

What's the cost of selling your story to the newspapers?

Words of warning

We all like gossip - but we don't like gossips. People who try to make money out of something unusual that has happened to them or their friends often live to rue the day - especially if they break a confidence just to earn some extra cash.

The real victim of most 'kiss and tell' stories is the person who does the selling. Few consider the horrendous consequences which can wreck their lives and those of their friends. Publicity-seekers cannot easily complain if their story backfires on them. By taking money they become 'fair game' in the eyes of the media.

When a publication 'buys an exclusive' it gains control of a person's life - even a good hotel loses its glamour when you are a virtual prisoner - and can run the story however and whenever it chooses.

One publication may have bought exclusive rights to a story, but there is nothing to prevent its rivals publishing different versions of events. And there are plenty of people willing to besmirch the good name of others if the price is right...

Some editors may claim the public have a right to know about the story - but there is a world of difference between an item that is 'of interest to the public' and one that is genuinely 'in the public interest.'

The main reason for BUYING stories is to increase the sales of a publication. The feelings of the people involved in the story take second place to the commercial aims of the publisher.

Think twice and take advice

If you are tempted to make money by selling your story, get professional advice FIRST and consider the long term consequences for you and your family.

News agencies and magazine may offer (paltry) sums for your version of an event that has hit the news. Their intention is usually to make more money out of it than you do, and they are unlikely to allow you approval of what gets published.

That's another reason why MediaWise advises people NOT to auction their story to the highest bidder. It could cost them their friends, and their peace of mind.

Don't court prosecution

If you supply information that is defamatory you could find yourself open to a libel action. If you are a potential witness in a court case there are special risks in selling your version of events. It could even contribute to a miscarriage of justice or the collapse of a trial. Your credibility may be challenged in court, especially if you have been offered a bonus related to the verdict.



Better be safe than sorry

If you have information you believe should be published in the public interest, it is better to manage the release of that information rather than risk your self-respect by auctioning it. MediaWise believes that if information IS in the public interest it should not have price tag.

If you want to remain anonymous, documentary evidence can always be supplied to journalists in a plain envelope.

The best course of action would be to work with a trustworthy journalist, a solicitor, or even a PR company, having first agreed the terms of the arrangement. They can help organise a press conference, provide protection from media exploitation, and negotiate a fair price if payment is offered.

Safety checklist for those entering into a contract with the media

If you do decide to enter into a contract with a print or broadcast publisher, you may find these guidelines helpful.

1. In your dealings with any publication make sure you are accompanied or represented by a legal advisor.
2. Keep a dated record of all conversations.
3. There is no copyright in ideas - only in the written words or pictures. If you write the story yourself or with the help of a 'ghost-writer', make sure you keep copyright.
4. Insist on selling 'first UK rights' only. If a publication wants to purchase 'all rights' it will be to make money by selling your story to others. Your fee should reflect the value of the material to the publisher if it is to be re-published in any form - including film & TV or electronically via databases.
5. If you are not able to write the story yourself, insist that a journalist is assigned to help you write it, on condition that the finished product requires your written approval before publication.
6. Do not part with tapes, photographs or original documents until the terms of your contract are agreed. Ensure that the contract includes satisfactory arrangements for the return of all materials including personal photographs.
7. Try to negotiate the right to approve the manner in which the material is published. If you are not happy about how it is to be presented you should be willing to forgo the fee rather than risk sensational or misleading coverage.
8. Don't be bullied into terms that you are not comfortable with. It is YOUR story, and you will have to live with the consequences if it is handled badly.

• For more advice contact MediaWise on 0117 93 99 333

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