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More Telegraph writers voice concern



The film Despicable Me 2 figures among the claims

Daily Telegraph journalists have said they felt discouraged from writing uncomfortable stories about a range of advertisers and commercial partners.

These included the governments of Russia and China, a film distributor and RBS, BBC Newsnight has learned.

Writer Peter Osborne said this week he left because he felt commercial matters were affecting editorial output.

The Telegraph refused to comment on the issues raised by Newsnight, but denied advertising had affected articles.

More than a dozen current and recent Telegraph journalists have confirmed Mr Osborne's concerns that the newspaper has a particular problem maintaining the "Chinese walls" that most newspapers keep between their advertising departments and the work of their journalists.

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In one bizarre case, the review for children's film Despicable Me 2 was bumped up from a two-star rating to three stars for commercial reasons.

The children's film's distributors had bought extensive advertising in the newspaper in the run-up to its launch.

More seriously, journalists gave examples to Newsnight of how commercial concerns affected coverage given to China and Russia.

In another case in December 2013, Jason Seiken, a senior editorial executive, responded to a story that had been published about turmoil within RBS by pointedly telling financial reporters that the bank was an important commercial partner for the newspaper.

Mr Seiken has upset some journalists at the Telegraph because he has been responsible for lots of changes within the newspaper relating to its approach to its online presence.

But reporters say this incident would have been out of character and have cited other occasions where he has defended the separation between advertising and editorial.

Confidential data

There were also profound problems with mutual trust within the newspaper.

In late 2012, it ran two big stories on HSBC's Jersey subsidiary.

In the discussions afterwards, HSBC sought the confidential data used by the newspaper. The Telegraph refused.

Aidan Barclay, the chair of the Telegraph, subsequently asked for a copy of the confidential data to be passed from the Telegraph's lawyer to his own personal lawyer.

Telegraph journalists prepared a redacted version of the information so they could give it to him without fear that their source might be identified from it.



Peter Osborne said newspapers had "a constitutional duty to tell their readers the truth"

Mr Osborne's decision to make his criticisms publicly was triggered by the newspaper's coverage of the recent controversy about HSBC's Swiss arm.

Independent analysis of the newspaper's output by the Media Standards Trust has indicated that it took less interest in the story than any other major newspaper.

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Gordon Ramsay, who works at the trust, concluded: "The Telegraph devoted far fewer articles to the subject than comparable UK news sources.

"Those articles that it did publish contained little or no investigation into the allegations levelled at HSBC, instead framing the issue as a matter of embarrassment or conflict among politicians, political parties, or public bodies."

'Inaccuracy and innuendo'

The Telegraph declined to comment on the specific issues raised by Newsnight, instead reissuing a statement first released on Tuesday.

A spokesperson said: "Like any other business, we never comment on individual commercial relationships, but our policy is absolutely clear.

"We aim to provide all our commercial partners with a range of advertising solutions, but the distinction between advertising and our award-winning editorial operation has always been fundamental to our business.

"We utterly [deny] any allegation to the contrary.

"It is a matter of huge regret that Peter Osborne, for nearly five years a contributor to the Telegraph, should have launched such an astonishing and unfounded attack, full of inaccuracy and innuendo, on his own paper."



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Telegraph journalists felt discouraged from writing uncomfortable stories about commercial partners including the Russian and Chinese governments, Newsnight learns.

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