

**Minutes of a Meeting of the Press Distribution Review Panel held on Thursday 30<sup>th</sup> January 2014 at 2.00pm at the Offices Marketforce, Blue Fin Building, 110 Southwark Street, London, SE1 0SU**

Present:	Neil Robinson	Chairman
	Dave Shedden	MD
	Barry Allsop	NPA
	Debbie Dalston	SN
	Lyn Smyth	PPA
	Richard Sage	Independent Retailer
	Rajiv Choti	Independent Retailer
In Attendance:	Dorothy King	PDRP Administrator

**1. Apologies for Absence**

1.1 Apologies were received from Mark Pardon and Raj Ganatra.

Absent - Mark Williams

1.2 The Chairman welcomes Lyn Smyth representing PPA in Mark Pardon's absence.

**2. Minutes of Last Meeting 28<sup>th</sup> November 2013**

The minutes were adopted as a true and accurate record.

**3. Matters Arising**

3.1 The Independent Arbitrator reported that he is still not receiving full Stage 2 documentation at Stage 3, and has requested that this is rectified.

He felt that wholesalers/publishers are doing a disservice to themselves by not forwarding the Stage 2 paperwork, as the complaint can get added to. He pointed out that his Stage 3 adjudication was an assessment of the fairness and accuracy of the Stage 2 decision and that is not possible without the full Stage 2 papers.

Wholesale representatives confirmed that every Stage 2 complaint now receives a written response, when the matter is concluded.

Wholesalers also confirmed that when a formal Stage 2 is received they send written acknowledgement of receipt of complaint, thereby acknowledging both the beginning and end of complaint process.

Assurances were given that SN circulates the 'Guidance Notes to Retailers' and MDL circulate its Customer Service Pledge which more or less replicates the industry process.

- 3.2 BA reported that the Associated Newspapers (AN) has launched a major study into the wholesale practice of sticking labels onto full bundles, thereby rendering the copy unsaleable and its failure to place wrappers top and bottom of bundles, which leads wholesale to stick labels on the bundles in the first instance.

RC commented that since this issue was previously raised, he has seen an improvement of quality of his Mail supplies.

RS commented, although he does not have full bundles, he receives approximately 30 – 35 copies per day, and the bottom two copies are always poor quality. He considers this a wholesale packing issue and confirmed that the Mail is always at the bottom of his pack and therefore more susceptible to being damaged. His bundles are tight which needs to be dealt with as a wholesaler issue.

#### **4. Standardisation of Restitution Payments**

- 4.1 The Chairman states that he appreciates wholesalers and publishers make strenuous efforts to resolve issues at Stage 2, before a complaint is escalated to Stage 3 and believes that the industry would be better placed if there was some standardisation of the terms and values of restitution.

DS reported that MD has within its published 'Customer Service Pledge' such a standard, and agreed that consideration should be given to a uniformed standard for all to abide by.

- 4.2 The PDRP appreciate that getting to a standardisation of restitution payments is going will be difficult, as there may be instances where SN/MD are prepared to make a payment when deliveries have arrived at the scheduled delivery time, but 5 minutes to the NPA cut off time but the NPA would not.
- 4.3 Wholesalers will consider standardisation of restitution at 40p per copy rather than a fixed rate of say 45p per mile, which publisher may give consideration to. Consideration would be given by the Arbitrator to a mileage claim, but most of the restitution is regarding loss of sales.
- 4.4 The notes to retailers would require amending to make clear the maximum retailers would get in restitution in a claim.

DS stated that MD operate by publishing the maximum a retailer can claim, which does not encourage the retailer to claim the maximum allowance as they can only

claim for what they can verify. MD may consider removing the limit cap as there is potentially no limit a retailer can claim against the constraint of the financial loss they can substantiate.

SN does not operate a cap, but rely on local limits of jurisdiction within their business and what level the personnel can sign off the restitution.

SN and MD restitution is reflective of both companies' policies, with the exception that MD quotes total loss of margin on value of lost sales.

SN requested a copy of MD's 'Customer Service Pledge' to consider re writing its restitution offer in accordance with MD's. DS to forward a copy of the same to NR.

NPA stay at the £30 per claim, but are happy to take any changes back for a point of discussion.

- 4.5 The panel will give consideration to reviewing the flat payment of 40p per copy, as the retailers on the panel considered this does not cover the real cost of today's market and suggested 45p – 50p per copy.

Owner/management time would not be covered within the restitution claim, but the cost of an additional member of staff would be.

- 4.6 NR Proposed that the NPA/SN/MD considers the matter and return with a proposal for a universal, transparent and simplified restitution process.

It was suggested that a timeline could be imposed on processing a Stage 2 restitution claim, similar to the complaint process timeframe and also acknowledging the initial restitution claim whilst the query is being handled and investigated.

All restitution payments must be audited.

- 4.7 SN,MD and NPA to complete and forward their restitution position to DK, who will circulate to everybody.

## **5.0 Annual Report and Quarterly Report 1/8/2013 – 31/10 2013**

- 5.1 The Annual Report and the Quarterly Report 1/8/2013 – 31/10/2013 have been published on the website and released as a press release.

- 5.2 In future the PDF Board would like the Chairman of the PDRP to present the Annual Report prior to its being released and published to the wider audience.

## **6.0 Timeliness and Accuracy of Stage Complaint Data**

- 6.1 The Chairman stated that timeliness has vastly improved with the exception of the NPA. BA undertook to take this back to the appropriate publisher and get it resolved. It was also request that, where appropriate, a publisher differentiates between complaints as a publisher or distributor.

- 6.2 The Chairman considered that the accuracy of data supplied was as important. The data is used to compile regular reports, and when it is submitted with errors it creates problems in the filtering of the data. This leads to a disproportional amount of time being spent on the analysis of the data and delays in publishing the reports.

The Chairman requested that the information submitted should reflect the reporting period and not the live period, as this can also cause misunderstanding.

Supply Chain representatives hoped that, due to changes with the key personnel who supply this data, the quality of the submissions will be greatly improved.

## 7.0 Stage 2 Complaint Audit

- 7.1 The Panel noted that it had previously been agreed that the administrator should follow up a proportion of the Stage 2 complaints in order to ascertain whether the complaints had been dealt with satisfactorily.

DK had circulated a basic sample of a PDF questionnaire, which needed amending as appropriate to about 6 questions so that it can be put into practise for the PDRP.

Example of questions could be:

- Was the process followed?
- Was the process simple and easy to understand?
- Was the time frame followed?
- Has the experience met your expectations?
- How easy was it to access, process and raise your complaint to the appropriate party?
- Did you get an acknowledgement of your complaint within 48 hours of returning your completed complaint form?
- How frequently were you communicated with?

- 7.2 The PDRP needs to consider if the wholesaler/ publisher should forward a letter to the retailer requesting feedback or whether it is for the PDF administrator to follow up at a later date as a review.

Alternatively, the administrator could set a format on the PDF website and then append a link to get feedback on the process.

- 7.3 Further questions could be:

- Q1 How did you find the process?  
Q2 Did you receive an acknowledgement within 48 hours?  
Q3 Did we meet the timings as set out in the PDF Charter?  
Q4 How soon were you offered a resolution?  
Q5 How easy was the form to complete and submit?  
Q6 Did you receive retailer guidance notes?  
Q7 How soon after submitting your form did you receive your resolution?  
Q8 Do you think you were dealt with fairly?

- Q9 Would you use the process again?
- Q10 Would you recommend the process to other retailers?
- Q11 Do you feel that the complaint has been dealt with efficiently?

7.4 It was agreed to send the questionnaire to all Stage 2 complainants and look for at least of 15% response.

It was also agreed that the PDRP administrator should forward the questionnaire.

**8. Reports from Retail Representatives**

8.1 RC stated that the usual day to day claims are not being taken seriously. He has raised various issues with Sheffield which have been ignored thereby requiring him to write a letter detailing his problems. He received a response stating that the branch manager will be dealing with the problem, and then no further communication.

Basically, bad communications and lack of response.

8.2 RS reported that most things are generally good, but he has concerns on some titles like the Guardian and the Independent where supplies have been reduced over a bank holiday period. He asked if there is a facility to prevent a zero supply being actioned? He has a regular customer who purchases a Guardian every day and then during the holiday period may get another opportune customer. Over the holiday period supplies of small quantity titles are cut below net sale, which leads to him having to obtain copies from the local supermarket, to meet consumer requirements.

RS went on to report that recently, this week received 6 wet unsaleable magazines at the bottom of the tote box.

**9. Report on Complaints Resolved Via PDF Help Line**

9.1 The PDRP Administrator reported that all the complaints handled by the PDRP Help Line are conducted in the nature of a Stage 2 Customer Complaint; she informed the panel that there had been:

29 complaints received

	Stage 2	Stage 3	Other	Total
Smith's News	7	1	0	8
Menzies	4	1	0	5
NPA	1	0	0	1

Breached of Standards – 33 Breaches

T&C	DT	O&S	SBR	RM	Invoice	VP	CS
2	8	3	0	0	5	2	2

## 10. Any Other Business

- 10.1 The panel recalled that MW had sent an email to the last meeting in November concerning the issue of 'when is a retail complaint not a formal PDC complaint'. There is a follow on from RG that retailer's phone the contact centre and the complaint is being lost 'amongst the fog', and fails to resurface or be resolved. NR had followed up by suggesting that wholesaler training in relation to the PDC and its complaint process was required. This was endorsed by DS.

DS responded that he had followed this through and emphasised that when retailers get to this situation, Customer Service should be offering/ referring the retailer to the PDC Stage 2 process and either advise them of the Customer Service Pledge or refer them to the PDF Helpline 0843 289 3967.

Over the Christmas period the personnel running MD's customer services, DS and Fiona who runs the London centre, had held a discussion on how to merge MD's complaints process, working on a methodology of, if a retailer has called three times, this person should automatically be offered the transfer to the PDF. Fiona has taken this away and is due to come back to DS.

DD states that SN is comfortable in the belief that everyone within SN customer service knows the PDC process as it has carried out a lot of work on training whilst reviewing their centralisation of the complaint process.

The Chairman asked wholesale representatives if they considered there is a need to launch a campaign for better training and if there is a need for the PDRP to supply a standard sheet detailing the process that should be used at the call centre when dealing with a complaint?

MD responded that it is taking the necessary steps within to remedy this situation, and SN is comfortable with its process.

SN has an IT development, whereby, if there is a retailer upset, the manager can be alerted and a follow up letter is generated to the retailer.

DD also produces a weekly report to the SN on all forms which have been issued.

Twice a month there is an hour training session.

- 10.2 DD stated that recently there have been two occasions where SN has received retailer complaints re late titles and upon investigation it was confirmed the issues were with the publisher and not the wholesaler.

SN has had to amend its data statistics to record the complaint against the publisher advise the retailer that the complaint belongs to the publisher and supplied the retailer with the appropriate publisher contact details.

SN sought confirmation of the preferred process when referring retailers along the supply chain.

BA suggested that the wholesaler should scan all the appropriate paperwork and email it through to the publisher; this was agreed as the most suitable process.

#### 11. Dates for Meetings 2014

- 08/05/2014          2pm    Blue Fin Building
- 04/09/2014          2pm    Blue Fin Building
- 27/11/2014          2pm    Blue Fin Building

Meeting closed at 16.05pm with thanks to the Chairman.

#### Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held on Thursday 8<sup>th</sup> May 2014 at 14:00 at the Marketforce Offices – Blue Fin Building.

#### MEETING –30 January 2014 SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

<b>Item</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>By Whom</b>
<b>3.1</b>	Copies of Stage 2 complaints to be forwarded to the PDF Administrator when the complaint is escalated to Stage 3	<b>MD/SN/NPA/ PPA/DK</b>
<b>4.5</b>	Forward a copy of MDL 'Customer Service Pledge' to DD SN and NR	<b>DS</b>
<b>4.5</b>	BA to take the claim limit of £30 pay out to NPA for discussion.	<b>BA</b>
<b>4.8</b>	NPA/SN/MD to forward their reviewed restitution offer to DK for onward distribution to the panel.	<b>MD/SN/NPA/ DK</b>
<b>6.1</b>	BA to speak with NI re receiving Statistics Data on time and to differentiate between publisher and distributor claims.	<b>BA</b>