

Written evidence submitted by AlphaGalileo Ltd (COM0003)

CONTEXT RESEARCH-MEDIA RELATIONSHIPS

1. AlphaGalileo Ltd provides a specialist, UK, business to business service delivering breaking research news to the global media community.
2. We began in the 1990s as a non-for-profit foundation, in response to requests from British and European research journalists for a reputable single source of news that would provide them with news on topics of personal interest, without them having to wade through a large number of individual emails. Our aim then, as now, is to ensure that the widest possible range of high-quality research reaches the media.
3. Ensuring raw news reaches the media is the fundamental for better research media relations.

ISSUES THAT WE ARE PRESENTING

4. The issues that we suggest that research communication via the media faces are:
 - The British experience of science communication via the media can provide valuable lessons for others.
 - the potential benefit from considering which audiences are most significant and to tailor output and media used to them.
 - an open and thorough discussion of embargoes which engages all those affected by the practice would be useful.
 - balancing the traditional media's needs for accuracy and depth with the social media's requirement for speed and immediate interest.
 - the significance of commercial research does not receive the attention it deserves.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

5. The AlphaGalileo Service is Internet based with a web site (www.alphagalileo.org) that acts as office and shop window and with news distributed by email and RSS feed. In the 12 months till 31 March 2016 we distributed more than 40 million email news alerts to the media. There are just over 7,000 journalists registered with the Service and we take news from more than 300 news providers. Although we started as a European service with the objective of correcting the imbalance of European news coverage that was skewed towards US news, we now also take news from North and Latin America, the Middle East and Asia. The Service is multilingual and has most recently added Chinese to its roster of languages.
6. Media relations is often based on lists of journalists built up by experience or bought from list providers. The arrival of email made it possible to create very large lists easily. The accuracy of the list's content was less easy to verify. AlphaGalileo's media audience is created by journalists who have asked to receive news and who are moderated. We distribute to fewer people than many of the list providers, however we guarantee the quality and interest of our audience.
7. AlphaGalileo is a private company limited by guarantee. Its shares are held by the current directors. As a project of the British Association for the Advancement of Science we were supported by grants from France, Britain and Germany initially, and then by a European Commission Framework 5 grant. From 2004 until 2014 we were a not-for profit company, AlphaGalileo Foundation, supported by UK government grants. The company transferred to full commercial status in 2014 and is now funded by subscriptions from news providers. Media access is free.
8. The organisations that supported us at our creation, EPSRC and what was PPARC, and the then British Association for the Advancement of Science, should take credit for their help at our birth. The

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support of UK Government, latterly BIS, as we transited from grant-funding to full commercial operation was as important and we are extremely grateful for that help.

9. AlphaGalileo operates as facilitator for its two audiences. As an independent company, unlike our major competitor, we are not committed to one audience or one corporate view point. We listen to and try to understand our media and research communities, so as to deliver a service that meets both their needs. Our content covers science, applied science, humanities, social sciences, medicine, the arts and business. We take news based on peer-reviewed papers, policy announcement, new publications, awards and events.

THE ISSUES THAT CONCERN ALPHAGALILEO

10. AlphaGalileo has delivered training across Europe to public relations staff and it is clear that the British media-research experience has value outside the UK.

11. Communicating via the media offers opportunities for targeting. Media audiences are more than national press and broadcasting. Unfortunately, AlphaGalileo rarely receives news items aimed at media sectors, for example young people or motorists, business press or bird watchers. There is a tendency for a one-size fits all approach to the media.

12. News embargoes are a frequent problem. The primary purpose of news embargoes in research is to provide time for the media to research the story in more detail than provided by the release; assimilate the paper on which the release is based; discuss the news with other researchers; and hence deliver a balanced or if appropriate a critical story. We receive embargoes of a few hours and embargoed releases, where the paper on which the release is based, is not accessible to the media by the peer-reviewed journal until after the embargo has lifted. Both of these practices reduce the ability of the media to do its job properly. In these cases, it appears that the embargo is being used as news management by peer reviewed journals.

13. The growth of social media and the wider range of information sources for all audiences presents a challenge to traditional research media relations based on specialist journalists, peer-reviewed media and embargoes. Traditional media continue to play a significant role especially amongst opinion formers in government, commerce and academia, but the research community ignores, or over-emphasises the importance of, social media at its peril. The research community has yet to fully embrace the importance of video and images.

14. AlphaGalileo's content is dominated by academic research. Our efforts to encourage business to publish research news in the same way has not been successful. The reasons given by industry are that it would conflict with the patent process or that the key media audience is the business press. The success of the business rather than helping create a society that values research appears to be a key concern. This does not help narrow the oft-identified gap between academia and commerce.

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