# The Big Writing Issue

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News that the iconic charity magazine Big Issue is celebrating its 20th anniversary this week by re-inventing itself with the help of some bold new ideas, may ring warning bells across editorial departments.

The revelation that Big Issue founder John Bird plans to re-train some 100 Big Issue sellers as journalists could be seen either as a worrying trend for the future of journalism or alternatively as a brave and far-sighted move to modernise this ageing publication. You decide.

These vendors-turned-hacks will be working out on the streets, finding and writing the stories they sell. They will be issued with the techie tools they need including smartphones, and then set up with blogs and paid a monthly fee for their services.

Although the Big Issue circulation spreads across UK cities and to eight other countries, sales had slumped following recent riots and Bird decided to give his baby a technological re-vamp.

Now plans include launching a new London edition in October, followed by a string of more locally focussed editions around the country, fueled by words from his new army of news-gatherers.

There’s no doubt the art of communicating effectively and engaging meaningfully with large audiences has changed beyond all recognition since this magazine first appeared on London streets two decades ago.

Back then the printed word was all-powerful and all-important, but how times have changed. Now the printed word is prey to the pressures of an avalanche of instantly-accessed alternatives on our screens, so Bird needed to do something to bring his magazine into the 21st century.

In this brave new world it seems everyone can be a writer and can instantly communicate - after all who isn't capable of stringing 140 words together and tweeting them out instantly to millions? But the bigger question remains: is the skill of writing well-written copy for the printed page, which was always the province of trained journalists, destined to become a thing of the past?

Tags: big issue , journalist , writing