



European Association of Geochemistry

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GOLDSCHMIDT2013: A MEDIA HIT

The Florence 2013 Goldschmidt Conference was marked by a major effort to reach out to the world's media to promote our research. It was a big success, but like many conference-related matters, this result required careful planning over the preceding months.

The media primarily want to know what new work is being presented at a conference. The different session chairs and subject experts first identified, from over 4300 abstracts, those that might have some press potential. The Goldschmidt media committee, chaired by EAG Vice President Liane Benning, selected 20 of these abstracts. After consultation with CampusPR, a UK-based science media company, the selection was reduced to 10 abstracts that both represented top-quality science and were attractive to the media. To achieve as wide a media reach as possible, CampusPR interviewed the lead authors of these abstracts and wrote draft press releases for each. I came on board, as Goldschmidt press officer, to work with Abigail Chard at CampusPR and distribute the press releases internationally.

Abigail's job was difficult. She had to turn the research into understandable science without over-simplification or over-dramatisation. As the work went on, it became obvious that some of the science being presented would not make it to the final press release stage. There can be many reasons for this. Some authors might be concerned that the media will take things out of context or take them out of their area of expertise. More than one author was worried about whether advance publicity might put a subsequent publication at risk. Or it may simply be that as the work is explained it becomes less newsworthy than was originally thought. These are all valid reasons not to proceed, and we set it as a rule that no press release would be issued unless all parties were happy with the final version. Eventually we arrived at a final five:

- Bacteria supplemented their diet to clean up after the Deepwater Horizon oil spill
- We may all be Martians – new research supports the theory that life started on Mars
- Research suggests terror bird's beak was worse than its bite
- Harmful particles in Icelandic volcanic ash fell first, says new research
- Chelyabinsk meteorite had a previous collision or near miss

Goldschmidt is an international conference, so our audience is international. This means that we need to reach the science journalists at their desks in London, Rome or San Francisco, as well as the journalist who comes to the congress. In fact, we considered staging an advance press conference in London, where there is a whole raft of specialist journalists, but logistics and time eventually worked against us. We did hold a small press conference in Florence for attending journalists, but most of our press releases were distributed via agencies and e-mail. Simon Redfern from Cambridge had just finished a media scholarship at the BBC, and his contacts and insight were also invaluable.

It's fair to say we had great success, much more than I had anticipated. Steven Benner's work on the evolution of early life on Mars went global, with reports in many languages and in many top-rank media outlets, such as the *Los Angeles Times*, Reuters, *New Scientist*, all the main UK papers, French and Italian news agencies, and so on. Perhaps the highlight was Steve's live appearance on BBC Radio's *Today* show, which is the top news outlet in the entire BBC. Some of the other stories also achieved great international coverage, but the good thing is that they were all firmly grounded in geochemistry.



Steven Benner in conversation with John Humphrys, presenter on the BBC Radio 4 *Today* programme. IMAGE COURTESY OF SIMON REDFERN

In summary, I'd say that we had some good stories, well-written press releases, and authors who were happy to work with us (we can't thank them enough for that). You also have to be lucky: a big story elsewhere can relegate your work to a footnote. But in the end we can be very pleased with the way it went: we learned a lot from Florence, and we have set ourselves a high standard for future Goldschmidt conferences.

Tom Parkhill, Goldschmidt Press Office

If you want to talk to Tom Parkhill about any aspect of dealing with the media at Goldschmidt, e-mail him at tom@parkhill.it. A full report on Goldschmidt2013 will be available in the next issue of *Elements*.

WHY NOT JOIN EAG OR RENEW YOUR MEMBERSHIP, AND FORGET ABOUT IT FOR A FEW YEARS?

As the end of the year is approaching, you are probably starting to receive reminders about renewing your membership. We would like to summarize why it is in your interest to renew your membership or to join the EAG:

For 25 euros or, if you're a student, 15 euros:

- you benefit from reduced registration fees at Goldschmidt2014
- you receive 6 printed issues of *Elements* plus online access to all back issues
- you receive 4 printed issues of *Geochemical Perspectives* plus online access to all back issues
- you benefit from reduced subscription rates for *Chemical Geology* and *Geofluids*
- you can request sponsorship for short courses your institution may organize

And to save you from having to renew your membership every year, we propose multi-year memberships with a discount: **professionals can take a 5-year membership for 100 euros, and students can take a 3-year membership for 35 euros.**

Think about it, just once: a professional taking a 5-year membership now receives reduced registration fees for all Goldschmidt conferences until 2018, 30 issues of *Elements*, and 20 issues of *Geochemical Perspectives* (plus online access to all back issues of those publications), and that person will not receive a reminder from the EAG for another five years.

So if you think this offer is worth it, please go to www.eag.eu.com/membership.

