



**British  
Geological Survey**

NATURAL ENVIRONMENT RESEARCH COUNCIL

Applied geoscience for our  
changing Earth

# Working with your press office

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# Working with your press office

- Comms experience
- Why should you engage with the media
- How to tell if your research is newsworthy
- What been making the news for BGS
- Images and key messages
- The BGS comms team and their advice
- What works well at BGS
- What happens when a big story breaks
- Handy reference
- Key take home messages



# How I got into comms...

- Industrial minerals geologist with 23 years at BGS, mainly overseas (Africa, Middle East, Afghanistan...)
- As an applied scientist I've been explaining myself to clients/ funders for years (& they still give me money!)
- My involvement with BGS comms began in 2007, back when Marie Cowan (GSNI) was in charge...



# Why engage with the media?

- Introducing new scientific discoveries, technology and methods to the world
- Raising the profile of your research team, organisation and funding agency
- Providing clear, scientific ‘thought leadership’ for sensitive issues e.g. CCS, fracking etc...
- Information for local communities
- Demonstrate the value of science and why funding, in these difficult times, is needed





# So you think its *newsworthy*...?

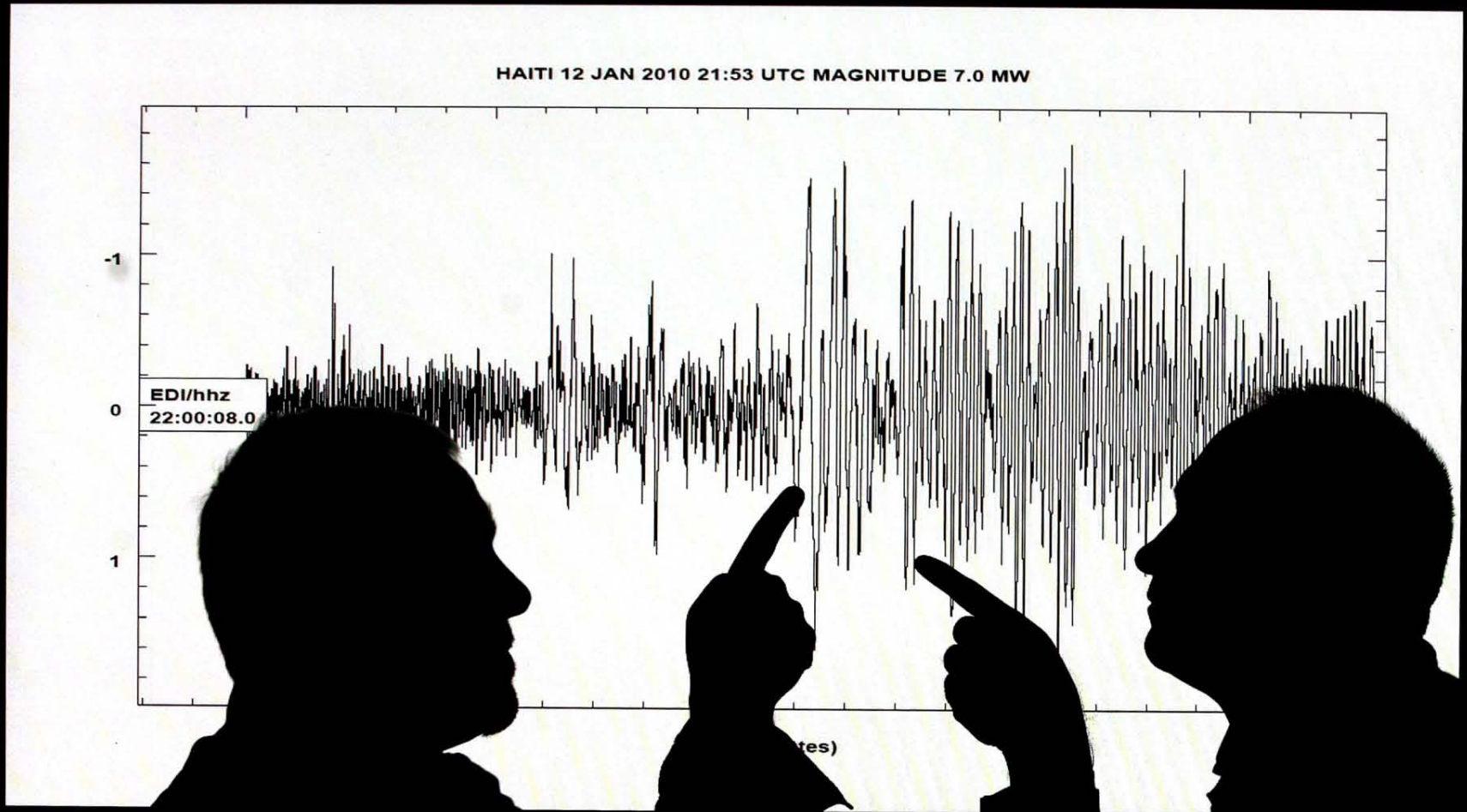
- Remember news is – new, unusual, interesting -  
apply this test to your own research and ask :  
*How would this affect people?*  
*Would anyone else be interested?*  
*Is it all just a big ‘So what?’*
- Issues that affect large numbers of people generally attract media interest e.g. earthquakes, volcanic eruptions & groundwater shortages
- Other factors include: human interest, connection to current news, links to famous people/ events, superlatives etc...



# BGS news – our top ten in 2012

1. Earthquakes (1418)
2. Darwin fossils (657)
3. Critical minerals and mineral resources (525)
4. African groundwater maps (477)
5. Shale gas and fracking (439)
6. Oil and gas (237)
7. Uranium chronology (46)
8. Space weather and geomagnetism (40)
9. Climate change (16)
10. Volcanic eruptions and ash (6)
10. Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS) (6)





**BGS seismologists interpret the Haiti earthquake, 12<sup>th</sup> January 2010**

# Going up - Elevator pitch



- Can you explain your science, using layman's terms, in the short time spent in an elevator?
- This is good practice for media interviews – you have 30 seconds ... harder than it sounds!
- Every scientist should be able to explain their scientific research to any audience, practice this on me in the coffee break!

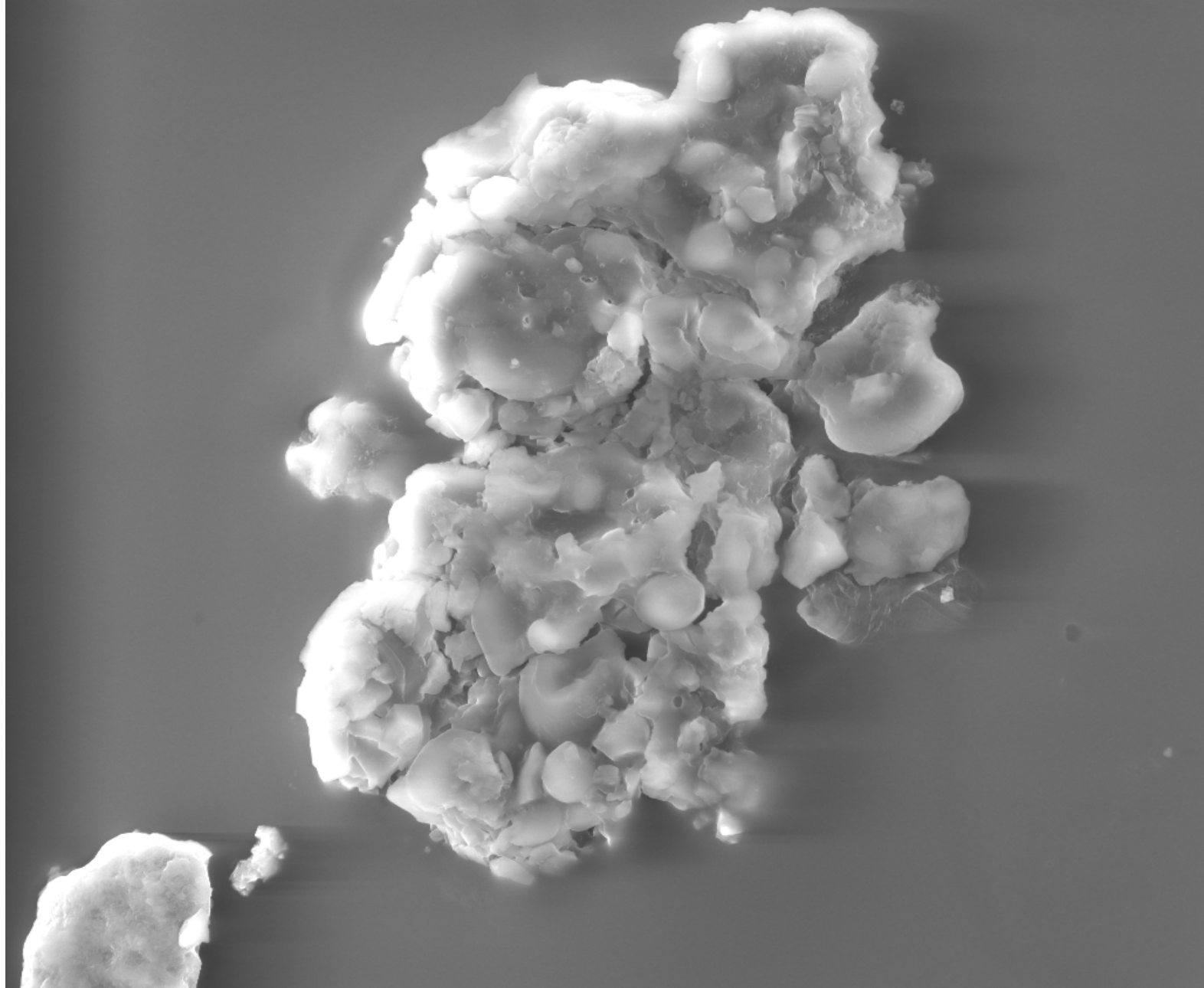




# A picture speaks a thousand words



**Volcanic ash plume from the eruption of the Eyjafjallajökull volcano, Iceland, April 2010**



**Volcanic ash particle from the eruption of the Eyjafjallajökull volcano, Iceland, April 2010**

British Geological Survey © NERC

50  $\mu\text{m}$

Iceland Volcanic Ash Particulate

# Key messages

- Most important 'take home' messages for your work
- Listen to a politician the next time they are on TV, those repeated words/ phrases are the key messages
- Key messages for BGS :

*A world-leading geoscience centre for:*

- *Survey and monitoring*
- *Modelling and research*
- *Data and knowledge*





# BGS Comms team

- The BGS Comms team is responsible for the BGS press office, web content & outreach
- The press office aims to create the maximum impact for BGS science via the media
- We do this with press releases, press conferences & briefings, media interviews, web content, social media and videos





# BGS comms team advice.....

- Work with your press office
- Interviews – be available, take your press officer, don't forget to breathe, don't look at the camera and be yourself
- Stick to what you know, keep it short and simple, (avoid jargon) and spell out your organisation name in full, repeat it and check it is credited correctly



# To tweet or not to tweet?

- Whether or not to use social media is a dilemma - banning its use is not a solution, it's a missed opportunity
- In my opinion, its fine but remember to moderate your choice of words to suit a wider audience
- Practice this four word social media policy:

*Act Like A Grownup*

*and follow me on Twitter! @CliveBGS*



# What works well for the BGS

- **Press officers with a science background** – we understand our scientists and work well together
- **Web content** – our web editor creates web pages for every ‘story’ and continually updates them
- **Exclusives** – BBC or broadsheet news papers
- **British Science Festival** – BGS events at the BSF have had great media coverage for last 5 years







**LIVE INTERVIEW:** Nick Higham interviewing Andrew Bloodworth at BSF 2011



# When a big story breaks...

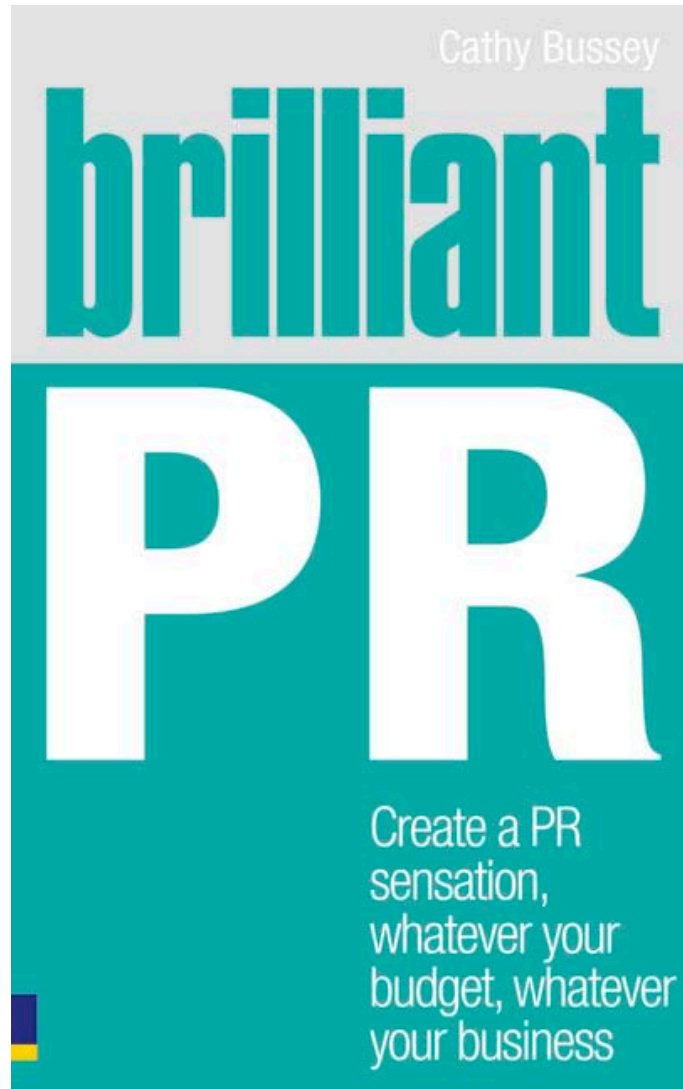
- Twitter is often first to tell us a story is breaking, usually an earthquake
- Next the phone starts ringing off the hook, typically starting mid-morning & slows down mid-afternoon
- All day it's a scramble to find scientists (& get them to talk), keep track and cover all requests
- Email alerts from our online monitoring service start piling up in my inbox
- Often it lasts for several days gradually tailing off



# How to keep track....

- We don't use a newspaper clipping service, we use the online monitoring service, **Meltwater** (relatively expensive), in the past we have also used **Vocus**
- You can set up your own free media monitoring using **Google Alerts** ([www.google.com/alerts](http://www.google.com/alerts)) – for example, my query for “space weather” found 10 hits on 10<sup>th</sup> May including the Washington Post (blog) and the Christian Science Monitor

# References



Most of what I have told you (and much more) is covered in this book :

‘Brilliant PR’

by Cathy Bussey

(deputy editor of **PR**Week magazine, which we also subscribe to )



# Key take home messages...

- Science stories have to be interesting
- Stick to what you know
- Be brave, take the plunge, its worthwhile and fun!



# Thank you for your attention



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