



Hub of talent goes beyond the Beatles

A growing cluster of world-class activities builds on a long tradition of success, writes Andrew Bounds

The north-west of England stands on the cusp of a revolution in the digital and creative industries.

It already has the country's second largest cluster of media and advertising businesses outside London and the south-east.

The BBC's arrival next year at MediaCityUK, a £150m project in Salford, could transform the region. Already more than 300,000 people work in the region, which generates £18bn of added value and accounts for some 16 per cent of the region's economy.

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Europe's 2nd largest media hub

World centre for computer games development

New home for 5 BBC departments

Programmes exported to over 150 countries

World's most advanced broadcasting centre

because of its expanding creative, digital and media sector and competitive offer in talent costs.

The agency will have 15 employees in the city and is using contacts within local universities such as Salford and Manchester to recruit graduates. It is also looking to bring in front-end web developers and account managers from the private sector.

However, the new digital age poses a challenge. Big advertising agencies are centralising their operations as part of cost-cutting and restructuring.

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A cast of thousands generating millions

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legacy businesses face a bigger challenge in many ways than the smaller, similar north-west companies.

"They built up vertically integrated sites that had the scale to get programmes made. Companies here are used to doing little pieces of the process and collaborating with each other. That is going to be the norm."

One example is Love, a marketing agency that is winning national clients such as Unilever and Dr Martens, the footwear company.

It sublets part of its space to the neighbourhood, a younger company that specialises in animation. It also commissions work that Love has allowed its chief illustrator to set up a joint venture with it for his own projects, to encourage him to stay.

"We have attracted staff from Amsterdam and New York as well as London," says Chris Condon, managing director. "It is because of the quality of work we do. At a small agency you get a lot more opportunity."

He says the quality of life attracts many. Companies are rarely more than 30 minutes and stunning countryside less than an hour away from the city centre.

frontally, it is harder to work locally than in London, says Mr Condon. "A lot of staff goes past the door because there is nothing from having a London agency."

Jon Corner of River Media, a digital communications agency in Liverpool, says the quality of education is a challenge, making it hard to find staff.

He says: "They go on media courses but the people teaching them have been out of the game so long they haven't kept up. It's not their fault, it changes so fast. There's no point learning to use a bit of old - we can teach them that. You just want someone with creativity and talent."

Steven Broadhead chief executive of the NWDA, says the agency is aware of the education and skills issue. "The digital and creative sector is a priority for the north-west," he says.

"We must continue to improve the skills in the digital field to ensure that north-west companies and media professionals can take the skills at all levels to exploit the opportunities."

Manchester is home to and away the biggest broadcast centre outside London.

The BBC, operating four local radio stations, is the biggest single employer and its radio presence will nearly double by the arrival of Radio 1XV.

The regional radio market is dominated by the output of the local offshoots of the big three commercial radio groups: Bauer, Global Radio, and the Guardian's GMR Radio.

Bauer's Top of the Pops was launched from a converted, Manchester church in 1964, and this month sees the launch of Gaydio, the UK's first gay radio station.

According to the North-west Regional Development Agency (NWDA), the region's TV and film industries turn out more than 500 productions a year, making up almost 1,500 hours.

Some 4,200 people are employed in the region's TV, cable, and 90-plus independent production companies. ITV and BBC, with about 800 staff each, are the sector's biggest employers, and this number will nearly double by the arrival of Radio 1XV.

The region's growing number of independent production companies includes Manchester's Foot Production, founded by Nicola Schindler, and Lime Pictures in Liverpool, which employs 600 staff.

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MediaCityUK in Salford: even before its impending expansion into the complex, the BBC has had a big local presence, as has ITV

Picture remains bright as BBC gears up for move

Televisual and radio

The biggest cluster outside London has shown its resilience, says William Hall

Manchester has long lived with rivals such as Birmingham and Glasgow, for the title of the UK's second city. But when it comes to TV and radio, there is no dispute.

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capital of the north-west, whose 6.5m population makes it the biggest region in the UK outside London and the south-east.

With a population one third bigger than Scotland, the region is always going to have a demand for local radio and TV.

However, the large population did not prevent the demise of Manchester's long-time role as the main northern output for national newspapers.

The Manchester Guardian, which employs 600 staff.

Granada built a big studio complex in Manchester and the north-west is still known as Granadaland.

Granada made TV programmes in the north for northerners, reflecting northern culture and attitudes.

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Manchester's success was not just based on "northern" programmes, such as Coronation Street, but also on a stream of popular dramas, including *Brief Encounter* and *The Jewel in the Crown*. Its output ranged from successful quiz shows, such as *The Argyton Factor* and *Inter-*

viewing programmes in the north-west, where the 5-acre site is seen as the long-pending chance to do something very special for the media and digital industries - and not just for the north-west and north-east region, but the whole of northern England.

The BBC is transferring a number of large divisions including Radio 1XV, Sports, Schools and Technology to the new site.

This has been set up in 1976 by two former Manchester School students, who worked together at Granada's commercial TV franchise, then with the BBC.

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Watch this space for move by ITV

MediaCityUK

Will Britain's biggest commercial broadcaster follow the BBC into the huge Salford site, asks Ben Benton

There is a large empty space on the banks of the Manchester Ship Canal. It is waiting for ITV.

While all the attention is the huge MediaCityUK development at Salford, Quays has been the presence of the BBC, many local business people are wondering about the absence of the UK's largest commercial broadcaster.

Under new management in London, the BBC will decide whether to move from its 1960s-era studios, home of the Coronation Street set, in the centre of Manchester, the few miles to MediaCity's Salford location.

People close to the company say they came near to a deal earlier in the year, but it is still far from certain that ITV will come.

The BBC at MediaCityUK is not to have them, but it is that the broadcaster's Salford premises offer a funded space out around the city, where the UK's first site co-ordinator.

Peter Salmon, director of BBC North and leader of the corporation's 2,000-strong foray into MediaCity, adds: "I think it would be really desirable for ITV to be there and to be honest I think it would be a lost opportunity for them if they didn't."

"That is a widely held view in the north-west, where the 5-acre site is seen as the long-pending chance to do something very special for the media and digital industries - and not just for the north-west and north-east region, but the whole of northern England."

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