

How the UK national media treats renewables

The communications challenge facing every business in the renewable energy industry

Introduction

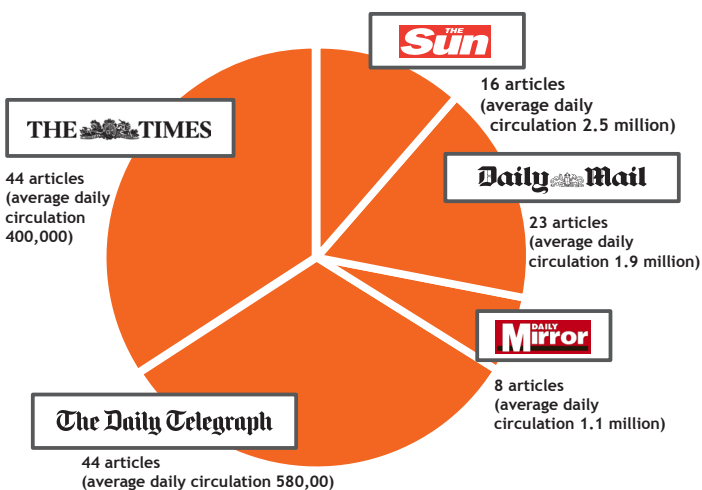
The renewable energy industry is vital to sustainable growth and the shape of its future will certainly be determined, in part, by the media. For generations, national media content has served as the lens through which we perceive and shape our understanding of the world. It plays an extremely important role in setting the tone for political decision making and wider public perception. On a commercial level, what the media says can directly affect confidence in an industry, from investors and policy makers, through to manufacturers, buyers and sellers. Editorial determines the extent to which an industry's 'voice' is heard, the issues and business priorities that are discussed and the type of story told. With this in mind, CCgroup conducted a study examining how the renewable energy industry is portrayed in the national media.

What was analysed

The study analysed the overall sentiment of articles mentioning renewables - wind, solar, marine and hydro, as well as renewable energy in general - published in the print editions of the five most widely circulated UK national newspapers throughout July 2012. This was determined as a key period for the industry due to the revision of Government support for renewables.

The sample consisted of 138 articles from across The Sun, The Times, The Daily Telegraph, Daily Mail and Daily Mirror - a combined average daily circulation of 6.5 million. This sample broke down across the titles as:

Media analysed



Findings

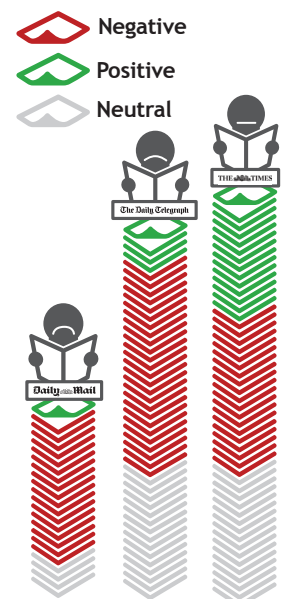
The analysis revealed a number of trends in the reporting of renewable energy news. These were:

The media is the barometer of 'public opinion' and the temperature is cold

First and foremost, the temperature of the media's sentiment toward the renewables industry is cold. More than 51 per cent of the 138 articles analysed were either negative or very negative toward the industry. Only 21 per cent were positive or very positive. 28 per cent adopted a neutral position.

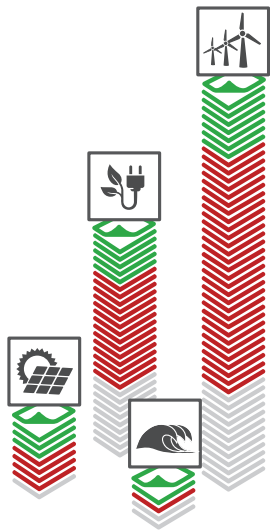
Broadsheet interest is there, but the news isn't necessarily good

More than 80 per cent of the articles analysed were published in 'broadsheet' titles - The Times, The Daily Telegraph and the Daily Mail. But 55 per cent of these articles were either negative or very negative about the industry, revealing the anti-renewables sentiment to be strongest across these publications.



Big interest in wind, but the attention is not very positive. Solar, marine and hydro are failing to register strongly on the media radar

The majority of the coverage across all five newspapers was significantly dominated by wind



energy. Articles focused on wind over five times more frequently than solar, marine or hydro, but the attention wasn't all positive. 58 per cent of articles portrayed wind in a negative light, substantially worse than other renewable energy sources. But although solar, marine and hydro were covered more positively, only 18 articles of the 138 analysed focused on solar and 11 on marine and hydro,

highlighting their failure to register regularly on the media's radar.

Renewable energy is a hot topic, but the industry isn't getting its voice heard

Worryingly, only ten per cent of the articles included a spokesperson from the renewable energy industry. RenewableUK was the most regularly quoted industry source, referred to across four articles. Greenpeace was next, quoted as part of three articles throughout the month. The Times included quotes from the renewables industry most often, featuring comments in almost 20 per cent of articles, followed by The Daily Telegraph who used renewables spokespeople in six per cent of articles. Overall, there was an obvious absence of industry 'voice' across the sample analysed.

Key concerns are financial support for the industry and costs to the consumer

Financial support provided to the renewables industry, and the resulting costs this would create for the consumer, were the two most regularly covered topics. Across the 138 articles analysed, almost 40 per cent focused on these discussions to some degree.

The true story of renewables is not being told

The sheer volume of coverage and attention the renewable energy industry attracted throughout the month of July is evidence that it's currently a hot topic. However, the fact that over 51 per cent of coverage analysed was negative highlights that the media discourse is stacking up against renewable energy businesses.

In stark contrast, a recent YouGov poll revealed that the vast majority of the UK population is in full support of greater solar and wind development. In fact 72 per cent and 55 per cent respectively stated their support for the development of more solar and wind energy. So if this is how the general public feel, why is it only reflected in 21 per cent of the articles written about the renewable energy industry?

What we are seeing is the minority becoming the majority. A democratic deficit has emerged as the debate becomes politicised and sensationalised around subjective issues, and this negative sentiment has been amplified through the circulation and reach of each newspaper's articles. Rather than focusing on competent business growth, development, technological innovation, investment and regional benefits - the real story of renewables - national media coverage has become dominated by political showboating, anti-renewables myths and skewed representations of the industry.

What's driving this democratic deficit and misrepresentation is a question for another piece of research. But the reality is that the media's current portrayal of renewable energy is not a true reflection of either the industry or the public's sentiment.

Why does this matter to the renewables industry?

National media coverage plays an extremely important role in setting the tone for political decision making and wider public perception.

Whilst renewable energy is receiving much profile raising attention, on the most part this isn't in support of the industry. In fact, it is becoming detrimental to the industry's development. The underlying negative media sentiment raises concern that this key influencer of public opinion is increasingly turning against renewables. If this continues unopposed, it could potentially have a number of implications for the industry.

The main threat is the uncertainty this kind of discourse breeds. Negative coverage is increasingly fuelling policy uncertainty, as well as doubt around investment security, future planning and industry development. For an industry whose future is reliant on significant public support and private sector investment, this is an issue of key concern.

The more dominant this negative sentiment becomes, the greater the uncertainty grows, placing question marks over future investment in renewables, wind and solar in particular. Similarly, prolonged media negativity threatens public and local stakeholder support, a crucial driver behind both policy formation and the ever important planning consent process.

But why does this matter to businesses?

It is undoubtedly tempting for a large part of the industry to turn a blind eye to this, and assume it's a problem for industry bodies and those on the front line. But the knock on effects of declining public opinion and political enthusiasm give rise to significant implications for all organisations operating in the industry.

Ultimately, if investment in innovative technologies decreases, or public support for new development declines, so do orders along the supply chain. Although it might initially appear to be a macro industry problem, the micro implications it presents to all renewable energy businesses are very real.

The current lack of vocal industry support is fuel for concern. Whilst this support undoubtedly

exists, the degree to which renewable energy businesses are included in reporting should be addressed in more detail.

Being able to attract customers, investors and supporters by effectively demonstrating your skills, services and expertise is a defining factor of business success. But the biggest challenge in achieving this is getting your audience to listen.

As it stands, the national media audience rarely gets the opportunity to hear about the competent, innovative and growth driven businesses that make up the renewable energy industry. Whilst this is fuel for concern on an industry level, it raises a very different question on a business level - why is nobody capitalising on this empty platform?

Alongside trade titles, the national media forms one of the key sources of information for investors, planners, developers and vendors. In this way this empty platform becomes a significant opportunity for businesses to raise their profile and differentiate themselves from competitors in a wide reaching and agenda setting forum. This study has shown the size of the appetite for renewable energy news, but it is down to businesses to capitalise on this potential.

Steps that need to be taken

If nothing more, this research highlights the challenging media environment that faces the renewable energy industry and the businesses that operate within it. It also points to a need for better communication from all industry players.

The fact that industry comment was included in only ten per cent of the articles analysed suggests a lack of vocal and media confident spokespeople in the industry. Whilst there are signs of industry bodies doing their part in this area, there is an undeniable opportunity for articulate, savvy spokespeople at an organisational level to capitalise by successfully positioning their business in front of key audiences.

Arguably more important, is the need for businesses operating in solar, wind, marine and

hydro to get better at telling their story. Proactive communication of business developments, new contracts, technology innovations and financial successes is crucial for getting a voice heard. Just as necessary is the need for businesses to better position themselves for reactive comment to industry developments.

A clearer, more consistent and credible presence in trade, stakeholder and business media is a vital piece of this puzzle.

Putting in place strategic communication plans that pull these elements together is far from easy.

But the opportunity to boost business success and industry understanding by leveraging the current communications gap couldn't be better.

Investing in communications activity is becoming of increasing importance to the success of renewable energy businesses. Only in this way will renewable organisations overcome the current media bias and ensure that the true success story is not only told, but becomes a driving force behind the on-going growth and success of the green economy. It's time for renewable energy businesses to get serious about communication.

About CCgroup

CCgroup is a PR consultancy specialising in the clean technology, mobile and financial services technology markets. Through its sister brand, Escapade PR, the company is also active in consumer lifestyle and technology. CCgroup is very commercially focused. The company uses messaging, insightful content and media, analyst and digital channels to drive awareness, generate sales leads, build value and, if required, position for exit. CCgroup was founded in the late 1980s and has offices in London and Reading. It is a part of the GlobalCom PR Network. For more details, visit: www.ccgrouppr.com

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