

GovComms

A newsletter for government and public sector communicators

September 2014

Highlights



**MDDA-SANLAM LOCAL
MEDIA AWARDS**
- PAGE 5



**WHY ARE YOU
PAYING FOR 'NEWS'?**
- PAGE 9



**BECOMING A MARKETING
COMMUNICATION SPECIALIST**
- PAGE 11



By Suzette van der Westhuizen (GCIS)

Following South Africa's fifth democratic elections, President Jacob Zuma accepted the mandate bestowed upon him to lead the nation for the next five years at his Inauguration on 24 May 2014.

A better place to live in

The President acknowledged the contribution of every South African to the process of renewal, reconstruction and development of the country in the past 20 Years of Freedom. He also made reference to the Twenty Year Review

released by The Presidency earlier this year. The review indicated that South Africa is a much better place to live in now than it was before 1994, due to the transformative policies of our democratic government. However, the review also confirmed that poverty, inequality and unemployment still persist.

Roadmap to prosperity

The reversal of the legacy of apartheid colonialism required more intense efforts from all South Africans. The President explained that the first



government
communications

Department:
Government Communication and Information System
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



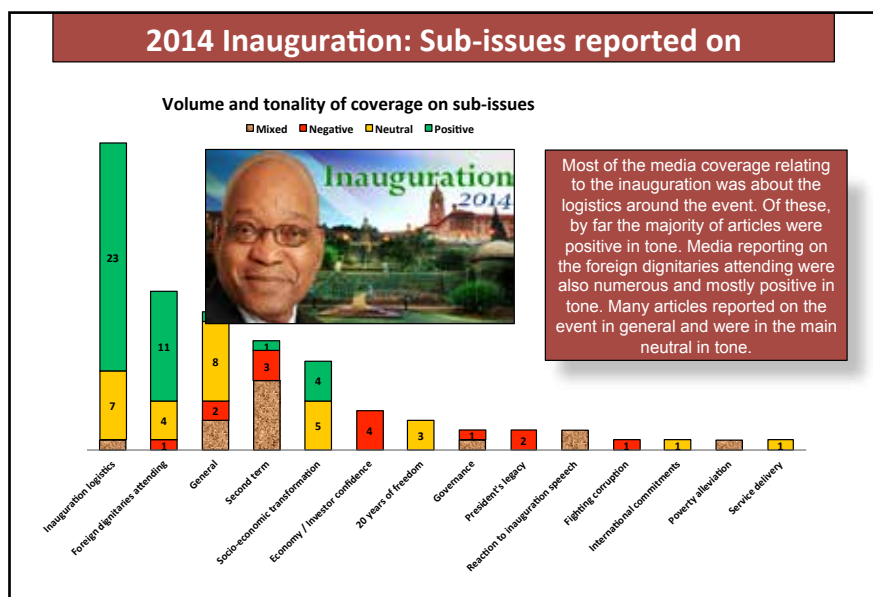
phase of transformation had been completed, and that the second phase would involve the implementation of radical socio-economic transformation policies and programmes. He identified the National Development Plan (NDP) as the roadmap to take South Africa forward to prosperity and success. The President also highlighted community development; economic transformation; safety and security; accountability within the public service; service delivery; nation building; and participating as a role player in the international community.

Media put the emphasis on the President's commitment to socio-economic transformation.

Regrettably, there seemed to be a general consensus that the President might struggle to "face up" to these, despite the fact that government has already acknowledged that there are challenges in these areas, and the five priorities have been selected specifically to tackle them.

Background to June 2014 SoNA

This environment then set the scene for the first State of the Nation Address (SoNA) of President Zuma's second term of office. The President was hospitalised due to fatigue following the election campaign; Parliamentary staff threatened to strike in the run-up to the SoNA; and the event had to be rescheduled to accommodate the African Union (AU) Summit. All of this diverted media attention from the usual speculation about the content of the President's speech.



Socio-economic transformation

In his address, the President stated that as the country entered the second phase of transition from apartheid to a national democratic society, it had to embark on radical socio-economic transformation to push back the triple challenges of poverty, inequality and unemployment. The economy took centre stage in this programme. He noted the most effective weapon in the campaign against poverty was the creation of decent work, which required faster

Festivity

Media coverage of the Inauguration reflected a festive spirit. Government's voice, led by the President, the Government Communication and Information System (GCIS) and the Department of International Relations and Cooperation (Dirco) was dominant on the logistics of the event and the overall tone of reporting was exceptionally positive.

Local media noted that the event attracted world attention with the number of foreign dignitaries attending. International media also paid noteworthy attention to the occasion.

economic growth. The low level of investment was a key constraint to economic growth. Government would work with the private sector to remove obstacles to investment, the President added.

Wage negotiations had recently been characterised by long and violent labour strikes, and the President committed to addressing the violent nature and duration of the strikes as well as ensuring a sustainable mining industry. Media paid notable attention to the commitments that the President also gave regarding developing a sustainable

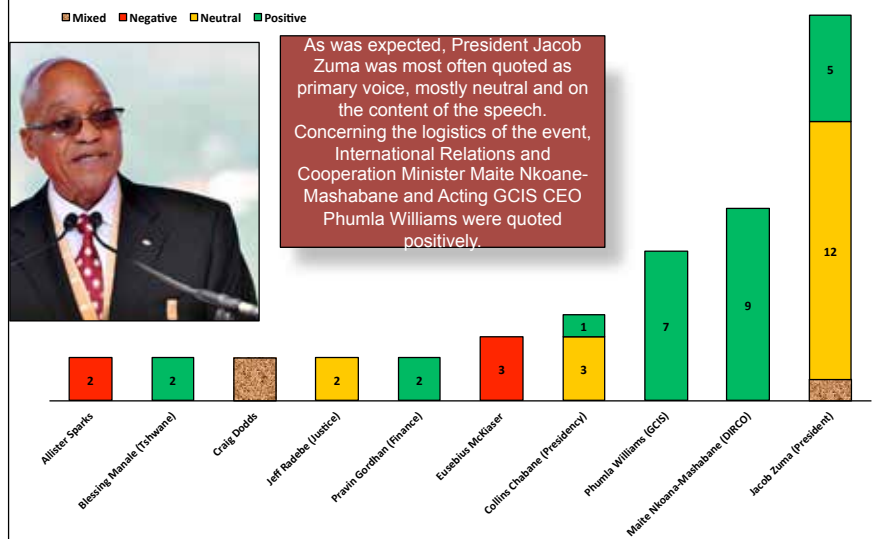
Second-term legacy

Only when it came to reflection in opinion/analysis articles and editorials in newspapers concerning the road ahead with the President serving a second term, did skepticism creep in with a more negative attitude. Media and analysts listed the challenges facing the President as: the economy performing poorly; labour unrest; unemployment; service delivery (water, sanitation, housing, electricity); poor education infrastructure; corruption; and the high crime rate.



2014 Inauguration: Main voices quoted

Voices most often quoted by the media on the inauguration



National consensus

In the debate, Deputy Minister of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs Andries Nel responded that there was agreement that the core challenges facing South African society were poverty, inequality, and unemployment. Similarly, there was consensus that the national priorities remained health, education, economic development and job creation, rural development, land reform and food security, as well as combating crime and corruption. The NDP was also accepted as the national roadmap to address these issues and create a radically transformed society. Parliamentarians were urged to focus on these areas of agreement.

energy mix; prioritising support for small business to boost broad-based black economic empowerment (BBBEE); prioritising youth empowerment in the economic transformation programme; agriculture as a key job driver; accelerating the settlement of remaining land claims and re-opening the lodgement of claims for the restitution of land. Other issues included continuing investment in education and skills development; increasing life expectancy, reducing child and maternal mortality ratios, building on the success of HIV and AIDS treatment campaigns; implementing National Health Insurance and improving the quality of care in the public sector; and further reducing levels of crime and corruption.

The President also congratulated municipalities that stood out for consistently good performance, and mentioned others where support was needed and projects would be implemented.

Media, analysts and political parties were very critical in their rating of the President's address. These comments intimated that the speech was muted, uninspiring, lacking in substance and did not offer anything new. More positive reactions, mostly from the ruling party, welcomed the SoNA as adequate, commendable, concrete and decisive. However, coverage on the top issues reported on, and the speech in general, was mostly neutral in tone.

Debate

The President's speech was followed by the customary Parliamentary Debate on the State of the Nation Address. Media devoted more coverage to the conduct of some parliamentarians than the substance of the speeches of participants in the debate.

Addressing social ills

Government Ministers extensively contributed to the SoNA debate and augmented the message put forward by the President. Minister in the Presidency Jeff Radebe reiterated much of the President's message, focusing on what government planned to do with regard to a wide range of economic issues. Only his pronouncements with regard to plans to address the social ills faced by mining communities found expression in the media.

Social Development Minister Bathabile Dlamini explained that social transformation was a pillar of improving the lives of people. There was a need to focus on the weak social infrastructure, which served as an incubator for the many social problems that faced the country. The Minister emphasised the importance of government programmes such as Early Childhood Development (ECD), the Child Support Grant (CSG) and the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS). The net effect of these services was to end the life-cycle of poverty.

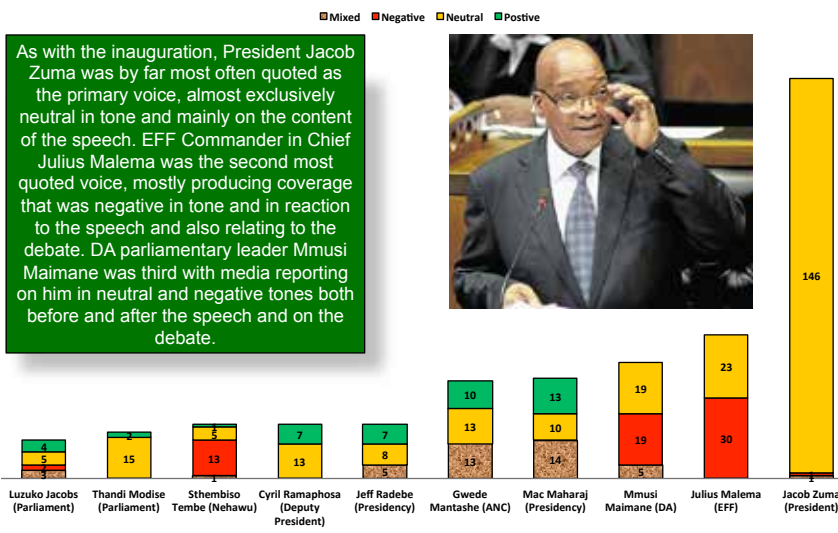
Fighting TB

Health Minister Aaron Motsoaledi said that with tuberculosis (TB) being the biggest killer in the country (80 per cent of people who are HIV positive die as a result of TB) three populations that were vulnerable to TB had been identified: inmates in Correctional Services faci-



SoNA June 2014: Main voices quoted

Voices most often quoted by the media on June 2014 SoNA



As with the inauguration, President Jacob Zuma was by far most often quoted as the primary voice, almost exclusively neutral in tone and mainly on the content of the speech. EFF Commander in Chief Julius Malema was the second most quoted voice, mostly producing coverage that was negative in tone and in reaction to the speech and also relating to the debate. DA parliamentary leader Mmusi Maimane was third with media reporting on him in neutral and negative tones both before and after the speech and on the debate.



warning about the TB threat, but his positive message about the way forward was only found hidden in the content. Despite this unfortunate media oversight, government still enjoyed a reasonable share of voice of 31 per cent. However, political parties were stronger at 38 per cent. It should be taken into account that this includes the ruling party, which made a very strong contribution to this component.

Moving South Africa forward

In his conciliatory reply to the Debate on the State of the Nation Address, President Zuma noted that South Africans all have the same goal: to move South Africa forward. Government had placed before the nation a programme of action that could go a long way towards injecting new life into the

ties; mine workers; and communities who stay around or next to mining operations. The mining sector could not be stabilised without dealing with this scourge. The Minister explained the plan of action to fight TB, which includes massive deployment of GeneXpert technology for the diagnosis of TB.

Service delivery

Human Settlements Minister Lindiwe Sisulu noted that the President had dealt in detail with the problems of service delivery at local government level, where inexperience, lack of skills, political interference and corrupt practices were identified. The Public Administration Management Bill would enable government to draw skills from the public service to areas most in need of those skills. She urged all South Africans to rally behind these efforts to move South Africa forward.

Deputy Communications Minister Stella Ndabeni-Abrahams said that the NDP represented the vision and aspirations of the people. It was important that all public servants geared themselves to lead in the implementation of this plan. For this to be effective what was needed was a transformed, efficient and corrupt free public service led by public servants whose only preoccupation was meeting and exceeding the expectations of the public. Attention needed to be paid to the goal of enhancing the capacity of the state in reshaping our society and the economy, she said.

Again, the Minister's encouraging speech regrettably got lost in the media.

The media's coverage of these Ministers was very limited. Minister Motsoaledi was readily quoted in media headlines

economy, as well as driving back poverty, inequality and unemployment. It was designed to boost economic intervention in key job and growth drivers such as infrastructure development, energy, tourism, manufacturing, agriculture, the green economy and mining. The programme was also designed to improve the delivery of services by government and in particular to revitalise distressed areas such as mining towns and service delivery hotspots. It was further designed to strengthen partnerships between government and the people, as well as government and all sectors including business and labour. While the economy would take centre stage, government would also invest its energies and resources in improving the performance of the state and in particular, the public service.

The programme of action was a call for all to put South Africa first and do what was best of the country and for the future.



Local media urged to serve democracy

By Cecilia de Vos Belgraver



Former Media Development and Diversity Agency (MDDA) CEO Lumka Mtimde and Sanlam's head of group communications Ainsley Moos with Zita Goldswain, who was named Journalist of the Year at the MDDA-Sanlam Local Media Awards.

With the media serving as a barrier between society and chaos, young media practitioners need support, said celebrated poet, author and activist Mandla Langa at the 2013 Media Development and Diversity Agency (MDDA)-Sanlam Local Media Awards.

Delivering the keynote address at the awards ceremony in Johannesburg recently, Langa praised the MDDA and Sanlam for coming up with the awards.

"Hopefully, [it] will give encouragement to the young practitioners in the media. And everyone knows, it has been said repeatedly, that media stands between chaos and us," he said.

Growing number of entries

Now in its fourth year, the MDDA-Sanlam Local Media Awards celebrate and promote excellence in the print and now also broadcast media.

Former MDDA Chief Executive Officer Lumko Mtimde said the awards were growing steadily while community television entries were also received for the 2013 awards. In the previous two years there were no, or insufficient numbers of, television entries.

According to Mtimde the number of print entries in-

creased and there was good response to the new categories introduced in the broadcast section. There were five categories in the writing section, seven in the photography section and 12 in the broadcasting section. The 11 newspaper award categories were for best front pages.

Before the winners were announced, Sanlam's head of group communications Ainsley Moos said: "We recognise that the healthy competition and the success of the awards are sustained by the enthusiastic participation and commitment to the awards by the community media across South Africa. In return, we remain committed to providing the resources and the platform for these important awards."

Judging from the record 750 entries received for 2013 the local, community and small commercial media in South Africa certainly is endowed with enthusiasm. This is essential given their challenging role not only to grow and expand but, according to Langa, also to deliver quality, accessible content.

Chaos and blindness

In his address Langa explored the concepts of chaos and blindness in a seeing world, asked pertinent questions about the extent to which proliferating media titles reach



Poet and author Mandla Langa delivers the keynote address at the Media Development and Diversity Agency-Sanlam Local Media Awards.

all members of society and also cautioned against us losing our cultural and uniquely South African aesthetic to the values of an imported superficial pop culture that is irrelevant to us.

Chaos, said Langa, was something with which he was somewhat familiar “having had a ringside seat in places where it has unleashed itself”.

Being blind in a seeing world, being illiterate in a world awash with text, said Langa, were forms of chaos and very real and substantial challenges to many in South Africa.

“A friend of mine, Jim Kelman, is a Scottish writer; his novel, *How Late it was, How Late*, was a joint winner of the Booker Prize in 1994. It’s a bleak story whose genesis I witnessed, of Sammy, an incoherent Glaswegian drunk who gets beaten by cops and goes blind. The novel is about his efforts to come to terms with his disability, in an unforgiving world full of judgmental people.

“I was thinking about Sammy’s predicament, his blindness and struggle to navigate the world as I started writing this speech, realising that the question of blindness in a seeing world, of illiteracy in a land where the directions are in hieroglyphics, is what exercises a huge section of our population,” said Langa.

No amount of writing can reach or speak to an audience that is illiterate.

Wasted poetry

In the 1970s Langa found himself living in exile in Botswana. The exiles included students whose education had been uprooted and “a motley crew of refugees, some of whom had left the country for all sorts of reasons”.

One of the South Africans was someone called Bra Deyi who Langa described as “the quiet ageless type who didn’t encourage intimacy” and doted on his girlfriend, Sis’ Maisie.

She ran a shebeen in the area and was “pretty in that dangerous way and was much younger and seemed wise in the ways of the street”.

Sis’ Maisie disappeared. She went “back home”. The devastated Bra Deyi eventually dropped in on Langa, and asked him, a poet, to write to Sis’ Maisie on his behalf. She was now in Botshabelo in Bloemfontein and had not replied to any of his messages.

With tears streaming down his face, Bra Deyi told Langa that he hadn’t treated Sis’ Maisie very well. They had a child together and he wanted to make amends. “So, my laaitjie, I want you to write to her en jy moet daardie ding gebruik,” he said, pointing at my typewriter. He exhorted me to reach deep down into my soul and bring out evocative language that would melt her heart. ‘Ek soek haar terug.’ I had a feeling that if this little exercise failed to produce positive results I’d be held responsible. And Bra Deyi wasn’t the kind of guy you wanted to disappoint, even if the matter were out of your hands,” Langa recalled.

So Langa wrote the letter, drawing on the work of his friend Keorapetse Kgositsile, borrowing allusions from Aime Cesaire and consulting the love poems of Pablo Neruda.

“I wrote Bra Deyi’s letter that was shot through with stolen poetry, hoping against hope that Sis’ Maisie would respond and give this poor man a sign. I then had to leave Botswana for Lesotho in 1979 and then to Mozambique, Angola and, much later Lusaka. Eleven years later, in December 1990, I stumbled into Bra Deyi, at Nasrec, during the Consultative Conference of the ANC, which was the period of the return



Former Media Development and Diversity Agency CEO Lumka Mtimde and Sanlam’s head of group communications Ainsley Moos present the Community Radio Station of the Year award to NFM station manager Brunhild Strauss (centre).

of Oliver Tambo and hundreds of exiles.

“After the chitchat of catching up, I asked him if Sis’ Maisie ever replied. For a moment he was disoriented and then he started laughing, almost breaking into hysterics. What’s wrong, I asked. ‘She didn’t reply because she couldn’t read,’ he said. ‘She did get the letters but was too ashamed to get anyone to read them for her.’ As I parted with him I thought of all that wasted poetry.”

Meaningless signs

In Tiananmen Square in 1998 Langa again experienced the isolation that comes with being illiterate in a landscape rich with visual information, albeit inaccessible. Suddenly finding himself separated from his companions and translators, he was lost.

Tiananmen Square, said Langa, is a "vast stammering acreage of concrete and wall-to-wall humanity. I scanned the directional signs, perhaps to find my way back to the hotel. They were in Chinese characters, blank and unresponsive to my enquiry."

Quality as well as quantity

In his view, this blindness and the inability to access amenities still exist in South Africa. "In many instances the survival of these hobbling conditions is more sophisticated and hides under the guise of openness," he said.

Langa doubts that more means more. "Many of us believe that the wretched of the earth have struck a better bargain now that there is a proliferation of communication platforms. For instance, we cite the growth of the print and electronic media, radio, television, on-line blogs, cellular telephones, and information at our fingertips. Granted, these are measures of progress and success of the democratic dispensation ushered in two decades ago. They are part of the good story of 20 years of media freedom and diversity and couldn't have happened in this accelerated form outside of a democratic process."

Yet, to what extent does a flourishing media landscape equate with access for all? How the successes towards the creation of diversity in the media have permeated those corners of society where they are most needed is a niggling question, confessed Langa.

"A lot has been achieved. There are many platforms. The choice might seem wide but we have to ask ourselves what that choice seriously offers. To what extent are South Africans more enlightened than they were twenty years ago?" asked Langa.



Former Media Development and Diversity Agency CEO Lumka Mtimde and Sanlam's head of group communications Ainsley Moos with Herman Steyn (centre), who won the Photographer of the Year award.

He warned that "our languages are in trouble".

He cites radio stations as an example of media that "present an aesthetic that is remote from the lives and loves of our people".

With "language" Langa does not mean the official languages of South Africa but "the inner, unquantifiable language of commitment, of criticism and self-criticism; the language of love and defence of all the things we hold sacred and dear; an adherence to the values that imbued us with the spirit that enabled us to withstand everything and fear nothing".



Former Media Development and Diversity Agency CEO Lumka Mtimde and Sanlam's head of group communications Ainsley with the Alet Roux Medal winner Laila Majiet.

Top honours

The 35 awards for 2013 announced at the ceremony included that of Journalist of the Year, which went to Zita Goldswain of *Witbank News* and Press Photographer of the Year award was presented to Herman Steyn of *Die Pos/The Post*.

Laila Majiet of the *People's Post* received the Alet Roux Medal for the Best Newcomer in Print Journalism and the coveted Community Radio Station of the Year award went to NFM.

Bush Radio earned the prestigious Rantho-Letsebe Community Media Award conferred in honour of Tshepo Rantho and Harry Mtshana Letsebe. They were pioneers of community media involved in the initial process leading to the Community Media 2000 Conference in 1995 and in the development of the MDDA Act of 2002 and the MDDA Regulations.

The Awards bring together more than 20 years of Sanlam Community Newspaper Awards and four years of SABC News/MDDA Community Media Awards in a single partnership now in its fourth years. Other partners include industry stakeholders such as the Association of Independent Publishers, the Association of Community Broadcasters, Forum for Community Journalists, Independent Forum for Faith and Media, National Association of Broadcasters, National Community Radio Forum and Print and Digital Media South Africa.

Awards Winners

PRINT FINALISTS

AWARD	Winner
1. WRITING AWARDS	
Hard News	Anoeschka von Meck, <i>Knysna-Plett Herald</i>
Investigative Journalism	Tereasa Ferrari, <i>Lowvelder/Laevelder</i>
Human Interest	Michelle Linnert, <i>TygerBurger</i>
Sport	Quintin van Jaarsveld, <i>South Coast Fever and Upper Coast Fever</i>
Columns	Avuyile Mngxitana-Diko, <i>Grocott's Mail</i>
2. PHOTOGRAPHY	
News	Michelle Linnert, <i>TygerBurger</i>
Sport	Sifiso Mathebula, <i>Echo and Ridge Times</i>
Features and Portraits	Herman Steyn, <i>Die Pos/The Post</i>
General interest	Evan Naudé, <i>Weslander</i>
Press Photographer of the Year	Herman Steyn, <i>Die Pos/The Post</i>
Journalist of the Year	Zita Goldswain, <i>Middelburg Observer</i>
Alet Roux Medal	Laila Majiet, <i>People's Post</i>
3. NEWSPAPER AWARDS	
BEST FRONT PAGES:	
Community/Grassroots Media	<i>Upstart – Youth Development Project</i>
Small Independent Commercial Newspaper - Emerging	<i>Zithethele</i>
Small Independent Commercial – Established	<i>EzaKwaZulu</i>
Corporate Owned Free Sheets	<i>Port Elizabeth Express Indaba</i>

AWARD	Winner
Corporate Owned Paid Newspapers	<i>Worcester Standard</i>
1. BEST NEWSPAPERS	
Community/Grassroots	<i>Ikamva Lase Gcuwa</i>
Small Independent Established (5 years plus)	<i>Grocott's Mail</i>
Small Independent Emerging (2- 5 years)	<i>Zithethele</i>
Corporate-owned Free Sheets	<i>Tabletalk</i>
Corporate Owned Paid Newspapers (Hultzer Trophy): circulation less than 10 0000	<i>Mpumalanga News</i>
Corporate Owned Paid Newspapers (Cronwright Trophy): circulation more than 10 000	<i>Lowvelder/Laevelder</i>

BROADCAST FINALISTS

Category	Station/Entrant /Finalist
Best Community Radio	NFM
Rancho-Letsebe Community Media Award	Bush Radio
Best Sports Magazine Show (Radio)	Bay FM
Best Children's Programme (Radio)	Alex FM
Radio Khwezi	
Best Educational Show (Radio)	Alex FM
Best Indigenous Programme (Radio)	Alex FM
Radio Khwezi	
Best Drama (Radio)	Radio Khwezi
Excellence in Investigative Journalism (Radio)	Radio Khwezi
Best Business Programme (Radio)	Chai FM
Excellence in In-depth Coverage and Current Affairs	Radio Riverside
Broadcasting in Indigenous Languages	Radio Khwezi
Best educational Magazine Show (TV)	Bay TV



Why are you paying for 'news'?

By *Allison Cooper

The latest trend in the online news industry is that of the proverbial press office. The now almost standard response from any news website when you send them a press release or news article is that of 'sure we will print your story... if you pay for a press office'.

A press office is not news content. It's advertising, pure and simple! Any content that's only published because it has been paid for is not news. It may be in story form – or advertorial as we call it – but it's still advertising and thus not credible content as people know that it has been paid for.

While studying towards my public relations (PR) diploma I was often told: "Advertising is what you pay for; public relations or publicity is what you pray for". It's a quote that aptly sums up that advertising is paid media and public relations is earned media.

This means that PR people have to convince reporters or editors to write or publish a positive story about their client, brand or issue. The story is then published in the editorial section of the online news website, magazine, newspaper or aired as news on TV or radio. It's not placed in the paid-for media section where advertising messages appear which is exactly where 'news' pieces are placed in press offices.

When a story is published in the news section, it gives it more credibility because it was independently verified by a trusted third party, rather than purchased. And this is why I do not believe in the press office concept. As a publicity specialist it is my responsibility to inform my client if a story suggestion would be newsworthy to a particular publication or not. In addition, publications literally receive hundreds of suggested stories or press releases a day so even if it's newsworthy, there's no guarantee that it will be published. Clients have to be made aware of this fact and how the process works.

If an editor publishes what I have written without me having to pay for it then, as a publicity professional, I have done my job and done it well. Well, that's the way it used to work anyway.

Changing PR landscape

The publicity specialist's landscape is changing rapidly due to the economic climate and the fact that it's always the public relations, advertising, marketing and communication budgets that clients cut back on first.

Numerous magazines, newspapers and online news websites – across various industry sectors – have closed their doors over the past few years. Why? Because clients have and continue to cut their advertising budgets – the income from which these publications used to survive.

To keep publishing, online news sites have come up with the press office concept. And, at the same time, many radio stations are following suit with the standard 'that's a great story, pay for this package and this is how we will air it' response. This begs the question, if they are willing to have it published or aired as 'advertising' surely then it's relevant to their target audience and should be published or aired as 'news', if warranted?

As the founder and publisher of Marketing Spread, an online news website, I can understand why they have gone this route, but I certainly don't agree with it. Without revenue, which should be obtained from advertising, sponsorship or membership, they too will cease to exist. The trick lies in getting clients to advertise when they don't have the budget to do so. For example, innovative ideas like a small monthly membership fee per PR person's client can provide the online news website with the income it needs to survive, while protecting the credibility of the 'news' it publishes.

One or two of the clients for which I am contracted to do publicity have paid for press offices with various websites, against my advice. But they too are now realising that by paying for news in the first place very few, if any, of their press releases sent



to these news sites are ever printed in the 'news' section, even though they are 'newsworthy' to the readers. In many instances – not all – I have found that it's a classic case of 'oh well, they pay for their press releases to be published anyway, let's use their press office credits so that they will have to buy some more'.

This does two things: it stops the client from purchasing a press office again, and it sours the relationship between the site, the PR person and the client.

PR people should support advertising

What publicity specialists don't realise is that they too have the responsibility to ensure that credible news websites survive and that this is not only the responsibility of the marketing 'gurus' who often have different messages or content that they need to get across. Even though PR and marketing should work hand-in-hand this is often not the case and both go off on their own to achieve different objectives (but that's an article all on its own).

How can PR people ensure the survival of the publications, TV and radio stations that they rely on to publish their news? By ensuring that their clients are not always on the take but understand that they too have to give a little in the form of sponsorships, memberships or advertising. It's a two-way street and PR people need to explain to their clients that they can only be effective if there are stable, credible, supported publications out there to which they can pitch their clients' news.

Let's face it, news websites and other publications are businesses and they have to employ staff and make a profit. It's up to you to make this happen if you want them to still be around to publish your news in future. The simple fact is that as a media and/or publicity agency it is your job to secure 'free' news for your client. You spend hours coming up with newsworthy ideas, writing articles and distributing them to the media and editors should publish these releases and not put them in file 13 provided they contain actual news content that is relevant to the publication's target audience.

The difference between advertising and PR

In a recent article published on Forbes.com, contributor Robert Wynne aptly summed up the differences between advertising and PR as follows:

Advertising	Public Relations
Paid	Earned
Builds exposure	Builds trust
Audience is skeptical	Media gives third-party validation
Guaranteed placement	No guarantee, must persuade media
Complete creative control	Media controls final version
Ads are mostly visual	PR uses language
More expensive	Less expensive
"Buy this product"	"This is important"

In addition to the above, word-of-mouth is a powerful public relations and publicity tool, especially with the fast turnaround offered via social media. And often, the person behind a word-of-mouth campaign is the publicity specialist that's still managing to spread the word by now looking at alternative ways to secure 'news' and to tell their client's

story without losing the credibility that press offices or advertorials bring with them.

The road ahead

What's the role of government and business in all this? It's quite simple really. You have three roles to play.

The first is to employ a publicity agency that actually knows the difference between news and public relations so that they can fight the fight when it comes to getting your news published and actually pitch your stories to the correct publications and journalists in the first place.

The second is to understand that the media environment is not all about 'taking'. Think of it as a currently struggling industry that needs support if it's going to survive in its current form – without having to ask people to pay for news.

The third, and perhaps the most important, is to not cut your public relations, marketing and advertising budgets when things get tough because this is the worst mistake you could make. Instead you need to increase spending to ensure you are top-of-mind when everyone else has gone quiet. Think of it as an investment.

Invest in your customers. Now is the time to find out what they want. What can make their life easier as their own disposable income takes a dive? Is there a cheaper option you can offer that will make you more money in the end, one that will build brand loyalty so that when the economy picks up those customers will remember how you supported them?

Is there added value you can provide? Let's face it, that's what we all want and are looking for at the moment.

And then tell the world what you are doing through genuine news articles as well as paid-for advertising that ensures you build both trust and exposure.



*Allison Cooper launched specialist writing, media, editing and publicity agency, Allycats Public Relations, in 2008. In 2012, she launched Marketing Spread (www.marketingspread.co.za), which is an online news platform for the marketing, retail, tourism, business, ICT and global news industries. Her 18-year career spans publicity generation, journalism and freelance writing across numerous industries.

Contact : ally@allycats.co.za

Marketing communicator: sell yourself as a specialist

By *Thamsanqa Malinga

Marketing communication practitioners normally have people coming over and saying: "We are going on a roadshow tomorrow and we want banners, caps, t-shirts and water bottles and other stuff to give away."

If this sounds familiar, don't despair. You are not on your own. In fact most, if not all, marketing communication practitioners will tell you that this request has landed on their desks many a time. When it's not for promotional material it is a request to "quickly send out a communique for a birthday or canteen special", I kid you not. The requests that we get, as communication practitioners will leave you thinking: "Am I here for ringing bells, blowing whistles and throwing confetti? Do people in the organisation understand the value of the marketing communications office?"

Recently our office received a rather insistent request to send out a staff announcement. A colleague, who happens to be the internal communications manager, used his powers to veto the publication of the announcement. I must say I fully agreed with him due to the nature of the announcement, as it didn't warrant general distribution.

A discussion ensued about how everyone in a company fancies himself a communications expert and the marketing communications department is seen as a nice-to-have with no return on investment in terms of rands and cents. Everyone who has done Communications 101 as a filler subject thinks this is a field they can master. This thinking normally leads to some in the C-suite getting all strapped up and on standby to shoot down everything from the marketing communications team.

What we are doing is not all about making sure there are banners ready to be rolled up and also about "getting" journalists to attend 'that' event tomorrow. It is not about handing out keyrings and pens emblazoned with the company

logo or dishing out t-shirts to staff 'going on some crusade'. It's not all about 'the newsletter'.

Marketing communications is central to any organisation's strategies. It helps define an organisation's relationships with customers not only by the kind of messages exchanged, but also by the choice of platform and occasion to suit the customers' preferences.

Our job is to wrap communication around customers and help them move through the various stages of dealing with the company. In return the company simultaneously consolidates its image, develops a dialogue and nurtures its relationship with its target market.

Organisations should realise that marketing communications is not just a 'business function' but is the interface between the business, its brand(s), customers, consumers and the public. Marketing communications should be seen as a vehicle through which the broader company objective can be realised. Granted, its core function is not about rands and cents but get this: it's about making sense of the company objectives. While we cannot quantifiably show our worth, we can do so qualitatively. This means what we do is all about building for the long term.



brand media Facebook social you branding blog Twitter branded yourself sell

How do we save ourselves from being perceived merely as specialists in balloons, banners and branded pens? It is not going to be easy but here goes:

1. Be there, from the beginning

Advocate that the communications office has to be involved in all campaigns being planned. This will not go down easily with your colleagues, especially if you are in an organisation that has a silo operations system. People will feel you are encroaching on their territory. If you don't do this, you will find people telling you there is an event tomorrow "so please bring banners and promotional material." If you are involved from the beginning you can easily highlight your interventions and advise on the best strategies to implement.

2. Own the platforms

This is critical for internal communications. The platforms for communicating to employees should not be owned by the IT or operations department. If they are, I challenge you to wrestle them away from those departments. Marketing communications has to own those platforms and segment them. Once you own them, develop a plan on how are they to be used and for what. There is no need to own a generic staff announcement email address if you are going to send birthday messages and other trivial announcements. That is called spam. By the time you send an important piece of communication the chances are that people will not read it because they will think "not another baby shower announcement".

3. Build and maintain relationships

I have noticed that a marketing communications office or officer that takes a stand does not become popular in

the organisation. Imagine the wannabe graphic designers who are always butchering the corporate identity and who throw tantrums when you tell them not to. You will have to work on building relationships internally and externally. Send courtesy emails to your internal stakeholders and ask them if they have campaigns coming up and if they need assistance with communication plans. Do the same with your external contacts. Keep in touch, be available and play the game of building the relationship. You don't want them to suddenly not be available now that you need them.

Everyone, from marketing communication practitioners to people in finance, human resources and other departments, as well as executives, must realise that this too is a specialised field.

I must mention that there are bodies like the European Association of Communication Directors (EACD) and the Africa-oriented African Association of Communication Directors (AACD), Public Relations Institute of Southern Africa, and the Council for Communication Management in South Africa among others. So, if you are not a marketing communication practitioner but tempted to prove that you "can do this" and unleash the genius in you, please pause. Breathe. Ask yourself why the company established a communications department and also went to the trouble of hiring practitioners in the field. Leave marketing communication to the team at the back office on the first floor but, most importantly, listen to what they say and work with them, then sit back and enjoy the rewards.

A fellow practitioner in the field told a joke about an executive at her company who came to her and blurted out "I don't know what it is you do but keep on doing it as you are making me shine out there, both in and outside the company".

To all practitioners in the field, let's go out there and make them shine.

*Thamsanqa Malinga is a marketing communications practitioner with industry experience spanning over 12 years in different sectors. He specialises in internal communications, media relations, strategy development and implementation, campaign management, online communities management and issues management inter alia. An avid writer, reader and blogger as well as voice over artist, event MC and conference speaker.

Currently he is with a credit solutions company as an external marketing and communications manager.

Contact : thamimalinga@gmail.com | [Twitter @Thami25](https://twitter.com/Thami25)

