

TRADE UNION  
**COMMUNICATIONS**  
**AWARDS 2008**

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Focus on  
the winners

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## General observations

In 2008 the former Press and PR Awards were relaunched and renamed the Trade Union Communications Awards, again sponsored by the Bank of Scotland. The TUC's aim was to reflect the increasing diversity of union communications and give more scope for unions to show off their activities outside the mainstream of their flagship journals.

We split the electronic communications category into two and created a new category for one-off publications, which also included recruitment and campaigning literature. This allowed the judges to assess entries for 'best campaign' purely on the basis of each campaign's objectives and achievements.

At the same time we asked more searching questions of unions in their support statements. For example: What was the editorial rationale for this publication? How many page visits does your site boast? How much did you spend on this item? This gave the hardworking judges a contextual 'steer' when reaching their decisions.

The standards this year were as high as ever, with unions showing plenty of skill in creating readable and beautiful literature for their members. The judges were impressed that readers' interests were being served, and the best entries had a strong sense of editorial direction and confidence, backed by thoughtful design. From journals to posters, handbooks to newsletters, websites to text messaging, unions are showing huge creativity and a breadth of skills that would be the envy of many other organisations clamouring for their members' attention.

## Judges

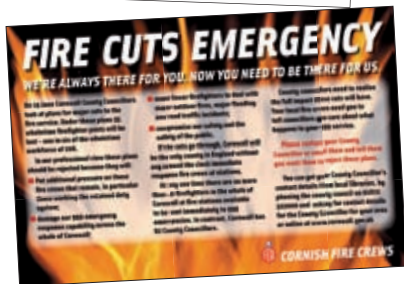
**Martin Shankleman** Employment Correspondent, BBC

**Martin Hearson** Campaigns Coordinator, Labour Behind the Label

**Deborah Summers** Political Editor, *Guardian* website

**Terry Rooney MP**

**Mike Glover** Head of Communications, USDAW



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## Best journal or magazine



↑ WINNER MU



↑ WINNER NUT

This category always produces the most diverse range of offerings and this year was no exception. The judges had much to ponder as they tried to assess everything from text-led A4 newsletters to grandiose full-colour broadsheet newspapers. In every case the challenge was to see whether the publication had intrinsic merit and appeal. In doing so the judges had to imagine themselves as reader members of all the unions – not an easy task!

The first challenge for all editors, as one judge pointed out, is to get readers simply to open the polybag, so front cover appeal is vital. That doesn't always mean a vivid picture or a 144pt headline – sometimes a carefully chosen cover line that has resonance for members is enough. On that point the judges were unanimous – the best entries suggested a strong connection between content and readers' interests and aspirations.

So evidence of carefully researched articles, lively news stories, vibrant letters pages and good advice sections all boosted entries in the judges' estimation. Any whiff of recycled press releases and boring opinion pieces had the opposite effect.

But one dichotomy that judges could not fully resolve led directly to the awarding of joint winner to the **NUT** and **MU**. *Musician* was widely admired for its production values, its advice pages and its appeal to musicians as professionals. Whereas *The Teacher* went less for the professional aspect and more for an appeal to readers as union members. Which best managed the trick of joining up both angles? In the end they were inseparable.

Third place was equally hard to decide, with the FDA, Connect, UNISON, PCS and Nautilus all in with a chance. In the end the **FDA's** *Public Service* pipped the others to the post. Special mention too to Unite's *The Landworker* for its very readable stories and all-round trade union appeal.



↑ COMMENDED FDA

# Best feature



↑ WINNER **FBU**

With clearer guidelines this year on what constitutes a feature, editors submitted well-researched, specially written articles demonstrating good journalism. This was what the judges were really looking for. Plenty of emotional clout and human interest won additional marks all round.

Judges also liked articles that approached complex or contentious issues with more than one viewpoint, so that readers did not feel they were being lectured to. Pull quotes, lively pictures or graphics, mini case studies and side bars all helped, too.

However, marks were lost for repetitive paragraph starts, unexplained terms or jargon, or missed tricks in the story telling (one judge was desperate to find out more about one apparently crucial character who disappeared after a first mention).

Top of the tree was the **FBU**, with its special supplement feature on the Atherstone fire, "A Tangible Sense of Loss", which one judge said was in a class of its own. Running a close second was **Unite** (Amicus) with "Despair of the Outcasts" about Indian call centres using the caste system to discriminate against Dalits. In third came the **FDA** with "Outside the Comfort Zone", which had civil servants telling personal stories of hardship during service in military zones abroad.

Special mentions also for Nautilus and TSSA, who each in their own way looked at the provenance and distribution of consumer goods, with some shocking stats to support their arguments.



↑ HIGHLY COMMENDED **Unite-Amicus**



↑ COMMENDED **FDA**



## Best use of a photo or illustration



↑ WINNER NUJ

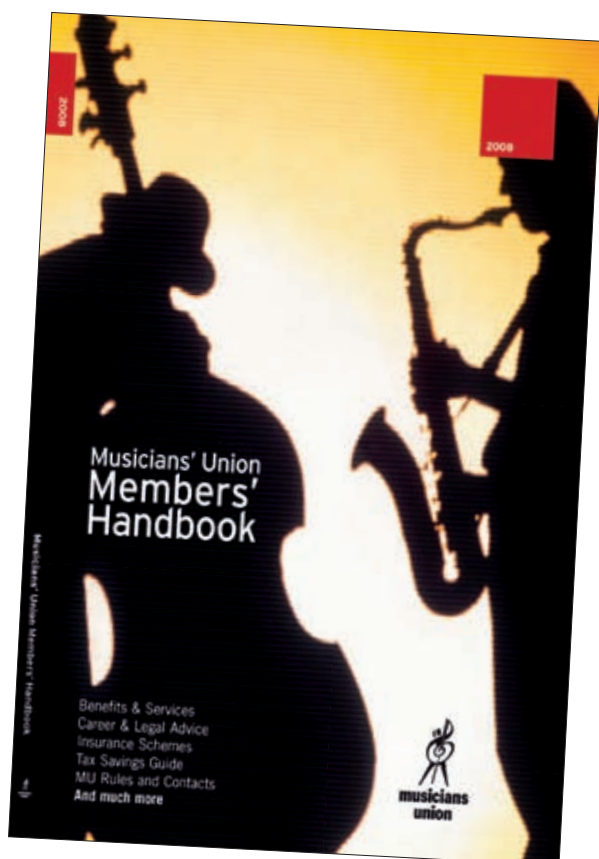


↑ HIGHLY COMMENDED UNISON



↑ COMMENDED MU

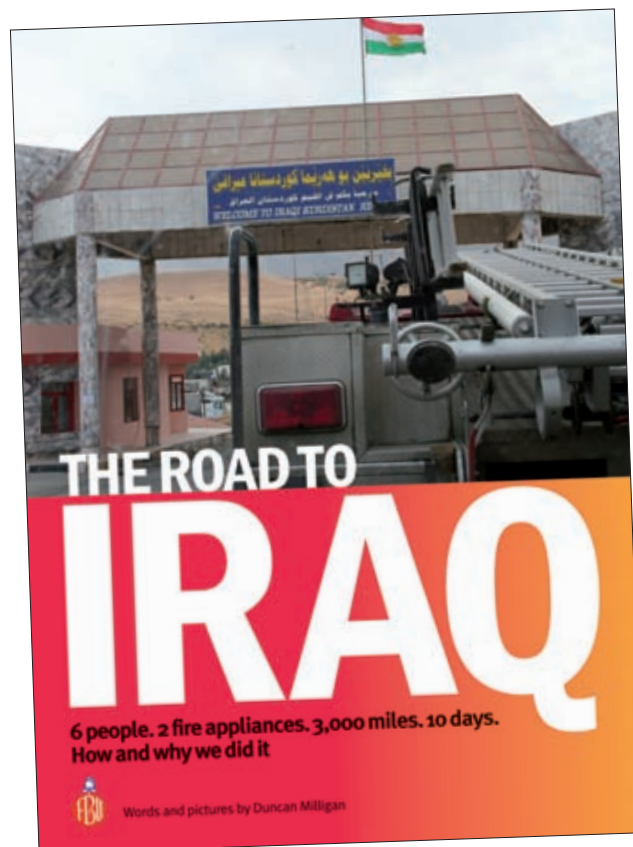
## Best one-off publication



↑ WINNER MU

Another new category this year, bringing together recruitment literature, campaign literature, reports, wall charts, yearbooks and indeed anything that did not meet the test of regular journal. The category was as diverse as one might expect, with judges commenting that it was the most enjoyable, simply because it showed what else unions are doing away from the mainstream of their member magazines.

Deciding on the winners led to an 'apples and pears' discussion about products for professional union members versus products for member-based campaigns. The MU's "brilliant" *Members'*



↑ HIGHLY COMMENDED FBU

*Handbook 2008* led one judge to swoon about its tax pages, whilst by contrast the FBU's specially produced mini-newspaper *The Road to Iraq* about getting fire engines to Iraq and equipping Iraqi firefighters was more stirring trade union fare. Chasing both was PCS with its interesting campaign leaflet *Defend Public Services* on the sale of MoD buildings.

The MU won the day, but special mentions also to Nautilus for its brave attempt to repackaging the traditional annual report, and to Prospect's fine 'greening the workplace' offering.



↑ COMMENDED PCS



## Best campaign



↑ WINNER UNISON

This category always shows off union inventiveness in planning and mounting campaigns. In the past 12 months many unions have run campaigns that have achieved a high public profile and gained considerable media coverage. Some have won concessions or outright victories for their members by influencing employers and government. These were well placed in the competition as for the first time this year entrants were asked to show clear evidence of measurable outcomes. Unions responded well to this raising of the bar.

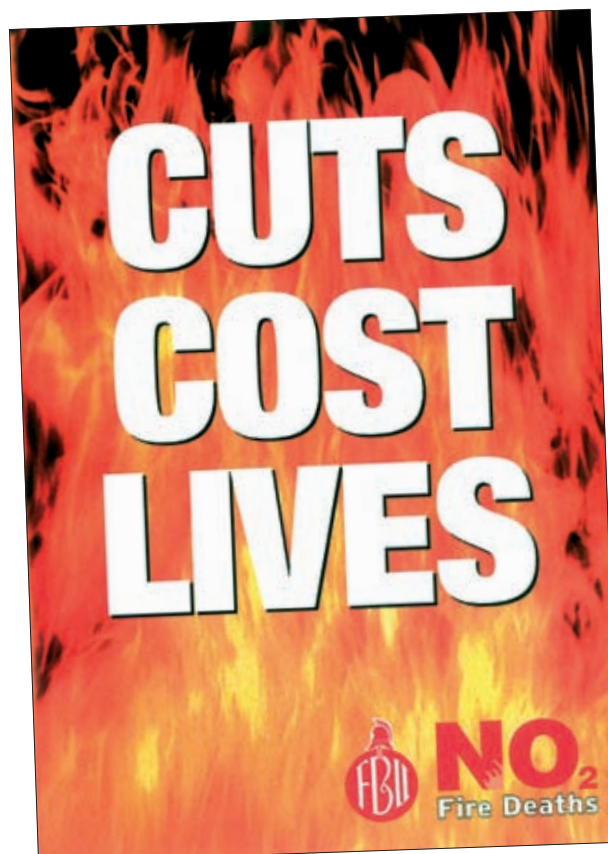
Many picked important issues, ran well planned and effective initiatives and produced some cracking support material. But one judge was in uncompromising mood – unless a campaign had achieved its aim it was marked down.

After much discussion the three in contention were UNISON, PCS and the FBU, with an honourable mention for UCU whose ESOL campaign was also strong.

**UNISON's** big-spend recruitment campaign Strong Yet Caring seems to have paid off: the judges gave it first place for imagination, great concept and great materials, marred only by what seemed to be anecdotal claims of success. **PCS** came in second for its Make Your Vote Count campaign which drew a strong link between democracy and public service. The **FBU's** local and low budget No Fire Service Cuts was a worthy third, targeting local and regional media to stop cuts to Cornwall's fire service.



↑ HIGHLY COMMENDED PCS



↑ COMMENDED FBU

## Best website



↑ WINNER **MU**

This year websites were split away from e-comms to mirror the best journal/magazine print category. But the number of entries was low, which judges found odd given that it must be one of the easiest to enter. Perhaps the request for user stats put people off? No matter, those that did enter won praise for their design, accessibility, high quality content and functionality – all the things visitors look for in a good website.

Inevitably no single site managed top marks for all these: UCU



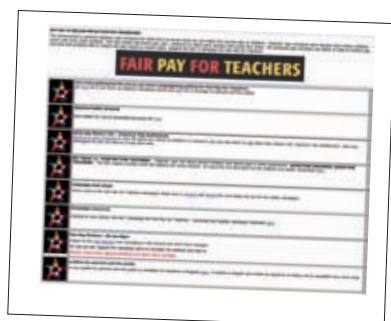
↑ HIGHLY COMMENDED **UCU**



↑ COMMENDED **NUM**

showed good design but underdeveloped database facilities; the NUT had a great pay calculator but the overall site was too heavily populated; and UNISON's entry, though a great conference mini-site, was not the union's main website. Ultimately, the **MU** stormed into the lead with top-class directions for members, good choices of categories and a fine legal advice section, especially on contracts. The **UCU** was awarded second and the **NUM**, with its labour history archive feel and great functionality, came in third.

## Best use of electronic communication



↑ WINNER **NUT**



↑ HIGHLY COMMENDED **UNISON**



↑ COMMENDED **FBU**



↑ COMMENDED **PCS**

This category concentrated for the first time solely on any union e-communication other than a union's main website and thus mirrored the 'best one-off publication' category for print. The entries showed that unions are not slow to ride the digital wave and try out new ways of reaching members. But the judges asked unions to take a step back and ask themselves about the added value in choosing electronic as a delivery method. For example, if you offer people a magazine as a PDF is it necessarily better than mailing them a printed one? If you offer a video message streamed from a site will you know how many members are watching? Also one judge was keen that unions should do more to harness the interactive power of blogging.

The four winners' offerings were all very different: a micro-site; a video facility; an e-newsletter packed with links; and a text message-based audit of striking members. The **NUT** came out top with their big budget micro-site Fair Pay for Teachers that really did push people into engaging with the issue. A close second was **UNISON's** e-focus newsletter; and third equal were **FBU Tube** (great name!) with members talking frankly about their experiences and **PCS's** text messaging system to aggregate numbers of striking members and scotch Department for Work and Pensions claims of low turnout.