



The Big Issue South West Case Study

The Big Issue Southwest is a social business dedicated to creating opportunities for homeless people to earn an income and participate in society through selling The Big Issue South West magazine. Vendors buy the magazine from us for 75p and sell it to the public for £1.50p. We operate with business principles but also have a social mission to provide working opportunities to our vendors; our business mission is to create a profit that is used to improve the product we sell to our vendors.

Founded in London in 1991 by Gordon Roddick and John Bird with start-up funding from the Body Shop Foundation, The Big Issue South West published its first edition in November 1993. Its administrative headquarters are in Brunswick Square, Bristol and our largest regional distribution office is based on Stokes Croft. We have 8 full time members of staff, and 4 part-time. Today The Big Issue is also an international entity, existing in Australia, Japan, South Africa, Namibia and Kenya.



As a social business, we benefit greatly from Bristol’s established networks within both the social and private sector. We work alongside a range of agencies that are effectively tackling the issues surrounding homelessness, and we have a strong connection with the local police and council. We currently have a work placement scheme for trainee police officers, gaining experience of working with homeless people in Bristol.

A large portion of our advertising revenue is sourced from the Bristol area and we have links with a number of businesses with a regional base in the city.

Big Issue staff from across the region recently worked with Zurich in Bristol to develop an advanced sales training package for all homeless vendors, organised through the Zurich Skillshare scheme.

“Bristol’s reputation as a centre for both retail and the arts is a big draw for our business. Combined with this, the high level of social awareness among the local community means that our sales in Bristol are higher than anywhere else in the region.” Emma Kernahan, Area Manager, Big Issue Southwest

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