



Information Policy & Compliance
bbc.co.uk/foi

Alfred Hermida
c/o request-279-76775eff@whatdotheyknow.com

7 May 2008

Dear Mr Hermida,

Freedom of Information Act 2000 – RFI20080443

Thank you for your request under the Freedom of Information Act ('the Act') of 24 April 2008, requesting the following information:

'Could you tell me how much the BBC has made in revenue since it started accepting advertising on the international version of the BBC News website - news.bbc.co.uk'

The reference number for your request is RFI20080443. We have taken your request as referring to bbc.com rather than bbc.co.uk (which does not carry advertising).

By way of context, the bbc.com website is a business of BBC Worldwide Limited ('BBC Worldwide'). BBC Worldwide is a private limited company which is legally separate from the BBC and is not subject to the Freedom of Information Act by virtue of section 6(1)(b)(ii) of the Act. Any information held solely by BBC Worldwide is not therefore covered by the Act and will not be disclosed to you by the BBC.

Where any information you request is held by the BBC, it therefore falls within the scope of the Act. In accordance with section 1(1) of the Act, the BBC confirms information relating to bbc.com is held by the BBC. However, the BBC will not be providing you with this information as we consider it to be exempt under section 43(2) of the Act. This is because disclosure would be likely to prejudice the commercial interests of both the BBC and BBC Worldwide Limited. The BBC believes that release is likely to prejudice BBC Worldwide's relationships in the future with existing and potential advertisers which would adversely impact upon the future revenues/profit of the bbc.com business. This is likely to prejudice the commercial interests of BBC Worldwide and the BBC because less profit from



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bbc.com would reduce BBC Worldwide's annual total profit and, consequently, the dividend paid to its shareholder the BBC.

BBC Worldwide must compete fairly in a competitive market and it is not appropriate to release commercially sensitive information that could be used by competitors to the possible prejudice of BBC Worldwide and its shareholder, the BBC.

As section 43 is a qualified exemption, in accordance with section 2(2) of the Act, we have considered the public interest factors in this case. Specifically, whether in all the circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

In favour of disclosure, we recognised that there is a public interest in the following:

- That there is a general public interest in disclosing information the BBC itself holds that indicates the BBC's commercial activities are conducted in an appropriate manner. In addition, we note the fact that the advertising funded business model for bbc.com is a matter of public interest to some licence fee payers in the United Kingdom. To this end we note that the public interest is met by the publication of the BBC Worldwide annual report and accounts for the year ended 31st March 2008 during summer 2008. These accounts will provide public information on the bbc.com business as part of the BBC Worldwide group. The annual report is available to any member of the public on request and the statutory accounts are filed at Companies House in Cardiff and are available to the public.

On the other hand, in considering factors that might weigh in favour of the public interest in withholding, we took into account:

- That it is in the public interest that the BBC has full and proper information in order to make robust decisions regarding its commercial activities. Disclosure of the information would make it less likely that BBC Worldwide Limited and other companies who may be involved in this venture would provide the BBC with commercially sensitive information in the future and that this would consequently severely undermine the BBC's ability to take those decisions.
- That advertising on bbc.com will generate significant funds for reinvestment into the BBC which is clearly in the interest of the UK licence fee paying public. It is also in the public interest that this opportunity is not jeopardised by releasing commercially sensitive information.

I am satisfied, in terms of section 2 of the Act, that in all the circumstances of this case, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

Appeal Rights

If you are not satisfied with this response you have the right to an internal review by a BBC senior manager. Please contact us at the address above, explaining what you would like us to review and including your reference number. If you are not satisfied with the internal review, you can appeal to the Information Commissioner. The contact details are: Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 5AF, telephone 01 625 545 700 or see www.informationcommissioner.gov.uk

Yours sincerely,

Lorraine Blair
Assistant Company Secretary, BBC Worldwide Ltd