



CIRCUIT 2021

A new series of Circuit: investigative journalism by *Stuff Circuit*.

PROJECT SUMMARY

A further series of in-depth investigations, launching from *Circuit's* track record, to continue to expose, delve, probe, and analyse issues of vital importance to New Zealand society.



PROJECT DESCRIPTION

New Zealand on Air funding for Circuit has enabled us to produce significant investigative journalism in the public interest that we would have been unable to achieve otherwise.

We want to continue that good work and to capitalise on the reputation we have gained, with NZoA's support, for challenging, necessary, groundbreaking journalism, such as that in our most recently published investigation *False Profit*.

Our other investigations broke new ground with *Big Decision*; *Infinite Evil* analysed the far-right site 8chan; *Life + Limb* exposed deaths and injuries of civilians in Afghanistan connected with New Zealand firing ranges; *The Fraudster* revealed how our justice system had abetted a major fraud against the taxpayer, and *Alias* exposed how that fraudster had continued her cons, further costing the taxpayer and making a mockery of parliamentary process.

We need NZ on Air funding in order to continue this complex, rigorous, risk-taking investigative journalism because it's time and resource-intensive - and expensive. But the need for this kind of journalism is now arguably greater than ever.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Through these investigations we have learned, though, that we have previously over-committed in terms of the number of pieces we can reasonably deliver, to the standard we set for ourselves.

For 2021, we propose a series which gives us greater flexibility to match the production to the nature of the story.

We would like this series to comprise a minimum of 90 minutes of programme in total, divided up in whatever way suits the investigation, but an individual episode would be of at least 30 minutes' duration.

For instance, it could be three x 30" pieces, or one x 60" plus one 30".

We have reduced our budget in order to reflect the shorter total minutes.

While the overall duration will be shorter than in previous years, what won't change is our commitment to telling the most important stories in the best way possible, in terms of both the journalism and the production.

FORMAT

90 minutes of investigation comprising:

3 x 30" Or 1 x 60 + 1 x 30"

Or, possibly, 1 x 90, if the investigation is significant enough to warrant that much attention, such as was the case with our landmark NZoA-funded project, *The Valley*.

These investigations will sit inside a new, bespoke website which will also house text analysis and explanation, alongside whatever other mediums we think best suit the story. We have previously experimented with VR for *The Valley*, 360 cameras for *Caught*, and cutting edge digital presentation for *Drug Deals*. In 2021, we aim to make further, more far-reaching innovations.



TREATMENT - Narrative

The experience we have gained over the past four years as *Stuff Circuit* has enabled us to take what we knew from our work in television, and develop it into a style which modernises visual journalism.

We reject the formulaic techniques often deployed in broadcast storytelling.

We work hard to tailor our scripts and writing to achieve the clearest narrative possible, right down to the individual words we use, the style of voiceover and pieces to camera, the way we ask questions in an interview.

We are constantly striving to hone and develop the way we tell our stories, while valuing the fundamentals of investigative journalism: accuracy, verification, corroboration, and a commitment to the responsibility we have to our sources.

TREATMENT - Visual Identity

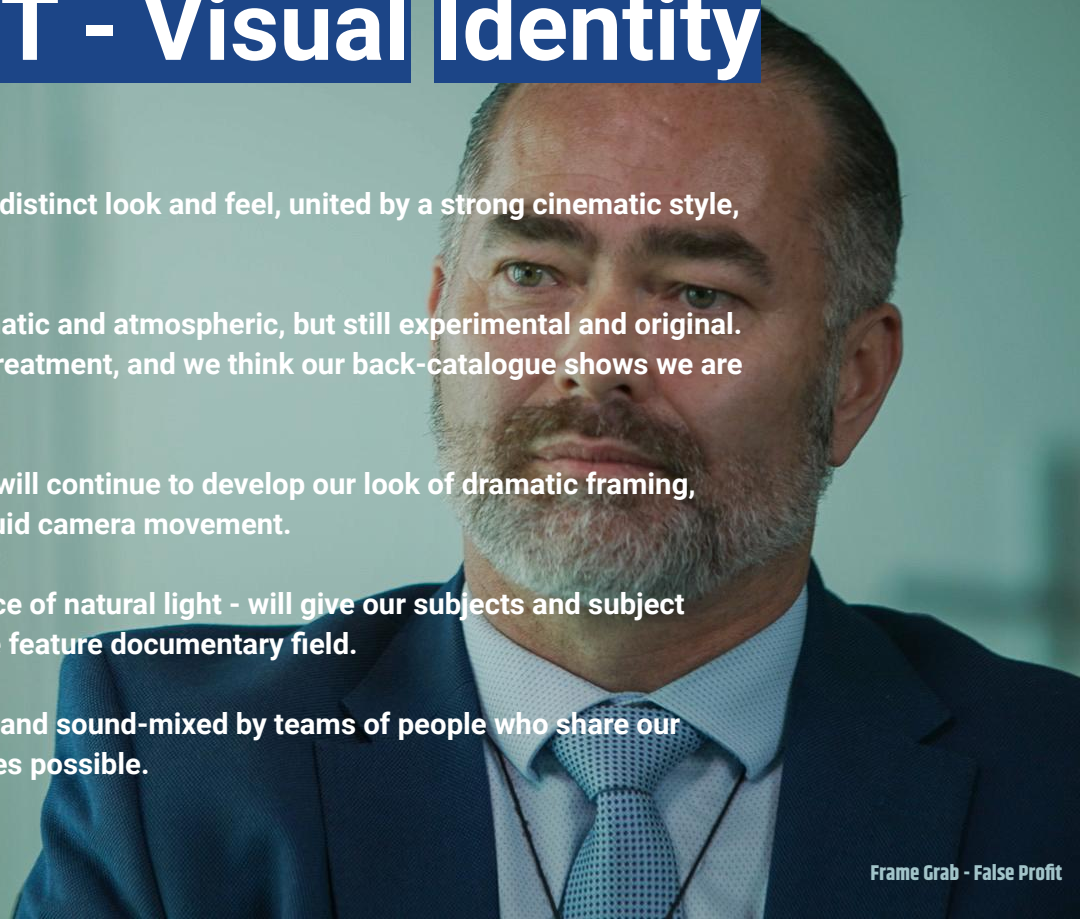
Our six investigations so far have each had a distinct look and feel, united by a strong cinematic style, while also aiming to try new things.

Throughout this series the style will be cinematic and atmospheric, but still experimental and original. We intend to be brave and bold in our visual treatment, and we think our back-catalogue shows we are up to the task.

Camera, editing and overall artistic direction will continue to develop our look of dramatic framing, multiple angles, non-traditional vision, and fluid camera movement.

Use of natural light - or at least the appearance of natural light - will give our subjects and subject matter an authenticity rarely seen outside the feature documentary field.

The stories will continue to be colour-graded and sound-mixed by teams of people who share our interest in delivering the highest quality stories possible.



TREATMENT - Online

We intend to establish a new online destination that maintains a familial link to the premiere *Circuit* series while introducing its own, fresh design that will revive our audience's interest and again present new invitations for engagement.

Interactive and digital designers will continue to work closely with the Stuff Circuit team to tailor a unique online presentation for each of the episodes that further pushes the boundaries of what is possible in storytelling. The design will follow the series' overall visual treatment to ensure the consistent and high-quality experience that we're known for.

Again, each new episode will present new ways to bring the audience back to the previous investigations, so that the series is both cohesive and inherently self-promoting.

WHO WE ARE



Stuff Circuit has an unrivalled record in producing long-form video-led investigative journalism, complemented by striking story art, text news and feature stories, and stand-out photography.

Consultant Executive Producer Terence Taylor will oversee each investigation, bringing a huge depth of current affairs and investigative experience.

Journalist Paula Penfold and Producer Louisa Cleave collaborate to identify and research the stories, strategise the interviews, write the scripts and deliver the best public interest journalism they can.

Editor/Director/Illustrator Toby Longbottom and Cameraman/Illustrator Phil Johnson give *Circuit* its signature look, disrupting the traditional ways of presenting investigative journalism.

PRODUCTION PROCESS

The background of the slide is a close-up, shallow depth-of-field photograph of a wooden workbench. On the workbench, there are several partially assembled LEGO Technic structures. Two prominent structures are white and black, featuring yellow gears and black axles. In the center, there is a small, dark-colored rectangular component, possibly a motor or a sensor. The lighting is warm and focused on the workbench, with the background being out of focus.

Due to the element of unpredictability, given these investigations will be topical, this schedule will be fluid with some aspects overlapping.

There will be no fixed time-slot for publication - it will be on an as-ready basis, but we aim to complete the work within the calendar year.

This schedule outlines the process for 3 x 30" pieces, but would be adapted to reflect a different configuration.

PRODUCTION PROCESS

January - February 2021

Subject identification and research

Identify the first areas for investigation. Analyse and gather background, contacts.

February - March 2021

Story Development

Plan structures/pre-script, design aesthetic for each investigation

January - April 2021

Website development

Design/plan begins for series website

March - April 2021

Pre-production begins

Begin filming first investigation

April - May 2021

Scripting/editing

Transcribe/script/story art/edit

June 2021

Series rollout

Publish investigation one

Begin filming investigation two

July - August 2021

Scripting/editing

Transcribe/script/story art/edit investigation two

September 2021

Publish investigation two

Begin filming investigation three

October - November 2021

Transcribe/script/story art/edit third investigation

December 2021

Publish investigation three



RESEARCH PLAN

Stuff Circuit is home to some of New Zealand's most experienced and recognised investigative journalists, whose work relies upon the quality of their research. When required we can also harness the skills of Stuff journalists throughout the country to augment the work of the *Circuit* team.

The process will vary depending on the nature of each investigation, but generally speaking, will involve:

- Story identification
- Elements identification
- Establish contacts/sources
- Seek other contacts/sources for corroboration
- Pre-interview contacts/sources
- Submit Official Information Act requests where appropriate
- Create spreadsheets to collate data/information
- Collate existing articles/research/statements

CONTRIBUTION TO NZ ON AIR GOALS

Quality:

NZoA funding has allowed *Stuff Circuit* the time and resource required to produce world-leading journalism. We've won awards at the Canon Media Awards, the Voyager Media Awards, the New Zealand Cinematographers' Society awards, the PANPAs, and the International News Media Association (INMA) awards.

Diversity:

We work hard to reflect diversity in story and talent-identification and we consult and engage outside expertise when required.

Discoverable:

Stuff is the biggest website in New Zealand, meaning *Circuit* is easily accessible to audiences and remains on the platform in perpetuity. It's also free. Our stories are often picked up by other media outlets, amplifying discoverability.

DELIVERY & AUDIENCE

The main platform will be Stuff's website and apps, home to the Stuff Circuit team since 2016. We will continue to use editorial and marketing drivers to promote the content to Stuff's substantial audience - including homepage story slots and pointers, native advertising, email newsletters, smartphone push alerts, pre-roll video advertising, and house display advertising online and in Stuff's stable of newspapers.

Stuff is a credible, trustworthy platform that has in recent years built a formidable reputation for high-quality original journalism, not just from Stuff Circuit but also from our national correspondents, our climate desk, and our special projects team. Now in New Zealand ownership, Stuff is also a very popular website. Most months, we are not just New Zealand's most-visited news site but the largest domestic website of any kind, with a unique monthly audience of 1.964 million (source: *Nielsen Online Ratings, August 2019-July 2020*). We serve an average 10.9m video views per month (Source: *Adobe Analytics, Brightcove, January-August 2020*).

Stuff's audience is the most authentic online mirror of the New Zealand population, drawn from all ages, ethnicities, income brackets and locations. The combination of these factors gives New Zealand on Air-funded projects the chance to reach a large and diverse audience in a reputable environment.

Stuff editor in chief Patrick Crewdson says: "The Stuff Circuit team have blazed a new path for longform documentary storytelling on Stuff. Our audience loves the beauty of their unique visual style and respects the investigative chops required to deliver impactful stories like *Life + Limb* and *Alias*."

A man with dark hair, wearing a blue button-down shirt, is looking down at a laptop screen. The background is a dark, textured green wall. The overall lighting is dim, with the man's face and shirt highlighted by a soft light source.

DISTRIBUTION-Stuff

Launch and release plan

The power of Stuff as New Zealand's biggest website and owner of national, metropolitan, regional and community newsprint titles will give launch and release of this series unrivalled prominence.

As previously stated, we intend for this series to be journalism-driven in its timing; therefore it's not possible to predict publication dates.

However, as and when each investigation is ready, Stuff will launch across all its assets, including text in its nationwide stable of print publications. *Circuit* will also be promoted through the vast range of Stuff's marketing channels.

The estimated internal marketing investment is valued at a total of \$862,500.00 over the 3 episodes, comprising print advertising, digital advertising, email marketing and PR activity Note that the figures listed here are estimated market values and subject to change.

DISTRIBUTION - Stuff

Channel

Details (per episode)

Total Value

Print Advertising

Sunday-Star Times ad
Two ads in each of Stuff's nine daily mastheads

\$87,000 per episode

Digital Advertising

Digital display advertising on mobile and desktop for 2.5 weeks: \$36,000
Native advertising (1 million impressions): \$10,000
Video pre-roll on article videos (one week): \$11,000
One-day mobile rectangle blast: \$12,000
One-day Home Page Takeover: \$35,000
One-day Mobile Splash: \$17,500
Neighbourly Sponsored Post (Nationwide): \$12,000

\$133,500 per episode

Email Marketing

Separate email to Stuff audience: \$50,000
Additional promotion in all subscriber and other external marketing eDMS:
\$10,000

\$60,000 per episode

PR activity

Press release on project launch: \$4,000
Bespoke media pitching for each episode: \$3,000

\$7,000 per episode

Total (with contingency)

The total value has been reduced by 30% for contingency
(i.e. if the marketing spaces are booked out)

\$287,500 per episode

In accordance with NZoA guidelines, none of these figures are included in the budget.



Measures of Success

Stuff has made a conscious and public pivot away from clicks, in favour of building trust. As Editorial Director Mark Stevens says, “There is no more valuable currency for journalism than public trust.”

Trust is difficult to measure, of course. But one of the ways we can get a sense of the value of our work is to look at impact.

For instance, within 24 hours of the release of *Life + Limb*, the prime minister ordered defence chiefs to the Beehive and ordered them to have New Zealand's firing range in Afghanistan cleaned up.

With *False Profit* we received overwhelming feedback about the importance of journalism like ours in a climate where conspiracy theories have taken hold around the world.

Trust in our journalism and making an impact with our stories will continue to be a key driver for us. But of course we also want to know that people are watching our journalism.

Circuit to date has attracted 500,115 unique visitors, 710,645 page views, and 152,001 video views.

Target for *Circuit 2021*: With growing awareness of our work, we hope to achieve similar overall figures with fewer episodes.

BUDGET EXPLANATION

(TO ACCOMPANY THE DETAILED SPREADSHEET)

The budget we are proposing is as follows:

Total budget: 795,348

External cash cost: 243,700 Internal cash cost: 130,500 Total NZ On Air cost: 374,200 Stuff non-cash contribution: 421,148

- *Salaries and office expenses:* We believe the production of these documentaries (to the standard we require of ourselves) will take us all year. In order to keep costs down however, we have budgeted for nine months' worth of salaries and other costs.
- *EP / legal costs/ insurance / wardrobe etc:* Some items of expenditure are more related to the number of documentaries rather than the time taken to produce them and these items have been assessed on the (lesser) basis of 1.5 times the current July-December 2020 budget (which was for two documentaries of 30 minutes each).
- *Travel / freelance crew / file footage:* With Covid still raging around the world, it is extremely difficult to predict how much travel we will be able to undertake in 2021. We have budgeted for two overseas trips, but these may not come to pass. In that case, we envisage using some of the existing travel budget to hire overseas crews and/or researchers. The cost of doing this, though, would be less than the cost of travelling ourselves, so in the event that Covid prevents international travel, the project as a whole would end up under-budget.
- *Outsourced coding:* We are very keen to continue innovating in the production and presentation of our on-screen journalism. Unfortunately Stuff's own brilliant interactive designer, Suyeon Son, is moving on at the end of 2020, we have taken the precaution of budgeting for outsourced coding. These funds may not be required, in which case, again, we may end up under budget.

CONCLUSION

Stuff Circuit is proud of the work we've managed to achieve with the assistance of NZoA funding, and grateful for that opportunity.

We believe that with your support we can continue to make important, public interest journalism. We are an experienced team that New Zealanders can trust to provide accurate and thought-provoking information. Engaging our audience through visually powerful, in-depth investigations will support NZ on Air's public media funding objective: to produce the sort of quality content that is vital to an informed democracy.

What the critics and judges have said

A man with short brown hair, wearing a dark jacket and light-colored pants, is sitting on a large, light-colored rock. He is looking directly at the camera with a neutral expression. The background is a vibrant, painterly landscape with a field of yellow and orange flowers in the foreground, and a sky with soft, colorful clouds in shades of blue, purple, and pink. The overall style is artistic and evocative.

“This world class investigative documentary takes the viewer beyond the horror of Christchurch to look at the dark driving forces that lead to the massacre. It is a stellar example of tenacious reportage with high production values and meticulous research. In a very competitive category, it was the clear winner.” - *Judges, Best Documentary, Voyager Media Awards 2020.*

“...genuinely very important contemporary television... made by a team of people who’re among New Zealand’s best investigative reporters and they’re pushing the boundaries of the medium...” - *RNZ National.*

“The whole thing is beautifully shot, it’s a work of art all the way through. The combination of using all these different platforms was really, really revealing. It sort of gave a wholeness to it... A must watch. All power to the Stuff Circuit team.” - *RNZ National.*

“Absolutely amazing work... I’ve got nothing but praise for this”. - *Former TVNZ current affairs executive producer, Phil Wallington.*