

Radio during a crisis

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Events are moving at a breakneck pace with the world in the grip of a pandemic. Every day brings new developments and announcements that affect the way we live, with impacts on society and the wider economy that are hard to predict at this point.

This is nerve-wracking and unsettling for everyone. It can be harder to trust the information in front of you or know what to do or how to react. It also demonstrates therefore why a range of free and independent media, supported by professional journalists and news teams is so important to our society.

We are fortunate in the UK to have a plurality of media both at a national and local level, across broadcast, press and online. All of these are playing an important part in keeping the public informed at this difficult time and it is particularly interesting to see how radio is providing accurate and trustworthy news in a time of crisis.

Radio is able to play this role partly because it retains an extraordinarily high audience (reaching nine out of 10 people each week), but also due to its versatility in offering different approaches to the challenge of talking about such an all-encompassing news story as the COVID-19 outbreak. In some cases, this will take the form of extensive live coverage of breaking news with stations like LBC exploring issues in detail, speaking to politicians or experts and broadcasting the Government's latest news conference. But it might also take the form of short bulletins at the top of the hour, highlighting the latest developments and advice at key points throughout the day. Or even something as deceptively simple as the empathy, understanding and good humour of presenters at such a challenging time.

This role is understood and valued by audiences. Repeated studies show that radio is the most trusted medium for news, with [research](#) finding that 77% of audiences in the UK say they see radio as a trusted source of national news, more than any other media. The same study also found that 60% of listeners turn to radio to keep informed during emergency situations. These findings are in line with [research](#) from the European Commission that consistently find that radio is the most trusted medium in Europe.

Radio stations are acutely aware of the responsibility they have to their listeners to keep them up to date with accurate news and information. We know from discussions in the past few days that they are doing all they can to continue to keep services running, sometimes in the face of very difficult circumstances. This will continue to be the priority and it is clearly something that listeners really value and expect.

At the same time, we cannot ignore the severe financial impact that it likely to affect all sectors in the coming weeks and months. With that in mind Radiocentre – along with many other industries – has already started discussions with the Government and Ofcom to understand what measures can be put in place to secure radio's vital future.

As the current crisis progresses and more people spend time at home we should also remember that radio is about entertainment, companionship and [lightening the mood](#). Right now, the world might feel like a lonelier place. We are used to being in

contact with people, whether at work, the pub, or enjoying events with our friends. It's unprecedented in peacetime to be told to avoid these places. So it's comforting to hear a familiar voice, laugh at a regular segment in your favourite show, or hear that song you really like. Radio offers not just an escape, but also a connection for those that might need it most. At a time of isolation the radio might be the only other voice in the room.

This is borne out by Ofcom [research](#) which found that, when radio was taken away for a day, people really missed its presence. It sounds obvious, but when radio was absent listeners referred to missing 'the friend in the room' and the driver of 'daily ritual'. It's such an accessible medium that sometimes we take it for granted.

This range of attributes that are unique to radio seem more important than ever at the moment. Radiocentre will be working hard over the coming weeks to highlight radio's importance – publicly through our [Radio Bites](#) series and privately with Government – fighting to ensure that stations can continue to be a key source of trusted news, an entertainer, a companion and a force for good in a challenging times.

Radiocentre CEO Siobhan Kenny said: "Radio has a unique and important role to play at the moment. These are tough times but we will do our very best to represent the interests of our members and the audiences who rely on them."