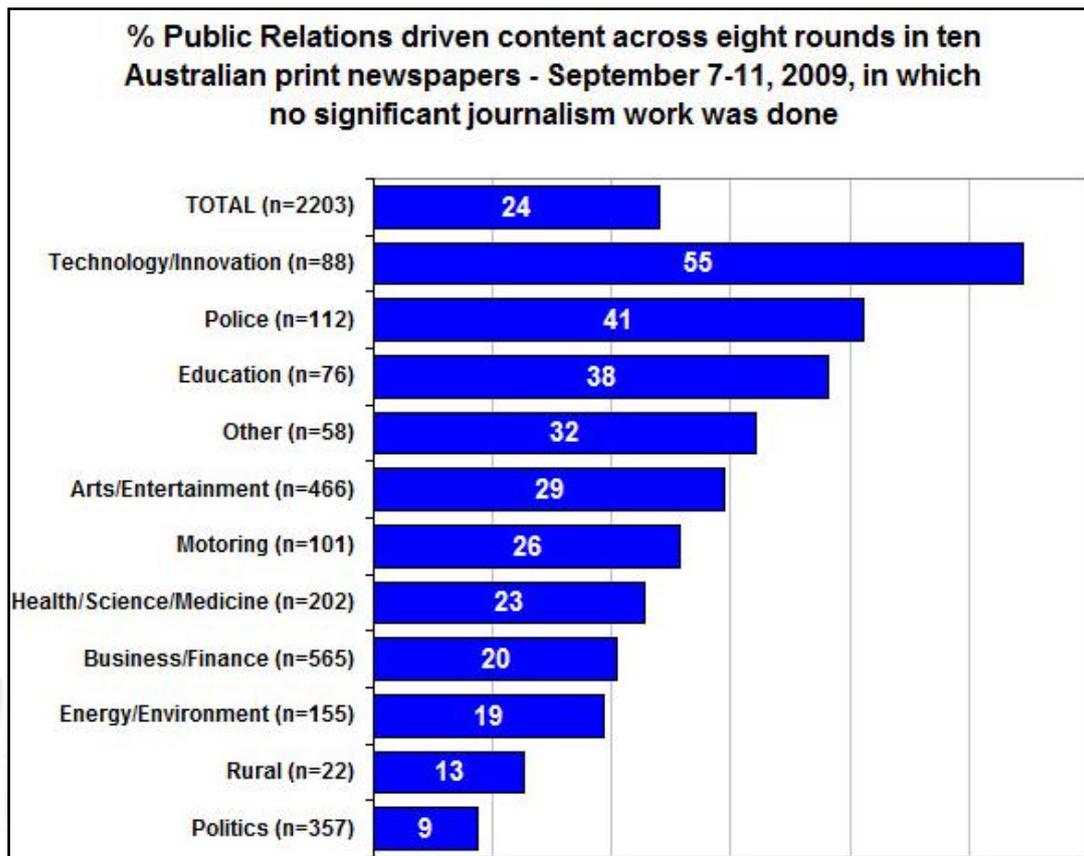
Now that you've read the key findings, surely this is what you're curious to know: how your newspaper sits relative to all others across Australia.

Who has the most public relations-driven content in the country? And which papers are most likely to publish PR driven articles without a journalist undertaking further reporting work to round out the story?

Here's how the numbers crunch (graphs by Possum Comitatus, *Crikey* blogger):







## Further reading

For a fortnight, starting Monday 15 March, *Crikey* and ACIJ are examining the results of the Spinning the Media survey and what they mean for journalism and PR. The content is for *Crikey* subscribers only. Here's just a taste:

- [Methodology](#): How did we define "PR driven"? What difference did it make that we analysed five weekdays and not a weekend? Why did we exclude sport from the journalism rounds analysed?
- [The newspaper editors fire back](#): Read what the editors (at least the ones who responded) had to say about the results of the Spinning the Media survey.
- [Interview with Chris Mitchell](#), editor-in-chief at *The Australian*.
- [How drug companies affect health reporting](#).



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