

Media bosses in 'mission-suicide' to save newspapers



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Currently operating in an environment plagued by the dominance of the Internet, dwindling advertising revenues, continuous exodus of skills and a convalescent global economy, newspapers worldwide remain in the intensive care unit. The onus now lies on media bosses to come up with innovative ways to sustain their titles and save them from melting away.

Beeld

In Africa, where political leaders stay 'forever' in power and allegedly steal state money to enrich themselves but fail to invest in technology, newspapers' hearts are still beating. For how long? Nobody knows.

"Crushed tree trunks"

Yesterday, Wednesday, 19 May 2010, Bizcommunity.com spoke to Barnard Beukman, *Beeld* newspaper GM, about the new lease on life for doing business with what he called "crushed tree trunks".

Beukman said: "It is a fact that the integration of newspapers in multichannel news models developed as an important life support for print media. Some see it as a life support for the so-called last days of print."

He said the dire situation requires the discovery of new values for print media, something that will work well for advertisers and audiences.

"You need to go here and there. Come up with creative and innovative ways to make it work to your advantage. In these hard times, you need to bring in people with big money, including winemakers. Organise quiet evening gatherings, where they will pay you to give them a platform to expose their products to the pool of readers.

"You can also look at a sport team, such as rugby. Print a Blue Bulls poster with your brand emblazoned in it. You can call all these techniques sponsorships or an activation fee. They are good."

"Need exposure to wealthy consumers"

Beukman explained further: "In short, if you want to move stock in difficult times, you need exposure to wealthy consumers

who can afford your product. Planners are sometimes stuck to traditional models of AMPS reach, cost per thousand, and so on. All these are important, but are we exposing our clients to the household income capacity they need?"

Based in Gauteng, *Beeld* is an Afrikaans daily newspaper that also serves readers of North West, Mpumalanga, Limpopo and Kwazulu-Natal. Statistics show that *Beeld* readership represents the third highest household income among South Africa's daily newspapers readers after *Business Day* (specialised) and *The Mercury* (regional). *Beeld* has the largest daily LSM 10 audience in the country.

Figures released this week by the Audit Bureau of Circulation (ABC) show that, despite the daily newspaper category experiencing a real decline (2.26%) year on year, their performance is still reasonable given the estimated print order cutbacks.

"You will be surprised"

Beukman said: "If you manage a newspaper on its own in these economic conditions, it will go down. But if you unlock new values and possibilities, you will be surprised about the kind of revival coming out of that process.

"A newspaper needs credibility and respects its audience and their distinctive needs. Keep investing in quality news, journalists, layout and printing and allow only premium brands near your brand. "Appreciate that the credibility of your brand as a credible newspaper was built over time."

Beeld is owned by Media24, a division of Naspers Group. For more, go to www.beeld.com.

ABOUT ISSA SIKITI DA SILVA

Issa Sikiti da Silva is a winner of the 2010 SADC Media Awards (print category). He freelances for various media outlets, local and foreign, and has travelled extensively across Africa. His work has been published both in French and English. He used to contribute to Bizcommunity.com as a senior news writer.

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