

SPONSORED SUPPLEMENTS – Editorial guidelines (September 2007)

The Guardian and Observer produce a variety of supplements sponsored by third parties. These supplements are a valued source of revenue and allow us to explore in more depth than editorial budgets would otherwise allow topics that we hope are of interest to readers. It is vital, however, that everyone involved in the process — from clients to commercial teams, journalists, interviewees and most importantly the readers — clearly understands the nature of the product.

Key to this understanding is the visual presentation of supplements, which should reflect the terms of the relationship with the sponsor, making it clear how the content has been commissioned and produced, by whom it has been financed and under what rules. Editorial integrity also requires adherence to a set of principles and measures from conceptualisation through to sign-off. These guidelines are designed to ensure that this happens. They apply to commercially driven supplements endorsed by the Guardian/Observer, not to editorial-led supplements (see endnote), or to advertisement products that are not endorsed by our newspapers.

Commercially driven supplements endorsed by the Guardian/Observer

Commercially driven supplements originate from an approach by the sponsor or an idea from Guardian News & Media's commercial divisions. This type of supplement — edited and written by Guardian/Observer journalists (or those appointed by us) to the same standards expected for the regular newspaper — aims to stimulate interest and debate around a subject defined by the sponsor, while satisfying Guardian editorial values and readers' expectations. In this sense the supplement is "endorsed" by the Guardian.

Concept stage: Before a sponsored supplement is agreed with a client, the relevant GNM commercial team should present the proposal to the special supplements editor or relevant section editor. If necessary the editor may refer the concept to a wider editorial group or upwards for discussion.

The special supplements editor may accept, refuse, or request that conditions (extra but not contrary to these guidelines) be attached to, the supplement.

Once a supplement is agreed, the special supplements editor, and where necessary the section editor, is responsible for appointing a commissioning editor.

The synopsis will be sent to the client for feedback. The commissioning editor can then discuss the feedback with the sponsor and if necessary draft a revised version incorporating any suggestions that he/she thinks appropriate and consistent with Guardian/Observer editorial values.

Once the synopsis is agreed — and before writers have been commissioned — it should be presented to the special supplements editor or section editor for approval. Questions of fairness and balance should be addressed and finalised at this stage.

The commissioning editor will not be subject to pressure to revise content once writers have been commissioned. The commissioning editor has no obligation to show copy to the sponsor until it reaches the proof stage, at which point the sponsor may check for factual errors and to ensure the brief has been correctly executed.

The commissioning editor must remain impartial: he or she may contribute articles and/or an introduction to the supplement, but not an editorial column.

Everyone asked to write for a supplement should be told what they're contributing to and who is sponsoring it. But the commissioning editor must emphasize to all writers that their journalism should be unchanged by the fact that a third party is sponsoring the supplement. This is not advertorial.

Writers: Commissioned writers should go about their work exactly as they would for any article for the newspaper — in the clear understanding that the sponsor cannot interfere with the tone or content of their work.

Where appropriate, writers should tell those they interview that the article is for a sponsored supplement.

Sponsors: A company or organisation is sponsoring a Guardian/Observer supplement in which they are partner. This is not the same as paying for an advertising insert.

The sponsor will have input into the planning (ie synopsis) for the supplement; they will be able to suggest themes, angles and information that they would like to see highlighted; recommend experts for interview; and request certain information be included. The commissioning editor will consider all such suggestions but is not obliged to accept any.

A sponsor cannot say which journalists should or should not be commissioned to write for the supplement.

Sponsors are free to discuss and negotiate a synopsis with the commissioning editor. The aim should be to arrive at an outline with which both parties are happy. If the sponsor and commissioning editor cannot agree, the supplement cannot go ahead. In cases of dispute, the final decision rests with the editor of the Guardian or Observer, as appropriate.

Sponsors are asked to respect the inclusion in the supplement of dissenting voices or competitor activities. Balance is an editorial requirement and produces a more satisfying and informative read.

Once the synopsis has been agreed the commissioning editor or writer may call on a sponsor's expertise in the subject area, but sponsors will not be involved in the commissioning of the supplement or seek to direct a journalist's article. Neither should they expect to view content until the proofing stage — at which point they can check only that the synopsis has been executed and for factual errors. The commissioning editor is under no obligation to accede to any other requests for changes to text, photos or layout unless he/she is convinced on editorial grounds that the suggestions will improve comprehension.

Design (supplements sitting within the Guardian's G3 branded sections)

Our usual fonts and furniture conventions can be used but the layout of the supplement must be distinct from the main G3 (eg Media, Education, Society) sections. To this end the sponsor's logo and the words: “[special report] in association with [name of sponsor]” should appear in the masthead at the top of the front page. Alterations necessary to accommodate multiple logos should respect the spirit of the above. G3 logos should not appear in the masthead.

Space should also be provided on the front page for an explainer, which will include the following information:

Editor: [commissioning editor]

Produced for [eg Guardian Professional, a commercial division of Guardian News and Media], to a brief agreed with [sponsor].

Paid for by [name of sponsor]

Contact: details

All editorial content commissioned by the Guardian.

For information on supplements visit:
guardian.co.uk/supp-guidelines

Design (other sponsored supplements)

Supplements not closely aligned with the G3 brand, such as those produced by Guardian Plus (eg travel supplements), are typically created to a distinct template that looks unlike any other regular part of the paper. The client logos should appear at the top of the front page whenever possible (in the case of multiple logos, design may dictate they sit elsewhere on the page but the commercial association should be made clear at the top) alongside a form of words as follows: Special report in association with [name of sponsor(s)]. Space should also be provided on page 1 or 2 for an explainer, which will include information as described in the box above.

Wider presentation of supplements

When sponsored supplements are promoted inside the paper, the wording of the advert should make clear the commercial dimension. We should refer to “a supplement” rather than “our supplement”, unless the sponsorship is made explicit. An appropriate sentence might read: “Find out in our special supplement, sponsored by Think 07, in Wednesday's Guardian.”

ENDNOTE: Editorially led supplements

Editorially led supplements originate within Guardian/Observer editorial and may or may not be sponsored. In cases where sponsorship is present, the sponsor has no input into the editorial process. Such supplements will be branded as “**sponsored by**” and will feature the sponsor's name and logo at the foot of the front page (or as appropriate to the design) and — along with any production/contact information — a line saying “**all editorial independent of the sponsor**”.