



Wednesday May 6, 2009

Twin storms at News Ltd

Campbell Reid, group editorial director, told Alliance delegates on Monday that there will be two major changes across the group:

A new national features initiative - based on the MX model, where reporters and editors are in several cities, but layout of each edition is executed in only one city.

Bigger “subbing solutions” – each division is currently looking at how it will work for them.

What’s happening in Features

The production hub for Features will be based in Sydney, not at Holt St, but at News Digital’s Liverpool St offices to allow easier publication across the platforms of newspapers and the website with its “verticals”. Staff would not be employed by News Digital but by their mastheads.

Editors, sub editors and reporters will not have to be based in Sydney. “Not one person who doesn’t want to move to Sydney will have to,” Reid said. “You can be anywhere.” He cited the Cars Guide experience where no reporters had to move.

There will be small national teams, not locked into any one geographical location, nor will all staff need to be in the same location. The rollout of the CyberPage ATEX system will provide one national editorial production platform which will allow editors to control exactly what’s on their pages.

The changes will affect most weekly sections such as Food, Travel, Body+Soul, Sunday Magazine and may eventually extend to Business and other areas. It will soon be rolled out across all metropolitan tabloids, other than Darwin, with the potential to be extended to regional newspapers.

What are the bigger “subbing solutions”?

This will vary from site to site, but may include:

- 7-day rosters across daily and Sunday papers;
- subbing across mastheads;
- fewer specialist subbing desks as per The Australian’s day desk/night desk model.

Brisbane is more advanced in its planning and should be making an announcement soon.

The scale of the project was large enough for News to keep subbing in-house rather than pursue the Pagemasters outsourcing model that Fairfax has pursued, Reid said.

More details soon

Reid has committed to a comprehensive briefing to staff within the next ten to 14 days and admitted that their communication to this point was less than ideal. Alliance delegate Gordon Dann said the failure to brief staff had created cancerous rumours: “The Herald Sun is like a morgue”.

Local editors had significant input over the past eight months that the plan had been in development and were aware of what would happen and how it would affect them, Reid said. The appointment of Alan Oakley was “the last piece in the puzzle”, he said, not the first.

Reid said anyone with questions is welcome to call him personally or refer to News Solutions on the intranet. Anyone wanting to apply for a national editorship should also contact him, he said.

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Redundancies

The company has been hit by the twin storms of the recession and the structural shift of advertising revenue away from newspapers, Reid said. The company suspects the revenue may not necessarily return when the economy picks up. The aim of the Features initiative and News Solutions, he said, was to improve the newspapers and there was no pre-set number of jobs to be cut.

Plainly, there will be job losses. Alliance Federal Secretary Chris Warren said the company should follow a voluntary redundancy process to allow staff some control of their future. This would allow staff to leave with dignity and also create an opportunity for staff to apply to work reduced hours.

Delegates reported several recent examples of loyal staff frogmarched out of the building after a lifetime of service, of which management claimed they were unaware.

What we want

The Alliance delegates pushed for the cap on benefits for those aged over 65 years to be removed. Andrew Biocca, News Group Employment Relations Manager, said all those over 65 years had received a significant payment and no-one had left with just their termination notice.

Biocca said that guidelines had been developed for flexible working hours and would be made available to staff and The Alliance. Options may include:

- Work fewer hours for less money for a fixed period of time with the right to come back to full-time hours;
- Purchase extra annual leave with the 50/52 model (Two weeks unpaid leave taken with annual leave, but with a reduced weekly rate over 52 weeks).

We also called for the payments for staff who moved from full-time to part-time to be averaged over the last five years of their service in the same way as long service leave.

Terry O'Connor from The Courier Mail summed it up: "We want humane national standards not a local dog's breakfast."

On several issues, Reid advised us to seek answers from local managers. These included:

- how the company would deal with people coming off an AWA and back to the collective agreement;
- the number and types of jobs that may be lost at each site;
- whether redundancies would be voluntary and fair.

What's next

Both management and delegates agreed the talks were useful and constructive. The Alliance will write to the company setting out our understanding of the company's position and areas where we need further discussion.

It's not too late – get off your individual contract

Alliance officers will be contacting everyone who's signed a bargaining agent form in the next week. Remember, the Alliance can only act for financial members, so join your union or reactivate your membership today. We will waive back fees if you go onto a direct debit payment system from your credit card or bank account – www.alliance.org.au



Appointment of bargaining agent

Name _____

Address _____

I appoint the Federal Secretary, Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance or his/her representative, as my bargaining agent in relation to the making and approving of any Australian Workplace Agreement, Individual Transitional Employment Agreement (ITEA) or Certified Agreement, or on the variation or termination of any Australian Workplace Agreement, Individual Transitional Employment Agreement or Certified Agreement.

This notice shall remain in effect until it is cancelled by me in writing.

Signature _____

Date _____

Fax to the Media Alliance 02 9333 0933 or email to claire.orourke@alliance.org.au

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Email address	
Phone number(s)	
Email address	
Type of contract?	
Has it expired?	
Are you a financial member of the Alliance?	

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