



Station of the Year entry from Marlow FM

We had a rollercoaster ride over the past 12 months - but it left us in a stronger position than ever before

- We certainly felt the impact of the Covid outbreak hard. We lost one of our founder members to the disease. All the local events we appear at to help promote the Marlow community were cancelled. We had to limit access to the studios. And our bank account was almost drained.
- On top of that, our wonderful riverside location was once again a double-edged sword, as heavy rains flooded the Thames and very nearly our studios, had it not been for a round-the-clock pumping operation.
- And yet, in the face of all this, around 80 volunteer presenters and coordinators managed to carry on producing 119 hours of programmes a week - that's an average of 17 hours a day.
- We banded together with other local groups to come up with new Covid-compliant events that could still bring the community together safely.
- We got a new - and dry - satellite studio up and running in a local school.
- We raised money in new ways, and got our finances in shape.
- We built a new website, revamped our social media presence, and rolled out our first ever mobile app - just with the help of our own volunteers.
- We welcomed new members, launched new shows, and notched up more listeners than ever before (we even gave Mike Read's breakfast show a temporary home for a few weeks).
- And now, having just celebrated our 10th anniversary on FM, we're more confident than ever that we can continue to serve all the people of our little Buckinghamshire town in the years to come.

Finding new ways to bring the community together

In normal years, we take our outside broadcast trailer to at least 10 events around town, from the Marlow May Fayre to Santa's Fun Run. But Covid put paid to them all. Determined not to be defeated, we banded together with other local groups to come up with new Covid-compliant events that could still bring the community together safely.

- We broadcast all the events at *The Marlow Christmas Drive-In*, the community's way of stopping the town's Christmas celebrations from being completely cancelled.



- We replaced our yearly *Hidden Gems* awards with the *Hidden Heroes* awards, recognising 15 people and organisations who had been doing so much to help others during the pandemic. The awards ceremony was part of *The Marlow Christmas Drive-In*.
- We broadcast *Marlow's Quiet Night In*, a special two-hour live event to raise money for Marlow chef Tom Kerridge's Meals from Marlow operation. One of our own volunteers, Amelia Slaughter, hosted the event, which raised £76,000 on the night.



- We did an eight-hour outside broadcast at a Marlow Rugby Club event to celebrate coming out of the first lockdown.
- We did a series of Friday and Saturday night outside broadcasts to help our landlord, the [Longridge](#) charity, raise money.

Holding back the river, and switching on a new studio

In February, it was all hands to the pumps, literally, as water levels rose above 'welly level' and our studio building at Longridge found itself sitting in the middle of the Thames again, rather than on the banks. We had to stop doing shows there.





Thanks to a hardy team looking after the pumps round the clock, a calamity was avoided, and it was an impetus to get our new satellite studio at Great Marlow School up and running (pictured below).

We'd been planning the studio for a while, and a lot of the equipment was already on site, but we still needed to connect and configure everything, and sort out a network connection. We had to work fast to get live programmes back on-air as soon as possible. In the future, we intend to use the studio for doing training, making pre-recorded programmes, and giving schoolchildren a taste of how broadcasting works.

We played the James Bay song *Hold Back the River* a lot that week!



Keeping our volunteers safe

As the months went on, and the Covid rules and guidelines changed, we made changes to how we operated the station.

From the start, we put in place new hygiene rules to reduce the risk of infection, and operated a one-person-in-the-studio-at-a-time policy. We also changed the schedule and put short pre-recorded programmes between live shows - this meant we could make sure the incoming and outgoing presenters didn't cross over in the studios.

Later, we set up a dedicated 'Zoom computer' in each studio so that presenters could broadcast once again with their co-presenter, and have guests on. And before we allowed co-presenters back in the studio, we installed perspex dividers between the presenter and co-presenter positions.

We made it clear we didn't expect anyone to come into the studio if they didn't feel comfortable doing so, and we helped them record their shows from home if they preferred.

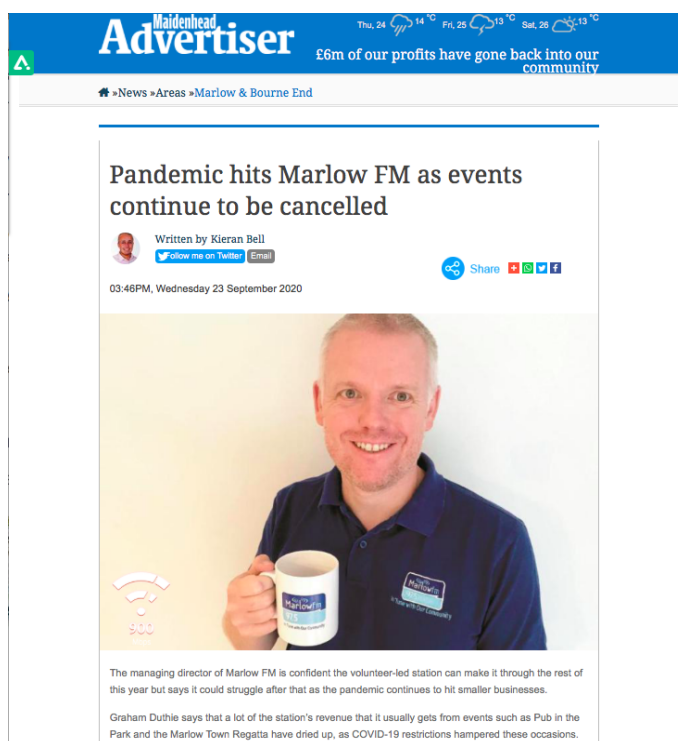
Raising money

As well as stopping us doing the usual community events, Covid hit our finances. Most of our money actually comes from doing outside broadcasts around town, and running our own events. Of course, while our income had dried up, we still had bills to pay.

So we launched [a campaign on GoFundMe](#), which has raised nearly £4,200 of donations, and elicited some touching and supportive comments from the community (see below). We successfully applied for grants from local councils and Ofcom. And we restructured our membership fee as a monthly standing order to give us more predictable income.

One of our volunteers also became a head of advertising, and she's bringing in much more from this avenue of funding than we've had in the past.

All in all, we're now in a much stronger financial position, and confident about the future.



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| <p>"Many thanks to broadcaster Paul Mansell for his support of my music & the opportunity of an interview." - <i>Pennan Brae</i></p> | <p>"JAM Theatre send their continued love and support to the wonderful Marlow FM ! Keep up the great work. :-)" - <i>Jo Noel-Hartley</i></p> | <p>"Very happy to support the wonderful service you provide Marlow FM" - <i>Rachel, Cricketers Gin</i></p> | <p>"Hi I often listen to Michelle Livings we must keep as much UK radio going as possible which is different." - <i>Chris Bryant</i></p> |
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Giving listeners a better online experience

It's not just about making a radio programme anymore. Listeners want to visit a website to see a schedule or 'listen again', or interact with presenters on social media, or be able to listen on a mobile app. This year we got to grips with the 'extras'.

A new website

We were already on our second website, but it was letting everyone down. It was an expensive pay-per-month site, it was slow to load, and it was difficult to keep up to date. It didn't even have a weekly schedule.

So one of our volunteers, who does coding as a hobby, built a new one himself. He also created a new episode information system that takes show information from the presenter and sends it to the website and elsewhere to power the 'now on' and 'now playing' functions.

An improved presence on social media

We already had the usual social media accounts, but our activity was haphazard - for example, posts looked inconsistent with each other, and weren't going in the right places.

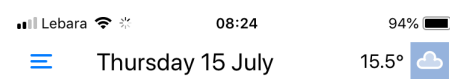
Two of our volunteers took on the challenge of putting a proper strategy in place, producing templates for posts, and helping everyone make the best use of the platforms.

Our first ever mobile app (pictured here)

Nowadays people expect their favourite radio stations to have their own app - it was time to give them a Marlow FM one!

Despite never having built a mobile app before, our website building volunteer put one together in three weeks and got it approved by Apple and Google.

As well as listening to Marlow FM, of course, you can get information like today's and tomorrow's schedule of programmes, Marlow FM news stories, the weather forecast for Marlow, train times and delays at local stations, and news from *MyMarlow*, an independent news website for Marlow.



On now: **Breakfast with Edan Gaskell**

Playing: **Suedehead by Morrissey**

Join Edan for a show filled with great music, fun, his signature cheesy jokes and of course a brand new Cliffhanger!

At 09:00: **The Music Box with Andy Jay**

Join Andy for an hour of music on Drinks!



Getting more listeners than ever before

Despite the disruption caused by the flooding in February, from Monday 15th February to Sunday 21st February, we had 2,334 unique online listeners, our highest weekly number since records began. Over the first seven weeks of 2021, the average number of unique online listeners each day was 41% higher than the average number for the whole of 2020, and 113% higher than the average for the first seven weeks of that year. We were delighted - the population of Marlow is around 15,000, and the listener numbers don't include those on FM, who we can't count.

We put this increase down to two main reasons.

First, we were giving out all the latest information on pandemic opening times and delivery services, and interviewing those in charge of running local medical centres and Covid vaccination centres to get to the bottom of rumours circulating on social media.

Second, we welcomed new members, two of whom are entering for *Newcomer of the Year*, and we launched new shows - *The Consumer Show*, *The Business Show*, *Internetted*, *Spotlight*, *The Sunday Sports Show*, *Sunday Serenade*, *After Hours*, *Houseworx Music Show*, and *Cafe Del Marlow*.

In particular, we wanted to give some young, local DJs, Jephthah 'Kwakzino' Bonsu, Monty Ozanne, Abigail Bailey, and Izzy Seddon, an outlet for their music during the pandemic.



Helping out Mike Read

In November, local resident and star of radio and TV Mike Read got in touch with us. He was between stations, and asked if we could give his breakfast show a home for a few weeks in the meantime. We were happy to help - he spent time with our volunteers, and gave our fundraising efforts some publicity.

We continue to broadcast his *Heritage Chart* show, which supports 'heritage' artists who are still releasing music.



Celebrating 10 years on FM

Our first test broadcast was in 2007, but 11th May 2011 was the day we started to broadcast on FM full-time as a community radio station. To mark the day 10 years on, we broadcast 12 hours of special shows live from The Causeway in Marlow, joined by presenters past and present.

Our second five-year FM licence extension also started on that day.

We produced some stylish lapel badges to celebrate, and gave them out to members and supporters.



Staying true to our purpose

We exist to serve all the people of Marlow and the immediate surrounding areas, whatever their background or age. For everyone here, this is far more important than being the slickest, or bringing in the highest ratings.

We provide opportunities for local residents and organisations to get their voice heard, tell their story, and publicise their events. We play a truly diverse and eclectic selection of music, carefully curated to create a unique sound - we publish [the top tracks and artists](#) we play each week.

Anyone living in or around Marlow can get involved, whether as a presenter, or behind the scenes, or both. If there's a section of the community we don't represent, or a style of music we don't play, we want to hear from them.

