

Q1 2022 ABC/ VFD summary

Issued by [Spark Media](#)

23 May 2022

The South African print category continues to recover, showing year-on-year growth of 10.9%, from 6,043,707 in Q1 of 2021 to 6,700,412 in Q1 of 2022.



This growth is being driven by the growth of free local newspapers. With a year-on-year growth of 16,7% (4,770,153 copies in Q1 of 2021 to 5,567,266 copies in Q1 of 2022), Local free newspapers continue to be the dominant force in the print media landscape.

To illustrate just how significant this shift has been: in 2000, 53% of all newspapers were daily and weekly/weekend newspapers and 47% were local newspapers. In 2022, a remarkable 85% of all circulating newspapers in the country are local publications. This means that over the past two decades, 50/50 has become 80/20. This equates to local newspapers circulating almost six times the number of daily and weekly/weekend newspapers combined (5,760,723 vs 939,689 copies in Q1 2022).

In contrast to local newspapers, daily and weekly/weekend newspapers continue to struggle, with some titles faring worse than others. The most notable decline in Q1 of 2022 must be that of The Daily Sun. Daily Sun has declined by 12% year on year. That's a drop of 16,257 copies from 51,342 in Q1 2021 to 35,085 Q1 2022. A far cry from its heyday in 2007, when it was circulating a massive 513,291 copies (July – Dec 2007).

A closer look at free local papers

The titles that have seen the most growth in the free local newspaper category include: City Vision (Khayalitsha), Umgungdlovu Eyethu, Overport Rising Sun, People's Post Mitchell's Plain and North Coast Rising Sun. The average increase in their circulation figures is $\pm 4,800$ copies.

In contrast, the title showing the sharpest circulation decline is The Olifants News with a variance of -9,511 copies since Q4 2021.

Evaluating sold local papers

Sold local newspapers have fluctuated in a similar way to sold daily and weekend/weekly titles. But with localised content and regional news as their foundation – they are still in demand and the decline was slight. The year-on-year comparison shows a -0.4% decline in sold local newspaper circulations. The sold local titles that have shown the largest growth include: Witbank News, Middleburg Observer, Mpumalanga News, Zululand Observer and Die Daller. Noteworthy increases were recorded by Witbank News and Middleburg Observer who have grown by 8,200 and 6,868 copies respectively.

The papers showing the largest decline include The Weslander, African Reporter, Worcester Standard and Newcastle and District Advertiser. The highest decline coming from the Weslander with a decline of 1,267w copies.

Hybrid local papers

The category of hybrid local newspapers continues to be an effective one. Titles such as the Lowvelder Friday / Lowvelder Express and South Coast Herald inc Ugu District News have shown significant growth of 1790 and 5339 copies respectively. The Daily Maverick changing sector accounts for the largest decline in this sector.

Other noteworthy changes

In the daily sector only five out of the 17 titles have shown growth. The Business Day showed the highest growth of 14.6%, albeit off a small base (from 13,958 copies in 2021 to 16,006 copies in 2022).

Looking at the weekend sector, only three out of the 19 titles showed growth. The Sunday Times had the highest growth of only 1,086 copies, taking its total circulation to 116,295 copies. For weeklies, all five papers showed declines. There was one new entrant, being Daily Maverick which changed sectors from a hybrid with a circulation of 29,776 copies in Q1 2021, to a weekly with a circulation of only 8,377 copies.

In 2022, local papers continue to provide better coverage than daily and weekend/weekly newspapers. A press schedule of every ABC'd daily and weekly/weekend titles provides less than one million copies, countrywide, while a local newspaper strategy can distribute ±5.7 million newspapers a week. Using smart combinations of local newspapers, advertisers can reach specific areas or target specific audiences, effectively. The robust nature of local newspapers makes the case for the category to be considered a desirable, modern-day print media solution.

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