

Key Editorial and Business Strategies:

A Case Study of Six Independent Community Newspapers

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- Leseding News
- Limpopo Mirror
- Nkomazi Voice
- North Coast Courier - and its affiliate the iNdlazi News
- Polokwane Observer
- Seipone/Xivoni/Tshivhoni
- Southern and Soweto Globe
- West Xpress

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Introduction to the Research

The Sol Plaatje Institute for Media Leadership (SPI) conducted this study with the goal of assisting small independent newspapers by exploring and publicising the many challenges that they face in their efforts to become sustainable enterprises. The intent is to reveal key business and editorial strategies successful publications have adopted to assist them in overcoming these challenges.

To this end, the SPI conducted in-depth case studies of six successful South African newspapers serving their local communities. Newspapers were selected from a pool of twenty newspapers, which were nominated as successful ventures by the Media Development and Diversity Agency (MDDA) and the Association of Independent Publishers of South Africa (AIP). All twenty newspapers were sent questionnaires. These collected information on each newspaper's background, money matters, the composition of staff, and the manager's perception of the opportunities and difficulties facing the small independent community newspapers. Based on the researchers' interpretations of responses in the questionnaires, the SPI selected six newspapers for the case study phase of the research. The selected newspapers are: KZN Community Newspaper, Southern and Soweto Globe, North Coast Courier, Eastern Free State Issue, Ikhwezi News and Limpopo Mirror.

The SPI's researcher spent a minimum of a week at each newspaper using interviews to gain an in-depth understanding of the informa-

tion given in the questionnaires. Interviews were conducted with management, staff members, advertisers and readers. The issues covered in management and staff interviews ranged from those relating to business and editorial strategies to probing how people experience the workplace, their local media contexts and the wider media environment. Advertisers and readers were asked how they perceive the performance of the different publications.

The value of these case studies is that they provide the reader with an overview of the challenges facing small independent community newspapers and the range of best practices and strategies they use to succeed. By sharing and disseminating this information the SPI hopes to contribute to the sustainability of small independent community newspapers.

The Research Findings in Context

South African community media sector is still emerging from struggle conditions where it was used predominantly as “a tool to counter state propaganda, inform, mobilise, and educate the masses about their rights and to facilitate the building of strong community organisations”.¹

Since the struggle era community media has changed. The most prominent developments are:

- The formation of the Independent Media Association.
- The combination of emerging Black print enterprises with non-profit organisations, which are newcomers to the publishing field.
- A growing range of community newsletters, which often work in partnership with government departments to promote a two-way flow of communication between government and communities.

The transition to democracy presented community media with the challenge to redefine its role. In fact ‘community media’ is an often-misunderstood concept, sometimes even by people who operate in the sector itself.² During a workshop held in Johannesburg by the Institute for the Advancement of Journalism (IAJ) in September 2005, various stakeholders in the sector reiterated that the concept ‘community media’ is currently a contested one. The workshop participants suggested a list of values and principles to assist in formulating a definition of community media. From the values chosen to describe and define grassroots media it is evident that priorities have shifted from resistance to reconstruction and development.³

The values and principles include:⁴

- Media that serves a particular community, be it a localised geographical community or a community of interest (bearing in mind that some small media organisations are growing to the extent that they serve a regional community).
- Media that incorporates a ‘community journalism approach’ where content is informed by the needs of the community. In other words, media that gives a voice to communities as opposed to that of authorities.
- Media that strengthens civil society and promotes participatory democracy and sustainable development.
- Interventions should promote community media diversity in terms of geographical coverage, languages and class.
- Social justice: media that challenges racism, sexism and homophobia.
- Independence: media that is independent from corporate, government or donor control.
- Media that is characterised by local ownership and control.
- Emerging media organisations, particularly those representing disadvantaged or marginalised sectors of society.
- Access and participation: media that provides community access to the means of production, including equipment and training opportunities.
- Media that promotes dialogue and social change about issues such as HIV and AIDS.
- Media that serves as an information and communication interface between the government and the community.
- Media which publishes in indigenous languages.

Participants in the IAJ's 2005 workshop also identified three types of small media organisations with the potential to integrate these values. These are:

- Small independent media enterprises.
- Community media (non-profit, community owned and controlled).
- NGO media (NGO's which use media forms such as newsletters as tools to promote their objectives).

The values listed above and the three types of small media organisations identified at the IAJ workshop are cause for some confusion. Firstly, some of the values conflict. Secondly, the newspapers in this research often fall into several of the three categories identified. It is often the case that 'small independent media enterprises' have non-profit and unfunded outreach initiatives similar to those normally associated with community development and thus 'community media'. It is also not unusual for small independent newspapers to produce newsletters on behalf of 'NGO media' ventures, to give NGOs 'airtime' by publicising and promoting their activities, and to extend discounted advertising rates to NGOs.

In this regard the research applies the concepts of 'community media', 'grassroots media' and 'independent media' interchangeably. Underlying this is the assumption - or perhaps the belief - that community / grassroots / independent newspapers need to engage with people and benefit them in ways that move beyond simply providing entertainment or advertisements. There needs to be participation between newspapers and the communities they serve. And this participation should help to change people and their communities in positive and meaningful ways that do not only focus on the acquisition of commodities. In essence, independent community media needs to extend people's possibilities for being in the world.

As this research finds, 'community media' exists in a dynamic environment in which multiple and often contesting interpretations have emerged of what 'the community' actually is and means. This is why each case study is preceded by a brief outline of who makes up 'the community' for each newspaper. And attending the different understandings of what and who 'the community' actually is, are the myriad strategic positions and operational tactics that managers use to navigate their publications to success. Strategies and tactics develop out of the need to be flexible, and to find a balance between serving local preferences and assuring survival in the broader context of a predominantly capitalist society.

As Mkhonza⁵ points out, instead of defining itself as a unique form of media and devising its own methods of financial sustainability, grassroots print media has shaped itself into existing commercial income generation models. None of the publications in this study falls within a concept of 'community media' as in being owned by a 'commune' of all stakeholders in a societal group. Rather, the newspapers are all privately owned and to different degrees all managers are driven by revenue and profit. This is one reason why the research uses the concepts 'community media' / 'grassroots media' / 'independent media' interchangeably.

When a newspaper is established and run for profit, or perhaps simply as a means of self-employment, it does not mean that community members, readers advertisers and employees do not experience a sense of ownership in relation to the publication. Readers in five of the case studies feel part of the papers that they read and to which they contribute, sometimes substantially, in terms of editorial content. Only one of the six newspapers shows no evidence of readers experiencing a sense of 'ownership' towards it. Notably, this one newspaper is an almost exclusively commercial

venture that has no solid community outreach activities. The research finds that the degree to which a publication is involved in outreach activities correlates with the degree to which customers experience a sense of owning that paper. The greater the community involvement - the greater the sense of ownership. So there are visible and subtle issues of ownership that apply to independent community newspapers.

- This is an important finding. It has implications for funding. All the newspapers that were studied struggle for survival - some more than others. If a definition of 'community media' persists that emphasises a concept of **commune-style ownership and community control** and overlooks **private ownership and profit-driven control**, then it is possible that many existing and emerging newspapers will not benefit from the help they need. A sense of owning publications through participation and the actuality of owning publications are subtly interconnected.

Two of the principles identified by stakeholders in the sector attending the 2005 workshop of the Institute for the Advancement of Journalism (IAJ) are that a definition of community should include "Emerging media organisations, particularly those representing disadvantaged or marginalised sectors of society"⁶ and "Media that strengthens civil society and promotes participatory democracy and sustainable development". One relates to race and affirmative action, the other to social responsibility. The research finds that these are intricately interconnected.

The SPI is strongly in favour of supporting newspapers that emerge from historically disadvantaged sectors of society. It needs to be recognised, however, that the Limpopo Mirror, the North Coast Courier, which are White-owned publications, and the Southern and Soweto Globe, which is an Indian-owned newspaper, all put back a

considerable amount into the communities they serve. None of them could be termed 'emerging', because they are well established. And none of them receive any institutional funding to support their community outreach initiatives. The Limpopo Mirror spends between R30 000 and R40 000 per annum on these activities, which include an award-winning and ongoing series of educational supplements for mathematics and science and other supplements aimed at raising awareness of HIV and AIDS in their communities. The paper receives no institutional funding for these projects and owner-manager Anton van Zyl says that they are becoming financially burdensome. The North Coast Courier has taken under its wing an emerging young Black entrepreneur and his publication the iNdlazi News. Owners Bruce and Rose Stephenson do not only give him use of their premises, he also benefits from practical help with the day-to-day running of his paper and receives valuable coaching from the newspaper's experts. In addition the North Coast Courier has established and continues to administer/ manage a fund for local orphans. Again, there is no institutionalised support for these activities. The KZN Community Newspaper and Ikhwezi News are both Black-owned publications. Neither of these have community outreach projects. But to be fair, these newspapers need to use whatever revenue they make simply to survive. And this is particularly the case for the Ikhwezi News, which is truly struggling. Yet neither has institutionalised support for the day-to-day running of their businesses. As pointed out earlier: the more a publication is involved in community outreach initiatives, the more communities report feelings of inclusion, unity and ownership.

- This is an important finding. **Community outreach is a necessity not a luxury** both in terms of developing society and increasing a publication's relevance and visibility. Newspapers that do not emerge from historically disadvantaged situations

and those who do (and which are able to initiate or expand community outreach activities) should have their community building activities or proposed activities recognised and supported so that their efforts to sustain and expand their initiatives can continue and perhaps even grow.

Returning to the principle proposed in the IAJ's workshop, a criterion that community newspapers need to meet is that they "...represent disadvantaged or marginalised sectors of society".⁷ As Emdon notes, community media is able to create jobs and related training opportunities and to encourage local economic activity.⁸ But a challenge experienced by grassroots print media is that the people who get involved in this sector have very little experience or training in the industry.⁹ Nonetheless, the six newspapers in this research employ a total of 91 people, 54% of whom are employed on a permanent basis. In most of the case studies existing and new employees are drawn from the pool of community members. The papers do not only have historically disadvantaged people as their target population, they also operate almost exclusively within these communities. So training is likely to have beneficial developmental spinoffs that go beyond job creation. Rose Stephenson, co-owner of the North Coast Courier offers a valuable insight on how independent community newspapers also benefit the wider media industry: "I think a lot of small newspapers...train the reporters to go to big papers. So we perform a service for the industry that way."

There are a whole range of factors associated with the success or failure of any business in an environment where people are struggling for upward mobility. Training is one of these. The better trained people are, the less likely a venture is to fold. Most of the training at the newspapers is on-the-job. As Emdon points out, "These organisations are forced to grow expertise in a few short workshops and learn on the job. There's nothing

wrong with this but it means the projects are immature in terms of experience, expertise and management capacity."¹⁰ This study found that on-the-job learning is common to all the newspapers researched, but in certain circumstances this training method can be counterproductive.

Firstly, in a context where money is short - which is the case for many of the newspapers interviewed, and particularly the Ikhwezi News - mistakes cost time and money, both of which are in short supply. Money also plays an important role in determining whether newspapers can send staff to attend outside workshops and courses. Secondly, it sometimes happens that on-the-job training serves to reproduce and entrench ineffective and inefficient ways of strategising and functioning.¹¹

Another important aspect of training relates to the dynamic technological environment in which media organisations are embedded. In this context IT skills and resources are vital tools for survival and success. Significantly the newspapers that struggle the most in terms of technology are those that are least able to afford the time needed to cope without appropriate technological knowledge, training and infrastructure. Due to financial constraints KZN News and Ikhwezi News, for instance, have no ISDN line.

- This is an important finding. **Newspapers need training, monitoring and mentoring** in all aspects of knowing how to start up and run a newspaper from strategising through to implementing skills-based tasks. Independent newspapers train journalists for the broader media sector and their value in this regard should not be underestimated.

Compounding the difficulties associated with becoming and staying financially viable, Emdon¹² remarks that major advertisers are reluctant to engage the Black population as the perception is that this sector does not have enough disposable

income to attract advertisers. Every newspaper researched, in some way or another, indicated that White-ness lends credibility as far as advertisers are concerned. Advertisers at the national level - and to a lesser degree the local level - are reluctant to invest their ad-spend on publications that target historically disadvantaged communities. Adrienne Shepherd, owner of the EFS Issue notes that “being White gave us more credibility. People tended to believe us and were happy to pay us upfront without having seen the paper. I doubt they would have if we weren’t White.” Rose Stephenson, co-owner of the North Coast courier offers an insight common to all the managers interviewed, irrespective of their race: “Advertisers can be quite difficult sometimes. I think they haven’t cottoned on to the fact that this is the biggest market.... maybe they’re looking for the big spenders. But you think that the masses would be the people you are looking to reach.” The Limpopo Mirror has a similar response, head of administration Adele comments: “Most advertisers now realise that the Black market is very important, but sometimes they don’t want to admit it.” The Jam-Jam’s of Ikhwezi News found it difficult to secure advertising as local Kokstad businesses did not think that the newspaper’s readership had the disposable income to buy their products and services.

Ironically, the majority of the advertisers interviewed do not read the papers they use for advertising their goods. Where there is a language barrier that prevents this, it is understandable, but it appears that there is an uncomfortable proportion of marginalisation that continues in our young democracy.

- This is an important finding. **‘Grassroots’ or independent community newspapers yield good returns on advertising spending.** Advertisers, and particularly national advertisers, need to rethink entrenched perceptions of small newspapers and

the communities they serve, as being in some way unreliable or unworthy of their support. Scott¹³ comments that grassroots print media is ideally placed to be a tool for the empowerment of local communities in the process of sustainable development. Representing a diversity of opinion and experience, local media has the potential to build a participatory democracy through the empowerment of communities at a local level. The newspapers researched often act as a voice for the people: editorial content is locally sourced and when it is not, it is at least locally relevant. The newspapers act as the ears of the people too. The papers in this study do so by supplying readers with information on municipal, government, NGO and other organisations’ projects and programmes, which has the potential to assist community members to address problems they face. Every case study in this research fulfils this task.

In this regard newspapers as well as their communities find that access to information remains a difficulty in South Africa. As the case studies show, most of the newspapers experience difficulty sourcing information from government officials. In recent years corruption and service delivery challenges have provoked glaring exposure in the press, publicising the dominant image of an under-functioning public administration. The majority of newspapers avoid reporting on contentious issues. But the North Coast Courier publishes regularly on the effects of local development on environmental degradation, irrespective of the ire of developers and estate agents. All of the papers, however, steer clear of reporting contentious and particularly political issues in a biased way and they tend to keep their reports brief and factual. Most papers commented that they present more than one perspective on a story. And this is one of the ways in which they contribute to a “diversity of opinion and experience.”

Diverse opinions and experience are underpinned and supported by available knowledge of the world and its workings. It is often the case that the newspapers in this research educate their readers, with information and articles of relevance and value to their lives: this is a common objective of most of the newspapers in this research. The Limpopo Mirror carries the presentation of information a step further by initiating and maintaining a series of educational supplements. Nthambeleni, a journalist at the Limpopo Mirror, points out: "People are no longer ignorant of reading newspapers. There's a growing culture of reading among many people, especially among the adult members of the community. And most of the people who are reading the newspaper are educated. But you still find people who don't understand the role of newspaper, of journalists, and the constitution of the country."

- This is an important finding. **Independent community newspapers are a source of education and information** for readers, many of whom have little or no access to print media.

Regarding the IAJ principle that community media is "Media that challenges racism, sexism and homophobia," it is notable that in five out of the six case studies, women hold positions at the top of the hierarchy, either as owners or co-owners of the newspapers. There is evidence in the interviews that many of the newspapers directly or less obviously contribute to the dissolution of stereotypes. Sheila Mhlongo of the KZN Community Newspaper is particularly sensitised to gender issues and will not publish stories in a way that perpetuates negative stereotypes of women. The EFS Issue steers clear of publishing photographs of Whites giving to Blacks, as management feels that this is a demeaning stereotype for both race groups. The majority of case studies show very real evidence of management and staff bridging cultural and racial differences in the workplace

and in their communities. The fact of working together harmoniously to pool different knowledges and talents is, of itself, a way of transcending racism, sexism and other social divides. Regarding religion, both the Southern and Soweto Globe and the Limpopo Mirror indicate that the communities they serve comprise people with diverse belief systems. Again, instead of ignoring or marginalising the various belief systems, these are given 'airtime' and issues are reported respectfully and in an unbiased way. It should also be noted that some small independent community newspapers also publish in indigenous languages. In this research the KZN Community Newspaper is published in Zulu and the Ikhwezi News is written in isiXhosa, so these newspapers give exposure to the two languages.

- This is an important finding. **The independent community newspapers bridge cultural, racial, language and gender divides.**

Two principles identified at the IAJ workshop as being distinguishing aspects of 'community media' are "Media that is independent from corporate, government or donor control" and "Media that serves as an information and communication interface between the government and the community". It is easy to see the potential clash between these. And this brings us to the issue of independence.

Interviews indicate that 'independence' is as highly a contested term as 'community'. Independence is a delicate issue in the media generally and thus a difficult issue to probe. All the newspapers interviewed said they were independent of outside control, so the interpretations offered below had to be pieced together from direct as well as indirect cues in the data and those gleaned in observations. As the researchers interpret it, most of the newspapers experience at least some degree of difficulty in balancing their financial interests with

the need to retain their editorial independence. Strategies ranged from swimming resolutely against any current of outside control regarding editorial content - be it from readers, advertising clients or government officials - to strategies aligned with 'not rocking the boat'.

The editorial practices of the Limpopo Mirror and the KZN Community Newspaper align with their interpretation of themselves as being "fiercely independent." The EFS Issue sources the majority of its revenue from businesses and municipalities and continuously negotiates tensions between advertiser and reader interests. Shirley Govender of the Southern and Soweto Globe is adamant that no one will dictate to her what will or will not get published, but it is less easy to determine from the interview data the degree to which this is practiced, particularly regarding the influence of advertisers on editorial content. Certainly, Shirley avoids taking sides particularly in terms of politics. And as the researchers interpret it, the Ikhwezi News nurtures the idea of independence, but it derives approximately 60% of its revenue from local municipalities and interview data yield a number of conflicting perceptions at the paper regarding the degree to which independence is actually practised. Interviewees at the North Coast Courier were open to discussing the tension between autonomy and dependency between the paper and its clients and revealed that they have occasionally refrained from reporting events that have the potential to impact negatively on business clients. But hard-nosed journalistic ethics at the paper manages to maintain an equitable balance between outside control and editorial independence. There is considerable resistance amongst most of the six newspapers towards political rhetoric and the papers limit coverage of politicians to what is done, not said. Papers tend to publish only information on political issues and developments that impact directly on their communities.

- This is an important finding. **Most independent community newspapers experience a degree of difficulty in balancing editorial independence with outside control.**

Competition could also be construed as a form of 'outside control'. Most of the publications in this research exist in a highly competitive media environment. There are some competitive practices within the small independent community newspapers that are inequitable. In almost all the interviews there are complaints about 'the numbers game' where newspapers use unsupported or unsupportable distribution numbers to influence clients to use their publications as advertising platforms. Small independent community newspapers should be encouraged to become members of the Audit Bureau of Circulation so that their distribution numbers are verified. In any event, case studies show that the controls and documentation attending formal audit help newspapers to target their distribution more effectively.

Emdon¹⁵ finds that "due to a lack of infrastructure and financial capacity grassroots print media are reliant on larger commercial publishers for their printing." In effect grassroots print media are often dependent on potential competitors. Larger commercial publishers charge high rates for printing and do not deliver a consistently reliable service. Only two of the six cases - the North Coast Courier and the Eastern Free State Issue - appear to have experienced little or no trouble with printers. But others amongst the newspapers have experienced the printing problems mentioned by Emdon. For instance, the KZN Community Newspaper (currently), and the Southern and Soweto Globe (in the past) find that printing companies do not always give them due service and that the smaller newspapers' print orders are delayed or shunted aside. On the other hand, most of the newspapers have managed to overcome printing problems and have established positive relation-

ships with their service providers.

The research does show that there is unfair competition from outside the small independent newspaper sector. Some of the bigger printing/newspaper companies offer advertising clients prices that Anton van Zyl, owner of the Limpopo Mirror, finds are anti-competitive. One large firm offers clients low insert costs if the client has the inserts printed with them as well. Anton van Zyl explains that in effect the big firm's printing unit subsidises its insert rates. Adrienne Shepherd, owner of the Eastern Free State Issue, aptly describes the inequitable practices of some large firms as "A David and Goliath situation".

- This is an important finding. **Large newspaper companies should be prevented from anti-competitive activities designed to maximise their advertiser base, but which use ethically unsupportable ways of luring clients - and sometimes long-standing clients - away from independent community newspapers.**

Another competitive practice that seriously detracts from the financial viability of independent community publications is a growing trend in municipalities to establish their own publications. Bruce Stephenson, co-owner of the North Coast Courier, comments: "They aren't going to save money. So I don't quite know why they do it. Perhaps it's for ideological reasons." The KZN News fell victim to municipalities starting up their own publications and the paper lost a chunk of revenue as a result. The municipality serviced by the Ikhwezi News went the same way, but the paper addressed the problem by putting in a tender to publish the municipality's newsletter/newspaper for them. It needs to be recognised that many of the publications outsource work to people in their communities. Scores of freelance journalists, distributors, and accounts administrators will lose income as will the staff and management of the

independent newspapers if this practice is continued. Anton van Zyl of the Limpopo Mirror says: "Discourage that. Support your local newspaper."

- This is an important finding. **Municipalities should refrain from starting their own publications. This takes the bread out of the mouths of people working in a media sector that most needs support. Furthermore, it is in direct contradiction to the government's vision of nurturing capacity in people and of growing the diversity and number of independent community media providers.**

Caribbean media analyst Cholmondeley,¹⁶ states that within South Africa's new environment grassroots print media enterprises can help to unite communities through becoming reliable sources of solutions that are shared with communities. This shared information has the potential to improve the quality of community decisions. Sibulele, marketing manager of Ikhwezi News, speaks for most of the newspapers researched when he says: "We try to unite these three regions and create a common understanding between them." One aspect of improving personal, and by association community decisions, is that many of the newspapers researched publish stories that raise awareness of community members' personal plights and service delivery problems. Particularly the North Coast Courier and the KZN Community Newspaper find that help is soon forthcoming, either from other community members, or from local authorities. In addition, many of the newspapers feature success stories of local community members. The stories encourage local people to believe that it is possible to succeed against odds and to strive for goals and a better life. A particularly evocative statement from a reader of the Ikhwezi News illustrates how emerging, as well as established independent community newspapers, can function as positive role models: "I think they have trust, respect to others and they think posi-

tive. [They communicate that] when you are doing something, tell yourself you're going to survive. And be sure to see the situation is not allowing you to be down."

- This is an important finding. **Independent community newspapers work towards creating unity in the workplace and in the wider communities they serve. They encourage philanthropy and positive thinking.**

It is clear from all the case studies that starting and sustaining a small independent newspaper takes considerable tenacity. But there is a general perception in the sector that their value often goes unacknowledged. Shirley Govender of the Southern and Soweto News summarises how the majority of independents in this research feel: "No one takes you seriously as an independent publisher...[we] feel that disadvantage is running through our veins." At every single newspaper at least one person says they are in the industry for the love of it. Most are stoic in the face of difficulties. Some are more independent than others. Many form good and often interesting symbiotic partnerships to share resources and people-power. Some report on contentious issues, most do not. The majority use their newspapers in ways that work towards building a better life for themselves and the communities they serve. And one person in particular represents the voice of small community publications by taking on and formalising the fight against unfair competition. Adele, head of administration at the Limpopo Mirror, says of her boss Anton van Zyl: "We've got an owner who is a good fighter for independent community newspapers."

This concludes the introductory section and the presentation of cross-cutting issues for the small independent newspapers that participated in this research.

The rest of the report is organised as follows:

- The **Research Process** provides a brief overview of steps taken in the study.
- The **Findings** are organised into three main sections:

1. Questionnaire Findings

'Perceptions of Opportunities and Difficulties' sets out the challenges faced by grassroots print media and the strategies they use to address these problems. Information in this section is taken from the 16 newspapers that completed the initial questionnaire.

2. The Case Studies

The case studies are in-depth discussions of each of the six participating publications. Each case study shows its own unique reflection on the points and findings from the questionnaire and those discussed in the introductory section above.

- Each case study begins with a leader page showing information such as the owner's name, the paper's medium of language, whether it is a paid or free publication, its distribution numbers, date of first issue, and the frequency with which it is published. The leader page also has a section describing who makes up 'the community' of each of the newspapers
- The case studies end with a bullet-point summary of main points.

3. A Compendium of Success Strategies

This section presents a synthesis of success strategies identified in the questionnaire and the case study phases of the research.

- **Conclusion**
- **References**
- **Appendices**

Footnotes

- ¹ Berger 1996:4
- ² Mkhonza 2003:115
- ³ Scott: 1998
- ⁴ Institute for the Advancement of Journalism: 2005
- ⁵ Mkhonza: 2003
- ⁶ Institute for the Advancement of Journalism: 2005
- ⁷ Institute for the Advancement of Journalism: 2005
- ⁸ Emdon: 1999
- ⁹ Print Development Unit: 2002
- ¹⁰ Emdon 1999: 3
- ¹¹ Mwamwenda: 2004
- ¹² Emdon: 1999
- ¹³ Scott: 1998
- ¹⁴ Institute for the Advancement of Journalism: 2005
- ¹⁵ Emdon: 1999
- ¹⁶ In Hadland & Thorne: 2004

The research process was divided into three phases: During the first phase successful and sustainable newspapers were identified. During the next phase information was gathered from a selection of twenty identified newspapers using questionnaires and, based on respondents' answers to questions, a final sample of six newspapers was selected for in-depth research. Finally, in the case study phase interviews and observations were used to collect data from the final sample of six newspapers.

In order to identify twenty newspapers to send initial questionnaires to, representatives from the Media Development and Diversity Agency (MDDA) and the Association of Independent Publishers of South Africa (AIP), were invited to nominate publications.

The newspapers had to comply with the following criteria:

- Be independently or community owned. There should be a commitment to involving people from historically-disadvantaged groups in the leadership and/or the governance of the publication.
- Publish at least one edition a month.
- Be financially sustainable.
- Not only service the upper end of the Living Standard Measure scales or particular racial groups.
- Be committed to promoting media plurality, diversity and democratic governance.
- Be committed to providing readers with solid journalistic content. Content should go beyond community announcements and press releases.
- Be able to serve as a model for other small newspapers in terms of their editorial and/or

business practice.

Once identified, these 20 newspapers were sent an email (where the newspaper did not have access to email, facsimile was utilised) explaining the research and requesting them to complete the selection questionnaire, which accompanied the request. (The questionnaire is shown in Appendix 1.) The questionnaire aimed to collect information relating to the newspaper's background, financial sustainability, staff composition and its perception of opportunities and difficulties facing the small print media sector.

Sixteen out of the twenty newspapers returned completed questionnaires. From the information gathered through the questionnaire, six publications were selected to participate in the focused case studies. Part of the selection process involved choosing newspapers situated in different provinces. Additional criteria were:

- Circulation numbers
- Publication Age
- Staff Composition
- Community Served
- Financial Sustainability

The final six selected for case studies were the Eastern Free State Issue in Bethlehem (Free State), Limpopo Mirror in Makhado (Limpopo), KZN Community Newspaper in Durban (KwaZulu Natal), North Coast Courier in Ballito (KwaZulu Natal's North Coast), the Southern and Soweto Globe in Lenasia (Gauteng) and Ikhwezi News in Kokstad (on the border of KwaZulu Natal and the Eastern Cape).

A limitation of the sampling process was that selection criteria are likely to have excluded many new publications that could have provided valuable insights into innovative and successful business and editorial strategies. Also, several publications with a lower circulation than stipulated in the selection criteria would have been excluded. However, for the purposes of the study the researcher needed to ensure that the newspapers selected had shown sustainability and success over a period of time.

A focused case study approach guided this phase of the study. Each of the six selected newspapers was visited for a minimum of a week, during which time observations and interviews with staff and readers were conducted. Advertisers were interviewed telephonically. Newspaper staff were asked questions (see Appendix 2) relating to their perceptions of their role, what difficulties they face, how they address these difficulties through their business and editorial strategies, and their reasons for thinking that their publications are successful. Readers and advertisers were asked questions (see Appendices 3 and 4) focusing on their perceptions of the newspaper's strengths and weaknesses. Where possible, the researcher interviewed all of the newspapers' staff members and a minimum of five readers and advertisers for each newspaper.

Data were audio recorded and observations were noted. Audio recorded interviews were transcribed.

The data were then analysed for content and meaning using grounded theory¹⁷ coding techniques. Data were organised into themes and the case studies were written up using a narrative approach.

To solicit feedback, the draft report was sent to the MDDA and other stakeholders as well as the six newspapers that participated in the case study phase of the research. Offering stakeholders and participants the opportunity to give feedback was not simply a courteous response, it also serves the purpose of correcting misunderstandings and errors, and thus increase the validity of the data and the findings.

The researchers also anticipated that incorporating stakeholder and participant feedback into the report will add value to and enrich the final report.

Footnotes

- ¹⁷ Strauss & Corbin, 1997

Findings

The results of the research are discussed in three main sections.

Questionnaire Findings: Focuses on the first phase of the research. Quotes from managers of the sixteen newspapers who completed the selection questionnaire are used to illustrate how they perceive the opportunities and difficulties encountered in the sector.

Case Studies: Focuses on the second phase of the research, and presents in-depth studies of the six newspapers selected from questionnaire respondents.

A Compendium of Success Strategies: This section presents a synthesis of success strategies identified in the questionnaire and the case study phases of the research.

Questionnaire Findings

Perceptions of Opportunities and Difficulties

Twenty newspapers that were sent the questionnaire (detailed in the appendices) were asked to draw on their own experiences to identify opportunities and challenges facing grassroots newspapers in South Africa. Insights from 16 returned questionnaires are captured below,

Opportunities

Although several newspapers felt that there are no or few opportunities or resources to draw on, other than those which they generated themselves, the following opportunities were identified:

- A variety of organisations were identified that are able to provide them with support. These include the Media Development and Diversity Agency, the Pan South African Language Board, MAPPP SETA, Print Media South Africa, Forum for Community Journalists and Capro.

The following quotes illustrate this:

- “MDDA, PanSALB and MAPPP SETA provide support and information”. **(Coal City News)**
- “Limited resources as we often not aware of who to approach for help – MDDA, PMSA, Forum for community journalists.” **(Southern Globe)**
- “Once we’d been in business a few years we were contacted by Capro who encouraged us to become a member (so we’ve had some support from them in helping us access some national advertising), but the rest we’ve had to do on our own. Last year was the first time we heard about the MDDA after 5+ years in the business.” **(Eastern Free State Issue)**

- The use of technology in the newsroom is seen as an opportunity as it lowers newspaper production costs.

This is illustrated by the following quotes:

- “Resources – freelancers, e-mail and internet as cheaper sources of information.” **(Seipone/Xivone/Tshivhoni)**
- “Telephones lines, faxes and e-mails [are] opportunities that we make use of.” **(Coal City News)**

Difficulties

- The most common challenge expressed by participants is difficulty in securing advertising. They say that the high incidence of failed local newspapers has contributed to making advertisers reluctant to invest in the sector.

This is illustrated by the following quotes:

- “There have been too many ‘fly-by-night’ publishing companies that give the industry a bad name.” **(Free4All)**
- “Big business does not believe in the small papers and do not trust they can deliver and therefore small newspapers lose lucrative business in the business community.” **(Leseding News)**
- “Access to advertising. Your bigger clients such as Pick ‘n Pay and Shoprite don’t trust small independent publications because they consider us ‘fly-by-nights’.” **(West Xpress)**
- “Independent newspapers also face the difficulty of trying to break into the national advertising market. Many national advertisers want to see that a newspaper has been established for some time before they take the ‘risk’ of advertising. So small newspapers have to dig in their heels and try and make it through the very rough and lean first months/years of getting established.” **(Eastern Free State Issue)**
- Grassroots newspapers find it difficult to compete with the larger commercial newspaper publishers. Due to their smaller scale they are unable to offer advertisers the same prices and distribution numbers.

The following quotes illustrate this:

- “Competition from the big newspaper groups is also pretty tough. In many areas the big newspaper groups have the monopoly and they have the advantage of being able to market all their newspapers to national advertisers together and offer much larger discounts as well as package deals which independent newspapers can’t do. [Use five of our papers and get 30% discount]”. **(Eastern Free State Issue)**
- “The big guns have the capacity to play around with their ad rates in order to keep you out of the market.” **(West Xpress)**
- Participants expressed an inability, due to financial constraints, to conduct the marketing research necessary to ease the concerns of advertisers.

This is illustrated by the following quotes:

- “Big business does not believe in the small papers and do not trust they can deliver and therefore small newspapers lose lucrative business in the business community. Small newspapers lack the resources to conduct research that could convince businesses that they do have a sizable readership or that they do have the potential to grow and reach more people.” **(Leseding News)**
- “Extremely difficult to reach national advertisers and prove to them that their advertising money will be well spent.” **(Kruger Park Times)**
- Participants view competition among local publications as very challenging. They think that grass-roots newspapers should find a way of uniting their efforts in an attempt to secure national advertising.

The following quotes illustrate this:

- “Competition amongst small papers does not help the sector; the small papers have to unite if they have to compete with the small papers owned

by conglomerates. The advertising market has been penetrated by the small papers owned by conglomerates and big business is more loyal to small papers owned by the conglomerates run by Whites.” **(Leseding News)**

– “If small independent newspapers aren’t grouping themselves it becomes very difficult to sell ads. Again they need to group to be able to talk in one voice in times of difficulty and sidelining or unacceptability in the mainstream. They need collective operation to cut costs when they do things in bulk e.g. printing and controlling their editorial content to avoid legal loopholes.” **(Nkomazi Voice)**

- A major challenge facing local newspapers is the shortage of experienced and qualified staff. This is viewed as directly associated with a lack of financial resources to either train staff members or to retain qualified and experienced staff members.

This is illustrated by the following quotes:

- “Small independent newspapers do often not have the resources to send their staff for training. Much of the training that exists comes at a price that smaller newspapers just can’t match.” **(Eastern Free State Issue)**
- “Skills are a major problem. Access to training seminars.” **(Southern and Soweto Globe)**
- “Staff retention – deliberate move to greener pastures with experience, poaching by competition.” **(Seipone/Xivone/Tshivhoni)**
- “The instability and uncertainty on the resources side makes the sector very unstable as it loses its trained people to the big boys in the game.” **(Leseding News)**

- Participants have difficulties with printing.

The following quotes illustrate this:

- “When an independent is successful they then

try to swamp them out by cutting prices, and refusing to print for the independents.” **(Eastern Free State Issue)**

– “Lack of state-subsidised printing press.” **(Kathorus News)**

– “Printing companies that are charging us a fortune and money coming late from advertisers. That causes cash flow problems.” **(Coal City News)**

– “Printing costs are too high and small independent papers depend on their competitors for printing.” **(Leseding News)**

Strategies for overcoming challenges

The following suggestions were made to overcome these challenges:

- Participants felt that they would have a better chance of securing advertising if local newspapers united their efforts.

This is illustrated by the following quotes:

- “If grassroots newspapers aren’t grouping themselves it becomes very difficult to sell ads. Again they need to group to be able to talk in one voice in times of difficulty and sidelining or unacceptability in the mainstream. They need collective operation to cut costs when they do things in bulk e.g. printing and controlling their editorial content to avoid legal loopholes.” **(Nkomazi Voice)**
- “Publication will succeed. Be sustainable without advertising revenue. We need a body to lobby for government ad agency support.” **(Southern and Soweto Globe)**

- Local newspapers felt they would benefit from training for government regarding their importance and role within the industry.

The following quotes illustrate this:

– “There is also a misunderstanding that the media is there to unveil every wrong that the bigger structures are doing and not doing anything to help advance co-operation in the communities. The better the understanding for their existence, the more support the small media is getting.”

(Nkomazi Voice)

– “It would be appreciated if organisations like the MDDA could run a campaign to educate government departments to utilise small publications for advertising. I would also appreciate if this study can be made available to the government since the government talks about BEE, which we do not see when it comes to supporting Black owned newspapers.” **(KZN Community Newspaper)**

This concludes the presentation of opportunities and challenges identified by respondents to the questionnaire phase of the research. Following are case studies of each of the six newspapers selected for the second phase of the research. Data was gathered using in-depth interviews to probe in and around the information gleaned from the questionnaires.

The Case Studies

Following is the presentation of the six case studies. They are: the KZN Community Newspaper; the Southern and Soweto Globe; the Eastern Free State Issue; the Limpopo Mirror; the Ikhwezi News; and the North Coast Courier.

1. Every case study is introduced by a leader page showing the following:

- Newspaper's name
- Owner's name
- Medium of language
- Whether it is a paid or free publication
- Circulation numbers
- Date of issue
- Frequency - how often the paper is published
- Who makes up 'the community' of the newspaper? These synopses were derived from discourse analyses of what is said during the interviews.

2. The case studies are organised under the following headings:

- Organisational Structure
 - Responsibilities and the Chain of Command
 - Internal Communication, Relationships and Management Style
 - Money Matters
- Production and Distribution
 - Marketing
 - Editorial Content
 - Printing
 - Distribution

- How the Paper is Perceived

- Advertisers
- Readers
- Staff perceptions of the paper's success

3. A summary list of points concludes each case study.

The KZN Community Newspaper

FACTBOX

Title: The KZN Community Newspaper

Owners/Managers: Shiela Mhlongo

Language: Zulu

Paid or free: Free Sheet

Print Order: 30 000 copies

Date of First Issue: 1998

Frequency: Bi-monthly

Who makes up 'the community of the KZN Community Newspaper, popularly known as the KZN News?

The KZN News 'community' can be roughly sketched as meaning "Black", "advertisers" and "readers" some of whom are in "government" and many of whom are "poor", but "respectful" of one another and "like family". They are "Zulu speakers" in and around Durban, Pinetown and Pietermaritzburg and staff members, readers and advertisers call the KZN News "our paper".



Equipped with an old camera, an old fax machine, and a new marketing qualification, Sheila Mhlongo started up KZN Community Newspaper in September 1998. In its first few years the paper was a free advertising sheet - essentially a pamphlet - targeting Zulu readers in Durban and the surrounding areas. It was a modest publication, printed on plain A4 paper, produced in Sheila's home and distributed free at taxi ranks and in government buildings and office blocks.

Noticing that people often threw her pamphlet away, Sheila decided to add items of news to it. She hoped that this would add value to the sheet and persuade people to read it and keep it and so prolong exposure for advertisers as well as the paper. This was the first of many innovative solutions and fluid business strategies that Sheila devised to keep her publication afloat. As she says: "...when business is bad, I am able to pick it up...and adjust accordingly. This is why we continue to survive."

At this point the paper's survival depended entirely on Sheila's efforts. She recalls working alone, having to sell advertising space, collect news, write up the articles, then deliver the draft to the local business services shop to have the advertisements designed, the news articles typed up and the publication's layout done. And finally, she had to arrange distribution. At first the publication's growth was uneven, but by 2001 it found firmer ground and was appearing at regular bi-monthly intervals. One problem persisted: revenue from advertising was hard to secure.

Hoping to generate more income for the publication Sheila decided to upgrade it from a bi-monthly free sheet to a weekly paid sheet. She recruited ten new staff members including two journalists and relocated the paper to offices. Then towards the end of 2002 one of the larger commercial publishers in town started a daily tabloid. The KZN News, as it is popularly known, struggled

to compete and reached a low point in 2003 when lack of finances halted production for three months. "I tell you," remembers one of the employees, "problems are coming left and right." Sheila realised that she would have to scrap the idea of building a commercial publication and restore it to its earlier status as a community sheet. To reverse the near collapse of her paper she gave up her offices, took a job at the municipality and used her salary to pay the newspaper's staff. She remarks: "...that was all to make money for the paper because, you know, we don't really make money...I'm doing it as a business of passion".

Despite her efforts all except two employees had to be retrenched. But when the paper showed signs of revival, Sheila rehired three of them and rented new business premises in Durban's city centre. Building on her previous experience of doing promotional work Sheila established a regular cash flow by offering business services to the local community. She began taking orders for promotional goods and printing business cards, letterheads, invitations, funeral programmes and so forth. In eight years the KZN News claims an increased distribution in KwaZulu Natal from 5 000 to 30 000 copies and they appear on schedule every two weeks.

Strongly community minded, Sheila declares: "We don't use our community as a source of income... We write in a way to educate and help people." The paper also serves as a voice for the people. In the words of one of its staff: "...The newspaper is a bridge where people, many poor people are able to be seen by the government. It gives information about what is happening to those people in their lives. We try to make people's lives better like this."

Organisational Structure

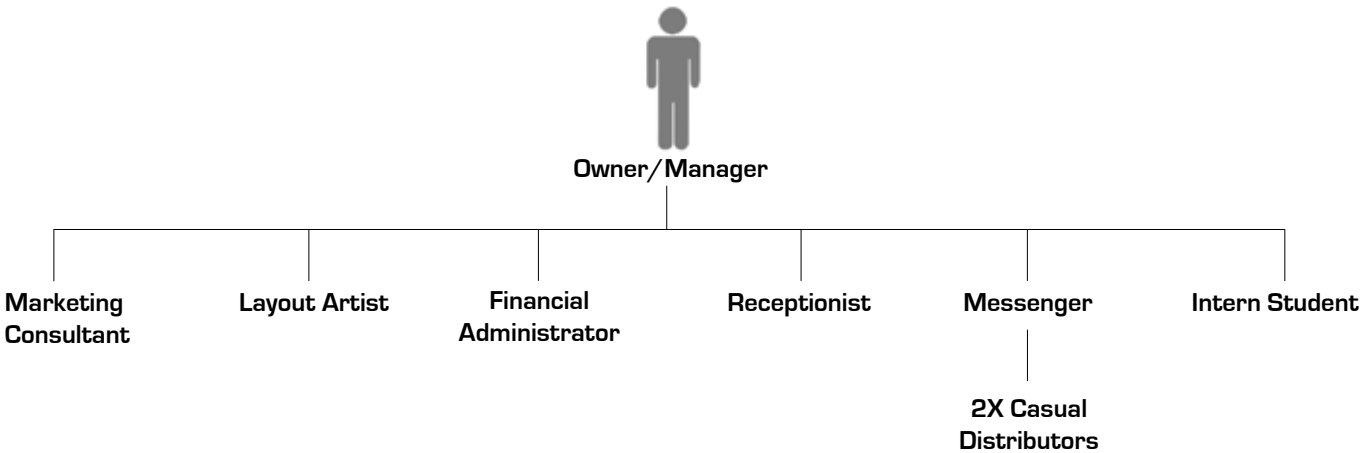
This segment focuses on how the KZN News is structured and managed. The section is divided into three parts: In the first section a diagram illustrating the paper's chain of command is presented and the different tiers of staff and their responsibilities are listed. In the second part the paper's internal communication, relationships and management style are discussed. The final section deals with money matters.

Responsibilities and the Chain of Command

In a series of financial advances and reversals the KZN Community Newspaper – or KZN News

– moved from its origin in Sheila's home, to offices, then back to her home, and finally into new business premises in Durban's city centre where it has settled.

The paper has a top-down chain of command and all staff members report directly to founder, owner and manager Sheila Mhlongo. Staff meetings provide a platform for staff to voice suggestions and concerns, but essentially it is Sheila who decides how the paper is run. She is assisted by one contractor, and eight staff members, five of whom are permanent employees. There are additional people who either work on contract, or on a casual basis, and there is one semi-permanent volunteer.



Permanent staff:

- Owner/Manager – Responsible for running the paper, managing the staff and marketing the community business services offered by the newspaper. She also writes the majority of the articles and determines the publication's layout.
- Marketing Consultant – Responsible for selling advertising space, following up regular advertisers and identifying new business. Ensures that all the advertisers are happy with the design of their advertisements and that all advertisements are properly signed off by clients.
- Layout Artist – Designs all advertisements and the newspaper's layout. Also responsible for designing items for the business services division of the paper.
- Financial Administrator – Writes up client invoices, writes out the cheques and does the banking. Also prepares the business' books for the external accounts officer.
- Receptionist – Answers the telephone and receives clients and guests to the newspaper. The receptionist is also responsible for providing the additional typing and photocopying services.
- Messenger – In addition to the normal duties associated with this position, the messenger recruits distributors and manages distribution. Also does some interviewing and takes photographs for the newspaper.

Non-permanent staff:

- Contracted/ Outsourced – An external accounts officer.
- Intern Student – The intern is a marketing student who, although contracted, works voluntarily in exchange for the benefits of workplace experience. The intern is responsible for assisting with the publication's marketing strategy and also writes articles.
- Distributors – Responsible for delivering the newspaper at the various distribution points, they work on an ad hoc basis and report directly to the messenger.

People working at the KZN News have clearly defined job descriptions with little overlap between roles. As a result, there is no confusion between people regarding their responsibilities and the division of work.

Internal Communication, Relationships & Management Style

Having fixed job descriptions does not mean that staff with no immediate tasks do nothing. Instead, everyone is expected to help out when the newspaper is chasing deadlines. As one staff member says: "We are expected to help each other. I can't just sit if I have no work to do and I can see someone else battling to get finished. It does not matter if it is not my job. We help each other." This sounds as if assisting one another is a formal rule, but the impression created in the interviews is that people at KZN News help one another as a matter of choice, and a sense of responsibility and caring resonates through the interviews.

Sheila balances the need to keep her publication on track with the needs and problems of her employees. Thobile, a staff member, confides: "I take Sheila as my parent because I know if I have a problem I can tell her, sorry my sister I have a problem...and she is very worried. [Once] I was really afraid...[and] she was trying to give me that love, like my mother would give me." Although she is "there and available" to listen to staff, Sheila sets clear boundaries. A staff member comments: "We cannot just walk into the manager's office. We have to make an appointment first." Another staff member confirms: "You write a letter formally." Congruently, Sheila notifies staff when she needs to speak to them. "She will write us letters...and we will know we have a meeting." Notification of a meeting is accompanied by an agenda and minutes are recorded. As opposed to being regularly scheduled, meetings are held as necessary, and particularly when there are

changes to announce and tasks to be delegated.

Staff describe the management style at KZN News as “strong”. Sheila clearly communicates what she expects from staff and fosters in them the professional attitudes and actions that she herself practises. One employee comments: “We have lots of rules here about how things must be done.” Sheila allows staff space to offer opinions on a situation and takes these into account, but ultimately she has the final say. Staff are informed of her decisions and what needs to be done to implement them: “She will say she wants something to stand like this. And we know we must do it like that.” They are expected to follow instructions closely and if things go wrong then, as one employee puts it, “there would have to be a good excuse.” Sheila monitors accountability and at the end of each day staff hand in records of the breaks they took and written descriptions of what they have accomplished. These rules don’t appear to stifle or oppress them: “We are very relaxed. We are very flexible, mobile. We are not stressed.”

Despite, or perhaps because of, her enforcement of strict business protocols Sheila has a low staff turnover. She notes: “I manage to keep staff...Everybody feels comfortable to work...I don’t remember any staff member just resigning. They finish their contract.” Part of the reason for her high staff retention may also be because Sheila earns and gives respect. As Thobile says: “She has respect...she tells us everyday we are a small family, we need respect.” One example of the manner in which Sheila shows respect is to deal with disciplinary situations in private, behind closed doors, so that they do not become public knowledge in the office. Part of the way staff show respect for Sheila is to do their best for her: “We try to behave...I like her. I don’t want to disgrace her.” And the way they show respect for the business is to adhere to the rules and follow good business practice: “We don’t close the office and go out everybody...If

the receptionist is not here then a colleague will answer the phone. It is not a good business [if] the phone rings and rings.”

KZN News has no formal performance management systems in place although there is a mechanism of reward in the form of an end-of-year bonus, which varies depending on cash flow. Salaries are liveable, but they are by no means excessive. One employee comments: “I do not get money from the month to cover all my problems but at least I am working everyday. And I am praying even if I am sleeping that this business will survive...it is my bread.” Sheila recalls the time she had to retrench staff, after venturing into the commercial print market: “I first started cutting their salary, and they said haww, it is bad. Because it was like they were volunteers. And I don’t like the idea of volunteers who want to come to work everyday, every week...for no money. You must pay them something, even if it isn’t very much. So I ended up saying I just can’t keep you guys...I can’t rely on people doing things for me for free. I’m not that kind of person.” Sheila does currently have an intern who is a student, but she compensates him for his voluntary work by sharing her time, knowledge and experience.

This raises the issue of training, which is done on-the-job. This is a valuable training method, but not without its drawbacks. Sheila elaborates: “Every time we have to take people with no experience and teach them. That takes a very long time. Before they can learn they make a lot of mistakes that costs...[and] you don’t have money to invest in their experience. I have to give a lot of supervision and then I can’t do other things in the business. And another thing, the background education, it’s problematic. It’s very poor.” Nonetheless, Sheila delivers a great deal of training and support. Initially she will position a staff member in accordance with the skills and capacities reflected in their CVs. After working together with them for a

while she begins to develop them in areas where they shine. "Because I don't have the capacity to send people on training, I try to encourage them and teach them what I can. I teach them according to their ability, according to their talents. I believe that people come with natural talents. Never mind what we learn at school." A case in point is the current messenger, who has begun learning how to take photographs and who was given responsibility for managing the paper's distribution. Another example is Thobile. Before working at the newspaper she had minimal computer experience but today Thobile can type efficiently and has risen from being the paper's messenger to being its receptionist. At first when she came into the office she would just sit in front of the computer until Sheila told her: "This does not work. Don't sit! Don't relax! The computer must not beat you! [and] I must know if I have a problem with the computer ask someone... I will get the help I need...And then I was typing slowly, slowly."

Money Matters

The KZN News was established in 1998 with a start up capital of R10 000 that Sheila had saved over a number of years. To keep costs to a minimum she produced the newspaper single-handedly from her flat and hired casual labour to assist her with distribution.

Without bridging finance to assist its 2001 transition from a bi-monthly free sheet to a weekly paid paper the KZN News struggled. In 2003 the situation was aggravated when a newly established tabloid in Durban presented Sheila with competition she could not match. This was when staff were retrenched and Sheila took a full-time job to keep the business going and pay its two remaining employees. Since reverting to a bi-monthly community paper the financial position of the KZN News is steadier, but it is not a lucrative venture.

Extra income is generated with a steady cash flow

from a range of business services the KZN News now offers to a variety of clients who are attracted by marketing strategies and by word of mouth or who are drawn from the paper's community of readers, contacts from Sheila's earlier work in the field, and new business leads.

Staff salaries are one of the costlier overheads. All the KZN News employees, with exception of the distributors and the intern student, are paid fixed monthly salaries with an end-of-year bonus. Distributors are paid for their time and for the use of their vehicles. As pointed out before, the intern student works as a volunteer and although not financially remunerated, costs Sheila in time and effort.

An astute businesswoman, Sheila has good checks and balances in place to manage the finances of the paper. She has separate systems to control and manage cash sales that are handled by reception, sales from the newspaper itself, from advertising, and from promotional sales. She explains: "We do a weekly cash flow analysis. Where we analyze to see how much money we get in the week and how much money we spend in the week. To be able to make sure we don't end up spending money we don't have. And we have debtors book and a creditors book. And at the end of the month we have an income and expenditure statement." Internally all the basic bookkeeping is done by a financial administrator, who is currently studying accounts part time at the University of South Africa (UNISA). Once the financial administrator has compiled the cash flow analyses they are handed over to an external accounts officer who scrutinises the documents and reports back to the Sheila. She is stringent when it comes to monies owed and owing: "There is no one who owes us money without me knowing...I supervise and make sure that all the debtors are up to date. And the creditors. I make sure that

we don't owe people and never get to pay them. I

make sure that we pay our overheads in time. By the seventh everything must be paid.”

The paper's main source of revenue is advertising. Its output averages eight pages every two weeks with an editorial to advertising ratio of 70:30. To ensure that advertising rates are competitive the offerings of other service providers are examined regularly. Regular advertising clients help to keep business stable. So it was a considerable loss when one of the municipalities who used to place a full page worth of advertising in the KZN News started up an internal newspaper run by staff from an independent newspaper, which then did the printing.

Income from the business services arm is sometimes used to fund the newspaper if revenue from all the various sales does not always cover costs. For the most part Sheila expects the newspaper to be self-sustaining as she resists borrowing. Outside funding is hard to secure. Perhaps the definition of a community paper as formulated by the MDDA precludes funding for the KZN News. One of the MDDA's requirements is that the paper should be owned and run by 'the community'.¹⁸ Sheila comments: "How can I go to media or diversity agent and say, give me money. They will not give me. That's why I don't even go for funding. In fact I am the only paper that hasn't gone for outside funding."

Low profit and lack of outside funding makes it difficult for the KZN News to extend its reach and to improve its functioning in terms infrastructure, training, extra editorial content, and importantly, research. Interviews show many instances of Sheila's forward-thinking style, but the KZN News needs a capital injection to bring her plans and hopes to fruition. She comments: "...in a small business...if you have an idea you have to create funding...If I can get at least 40-50% profit then I will make sure that I spend 20% to get someone

to help me with the paper”.

Production and Distribution

In this segment of the case study the marketing, editorial content, printing and distribution of the KZN News is discussed.

Marketing

Responses to the first versions of the KZN News, when it was only an advertising pamphlet, were not promising. People would discard it after a cursory glance or “use the paper to wrap their glasses and all that cutlery they sell.” Sheila's first marketing strategy was a remedy. She began to add news items to the pamphlet to give it added value and persuade people to read it and keep it for longer. To this day the KZN News articles are written to last a fortnight: a deliberate strategy designed to increase the newspaper's shelf-life and to provide advertisers with greater exposure.

In the second phase of its life - between 2001 and the end of 2002 - the KZN News was a daily paid sheet. It was aggressively marketed to readers and advertisers. During this time the publication appointed a full-time public relations officer responsible for marketing the newspaper to potential government and corporate clients. He was also responsible for organising various marketing events to raise public awareness of the paper. Sometimes staff members, wearing KZN News t-shirts and caps, would sell the newspaper from stalls set up at busy shopping centres.

Towards the end of 2002, the arrival of a commercial competitor in the marketplace sent the KZN News into a downward spiral and its marketing strategies faltered. Sheila recalls: “Then we were being too discouraged about the new tabloid.” After returning to its original niche as a

community free sheet, the paper slowly regained its footing and is now in the process of reviving its marketing division: "Now that we can see that the worst is over and we are still here we are slowly starting to rebuild ourselves. Even if it is for free we must do something."

It normally falls to Sheila to "do something". As she says: "I am the one person to make sure that the business is marketed. At least 90% comes from my initiative." She makes sure she attends the right marketing functions "where you need to be seen as a newspaper." Sheila represents the paper at these functions but also gets exposure as a businesswoman and entrepreneur. She comments: "The value I get from marketing and publishing here in community newspaper for the last seven years, I cannot measure in terms of money, but there is a value that it does in my life...I'm surprised, so many people know me now. If I was to do something someday, people wouldn't say 'Who are you?' So I am using it as a marketing strategy to market myself, as well as the newspaper." The memory of hard times makes Sheila reluctant to employ a marketing expert. This is partly because of the cost of an extra salary and partly because of the risk involved in employing someone who may not be able to perform in the field. She prefers to hire someone, preferably from the community, and teach them. She recently found a suitable candidate to train and now has a marketing consultant to follow up regular advertisers and identify new business. The consultant goes door-to-door visiting local businesses with back copies of the publication and with distribution numbers and other information that illustrates the paper and its market. The KZN Community Newspaper also sends copies of the publication to potential and regular advertisers and puts up posters at distribution points. Business services offered by the paper also increase its visibility.

A recent innovation is to send the messenger out

into the community to talk to people and get their views on various topical issues. Manned with his camera and his newly acquired photography skills he takes shots of everyone he interviews. This is a triple-edged tactic. First, it serves to introduce new readers to the publication. Second, it is a way of generating news items for the paper. Third, there is the potential that advertising sales will be boosted when friends, family and business leaders - hearing about the interview and the photograph - will want to see both and will pick up the paper. It is certainly likely that the paper will be kept and brought out to illustrate the retelling of the experience. What makes this strategy clever is that it is congruent with the understanding of community - of family and familiar - reflected in staff interviews. It indicates a solid understanding of their market and an appropriate avenue of action.

Even through difficult times the KZN News has been able to attract advertisers to its publication. Staff credits this to the fact that the paper is a free sheet that is easily accessible to the community. The paper's relevance to its target market is another of its fundamental attributes. Reliability also plays a role: the paper is distributed regularly and its content is consistent. This last factor is understandable given that Sheila has a clear editorial ethos for the KZN News.

Editorial Content

Two broad values guide Sheila's choice of editorial content for the KZN Community Newspaper.

- To publish in a way that is sensitive to and empowers the people served by the paper.
- To avoid scandal and sensationalism. When the paper went commercial Sheila was pressed for time and unable to run thorough checks on everything the journalists wrote. She finds that "running a community newspaper is much better. I have full control of the content." Sheila and her intern do all the writing.

The publication will not publish articles that position the community in a negative light. Stories are written with the intent to empower the community, get help for the people involved, or to educate people on their rights and how to access these. Sheila tells a story to illustrate: "There is a woman who lives in the bush with her grandchildren. Now that is a negative story. But the way we wrote it we made sure that this old lady gets help. She didn't have an identification document to get pension, and the grandchildren didn't have birth certificates to get the grant they could access from the government...Through that article that lady got help and we were able to educate the community about how to go about getting help themselves."

Staff at the KZN News emphasise that editorial content is sensitive of their people. They do not sensationalise their content and refuse to make money at the expense of the community's well being: "We don't use our community like a source of income; we are very sensitive to the challenges that face our communities." Sheila offers an example: "Instead of showing a picture of a man hanging, and carrying on about him committing suicide, we will try to focus on the real problems that he was facing and show a picture of him at a better time in his life. I will look for other people with similar experiences...and generalize that story." Gender issues are also very carefully handled and Sheila never publishes stories that perpetuate negative stereotypes of women: "I'm one person, but I would want to change wrong perceptions about various issues that concern people. Because most of the time people depend on perceptions to make decisions and that is very wrong." Instead, Sheila chooses to engage with topics "in a conscious manner".

Editorial content focuses primarily on giving people information about what is happening in their surrounding world: "We touch more on the community...when the people read the newspaper they

see stories about themselves." The messenger and his camera capture stories and images that communicate people's views and concerns: "We try to be a platform for our readers to voice their views on different issues that affect their lives." The lighter side of life is reflected in entertaining stories about talented community members and interviews with artists, local bands and other entertainers. The newspaper reviews the latest music releases and runs CD give-aways for lucky readers. Sheila says "when it comes to sport we don't look at what happened this weekend. We look at sport in general." Again, this tactic aims to sustain interest in the paper over time.

Many people in the community do not have access to other newspapers so it is important to include some news from beyond the immediate vicinity. The newspaper also features articles about events at national and provincial levels: "We make sure that we are fully aware of what is going on. Because the newspaper it is very important to give people the information about what is going on, remind people. If it's a Freedom Day or if it is World AIDS Day the community needs to know." When reporting important government changes and events Sheila keeps descriptions brief and neutral: "We don't have the capacity to run investigative or corruption stories."

Sheila writes most of the editorial herself. She is assisted by the intern student who writes the sports articles and the messenger who doubles as photographer-interviewer. Then Sheila designs the layout and then passes this information on to the layout artist to assemble the publication.

Printing

The day before the KZN News is distributed the messenger delivers an electronic copy of the publication to the printers. The messenger then returns with the proof for Sheila and the layout

artist to check thoroughly. Once satisfied they instruct the printers to go ahead with a print order of 30 000 copies. Very early the next morning the newspapers are collected for distribution.

During the researcher's visit to the KZN News the messenger arrived at the printers to collect the newspapers only to find that they had not been printed. The company gave them no indication of any delay nor did they offer any explanation as to why they had not done their job. The KZN News was simply instructed to come collect the publication on the following day. The paper has always outsourced its printing. But as the researcher's observation shows, the paper's relationship with printers is problematic. Sheila recounts her experience as a regular client of the company: "every time you print we must pay up...[but] they have their own newspapers, they don't care about us. If we print or we don't print is fine with them. After seven years of printing with them we are just treated as another person who is just a competitor. And yet when we started we...we thought they are so big we thought they will always help us, but it never happened like that. They are harsh but we don't have the resources to go anywhere else."

Sheila has identified an alternative source that is likely to be reliable and "do a proper job" but they are based in a distant town. As the KZN News lacks the basic electronic resource of an internet connection, at this point in time the paper cannot easily shift its business to the alternative provider. Sheila says: "We need a certain programme on our computer. I can't remember but there is something that we need Telkom to connect to send electronically. We are working toward that."

Distribution

In 2001 and 2002 when the KZN News was a paid weekly, a newspaper company was contracted to distribute the publication to various

shops across KwaZulu Natal. This was not a viable arrangement as several distribution points lodged complaints that they were not receiving the publication. Moreover, distribution was expensive and debt accumulated: these factors contributed to the paper reverting to its earlier form as a bi-monthly free sheet.

Nowadays the KZN News distributes 30 000 newspapers every two weeks in Durban (18 000 newspapers), Pinetown (8 600 newspapers) and Pietermaritzburg (3 400 newspapers). The messenger, a minibus taxi driver, and a casual worker employed for the day, deliver the KZN News to points where readers can easily collect a copy. These include shopping and business centres, municipal buildings and taxi ranks. In the past the KZN News was also distributed in small shops, a practice that was stopped when it became evident that the paper was being used for wrapping breakables and takeaway foods.

Sheila struck upon an idea to streamline her distribution by making use of an existing government communication channel - the Government Communication and Information System (GCIS). She accesses this system in a way that is probably unanticipated in terms of formal operational protocols. Yet her strategy fits well with the principal idea underlying a Government Communication and Information System (GCIS), so her tactic lies within government's broader mandate. She utilises the GCIS in what is essentially a 'piggy back' arrangement. Each of Durban's Multi-Purpose Community Centres has a manager who attends weekly meetings in Durban's city centre. So she approached the managers with a request to deliver 5000 copies of the KZN News on their return trips to the Community Centres where they are based. She observes: "They do this for us because the GCIS is a government communication service. It's their duty to make sure that people get access to media. So we just take advantage of that."

How the Paper is Perceived

This segment presents advertisers' and readers' perceptions of the KZN News, and staff perceptions of why the paper is successful

Advertisers

Advertisers discovered the KZN News through Sheila's work as a representative or through other businesses recommending the publication.

In response to being asked what they think contributes to the KZN News' success advertising clients identified several reasons. They remarked that the paper meets the needs of its community because it provides them with local information that is of interest and relevant to them. It is written in Zulu, which also makes it accessible to the community. And the paper is distributed in the rural areas of KwaZulu Natal where access to printed information is scarce. On the business side, advertising clients enjoy good service from the paper and most found the community responds positively to the advertisements.

Advertisers do not only come from 'the community' as outlined in the introduction to this section: "We are a marketing company and we're always running ads. So we were looking for sales people who are from the Black communities because we wanted to expand our services in the Black township...But we only advertised in the newspaper once as we did not get the kind of response we have anticipated."

One advertiser remarks: "The newspaper's strength is quite well, but from a central Durban perspective, the newspaper never worked for me because most of the bigger newspapers dominate in the area. But, having said so, I had a very good reply from people residing outside central Durban area."

Readers

Readers appreciate that the KZN News is a free sheet as they cannot afford to buy publications on the market. For people in rural areas the KZN News is the only source of printed news that provides information of interest to their communities. In the words of one reader: "The newspaper is a good tool for information to the community. People...don't buy or get newspapers everyday. But this paper can go as far as rural areas."

Readers say that the KZN News informs them about their rights and how to access assistance for the many difficulties they experience. They also find the articles very interesting. A reader remarks: "I think it's a lot of interesting stories. Government stories, they make an improvement in the paper...a lot of things."

The publication is viewed as being reliable because it appears regularly and provides readers with accurate information: "This newspaper is reliable."

Finally, readers greatly appreciate that the newspaper is written in their mother tongue as it is easier to read and so the content is accessible.

Staff perceptions of the paper's success

Staff members at the KZN News identify numerous factors which they regard as leading to the paper's success. The main reason is editorial content with its strong emphasis on local and developmental stories. This means that the community experience a sense of belonging and importantly, ownership. Sheila observes: "They feel it belongs to them...They call it our paper."

The consistent appearance of the paper on schedule every two weeks is another factor that staff consider to be in the paper's favour: "People know when they think about the paper it will be there. It

does not disappear for some months and then afterwards it comes again. The frequency is stable.”

They note that advertisers can rely on their advertisements being accurate and professionally designed: “We make sure that we publish their advertisement exactly as they have asked. We do our best in designing the advertisements and we try to offer them a professional service.”

The fact that it is a free sheet, say staff, brings the publication to a market that may not buy newspapers. Being free also means that the KZN News can offer advertisers good distribution numbers and thus a sizeable reach. A staff member comments: “Maybe as a business man they like to advertise in KZN News because it is free. It is easy for everyone to get the newspaper and read that information from the advertising.”

Finally, newspaper staff associate their success with their flexibility and willingness to adapt in order to survive. In this regard Sheila is resilient and determined to weather the storms of being an independent publisher of the KZN Community Newspaper. She remarks: “We sense the challenges before they happen and then we are willing to adjust accordingly. This is why we continue to survive. Adjust so you can survive.”

Following next is a summary of the main points relating to this case study. The summary concludes the review of the KZN Community Newspaper.

Summary

- Shiela completed a marketing qualification prior to establishing the KZN News.
- She was extremely dedicated to making the newspaper work and even took on an extra job at the municipality when the newspaper went through a difficult time.
- The KZN News offers the community extra business services to supplement the paper's income.
- The management style is described by staff as formal. At the same time there is a strong sense of community among staff members.
- Staff have the opportunity for on-the-job training and many staff members have undergone personal development while working at the newspaper.
- No loans were taken out to start the paper.
- To keep costs down, Sheila initially produced the paper by herself from home.
- Their advertising rates were developed by looking at expenses and taking what other publications charge into account.
- The newspaper is written in Zulu.
- The KZN News has sound financial systems and employs an external accountant on a contract basis.
- The publication markets itself through door-to-door sales, sending copies of the paper to potential advertisers, and interviewing readers and placing their photos in the paper.
- The KZN News has an informal editorial policy to present the community in a positive light and to be sensitive to the community and not sensationalise articles.
- The editorial content includes information about what is happening in community, news from outside the community, government information, reader give-aways and entertainment news.
- The publication is distributed through taxi ranks, shopping centres, municipalities and the GCIS.
- Advertisers use the paper because it reaches their target market and is published in Zulu. They feel that the KZN News is successful because it provides the community with local information and

provides them with a professional service.

Footnotes

¹⁸ Media Development and Diversity Act, No. 14 of 2002

The Southern and Soweto Globe

FACTBOX

Owners/Managers: Shirley Govender

Language: English

Paid or Free: Free Sheet

Print Order: 30 000 copies

Date of First Issue: 1992

Frequency: Monthly

Who makes up 'the community' of the Southern and Soweto Globe?

The meaning of 'community' conveyed by management, staff, readers and advertising clients of the Southern and Soweto Globe can be reconstructed from fragments of their interviews to roughly approximate: "Black, Coloured, Indian and other Asian" people living and working 'in a changing dynamic environment' around and in "Lenasia South, Lenasia and Soweto". They are "big generators of income" and speak "English". There are "pioneer residents" and some "new faces" and they are generally "staunch people", who value "family", appreciate the "familiar". Most "enjoy reading", some are "intellectuals" and many are "religious". They are "culturally rich" although sometimes "divided" by history, culture, or creed. And most share a sense of social "conscience" regarding "human rights" and responsibilities and recognise the need for "humanitarian action".



When Shirley Govender launched the Southern and Soweto Globe in 1992 she was already well known in Lenasia South as a pioneer resident and an active contributor to community affairs. She struck upon the idea of starting up a community newspaper while working with a group of volunteers to assemble a newsletter for a local civic organisation. One of her tasks was to collect stories from people in her neighbourhood. This experience sensitised Shirley to the fact that the community “needed a voice” and so she resolved to provide it. Her resolve was strengthened by several demotivating experiences of working in corporate publishing firms before South Africa’s transition to democracy. She remembers that despite being the only one amongst her colleagues to hold a BA degree, and “even with obvious potential and enthusiasm for my craft” as a non-White employee she was ignored, bypassed for training and given “all the skivvy stuff” to do. So Shirley decided to take the leap and start her own community publication. It would be a mouthpiece for the community as well as a financially viable business: “I could make a living...[doing] something I genuinely enjoyed.” And now, fourteen years later, the Southern and Soweto Globe is a monthly free sheet published in English and targeting Indian, Coloured and Black readers in and around Lenasia South, Lenasia and Soweto. It distributes 30 000 copies “to every structure in the areas: shops, shopping malls, civic centres, old age homes, clinics, schools, [even] police stations.”

Shirley remarks: “It wasn’t something I thought in school ‘I want to be a journalist. I want to own a paper’, but that’s where life’s journey took me.” Her journey to success was slow and arduous. At first she did not even own a computer and knew nothing about layout. But spurred on by the encouragement of a friend, who works at the Stanger Weekly, Shirley started writing out her stories by hand. Every month on the Saturday before going to print, Shirley and her husband would drive

all the way from Lenasia South in Johannesburg to Stanger in KwaZulu Natal where her friend would help her with layout and design. Shirley would type up the publications and fax and phone clients to secure prompt approval of their advertisements. When the newspaper was ready they would rush back to Johannesburg to have 8 000 copies printed and then distributed at taxi ranks and in various shops in Lenasia South.

She remembers the first eight months of the Globe as a time of “lots of begging” and very little time. She held down a full-time job for the first three months, as well as being mother to three children. She worked from home and often had to recruit the help of her maid: “I’d say...make the bed, wash this, and just cut this out, whatever, stick it onto the pages. Poor husband, I’m fighting with him in the morning to get the kids ready and off to school, he has to get to work, we only have one car. It was a nightmare.” It was only in 1993 - one year after starting the Globe - that Shirley could buy a fax machine and a PC. Unable to afford full-time staff, she employed a fellow “moonlighter” to help with layout and it was not unusual for the two of them to work on the paper till three in the morning. A year later, in 1994, Shirley and her husband bought a pickup for distribution and employed a part-time driver. By then the newspaper was being fully produced in Lenasia South. The Saturday dashes to Stanger had come to an end.

From her home office in Lenasia South Shirley, assisted by sixteen people, produces a newspaper that aims to be “a mirror of all that is happening...the magic and the tragic”. The Southern and Soweto Globe sets out to create opinions and trends in the community, to provide the community with interesting and useful information, and importantly, to transcend old cultural divisions within it. Shirley reflects: “When I look back, jeez, it was medieval how we put this thing together...But

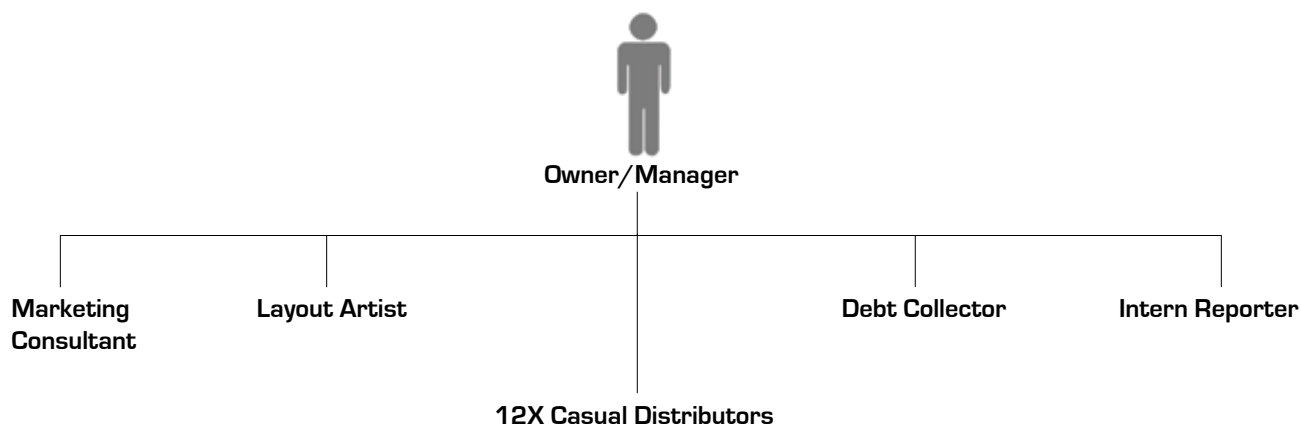
I rejoice now. It was something to have accomplished.”

Organisational Structure

This segment of the case study focuses on how the Southern and Soweto Globe is structured and managed. It is divided into three parts: In the first part a diagram illustrating the paper’s chain of command is presented, and the different tiers of staff and their responsibilities are listed. Next, the paper’s internal communication, relationships and management style are discussed. The final part deals with money matters.

Responsibilities and the Chain of Command

Owned by Shirley Govender, the Southern and Soweto globe is produced from her home office in Lenasia South. She is assisted by sixteen staff who report directly to her. Although Shirley consults her staff, she is the one who makes all the final decisions on the publication’s production and content. The marketing consultant and the layout artist are employed full-time, distributors are casual employees and the intern journalist works voluntarily in exchange for workplace experience. An outside accountant is contracted to prepare formal financial statements.



Many family members are involved in the publication. One employee is “a cousin of a cousin”. When he was still alive Shirley’s husband was a solid presence during and after the start-up of the paper and presently Shirley’s son keeps the books and acts as the newspaper’s debt collector, although he is not a formal employee.

Permanent staff:

- Owner/Manager – Responsible for financial and staff management. Writes the majority of the editorial articles, edits the newspaper and determines the publication’s layout. Sells advertising to national businesses and markets additional publishing and business services offered by the newspaper.
- Marketing Consultant – Responsible for selling advertising space in the newspaper. This includes following up with regular advertisers and identifying new business. Ensures that the clients are happy with the design of their advertisements and checks that every advertisement is properly signed off.
- Layout Artist – Responsible for the layout and design of the newspaper, advertisements, inserts and any additional design work. Assists with typing up the articles and telephonic advertising sales. Also responsible for managing the additional business services offered by the publication.

Non-permanent staff:

- Contracted/Outsourced – An external accounts officer. A distributor for Lenasia. A distributor for Soweto, who sometimes also sells advertising.
- Debt Collector – Writes up the invoices for various clients and follows up on payment. Administers staff salaries and does the banking. Also prepares basic financial records for the external accountant.
- Intern Reporter – Responsible for writing articles and taking photographs.
- Casual Distributors – Deliver the newspaper to

various distribution points.

Although specific job descriptions do exist, employees at the Southern and Soweto Globe are expected to be actively involved in all aspects of the newspaper’s production and to assist one other as far as possible. Being a relatively small staff complement means that “there is a lot of multi-tasking...especially at the end of the month.” As Shirley explains: “Every one needs to be geared to get that product together.”

Internal Communication, Relationships and Management Style

Shirley comments on her approach to management: “A very open style. Very relaxed atmosphere. Managing...it’s got to be a two-way thing... [or] you’re not going to get the best from them... So I engage my employees in how I manage my day-to-day functions, but there are things I unilaterally make a decision about.” She notes that it is important to her that staff members “are not afraid to come and talk to me about something. It is such a changing dynamic environment that they must be free to come and talk to me.” Marketing consultant Shiraaz agrees that the management style at the Southern and Soweto Globe is “very informal”. He says that Shirley “wants feedback from the staff...We have a big say in the paper.” Clearly Shirley’s collaborative approach allows staff members to feel a sense of ownership of the paper, as Shiraaz’s affirms: “It’s like I own the company.”

Despite the relaxed and friendly atmosphere at the Southern Globe office Shirley sets clear standards: “I am particular. In my office I am particular about people addressing me...I’m pretty conservative...you have to dress appropriately. You dress for success. It’s important that people see us like business people...They must trust you to spend their money wisely.” Shirley goes on to observe

that “it’s a community newspaper but it’s still a business...a lot of what you get is how you present yourself.” In this regard, codes of conduct extend beyond forms of address and ways of dressing. Shirley observes that she and her staff need to hold both the business and the community in mind: “You live there...you have to know there are boundaries...I don’t want staff talking about me to somebody else.” A staff member adds: “Our main policy is we are not allowed to discuss what goes on in this place, how we do things...And whenever a client needs something we have to approach Shirley with it first.” Appropriate behaviour inside and outside the office works well for Shirley who feels that: “people look up to me with respect. They see me as a role model.”

Regarding role modelling, scarce financial resources curb Shirley from sending her employees on specialist training courses and workshops. Shirley aside, none of the Globe’s staff have formal qualifications or previous print media experience. But everyone draws on one another’s special talents and they transfer skills as and when required. Shirley observes: “I’ve learnt now in the last couple of years, that if you want the right kind of skills you pay for it. If you can’t pay for it, you train it. If you want someone to work for a two year period, it’s worth the investment.” Her policy that staff members should multitask fits well with on-the-job learning as employees have many openings to acquire new knowledge and hone new skills.

Because the Southern and Soweto Globe is a monthly publication, time needs to be apportioned in a way that allows an even flow of tasks throughout the month. Shirley observes: “It’s very easy to just sit for three weeks and do nothing. And what happens? I’ve been there, done that. We relax too much and then the last week we’re all screaming and shouting.” To avoid this happening Shirley sets interim outcomes for staff to achieve. These include taking photographs, following up leads,

working on background information, rounding up deals, sorting out the paper’s sideline business services, and so forth. Shirley asserts: “Target deadline, that’s my thing.” Generally staff agree that the paper must meet its production deadline but there is some dissent regarding interim targets: “I have this thing that we only work once a month...as long as we print the pages we said we’re going to print its fine.”

Planning meetings are held to discuss and monitor progress against deadlines: “It’s supposed to be every week, but sometimes just before the paper comes out. But look, if there’s a need it then we have it. Otherwise Shirley just calls us, and we discuss it at the desk.” In meetings staff members brainstorm to generate ideas on how to improve the Southern and Soweto Globe. Strategies are devised to increase the paper’s content and various publications are examined to get tips on layout and design. Meetings also provide a space for staff to offer feedback on workplace issues and to table any difficulties they are experiencing. All articles and advertisements have to be in before the monthly production meeting, which is held without fail. This is when staff members go over what still needs to be done to get the newspaper out and the final decisions on layout are made. Just prior to paper’s print deadline everybody works for a solid weekend. Shirley remarks: “they choose not to go home to get the paper out.”

Shirley reflects on her personal style: “I’m one of those people that needs to be in control, that needs to have everything in place.” There do not appear to be any formal mechanisms set up to measure staff performance. As Shirley points out, advertising sales performance is easy to measure: people either sell or do not. Editorial quality is less easy to gauge but before going to print Shirley scrutinises all the articles so problems in that area rarely continue beyond a month. Regarding discipline Shirley explains: “I’ve learnt how to keep

staff in line. To check, to know you have caution...In any structure you get those workers who are delinquent. They just need to be told. And I think they can be quite afraid of me because I can be a tyrant...I can go ballistic if I ask for things and they aren't there." Work at the Southern and Soweto Globe is not all about tasks and deadlines. Shirley also recognises that people need to relax and have fun: "Fridays are the party. And I don't mind giving them time off. Who wants to work on a Friday?"

Money Matters

In 1992 Shirley created the Southern and Soweto Globe with zero start-up capital. Both she and her husband had full-time jobs, so they used a sizeable portion of their salaries to float the paper. At that point its survival depended on a judicious mix of low overhead costs, goodwill, begging and the prompt collection of advertising revenue.

Like many newspapers, advertising is the primary source of revenue for the Southern and Soweto Globe and it averages between sixteen and twenty-four pages per month with an editorial to advertising ratio of 30:70. In the very beginning Shirley had no idea of how to go about developing a rate card. Again, her friend at the Stanger Weekly helped. He explained the concept of column centimetres to her and showed her how he calculates his paper's advertising rates. Shirley also examined the prices of other local newspapers. And she made sure to charge less. Newly opened publications use the same tactic, but now Shirley understands the tactic's potential of these "little titbits" to destabilise the market. She offers an insider view: "Because they think we're making money. They think they can come in for their slice of the pie. And every time they do that you lose revenue. They come in with something for R2, they come in at 25c. So we ride the tide, but there is lot of compromising." The Southern and Soweto Globe operates is a highly competitive advertising

market. Local business people are either reluctant to spend on advertising, have not planned financially for it, or remain unconvinced that they need to advertise. So Shirley also focuses on sourcing corporate and national clients. But this is not always easy. One reader points out that there is a tendency amongst this group of clients to place advertisements in publications that target visibly affluent White communities, which in turn gives rise to visibly affluent White newspapers. Reflecting that "you have to have money to make money", Shirley comments on its role in attracting and rewarding advertisers: "[the big publishing houses] sell forty different publications at a time. They can afford to take their advertisers to San La Mer for a weekend."

At no stage does Shirley mention obtaining outside funding for the paper and her experience is that any initiatives she takes "have to pay for themselves". She continues: "A new publisher has so much opportunity, there is so much funding. I unfortunately had to take the long road." Despite the long road to success, fourteen years after start-up the Southern and Soweto Globe is financially viable and well positioned in its market. And as a dynamic and ambitious businesswoman Shirley pushes to achieve more. To generate additional revenue the paper recently started offering a range of business services to the community. The extra work ensures that the facilities of the business and its human resources are profitably utilised. No doubt it also increases the publication's visibility to the public eye.

This raises the issue of staff payment. In the early days "Staff turnover was high because you couldn't afford to pay them. And we had to wait 'til the paper come out to pay them. So salaries were always paid later than they should be. But that was a condition of employment." Happily the paper has moved on and Shirley can occasionally reward an individual staff member with a small

monetary gift - or take them out to lunch. The layout artist and the marketing consultant are employed full-time and earn set monthly salaries, although the marketing consultant can also earn commission on his advertising sales. The twelve distributors are employed on a casual basis and are paid per thousand newspapers that they distribute. The intern journalist receives a monthly travelling allowance but not a salary as she works voluntarily in exchange for skills and experience. Shirley's son collects debts and is not paid: instead his work contributes to the family's shared success. This family ethic continues from the genesis of the paper when Shirley's husband would do all accounting tasks. She smiles: "I was not having any financial skills whatsoever. Fortunately my husband became an auditor. So that helped. If you don't have financial skills, hire it or marry it."

Production and Distribution

In this segment of the case study the marketing, editorial content, printing and distribution of the Southern and Soweto Globe is discussed.

Marketing

The Southern and Soweto Globe operates in a highly competitive advertising environment and as Shiraaz, the marketing consultant, explains, it is not only a matter of "the smaller papers muscling in...Saying they're printing so many thousand copies and selling their adverts for next to nothing." Advertisers can choose from a range of providers from local and national radio stations, and "between five and eight" newspapers, two of which are strong and well established rivals targeting the same market as the Southern and Soweto Globe. "It's hairy, it's quite hairy" says Shirley, adding that advertising costs are often not a part of shopkeepers' business plans. In addition "he has the mentality that he doesn't have to

advertise. [He says] the customers know that they can get their masala or whatever by me." Shirley notes that in terms of advertising business "we've endeared our local market a hell of a lot. We're sure of support. But the shop around the corner doesn't have a whole lot of ad spend...So we need national advertising." Shiraaz notes that, unlike rivals in the vicinity, the Southern and Soweto Globe has secured numerous corporate and government advertisers and appears to be "doing well" in these arenas.

Shirley asserts: "We market aggressively all the time...I am guilty of harassment. We really trouble people. But we do what we have to do to outsmart the competitors." To stay one step ahead Shirley adopts a multidimensional approach to marketing.

Shirley favours a marketing tactic that has proven effective in her areas: selling advertisements door-to-door. The marketing consultant, sometimes accompanied by Shirley, approaches potential clients, explains the benefits of advertising in the newspaper and tries to convince them to buy space in it. In the eyes of the observing researcher, the process is very informal. The marketing consultant does not carry a rate card or past issues of the publication with him to bolster his bargaining power. And the exchange appears more like two friends having a chat than two business people negotiating a deal. In a sense it echoes the management style in the office. Shirley also has staff search rival publications "to look for clients, look for advertising. So they are doing some of the telesales in their not so busy time." She runs specials on advertising rates. "We have reader give-aways. We have movie give-aways. We encourage advertisers to have give-aways - killer specials." To promote her paper and "to convince people that we have a quality product that will provide returns" she has copies of the paper posted to existing advertisers. Copies are also sent to potential clients

such as government people, advertising agencies, and “people we’re trying to charm”. Shirley runs features and supplements and consults with staff, business clients and community members so that she can slot in their ideas and perspectives. Supplements are often built around special community events, important religious festivals, and special days like Mother’s Day and Father’s Day. One example of a special feature is “when we had child protection week a client sponsored the page with emergency numbers and phones and statistics. And that worked very well.”

Most of all Shirley focuses on branding. She pays to have the Southern and Soweto Globe’s name printed on people’s walls and on t-shirts. “So it sticks in people’s minds.” But more specifically her branding is geared to community needs and values. She ensures that the paper is grounded and visible in community issues and events: “There is a standing invitation to all organisations to take part in the paper.” And schools are encouraged to send photographs of academic and sporting achievements. During annual schools’ sports days the Southern and Soweto Globe visits thirty schools, photographing groups of thirty children in each school. Shirley emphasises that this is a service to the family ethic in her community: “And how many people were out there looking for the paper because their grandchild, their daughter, their son was in that paper.” In a similar vein, she had media brooches made for her staff to wear so that if people in the community have a story or a problem they “must feel free to come and speak to you. Without feeling uncomfortable.” The Southern and Soweto Globe co-hosts two annual events. One showcases the contributions of people working for social upliftment, and one community member is honoured with a Human Rights Award. The other annual event is schools’ sports days. In 2005 the paper also co-hosted a comedy show called ‘Chuckles for Charity’.

Editorial Content

The majority of the editorial is written by Shirley and her intern journalist. In their absence other staff members will write up articles. Shiraaz describes how an article is judged: “We see if it has relevance to our readers. We see if it’s going to inform them. Basically what I do is put myself in the readers’ shoes and say: ‘Do I want to read something like that?’” Shirley has the final say on the paper’s editorial content. She is adamant that individuals and organisations do not dictate what the paper can or cannot publish. She says: “I don’t believe that anyone should try to interfere in how I run my publication. It’s a community publication and people have a right to know what is happening around them. I won’t allow it.” In this regard, Shirley applies three principals to guide the nature of editorial content in the Southern and Soweto Globe:

- Firstly, she and her staff note that cultural, religious, ethnic and political divisions exist within the community. They recognise the place of multiple perspectives in a dynamic, culturally rich and changing social context. So they do not align themselves with any political party or religious sect. Reporting is kept factual, balanced, unbiased and sensitised to the myriad voices of the people. As Shirley remarks: “We generalise. We cater for everybody”.
- Shirley recalls: “One of the reasons I started the newspaper was to give the man on the street a voice. A chance, for justice, to inform and educate.” Underpinning this principle is a vision of building unity in community.
- The third guiding principle is to report “the magic and the tragic” in a principled way. Human experience is not sensationalised and reporting is sensitive and respectful to community members. Shirley notes: “We’re not like a national daily, where you’re not really involved, you just write the story.”

Shirley shares her aspirations for the publication: "I'm trying to get every reader within my area of distribution to be totally into that newspaper. To be one with it. It should be a mirror of all that is happening." As a mirror the paper reflects many aspects of local life. Shirley says that from the very beginning her involvement in community structures has helped her to understand the needs of her target population and to allocate editorial content accordingly.

Editorial content is allocated into several sections. The 'general news' section reports on government issues relevant to residents in the paper's target areas, crime reports, and as one reader attests: "information of interest to the community". The 'community news' section covers various charity and social events, showcases non-profit organisations and announces reader give-aways. Theo, the layout artist, adds: "If a reader dies we have that in the paper." There is a 'school' section that comprises photographs of pupils and tells of their sporting, academic and community achievements. A 'health and beauty' section dispenses information on alternative healing methods, offers a health recipe and gives beauty tips. The 'letters' section publicises readers' views and sometimes carries an additional column entitled 'Street Talk'. To source information for this column, a journalist approaches people in the street and questions them on a topical issue. After recording their stories and opinions the journalist photographs them. This is a popular column as people and their families enjoy being seen and heard. The final 'sports' section tells of sporting activities and describes sporting achievements in the community. Every month the paper runs a monthly insert that focuses specifically on news from Soweto. Shirley would like to increase this coverage: "It's an immediate target of mine."

Shirley has many plans for the paper's unfolding future. She thinks ahead and in her opinion this distinguishes her from competitors. "I can't go running to the corner shop every day" she says. Her latest plan is to "try to drop the ratio of advertising to editorial. To spread the editorial." To this end she had a journalist from a Zululand newspaper spend a day at the Southern and Soweto Globe to offer advice and insights on layout and design. Shirley anticipated that this would enable her to bring her newspaper in line with what "the broader publications" are doing. And she is pleased with the result: "The most recent issue looks quite different. More spacious." She remarks that the paper's front page is also more in line with national publications: "One ad at the bottom, another little ad. Maximum three ads. The other papers have fifteen ads on the front page. The thing is, I do not produce a medium where I am trying to get money from it. I'm not becoming an ad campaign. It comes across in the publication, in layout and design, it falls in line with national standards." Clearly Shirley intends to extend the reach and appeal of the Southern and Soweto Globe.

For the paper to grow it must maintain a high standard and show close attention to quality and detail. Shirley remarks: "From a quality point of view you must have the relevant staff to do justice to a particular section of the publication." Attracting trained journalists is a major difficulty for the publication: "We don't have a proper journalist and haven't for the entire duration of the newspaper. Occasionally you get an intern but it's not a constant." Ultimately, success depends on having and reaching the right people: "Everything depends on people." Shirley continues: "And you can have the most marvellous product, but the secret is people must read it. If you're not reaching your market, you're wasting your time."

Printing

In its first year the paper was printed by a printing company in Johannesburg. She still uses their printing services, but only occasionally. And their working relationship is not easy. Despite having a “love-hate relationship” with the firm Shirley concedes that “they can be very sympathetic. They give me good deals if I’m having a bad month.” But because the Southern and Soweto Globe has a relatively small print order, the printer often tackles the bigger jobs first. This leads to distribution delays for the Globe, which can result in unhappy clients. Also, Shirley gets indignant when the printer presents her with “a different price each month. It depends on if the guy is in a good mood or not.” In Shirley’s experience, high or fluctuating prices are common in the printing sector: “There is such a monopoly on printing in this country. You are at their mercy with pricing.” Apart from infrequent use of this company’s printing services, the Southern and Soweto Globe has been using the same printers - Seculo Triweb Printers, in Ormonde - for the past thirteen years. “We have a positive relationship with them. In all the years we have been printing with them we have not had any problems.”

On the day before the newspaper comes off the press, Shirley hands an electronic copy of the newspaper to the printers. Once the proof copy is ready and checked, Shirley will sign it off and collect papers for distribution in her Lenasia South neighbourhood. A contract distributor collects the remaining copies.

Distribution

Every month the Southern Globe distributes 30 000 newspapers house-to-house in three areas: Lenasia (12 500 copies), Lenasia South (6 500 copies) and Soweto (11 000 copies). In the early days, distributing the newspaper was a stressful

experience for Shirley, who recalls “I used work the whole night. Print the paper. Get the guys. Drive from street to street, checking the distribution. Waiting for the guys to come back to the car. People hooting.” Nowadays distribution begins three days before month-end and is well organised, or as Shirley says: “strong”.

Because the newspaper is based in Lenasia South where Shirley lives and is “so involved” she prefers to play an active role in deliveries to the area. She hires twelve or ten casual employees and together they complete a house-to-house distribution in one day. Lenasia and Soweto deliveries are outsourced. Distribution in each of these areas takes a half a day to complete and involves house-to-house deliveries and drops at various shops and taxi ranks. For distribution in Soweto, Shirley employs the services of “someone we’ve been using for years. He has his van. He has his guys. And he does it. He knows the market, he knows the people.” His familiarity with Soweto not only benefits the paper in terms of distribution, “if someone wants to advertise, he takes details for us.” Currently the paper is unable to print enough copies for every home, so each month deliveries are alternated between different suburbs in the three distribution areas. There is also a postal aspect to the distribution. Based on a subscription list, copies of the newspaper are sent to government officials, ad agencies, and existing and potential clients.

Shirley tries to avoid placing inserts into the Southern and Soweto Globe. In her experience inserts are time consuming and not cost-effective. It is more financially viable for the publication to sell advertising space. Their door-to-door distribution method is another way of ensuring cost-effectiveness: it prevents large numbers of the newspaper being placed in any one location and so wastage is minimised.

How the Paper is Perceived

This segment presents advertisers' and readers' perceptions of the Southern and Soweto Globe, and staff perceptions of why the paper is successful

Advertisers

The majority of advertisers interviewed say that they discovered the Southern and Soweto Globe through its marketing consultant. Several reasons motivate their choice to advertise in the paper. Firstly, it reaches their target market. Secondly, it has a large distribution. Thirdly, advertising rates are reasonable. And finally, the marketing consultant is persistent. As one advertiser says: "The Southern Globe sits on your back."

Advertisers attribute the paper's success to three factors. They appreciate its good customer service, which they find professional and friendly. In their opinion they get good value for money as the paper's advertising rates are reasonable and adverts generate the right response: "The Southern Globe's success is visible and measurable in terms of the response to my adverts." Also, they point out that the editorial of the Southern and Soweto Globe contributes to its success. Editorial content is interesting and of value to readers: "It covers local news that matters to the community – things that people are interested in reading about."

Readers

Readers appreciate the Southern and Soweto Globe's focus on local news that impacts on the community: "We depend upon them to inform us of events and issues that regard the community itself. They are willing to engage the community." One reader applauded the paper for exposing corruption within the local municipality.

One reader remarked that the paper has "thorough" coverage "across a spectrum of events" in the community: "They have all community happenings, like a diary in the paper that lets the community know about what's happening and when." The Southern and Soweto Globe is viewed as part of the community. One reader elaborates: "This newspaper goes beyond news. This newspaper is involved in community events."

Importantly, the paper balances multiple perspectives. Readers note that some local newspapers are strongly aligned with specific political parties or religious sects. Conversely: "Her paper goes to broader spectrum and in doing that she has done a good job. She has balanced her role effectively."

Staff perceptions of the paper's success

Staff members identified a number of factors which they consider integral to the Southern and Soweto Globe's continuing success. The Southern Globe's greatest strength, they say, is its close involvement in the community. Shirley notes: "it is to our advantage that we are involved with the community. And we market aggressively all the time - branding in terms of getting involved in events." Theo adds: "We found this out...the community wants the content of the paper to be based about 99% on the community and we do that...we try hard to get everything from here."

"Our advertising" is a critical success factor. And more specifically, the balance between advertising and editorial content that serves to spotlight people and the community. Staff anticipates that by increasing readership, the paper will increase its advertiser base and so meet the needs of both groups of people.

Staff credits some of the paper's success to their willingness "to go the extra mile for a client". They

make sure to provide advertisers with professional service and to design and produce adverts that meet their clients' expectations. Staff point out that readers and advertisers are assured of receiving a quality product on time.

To conclude this discussion, a summary follows, which shows the main findings from the case study of the Southern and Soweto Globe.

Summary

- Shirley has previous experience in journalism through the civic organisation's newsletter that she was responsible for.
- When she started the newspaper she was working full-time and produced the paper after hours with the help of a friend that worked for another community newspaper.
- The Southern Globe currently offers additional services in the line of publishing.
- Shirley and her staff still produce the publication from her home in Lenasia.
- Staff members describe the management style as open and relaxed. Their opinion is taken into account when Shirley makes decisions.
- Staff are provided the opportunity for on-the-job training.
- The newspaper's accounts were initially done by Shirley's husband who was a qualified auditor and are now done by an external accountant on a contract basis.
- The paper was started without taking out a loan as start up capital. Shirley used her husband's salary to pay for the printing bill and had to get advertisers to pay immediately.
- The Southern Globe's advertising rates were calculated by taking the production costs into account and ensuring that they would be cheaper than any of their competitors.
- The publication's marketing is done through door-to-door sales, telemarketing, supplements,

sending copies of the paper to potential and current advertisers, involvement with community, and their schools section.

- The Southern Globe has an informal editorial policy not to support a particular party, to be balanced and unbiased, to meet the needs of their community and to contribute to building unity within their community.
- The paper's content includes general news, schools news, community news, health and beauty.
- It is distributed from house-to-house and through various shops and taxi ranks.
- Advertisers found out about the Southern Globe through its marketing consultant. They explain that they advertise in the publication because it reaches their target market, has a large distribution, reasonable advertising rates and because their marketing consultant is persistent. They feel that the paper is successful because it provides them with good customer service and because it reports on news that is of value to the community.
- Readers appreciate the newspaper because it covers local news that impacts on the community; they are not aligned with a particular religious group and report on a broad spectrum of news and are involved in community activities.
- Staff believe that the publication is successful because it is actively involved with the community, they provide their advertisers with a good service and the paper is reliable and consistent.

The Eastern Free State Issue

FACTBOX

Owners/Managers: Adrienne and Martin Shepherd

Language: English

Paid or Free: Free Sheet

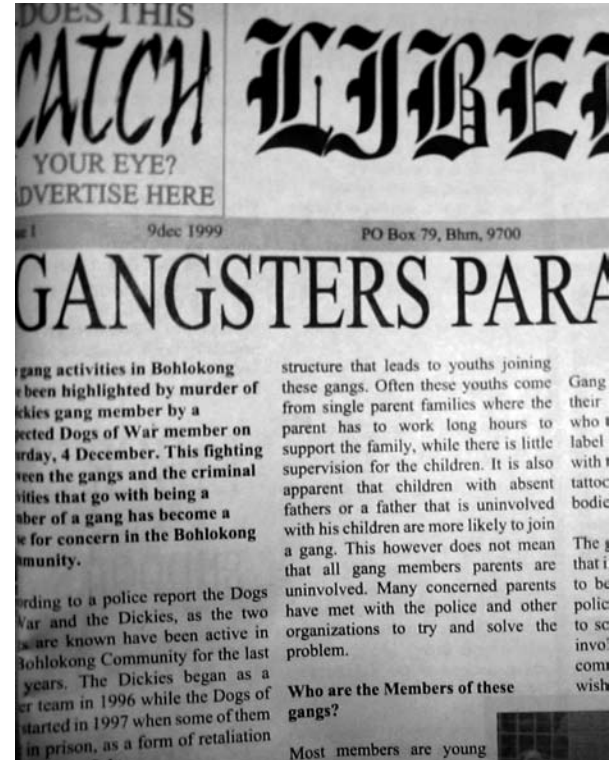
Print Order: 18 000 copies

Date of First Issue: 1999

Frequency: Weekly

Who makes up 'the community' of the Eastern Free State Issue?

Two groups of people make up the "lone voice" of the EFS Issue. There are "loyal advertisers" and "clients" such as "municipalities" who comprise "Whites" and "emerging Black entrepreneurs" who "meet needs commercially" of the "Black" "township" "market" in "Bohlokong" and the "Qwa Qwa" "homeland". The paper has a policy of not publicising "stereotypes of White people giving to Black people", and advertises for "alcohol" and "casinos". They are "not that much involved in the community" of readers. Then there is the "other" group which is made up mostly of "Black people" who read "English" and who can find out "where to buy for a good price". EFS Issue's "Black" journalists are "into the cultural" and some of them would like to see the paper "upbuilding editorials". Journalists find that readers "help us a lot" to "inform" them about "positive" happenings in "their communities".



For Adrienne and Martin Shepherd the launch of their own independent newspaper has given the couple a chance to promote development in poor communities around Bethlehem in the Eastern Free State. Observing that residents of Bohlokong, the township adjacent to Bethlehem, had little or no access to information about developments in their community, the husband and wife team launched a fortnightly free sheet on the 9th December 1999. Originally known as the Liberty News, the paper provided community news, updated people about developmental activities and gave local businesses a vehicle to market products and services to people who previously had little access to the media.

Starting out with an initial print-run of 3000 copies distributed in Bohlokong, the paper has grown substantially over the past six years. Now the Shepherds produce a weekly free sheet distributing 18000 copies to most of the surrounding towns. Today the newspaper's distribution area extends as far as Harrismith and incorporates the former Qwa Qwa homeland. On 27 June 2002 the paper changed its name to the Eastern Free State Issue (EFS Issue) to reflect its repositioning as a regional publication.

The EFS Issue's growth has been impressive, but it has not come without personal risks and sacrifice for the owners, neither of whom had any journalistic experience. Prior to launching the paper Adrienne was earning a very basic salary as a teacher working in one of the neighbouring towns, eighty kilometres from Bethlehem. The 160km round-trip used up a significant amount of her income and time: "It was just rush, rush, you never stopped you know." Finally deciding she could not continue this way, she resigned her teaching position and launched her new career as a newspaper proprietor, journalist, advertising sales representative, receptionist and delivery driver. Martin continued working as an articled clerk for a local

firm of accountants to keep the couple afloat, but his evenings were devoted to helping Adrienne get the paper out. Once it started bringing in enough revenue to meet the family's basic needs, he was able to resign this position and after four years he started to work full-time on the publication.

At first Adrienne sourced most of her stories from the media liaison lady in the SAPS, who lived in the same block of flats as the Shepherds; they were mainly stories about gangs in the township. Adrienne also belonged to the athletic club and they held a marathon, so she included some sports news too. But she rapidly expanded the content as the community became aware of the product and people began approaching her with story ideas and contributions. With no capital to invest the couple made do with their outdated personal computer, their own camera and the family car to produce and distribute the paper.

After some time working in this way, the couple began recruiting staff. Martin explains: "After our first issue had hit the streets we were covering a music festival where we met a guy who offered to write for us, and he did so from the second issue for about three months until he ganged up with our printers to launch their own newspaper. Then we hired freelance journalists (first one, then three, now five) from the second issue. The first full-time staff member was Samuel, who was employed in February 2001, just over a year after we started." Today the EFS Issue employs six full-time staff, including Adrienne and Martin, and 15 part-time staff members. The paper also maintains a small satellite office for the Phuthaditjhaba-based editor and marketing consultant. EFS Issue's team views the paper as the "eyes and ears of the community". They are dedicated to ensuring the publication contributes to empowering and educating readers from the communities it serves. Staff are also committed to the newspaper's long-term sustainability, recognising that the

EFS Issue is “a business like any other business. The objective is to make money.”

Organisational Structure

This segment of the case study focuses on how the Eastern Free State Issue is structured and managed. It is divided into three parts: In the first part a diagram illustrating the paper’s chain of command is presented, and the different tiers of staff and their responsibilities are listed. Next, the paper’s internal communication, relationships and management style are discussed. The final part deals with money matters.

Responsibilities and the Chain of Command

When the EFS Issue was launched its head office was located in the Shepherds’ home in Bethlehem, where the couple made space for news production, layout and advertising sales. With the growth of the paper the EFS Issue has since moved to an office in Bethlehem and Martin hopes that soon the paper will have “a full on classified section”. The EFS Issue still maintains a small satellite office in the town of Phuthaditjhaba in the former Qwa Qwa homeland. This office is staffed by the editor and a marketing consultant.



*Half of these staff members are based in Qwa Qwa

While each staff member has a formal title, these designations do not accurately reflect their individual responsibilities. Each person is responsible for a wide variety of tasks that, in a less streamlined organisation, would not normally fall under their job titles. This diversification plays an important role in ensuring the salary bill remains within an affordable range, but the need to multi-task means that everyone feels stretched. Adrienne comments: "You can't really give a hundred percent to anything because you are laying yourself quite thin."

Officially Adrienne is the EFS Issue's proprietor,¹⁹ but all major decisions are taken jointly with Martin, who is employed as the newspaper's manager. Martin's responsibilities include the direct supervision of all staff, although some of this responsibility has been delegated to the newspaper's driver, whose job includes managing the Qwa Qwa-based distributors.

Permanent staff:

Staff members at the EFS Issue have the following duties:

- Owner – Sells advertising to local businesses, writes articles and takes photographs for the newspaper. Also responsible for its layout and design. Shares final responsibility for all of the paper's editorial content with the editor.
- Manager – Sells advertising to national businesses, writes articles and takes photographs for the newspaper, assists with its layout and design, and is responsible for the newspaper's financial and staff management. Shares final responsibility for all of the paper's editorial content with the editor.
- Marketing consultants – Two marketing consultants sell advertising space in the paper. They maintain relationships with regular advertisers, identify new clients and collect monies due. They occasionally report on events if nobody else is available. The marketing consultant in Qwa Qwa is

also responsible for overseeing distributors based there.

- Cleaner – Keeps the house and office clean, makes refreshments, helps with answering of the telephone and translation from Sesotho into English. She also takes care of the manager and owner's child.

Non-permanent staff:

- Editor – Responsible for writing a weekly editorial and contributing occasional articles to the publication. The editor is not responsible for deciding on the content of the paper.
- Freelance Journalists – Two freelance journalists write articles and take photographs for the paper.
- Driver – Collects the newspaper from the printers and ensures that the print quality is of a high standard. He also manages the newspaper's distribution and oversees leaflet insertion.
- Distributors – Fifteen distributors hand out the newspapers from distribution points and deliver batches of newspapers to the bulk distribution points. They also assist with inserting leaflets and flyers

Internal Communication, Relationships and Management Style

Both the production staff and management at the EFS Issue describe the overall management style as open and democratic: "It's quite informal and we don't spend our time looking over people's shoulders," says Samuel the Phuthaditjhaba based marketing consultant. He adds: "We don't have rules or policies in place, but we are ethical. The owner trusts our discretion."

In keeping with the informal management style, decisions are made in consultation with staff. New ideas or concerns are presented to staff members who are invited to give their feedback and to put forward ideas of their own. Adrienne

and Martin have the final say, but in most instances the team works hard to reach agreement. Describing this approach Adrienne says: "Usually the majority wins unless the other person can put up a really good argument. Usually we come to a compromise or an agreement." Staff feel they are trusted and empowered to take the initiative. This has had positive consequences for the EFS Issue. Adrienne explains: "We are results orientated. We don't have proper job descriptions, they are not written. We just do what needs to be done. Even though nobody sets us targets in terms of advertising, we set our own targets so that we can stay afloat in the business. We know what to do and we set ourselves deadlines." By giving staff a large degree of autonomy, the newspaper's managers have time to focus on meeting production requirements rather than on micro-managing how staff members go about their work.

To ensure the paper continues to improve from week-to-week, all the production staff meet in Bethlehem each Thursday to conduct a post mortem of the previous edition, plan the next week's paper and to allocate tasks to staff. These meetings are central to the newspaper's operations and provide an opportunity for the staff to thrash out difficulties encountered during the previous week and to jointly explore possible solutions. The Thursday meeting also provides a space where people can share success stories and discuss approaches that yielded good results. Meetings contribute to staff having a sense of ownership of the paper. They also create opportunities for information sharing and informal training where staff and management have an opportunity to coach each other through successful strategies for improving content and for convincing advertisers to buy space.

When it comes to casual staff, management have adopted a more formal approach to ensure that all flyers are correctly inserted and that papers

are distributed as widely as possible. Remarking on the need for close supervision of these processes, Martin says: "When it comes to the distributors, the flyers and that sort of thing we had the same [hands-off] approach in the beginning. We assumed that everyone would be responsible. Then we realised that some of them [the distributors] were taking chances. So now we check the distribution and flyers. We keep checking."

Money Matters

The EFS Issue's financial circumstances have improved significantly over the years, but in the early days Adrienne and Martin faced a daily struggle to keep the newspaper and their family afloat. Starting out with just R7000 to invest in the project, the paper survived on subsidies from Martin's salary. Describing the difficulties, Martin remembers: "I was earning R2200 as an articulated clerk, which mostly went to the newspaper. I don't know how we survived."

With no financial safety nets in place the Shepherds were committed to staying in the black from the outset. Adrienne comments that: "with no funding, loans or anything from anywhere" they were determined "not to go into debt at any stage". This decision has meant that the newspaper does not need to worry about serving debts, but it did place pressure on the couple. They saved money by working from home, using old equipment and doing virtually all of the work themselves. The only people they did employ were part-time distributors who were needed to ensure that the paper was widely circulated. Describing these difficult times, Martin says: "We put a lot of work in and I think it helped having no staff. We couldn't afford staff. We couldn't even afford to pay ourselves. We were paying money in for the pleasure of working here." Now that the EFS Issue is bringing in reasonable revenues the paper maintains a full-time staff and pays employees monthly

salaries, calculated in different ways depending on the nature of the work.

Martin and Adrianne do not pay themselves salaries from the company, instead they draw against the loans made to the paper from Martin's salary. Marketing consultants receive a relatively low basic salary, which is supplemented with commission on any sales they make. Distributors are paid per bundle of 500 papers. If the flyers are thick the finished newspapers with flyers are split into two 250 paper bundles. The two reporters work on a freelance basis and are paid per article or photograph published. Articles are valued according to Martin and Adrianne's personal perceptions regarding their quality and newsworthiness, rather than by word count or column centimetre. This is done to discourage writers from bulking up articles for extra pay. Payments for news stories range from R40 to R80 per article. Features and columns, which are popular with readers, are paid at a higher rate of between R100 and R200. With most of the journalists having digital cameras, they are paid a flat rate of R25 per photo. These rates are not cast in stone and journalists can earn considerably more for an article or photograph if the managers feel they are exceptionally newsworthy or of an extremely high quality.

As a free publication the EFS Issue is completely reliant on advertising for its income and the couple have had to make some critical decisions in setting their advertising rates. In doing so they studied their competitors' rates and spent a lot of time trying to figure out what clients might be willing to pay. To stay profitable they have had to make careful calculations regarding the amount of advertising they need to attract to cover the printing and distribution expenses. Based on the current advertising rates the EFS Issue can print eight pages of news for every five and a half pages of advertising. This 60:40 advertising: editorial ratio is based on a rough calculation in which the

newspaper's expenses are subtracted from its advertising revenue. The EFS Issue averages twelve pages per edition.

Despite careful planning, the Shepherds admit that inexperience in the newspaper business has led to them making some mistakes. The first time they were approached by an advertiser wanting to insert flyers in the publication they quoted a price that they later realised was "ridiculously low". Basing their quote on the amount of effort involved in inserting the flyers, they failed to consider the fact that by allowing clients to insert their own flyers they were depriving themselves of advertising revenue. Martin looks back: "We did not know that our prices were ridiculously cheap at that time. We just looked at the amount of effort that it took to put flyers in".

Production and Distribution

In this segment of the case study the marketing, editorial content, printing and distribution of the Eastern Free State Issue is discussed.

Marketing

The EFS Issue employs a variety of activities to raise the newspaper's profile in the region. These include putting up posters advertising the main stories in each week's publication and painting a wall at the entrance to the Qwa Qwa office which says, 'Welcome to the land of Kgotso, Pula, Nala and Eastern Free State Issue'. Kgotso is peace, pula is rain, and nala is prosperity. The newspaper also has a relationship with the local community radio station, Qwa Qwa Radio in which the headlines are read out over the air each week.

In addition to these traditional marketing approaches the EFS Issue runs a regular bumper sticker competition, in which distributors hand

out stickers with the newspapers for readers to put on their cars. This sticker says: 'I know it all. I read the Eastern Free State Issue'. To encourage people to display these stickers prominently, the newspaper sends someone out each week to look for cars displaying the sticker. The paper awards a prize of R200 to the owner of the first car found displaying the sticker.

When it comes to marketing the paper to the advertisers, the Shepherds have learned the importance of being both aggressive and strategic in their marketing activities. When they launched the paper they approached local businesses in Bethlehem to introduce them to the title, explain their vision and tell them about their target market. Businesses were asked to contact the paper if they were interested in advertising with them. They were convinced that businesses would see the value of advertising in the newspaper and that it would be relatively easy to secure regular business. They soon learned they had underestimated the challenge of attracting advertisers. And Martin remembers that "The phone just never rang."

It was a comment by a prospective client that put them on the right track, when he told them they could not expect companies to come to them. Following up on these remarks they realised that to survive they would have to adopt a more aggressive approach to marketing and this became a major focus of their activities. Since then they have found that the most effective way to secure advertising is to have their marketing consultants make personal visits to clients armed with back issues of the paper, circulation figures and information describing the target market. This strategy is particularly important since many of the potential advertisers are not familiar with the newspaper, which is primarily targeted at people from neighbouring areas. These people are often not regular readers of the paper and it is important for the EFS Issue to show clients copies of the paper to

ensure that they know it reaches their customers. Describing this dilemma, Adrienne says: "In Bethlehem there are still lots of people that don't know about us because we distribute in Bohllokong. That is why we put it in obvious places like grocery stores where people who won't normally see it might pick it up."

The EFS Issue also runs regular advertisements of their own aimed at educating readers about the vital role advertising plays in ensuring they receive a regular free newspaper. Readers are asked to support the paper by telling storeowners and service providers they are doing business with that they saw their advertisements in the paper. They are also asked to show their employers copies of the paper and to encourage them to advertise. Anecdotal evidence suggests that this strategy works. One of the EFS Issue's regular advertisers described how each of his staff members arrived at work with a copy of the newspaper to show him their advertisement.

However, despite these efforts the newspaper still faces many difficulties, which include having to compete with much larger and better-resourced media corporations for national advertising. The EFS Issue struggles to compete because it does not operate on the same scale, nor does it have the benefit of being able to draw on a large corporate infrastructure. This means they cannot match the larger companies' discounted advertising rates and they cannot offer the same circulation figures. Describing the difficulties of competing with large corporate players, Martin says: "They [the large media companies] have got all the contacts and they say okay we have ten newspapers in this area or in this province, use us. And here we come and say we are this lone voice in the Eastern Free State, use us. It is just sort of a David and Goliath situation. It is difficult and it is still difficult for us. They are like a one-stop shop. Advertisers will just phone them and say we are

looking for something in Bethlehem. If you are one in the area it is hard.”

The paper has, however, managed to secure some national advertising through a national advertising agency, including a healthy amount of advertising, which was placed by the Independent Electoral Commission. And to get around the problem of not being able to compete with the large media companies, the EFS Issue has tried to convince managers at local branches of national companies to speak to their national offices about advertising in the newspaper. However, in most cases they have found while local store managers are aware of the benefits of advertising with the EFS Issue the message seldom filters up to national level. Martin explains: “The problem there is that the area manager is sold on us and says that he is getting a better response than with the other local paper, so we talked to the guy at the national level and he is not keen. So now they could advertise with us but it will come out of the local store’s budget.”

Despite these difficulties the paper has managed to secure a regular client-base of loyal advertisers and attributes its success to vigorous marketing, and making sure that advertisers know they are valued customers. Another reason for the paper’s success is the fact that, while it does face some competition in certain areas, many of the areas it serves do not get any other regular newspaper.

The Shepherds are somewhat cynical about discovering that the fact that the paper is owned by a White couple makes a difference with some advertisers in Bethlehem. Adrianne noted that for some of the White advertisers; “being White gave us [the EFS Issue management] more credibility. People tended to believe us and were happy to pay us upfront without having seen the paper. I doubt they would have [been willing to pay in advance] if we weren’t White.”

Staff at the paper have also observed that introducing new people to the advertising sales team helps. They say that when people have been in marketing for a while, they tend to have a good idea about who will be interested and who won’t and they tend to ignore certain businesses. However, new people are not put off by previous experiences. They begin knocking on doors other people have written off. The results can be surprising and sometimes lead to new business opportunities. Commenting on the impact of a new marketing consultant, Martin says: “Once you have been marketing in a place for a while, you know who’s interested and who is not. You don’t even bother to look in certain places. It really helps to have a new person. It’s a huge bonus because she [the newly appointed marketing consultant] is discovering new clients again.”

Despite the paper’s dependence on advertising revenue, Adrianne and Martin, who are strongly religious, have taken a principled decision not to carry certain types of advertising. They say the newspaper’s role should contribute to community development and should not perpetuate any social degeneration. The EFS Issue does not carry advertisements marketing alcohol, pornography or firearms.

Editorial Content

EFS Issue staff say they have no formally documented editorial policy, but they do have a clearly agreed on understanding of the types of issues the paper will cover and how it will cover them. All articles are measured against two basic criteria: firstly, they should convey positive messages on the lives of people in target communities and, secondly, they should not place the paper at risk of being sued.

The EFS Issue’s editorial content focuses predominantly on the community’s activities and

the editorial pages concentrate on highlighting success stories ranging from school prize giving ceremonies through to a decrease in crime and gangsterism. The newspaper updates readers on the current happenings at the municipality and provides news on NGOs and community based organisations. They attempt to empower readers by providing information about how to access government grants and educating them about issues such as HIV/AIDS and domestic violence. The paper also aims to raise awareness about human rights and provides information about where readers can get assistance with difficulties they may be experiencing. The newspaper also provides readers with a lot of soccer coverage, updating them on what is happening at both national and local levels. This focus on soccer has proved very popular with readers.

The newspaper's main source of news is the news editor of Gwa Gwa Radio who works for the EFS Issue on a freelance basis. This relationship works well for the paper, because it means that when he is covering community events for the station, he is also able to produce articles for the paper. Other sources of news include information from people in the community, minutes from local council meetings and the South African Police Service (SAPS).

The EFS Issue would like to expand the pool of journalists they can draw on, but they have found it difficult to find people who can meet their needs. As Martin says: "It's really been a problem trying to find somebody who, firstly, can write in English, and secondly, has a similar understanding of what we are looking for." In addition to the difficulties in finding people with the necessary skills, the newspaper has also found that potential freelance journalists often lack the equipment they need to report on events. Potential writers do not have cameras, mobile phones or access to transport. Many potential writers are also employed in

other jobs and they are often unavailable to cover important events, which occur during their work hours. As a consequence, Martin and Adrianne have had to continue working as reporters and photographers in addition to meeting their other responsibilities at the paper.

In keeping with the newspaper's commitment to providing uplifting coverage, the EFS Issue has an unwritten policy that the paper does not run stories that show one segment of the population providing handouts to another. Adrianne says: "We hate that because it's always some generous White person helping these helpless Black people kind of thing. In our opinion they are not helpless and they don't need stereotypes that White people are there to hand things out."

The newspaper has found that it cannot completely ignore less pleasant stories. In its early days the EFS Issue's focus on positive news led to it deliberately avoiding reporting on crimes. This position has been abandoned following feedback from readers who say they need this information to take appropriate precautions. Adrianne says: "We did not like covering crime because we were trying to be uplifting. We have changed that quite a bit. We came to our senses. What we want for this community is not necessarily what they want. Now we cover crime and more of the bigger community issues." However, for the EFS Issue, updating communities about crime in their areas is complicated by the fact that police stations often fail to provide timely information.

With regard to political reporting the EFS Issue staff agree that the newspaper is not there to provide a platform for any politician. The paper does not report on political meetings, nor does it cover speeches by politicians. Instead, the paper focuses on the implementation of development projects and the provision of services to communities. The unwritten policy is summarised in Adri-

anne's statement: "We are interested in events, not promises".

The paper also avoids covering controversial stories. This tendency is partly due to their commitment to highlighting positive developments in communities, but also relates to the lack of reporting capacity. With a very small team of writers, the EFS Issue relies on untrained freelancers for stories and there are concerns that these reporters may not be equipped to cover complex controversial issues fairly and legally. Even the EFS Issue's management feel they lack the expertise to assess the legal risk in reporting on certain events and the paper consequently avoids these stories. This position is summarised by Martin: "We don't report much about that [controversial stories and stories that could result in the paper being sued] because I don't think we have the journalistic skill to be able to write about it - to be able to look at the contracts and find corruption and things like that. Particularly if it is a freelance journalist, we don't know whether we can trust it [the information]. We generally avoid stories that can get us into trouble."

Both the management and the staff are also willing to admit that their reliance on advertisers does impact on editorial independence. They admit to placing the needs and interest of advertisers first, arguing that the first responsibility of the paper is to remain viable. Martin says: "News is something we have to get to put with our ads. We make an effort to put out good news but news is definitely second." The result is that stories regarding the activities of regular advertisers are often given prominence. Martin comments: "But if one of our advertisers was really cheating the community we would stop accepting their adverts, in the same way we don't accept other ads that we deem harmful. We probably wouldn't write about it, because we don't cover that kind of 'consumer assistance' story. We make it easier on

ourselves in that we also probably wouldn't write about it even if it wasn't an advertiser. We just have never yet come across any story of a local business - as opposed to a fly by night - cheating the community." He goes on to say that: "What we do get is strikes, and here it's simple too. If it's a parastatal or a government or municipality striking we cover it, because those readers who aren't striking are the shareholders. Everybody has an interest. If it's a private business we keep clear, because these kind of things are far too complex for a simple community paper. Low wages versus high unemployment. We've ignored calls to cover strikes at advertisers and non-advertisers alike. In a nutshell - bad news about advertisers or non-advertisers alike we would be unlikely to cover. Good news from non advertisers - would have to be newsworthy, good news from advertisers - would be in."

To encourage more community participation, the EFS Issue has tried running a letters page, but this approach has not been very successful. Adrienne remarks: "In the past we invited letters from the readers, but the response was poor. In most cases the letters we received were not the type of content we can put in the newspaper."

Printing

For the first three months the EFS Issue was printed in Bethlehem on a flat bed printer. At this stage the newspaper did not have a compact disk writer so they would either borrow a zip drive or take their hard drive to the printers. This process took two days and was extremely expensive. Martin remarks: "Nobody bothered to tell us just how much cheaper and faster those roller presses are. We were completely ignorant, and that ignorance probably cost us over R20,000 in higher printers bills that we could ill afford to spend."

Then the EFS Issue began exploring alternative

printing options and settled on the Noordwes Drukkery in Potchefstroom which has a rotary press. Adrienne explains: "We knew about a thing called a rotary press but we had always thought it was for big newspapers like the 'Sunday Times'. We got a quote and found out that it was less than half of what we were paying." Since then the newspaper has been printed by the Noordwes Drukkery where they have enjoyed a very good relationship: "We have a very good relationship with them. He used to be an independent newspaper owner and had difficulties finding someone to print for him so he said he won't do that to anyone. He understands our needs very well."

On a Wednesday (the day before the EFS Issue is distributed) the driver goes through to Potchefstroom with the newspaper on a compact disk and waits for it to be printed. Once the proofs are ready, he checks the print quality and ensures that all the advertisements are correct. He then waits for the print run to be completed and delivers the newspapers to the EFS Issue office where the distributors insert the week's leaflets.

Distribution

While the EFS Issue does not rely on circulation for its revenues, staff remain dedicated to ensuring that the distribution process functions as efficiently and as effectively as possible. Staff recognise that advertisers will only continue to put money into the product if they see results and this means ensuring that the paper gets into the right hands at the right time. Today the distribution system is closely monitored and runs smoothly, but this was not the case when the paper was first launched.

In the early days the EFS Issue distributed 3 000 copies door-to-door in Bohlakong every two weeks. Martin recalls: "We started out with 3000 papers, but our intention was to distribute 6000 from the

second week, which we did. We were just scared that if we started with 6000 without the right systems in place we would anyway waste half of them. Our plan was to be weekly, and we were for the first two months (Dec 99 and Jan 00) with a break for Christmas. We found it impossible to sell ads in Feb, so we cancelled an issue, and then we published three times a month until June 2000. Three times because we always found the week just before the middle of the month impossible. By June we were exhausted and permanently scratching in the washing machine for stray cents we were so broke, so we decided to go twice a month – middle and end."

Eventually door-to-door distribution was stopped. Martin cites four reasons for this:

"Because of the housing shortage, each stand has between one and five families/entities living on it, and sometimes more.

The distribution is done during the day while the bread winners are at work. The paper is taken out of the post box, usually by an unemployed youth renting a shack in the back yard, or a scholar, and in many cases when we did our checks after work we would go to a house and the people would say no, they didn't get a paper that week. The people next door did get the paper though, so we knew the distributor had been there.

In the wealthier areas, the paper was taken by the domestic worker or gardener. One of our advertisers kept telling us he never received the paper, and I even drove down his street and checked that the distribution had been perfectly done. When I phoned him he hadn't received it again. His domestic worker kept taking it. It's her community's paper too, and it's free so why not...

Then the school kids would often just take papers as they were walking down the street, and in other cases houses wouldn't have a fence or a letter

box.

With these problems even when we knew we had done a perfect distribution, and it was close to perfect for all the planning and checking, the paper was taken by a high percentage of unemployed youths or scholars, or domestic workers earning a pittance. When an employer asked his staff if they got the paper they would either say 'sometimes' or 'no'. We decided that for door to door to be effective you need each stand to have one family living on it, or else each family must have their own post box, and people must respect that what's in someone's post box is theirs."

Currently the EFS Issue distributes 18 000 newspapers every Thursday to Bohlokong (8 000 newspapers), Phuthaditjhaba (9 250 newspapers) and Harrismith (750 newspapers). In Bohlokong and Phuthaditjhaba the newspapers are handed out early in the morning at the townships' main exits to individuals on their way to work. They are also placed in various shops and municipal buildings. In Harrismith however, the newspaper is only placed in shops and municipal buildings because they do not have the manpower or the time to manage this additional distribution.

The decision to extend the distribution network to Harrismith was taken to satisfy the needs of the local municipality, which advertises extensively in the publication. The driver says: "We also put the newspaper in Harrismith so those people also need to read about the vacancies and tenders and stuff."

The EFS Issue is a member of the Audit Bureau of Circulation, which means that the distribution process is thoroughly documented and controlled. Every drop off point has to count and sign for the receipt and return of the newspapers. The distribution strategy is critical to the newspaper's success. Staff are dedicated to ensuring that the

advertisers are able to get the maximum benefit from the paper. Martin comments: "there's going to be wastage, but [the goal is] getting the minimum wastage. Our reasoning is that if every tenth person that gets the paper is going to go to an advertiser to buy something, then we want to make sure that ten more papers get to the right hands. Every ten papers that are wasted is one less client they are going to get and one more reason why they shouldn't use us again. We try being strict about every single paper."

To ensure that advertisers do get the most for their money the EFS Issue targets people on their way to work, because they believe these people are most likely to respond to the advertisements. Furthermore, the manager checks the newspapers to ensure that the leaflets have been inserted correctly and distributors are paid bonuses if they are still distributing after 7:45am to ensure that they do not hand bunches of newspapers to the same person.

How the Paper is Perceived

This segment presents advertisers' and readers' perceptions of the Eastern Free State Issue, and staff perceptions of why the paper is successful.

Advertisers

The majority of the advertisers interviewed found out about the publication through its marketing consultants. They explain that their main reasons for advertising in the newspaper are because it is reaching their desired target market, it has a large distribution area and because it is free. It is interesting that these reasons closely resemble the EFS Issue's marketing strategy, as well as the staff members' understanding of the reasons for the newspaper's success, which are presented in the last section.

Advertisers interviewed identified two main factors contributing to the EFS Issue's success. The first relates to editorial content. Advertisers described the newspaper's content as professional and objective and say that it focuses on current issues that are of importance to the community. They believe the newspaper contributes to building unity in the eastern Free State by providing a means for people to learn about each other and to find out about what is happening in their different communities.

The second reason for the newspaper's success identified by advertisers relates to service. They say they are extremely satisfied with the customer service that they receive from the marketing consultants, who they describe as "professional", "attentive" and "reliable". Advertisers also appreciate the EFS Issue's low advertising rates and reported getting good responses to their advertisements.

Asked about areas where they felt the publication could be improved, advertisers explained that although the EFS Issue goes a long way towards providing the communities with essential information, more could be done to educate and develop the community. Specific mention was made of the need for an educational supplement for the youth addressing topics such as HIV/AIDS and domestic violence. Advertisers also felt that as the only form of information available in many communities, the paper could cover a broader content area and have more editorial content in each issue.

Readers

For readers, the fact that the EFS Issue is free was a major plus point. Many said they could not afford other publications and that EFS Issue is their main source of up-to-date information about events in their communities. There is clearly an interest in the paper as readers have been observed clamouring for copies when taxis they are

travelling in pass distribution points. Shops that distribute the paper have also reported a strong interest in the publication.

Readers say the paper provides them with information about services and keeps them informed about places where they can find help with problems they are encountering. The newspaper makes them aware of the crime in their area so they are able to protect themselves. This according to readers makes them feel safe. Readers identified the vacancies section and the soccer news as their favourite things about the EFS Issue.

Readers feel they are able to participate in the EFS Issue in several ways. Firstly, they can write stories for the newspaper about the events happening in their community. Secondly, they are able to phone the newspaper to cover an event or with information that could lead to an article. Finally, readers feel some sense of participation, if not ownership, in the paper when the EFS Issue covers events in which readers are involved.

Staff perceptions of the paper's success

Staff at the EFS Issue share the same views regarding the newspaper's success. They say the fact that it is free is crucial, because this enables them to guarantee advertisers wide distribution. Martin says: "If I compare it to other newspapers that have come and gone I would say firstly [that] it is free, because it is free we guarantee the advertiser a large distribution. It's not if we have a good front page this week everyone is going to read it and if we have a boring one no-one is going to read it. Being free definitely helps us."

The EFS Issue staff also say the newspaper's success is based on their aggressive advertising sales and the fact that they do not wait for advertisers to come to them. Martin remarks "it's

our focus on advertising...because we know where our bread is buttered. I think a lot of papers start up and they don't sell as well. They sit and wait for the ads to come like we did when we first started. I think maybe they don't click that people aren't coming."

Finally, staff ascribe the EFS Issue's success to hard work and dedication. Samuel says: "I think we work hard. We have a dedicated management team and members of staff. We love what we do."

To conclude this discussion, a summary follows, which shows the main findings from the case study of the Eastern Free State Issue.

Summary

- Neither Adrienne nor Martin had previous experience in the newspaper business. Adrienne was a school teacher and Martin was an accounts articulated clerk.
- When they started the paper they only had an old computer, a camera and their personal vehicle.
- They did not take out a loan to start the paper and supplemented its income with Martin's salary and took drawings instead of paying themselves salaries.
- To keep costs down they initially did all the work themselves – production and distribution.
- The management style is described by staff as trusting and informal. Staff are allowed the opportunity to take initiative.
- The EFS Issue has a satellite office in Phuthaditjhaba to allow them to keep in touch with their readers and advertisers based there.
- Staff members receive on-the-job training during meetings in the form of discussions.
- When developing the newspaper's rate card they took their expenses, competitors' prices and their perception of what the market can afford into account.
- When they were determining the cost of flyer inserts they made the error of looking at the amount of effort it would take to insert the flyers and did not consider the advertising revenue that they would potentially lose through inserts.
- The newspaper markets itself through door-to-door sales, their relationship with the local radio station, a painted wall outside Phuthaditjhaba and the placing of posters along the main street, a bumper sticker competition, and educating readers about free sheets and requesting that they show the publication to their employers.
- The EFS Issue feels that their publication should contribute to community upliftment and should not place the publication at risk.
- The paper avoids showing White people giving Black people handouts and they believe that its content should have a direct impact on the community.
- The paper is distributed on street corners to people on their way to work and in municipal buildings.
- To avoid waste they've introduced a bonus system for distributors and don't distribute through shops that use the paper to wrap takeaways.
- Advertisers found out about the publication through its marketing consultants. They advertise with them because they reach the target market, have a large distribution, and are free. The newspaper's content is viewed as professional and objective and of importance to the community. They also feel that the newspaper provides them with good customer service.
- Readers value the paper because it is free, the only source of information aimed at them, provides them with information on their rights and available services, and they feel they are able to participate in the publication.
- Staff believe that the newspaper is successful because it is a free sheet with a large distribution, focuses on advertisers and has hard working and dedicated staff members.

Footnotes

- ¹⁹ Since collecting data for the research, there has been a shift in ownership. Martin explains: “At this stage the paper is 26% owned by Samuel, and 74% by Adrienne.”

The Limpopo Mirror

FACTBOX

Owners/Manager: Anton van Zyl

Language: English

Paid or Free: Paid Sheet

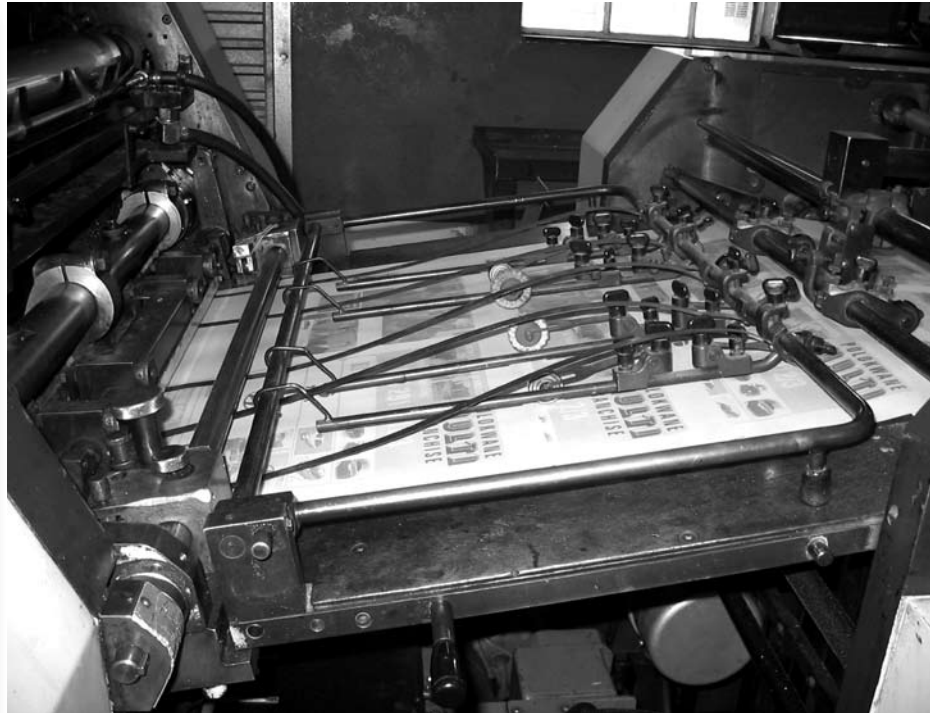
Circulation Numbers: 8 213 copies (ABC Jul-Dec 2005)

Date of First Issue: 1990

Frequency: Weekly

Who makes up 'the community' of the Limpopo Mirror?

Many "small communities" with "different ethnic and cultural backgrounds" live in "townships and rural areas" spreading over "long distances" in and around Thulamela municipality, which is viewed as the "community's inner city" in the Thohoyandou area. There are a "few White" readers, but most readers are "poor" "intelligent" "Black people" many of whom are from "disadvantaged educational backgrounds". Written in "English" the paper is also read by some "Afrikaans people" although most people's home languages are Tshivenda and Tsitsonga. Some tensions exist in this "fiercely independent" and diverse population, but overall the community is "family" oriented, "friendly" and "harmonious". The community is "committed" to "working together" towards "representative democracy" and "social upliftment". The community reads the paper to find out about "important local events" such as "soccer" and the odd "magic" occurrence.



In 1985 Johann du Plessis drove into Louis Tri-chardt in his old Peugeot, towing a caravan that was to be the birthplace of The Zoutpansberger. It was the first newspaper Johann started after breaking away from the Northern Review in the then Pietersburg. And in this northernmost part of the country, it was next in a lineage of pioneer newspapers that stretches back almost a century, to 1888. Soon Johann found an office in town and within five years he and editor Wikus Lee launched the first commercial paper aimed predominantly at Black readers: the Venda Mirror. Written in English, this paid publication first appeared on the streets on September 7 1990 and was aimed at readers in the former Venda homeland. Until then, the only access to information for the local Black community was the radio and a government publication that Wikus notes “was free and it was propaganda”.

When Anton van Zyl bought the Venda Mirror and the Zoutpansberger from Johann in December 2000, he changed the name of the Venda Mirror to the Limpopo Mirror: “The paper’s distribution area stretched beyond the boundaries of the former Venda homeland. We felt that the name - the Venda Mirror - linked it to only one geographically and culturally bound group of readers, which was not the case.” Coincidentally, not long after the paper’s name change, the province changed its name from the Northern Province to Limpopo. Anton asserts “the intention was never to be a provincial paper.” Instead, it is a community publication focused on the needs and interests of local people. Because the paper’s footprint extends outwards in a 100 kilometre radius from Makhado, it reaches not one, but many diverse communities. For this reason Anton wanted “to localise even further”. So he divided the distribution area into three regions each with its own local edition.

- **Thulamela Edition** – (in Thohoyandou, Sibasa,

Shayandima, Vuwani, Levubu, Nzhelele and Punda Maria)

- **Makhado Edition** – (in Makhado, Sinthumule, Kutama, Elim, Musina and Nancefield)
- **Giyani Edition** – (in Giyani and Malamulele)

The three editions make up the Limpopo Mirror’s total (audited) circulation of 8 213 copies per week. All editions have the same inside pages, but each has a different cover page, which carries news relevant to its local community. Although Zoutnet staff do the layout of the cover pages, news is collected and adverts are sold by area-based reporters and marketers. Outsourcing these tasks ensures that the Limpopo Mirror captures relevant information. As Wikus poetically expresses it: “Are you writing for someone, or it is just a thing in the wind?” The arrangement also opens avenues for reporters in this very poor region to sustain themselves financially, and with some training from staff at the Mirror, to hone their skills and talents.

The Venda Mirror was originally an economic venture started in response to “this big market, just lying there”. The paper continues to serve its advertisers well, but the Limpopo Mirror of today is strongly motivated by social responsibility. Leon, one of the marketers, remarks: “The newspaper helps brings closer together members of the community.” Anton van Zyl, owner and manager of the Zoutnet Group, is committed to “building healthy communities through communication”. To this end the paper is involved in numerous sponsorships and outreach programmes, one of which is ‘The Science of Life’ an educational initiative to help young schoolchildren learn.

The Limpopo Mirror has won several awards for service excellence and quality products. In 2004 it was voted the best newspaper with a circulation below 10 000 in the national Nissan Capro Awards. In 2005 the paper’s Press Store System

was runner-up in the Innovative Award of the Association of Independent Publishers of South Africa. The Zoutnet Group also won the Best Innovation award in this competition for its Advert Booking software. And in the same year, the Limpopo Mirror's 'Science of Life' insert was joint winner of the international World Association of Newspapers' World Young Reader Prize.

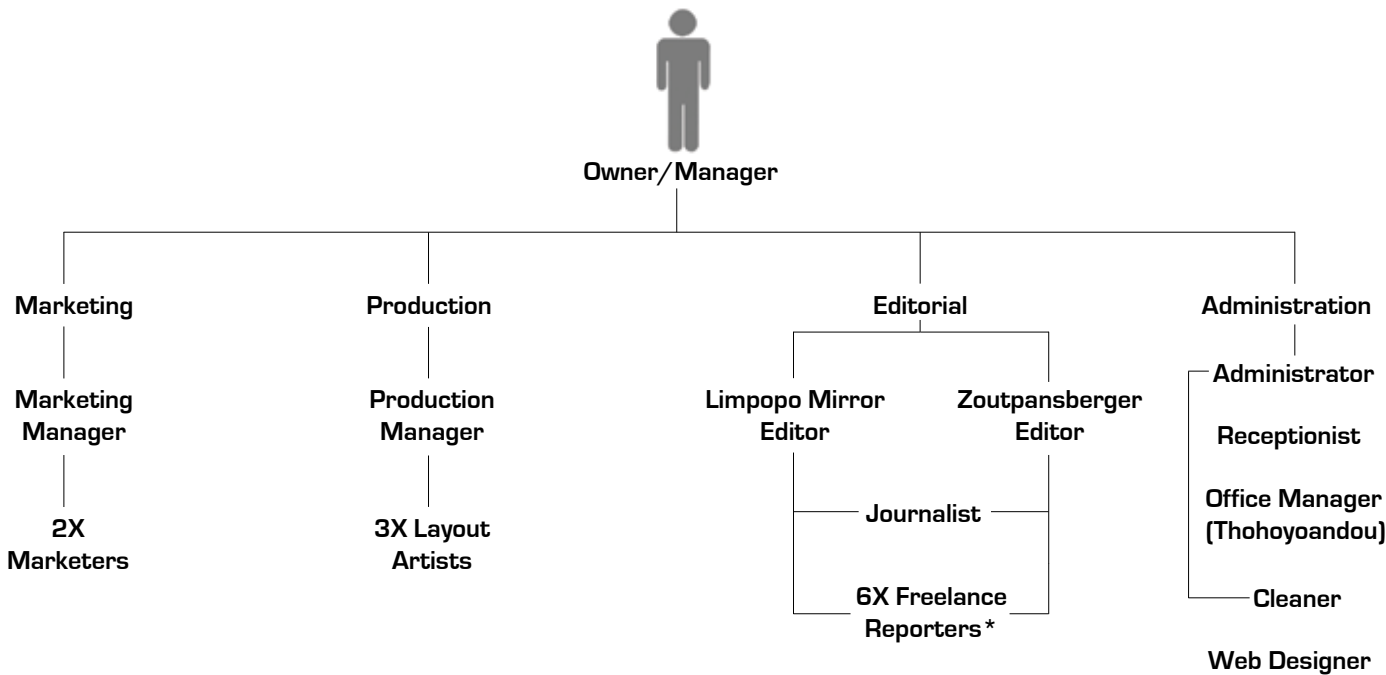
Organisational Structure

This segment of the case study focuses on how the Limpopo Mirror is structured and managed. It is divided into three parts: In the first part a diagram illustrating the paper's chain of command

is presented, and the different tiers of staff and their responsibilities are listed. Next, the paper's internal communication, relationships and management style are discussed. The final part deals with money matters.

Responsibilities and the Chain of Command

The Zoutnet Group of publications, owned and managed by Anton van Zyl, is situated in Makhado and operates from a four-bedroom house that was converted into offices. There is also a small satellite office in Thohoyandou. The Group produces two main publications: The Limpopo Mirror and the Zoutpansberger. Each publication



*3X Freelance reporters are based in Thohoyandou

has its own editor but the papers share the same systems and staff, so they are closely interwoven. This research focuses on the Limpopo Mirror.

The Zoutnet Group has 15 people permanently on its payroll. There are four separate departments: Marketing, Production, Editorial and Administration. The Marketing department is headed by a manager who reports to Anton, and who is responsible for two marketing consultants. The Production department manager reports directly to Anton, and oversees three layout artists. The Limpopo Mirror has its own editor, Wikus Lee, who is in charge of one permanent journalist and any of the six contracted reporters who are writing for the Limpopo Mirror at the time. Although Wikus reports directly to Anton, he has autonomy over editorial content. All administrative staff report directly to the Anton. These comprise the Thohoyandou office manager, the Makhado office's receptionist and the Makhado office's administrator, to whom the cleaner reports.

Andries van Zyl, the Zoutpansberger's editor says: "We have a structure here, and everybody knows where everyone fits in. Because of the structure everyone gets their job done." The meetings of the Zoutnet's board are less structured. Anton explains: "Ja, we get a couple of people together and that's it. There's no official board meetings... we've outgrown that."

Permanent staff:

- Owner/Manager – Responsible for Zoutnet's financial and staff management and decides the papers' layout. Represents the newspaper on various committees such as the Association of Independent Publishers of South Africa, and Capro, a national advertising agency.
- Marketing Manager – Sells national advertising, plans Zoutnet's marketing strategy and manages and co-ordinates the marketers.
- Marketers – Two marketing consultants sell

advertising space for the Zoutnet Group. This includes following up regular advertisers as well as identifying new business. They see to it that clients are happy with their advertisements' design and that every advertisement gets signed off properly. The marketing consultants also write the advertorials.

- Production Manager – Oversees Zoutnet papers' layouts, designs advertisements and manages the three layout artists.
- Layout Artists – The three layout artists are responsible for the layout and design of the Zoutnet newspapers, the advertisements and inserts.
- Limpopo Mirror Editor – Edits the Limpopo Mirror and is also responsible for the management and co-ordination of the journalists. Although reporting to the owner, he has autonomy over editorial content.
- Zoutpansberger Editor – Edits the Zoutpansberger, writes a weekly editorial letter, and manages and co-ordinates journalists. Although reporting to the owner, he has autonomy over editorial content.
- Journalist – Writes articles and takes photographs for the newspapers. Based in the office, he assists people who come in with editorial related information or requests.
- Administrator – Does the accounting, writes up advertising invoices and does the banking. Also purchases stationery and manages the cleaner.
- Receptionist – Answers the telephone and receives clients and guests to the Zoutnet Group's offices. Attaches a copy of clients' advertisements to their invoices, posts invoices to advertisers and collects overdue debts.
- Thohoyandou Office Manager – Co-ordinates the Thohoyandou office. This includes selling advertisements and classifieds to people who come into the office.
- Cleaner - Keeps the office clean and serves refreshments.

Non-permanent staff:

- Contracted/Outsourced - The marketing manager, in his private capacity, is responsible for the distribution of the Zoutnet newspaper group's publications.
- Contracted/Outsourced - Six area-based freelance reporters who write articles and take photographs for the newspapers.
- Contracted/Outsourced - One freelance marketer, who helps to sell advertising
- Website Developer - volunteered to redesign the website as "an experiment" and a way to gain experience. Now involved with maintenance of the website.

Internal Communication, Relationships and Management Style

Working life at the Zoutnet Group is informal, one staff member says: "The management style is very relaxed. We have a relaxed working environment and atmosphere here." Wikus comments: "It is a simple line of communication, a simple management style." As Anton puts it: "From up it goes down, and from down it goes up. It's not just top down."

Management has, as William the website designer says, "a very hands on approach" and there is a good balance between direct involvement and the degree of freedom given to staff to get on with their jobs. Staff are not micro-managed and as Adele, head of the admin department says, management is "non-confrontational". Anton confirms: "There's no big enforcement. If you keep arriving very late there will be a disciplinary hearing. But we haven't had a disciplinary hearing in like ten years." Besides "basic conditions of employment", the Group has no official code of conduct, although it keeps in mind the requirements of the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) an organisation that sets national quality standards for advertising. Also, each reporter has been given

a copy of the Press Ombudsman code of conduct, although Andries regrets "the journalists never look at it". Anton finds that it has become increasingly necessary to train freelance reporters to act appropriately in the field: "If there's a function in Musina, and they're handing out pens and t-shirts, [the freelance reporters] will collect as much as possible. But that's not correct. So for that we need a code of conduct to say: What you do there, we pay you for. You represent the Mirror and you can't take that t-shirt, even if you need it."

A good time for coaching is every Friday when the Limpopo Mirror's editor Wikus visits the Thohoyandou office. He meets with the area-based freelance reporters to give them feedback on the previous week's edition, discuss possible follow-up articles and allocate the next week's tasks. This is when Wikus identifies training needs. Based on his findings the Zoutnet Group holds practical workshops to build skills. Some examples are 'how to write an introduction to a story', 'effective interviewing', 'taking good photographs', and the 'laws and ethics' that guide issues of confidentiality and sensitivity towards the manner in which information is collected and stories are reported. In a region of the country with a high unemployment rate, The Limpopo Mirror does not appear to experience much difficulty finding staff. Wikus explains: "We said we want to create jobs. So we advertised and we got unemployed guys with some skills." Rather sweetly, he continues: "I still have all the letters of the people that have applied. I even had a letter from someone who was studying in prison and going to finish in a few years, wanting me to save him a place." The problem is that many freelance reporters come from historically disadvantaged educational backgrounds and have little or no suitable training. Wikus elaborates: "It's a matter of moulding them in a certain direction and we had long sessions rewriting every word. I think we succeeded in that, because some of them now are also taking photographs for the

bigger papers.”

The Limpopo Mirror encourages freelance reporters to spread their wings and source as much outside reporting and photography work as possible. Like all contractors, freelance reporters do not have the security or benefits that attend permanent employment. But as Wikus rightly points out, this is the world of work nowadays. Having contracted staff works well for the paper: it keeps overheads low, and as only work of an acceptable standard is accepted for publication, it also assures that quality is maintained. Anton adds: “We often lose the good correspondents to bigger groups, which is a pity. We train them and get them up to a certain standard, but then they move on.” In any event, at this stage in time the paper is not in a position to offer permanent employees many prospects for promotion. Anton explains: “We employ people every two or three years. They reach the pinnacle almost immediately...That’s where you say, I wish I had somewhere to send talented people. They’re way too good for a community newspaper. That is a thing throughout the industry.” Although this is the norm, there is occasionally a gap for freelancers to move into a permanent position. This is how the paper acquired its one full-time journalist. Anton explains: “When Nthambeleni was a student here, his work was good. And we had the problem where a lot of the Mirror’s readers bring in stories and we didn’t have the correspondents to handle them. And these correspondents, and freelance workers, you can’t force them to be here. They’re their own bosses. So we found we needed someone to be here and handle some of the work.” Nthambeleni has the added advantage of speaking Venda, which fills a gap in the language proficiencies of existing staff members.

As Anton points out: “It’s like any other business. It’s not ideal and people are never extremely happy and content, and they don’t always get along with

everyone else. But you get it going and people start talking to each other.” Andries describes how open communication is fostered at the Limpopo Mirror: “We try to be open and honest towards each other. If someone has a problem, we try to deal with it as sensitively as we can. If there’s a misunderstanding between two parties, we ask them to solve it between themselves first, and if they can’t, only then management will intervene and sort it out.” One way of getting people to talk to one another is by having regular meetings. Anton explains that there is a Monday morning get-together that all staff attend: “It works a lot better for communication channels if they all sit around on Monday morning. Even if it’s only for five minutes. Often they don’t have anything to say but at least they get the opportunity.” Then every Tuesday Anton has a meeting with the editors to discuss the previous edition, decide which articles will appear in the next issue and choose appropriate photographs. Anton also meets with the marketing manager once a week. They discuss inserts, promotions, sales targets and any difficulties with advertisers. Anton heads up administration at the paper so he is in continuous contact with the administrator and they do not need formal meetings. After management meetings, the editors and the marketing manager meet with their respective staff members to convey what has been discussed. If they have said nothing at the Monday staff get-together, this is when staff have the chance to voice concerns and offer feedback. Frans, a freelance journalist, comments: “We discuss it, even the people that are not formally part of the decision making process.”

To move communication from “talking to each other” to “getting people to work together and do something together”, the Limpopo Mirror has many team building activities to help strengthen bonds between people. The Limpopo Mirror has a soccer team and “all of us go to the stadium and we play.” The paper also has a special “fun day”

and it hosts a charity marathon. It appears that these bonding activities work. One staff member declares: "We have a good team and a good cooperation between different sections of the newspaper."

As one marketer comments: "A good team and a good system working together is a great recipe for success." Part of the communication strategy at the Limpopo Mirror is an excellent information technology system and "the latest software". William, who volunteered to help with the website as a way of gaining experience, modestly refers to a "little programme that I wrote" which is a web-based access system for everyone to tap into "from your marketers to your admin to your setters, basically everyone." Regarding communication and working relationship, in his opinion "the atmosphere is very important, but the tools of the trade probably even more so". In my mind those are probably the most important things, dedicated boss, dedicated staff and technology." Predictably, perhaps, but ironic in the context of a community newspaper, Wikus notices that with freelance reporters: "We were very close knit in the beginning. Due to the technology it is not that important that we see all of them everyday anymore...that is why I am going through [to Thohoyandou] every Friday."

Money Matters

At the end of 2000 the founder of the two newspapers, Johann du Plessis, opted to sell the newspapers to Anton van Zyl. The sale was structured in such a way that Anton could pay it off over a period of a few years. Anton needed bridging finance to cover the costs of running the paper for the first few months, and this was achieved through an overdraft facility. Within six months the Zoutnet Group went into the "green" and part of the debt burden was released. Adele comments: "The newspaper is successful because it is run on sound business principles. I think that the staff

and management have clear ideas of what the newspaper is trying to achieve. We look after the finances of the newspaper very well."

Andries, editor of the Zoutpansberger, says that there is not much competition in the area: "We've got [two around here] but their circulation is not very impressive. And [we have] I won't call it a partnership, but a working relationship, with the Review so there's no animosity between us even though we operate in the same market." And the Limpopo mirror has captured its local market as Nthambeleni confirms: "Our local people support the local businesses." ²⁰

To be financially viable the publication has to print a minimum of 16 pages with a 60:40 advertising-to-editorial ratio. On average the publication prints twenty pages a week. The paper aims to have as many pages as possible, but Anton remarks that numbers are "determined by the advertisers...the advertisers are the people who make the business grow or not grow." Anton, who describes himself as "an idealist", appears to be very set on producing newspapers with a high editorial content. He explains: "We're offering a product where you're putting a lot into a community. A healthy community is dependent on communication, which stems to a great extent from the newspaper. The communication is not limited to advertisers' messages." One staff member comments: "I think some people overlook the marketing and advertising side of the newspaper. The marketing and advertising side of a paper pays the salaries of people working in the newspaper because the money from copy sales is really not so much." Anton is aware of the need to balance editorial and advertising. But he is not happy about inserts: "Now I sincerely believe that inserts are killing newspapers. He explains that every time an advertiser chooses to put an insert into the paper instead of buying advertising space in the publication itself, the paper suffers financially: "For each advert you take out, you take

out another page of community news. You might end up with an eight page newspaper thick with inserts, but you have no money to sponsor the news. So it's not good for newspapers."

The separate cover pages for each of the editions introduce an unusual financial dynamic between profit and loss. Anton explains that to comply with the standards set by ABC "you need to bank at least 50% of your cover price. Which means we must deposit at least R1.01. The rest goes into the distribution system. Normally the Mirror sells for R2. The distributor sells it for between R1,20 and R1.40 - it depends on who buys, but the normal café buys for R1.40. So the additional 60c goes either to the guy who sells it in the street or the café. Which is why they are keen on stocking up papers and selling them." In effect, this means that the extra sheet is a free sheet. It does not make anything except for the advertising revenue, which goes into production costs.

Distribution and finance are closely related for the Zoutnet Group. Pieter explains: "Because our newspaper is a paid paper there's a lot of control and we can see what our market wants. A tightly controlled booking system helps to determine how many copies were delivered into each distribution or delivery point, how many copies were sold and how many copies are returned." With this system in place, the Limpopo Mirror can tell exactly where it is selling well. Another effective system to streamline finances is the Zoutnet Group's IT system. As Anton says: "The list of technology is quite extensive. I'm not sure of anything that is available that we're not using." And technology has streamlined the company's production process; "over the last couple of years we have completely computerised the whole process of newspaper production - from lay-out to print."²¹ William custom designed two software programs for the Limpopo Mirror. One program, The Ad Booker, calculates how many pages the newspapers will

carry each week. It is a complete booking system with a report function accessible from any of the computers on the network. This program is then linked to the accounting software which ensures that the Group can keep track of all monies owing and owed. In turn, this helps the Group to manage its budget. The other program William developed that helps to manage the newspapers' production process, is the Press-Store system, a file repository on a web server accessible anywhere in the world. This system allows news correspondents to upload articles and photos from wherever they can get an internet connection. The system was also designed to facilitate the transfer of large files, which normally is not possible via e-mail. It is a browser-based system, meaning that no specialised software is needed. The Press-Store system is extensively used when assisting emerging publishers in other parts of the country to send and receive large files.

In terms of staff costs, Zoutnet Group's marketers are paid on a commission basis with a small basic salary to cover transport and phone costs. Before he bought the business Anton recalls asking Johann: "How do you calculate your target? And he said: no, I just increase it every month." So to address this haphazard approach Anton devised a system to work out what a marketer's personal targets should be: "The target is calculated according to a number of factors. It's not just thumb sucking." So now a marketer's monthly target factors in his previous year's sales, a market growth percentage, and allows for tariff increases. Commission is earned in increments. If a marketer fails to meet 50% of his target, he earns no commission. If he sells between 50% and 100% of his target, commission is calculated at 8.5% on any sales above 50%, and "a R1000 bonus kicks in. If he does more than 125% another R2000 bonus kicks in and the surplus commission rises to 16.5%."

The Group currently employs one full-time journalist, who is paid a standard monthly salary. The six freelance reporters are paid a set per-column-centimetre rate for each published article and photograph. Senior experienced freelance reporters are paid more than those with less experience. Nthambeleni adds: “If you come up with a scoop, as a journalist you can expect an increase in addition to what you are paid every month.”

Production and Distribution

In this segment of the case study the marketing, editorial content, printing and distribution of the Limpopo Mirror is discussed.

Marketing

Building on its tightly controlled distribution system, the Zoutnet Group has a good idea who buys which papers and where, and this assists the Group to strategise effectively. The Group’s marketing strategy comprises four aspects: visiting local businesses, national promotion activities, international web-based branding, and community involvement.

To market locally the two full-time marketers Leon and Niël, and a “marketing freelancer” go door-to-door visiting existing and potential advertisers. Marketers have divided the paper’s circulation areas amongst themselves so that they don’t all call on the same clients. To support their sales marketers take with them back copies of the newspaper, audited circulation numbers, and information that describes the target market and illustrates the Limpopo Mirror’s successes. Marketers think that the relationships they share with advertisers keeps their clients coming back: “The newspaper builds loyalty with the advertisers. We need to treat our advertisers very well.” National advertising is handled by Anton and marketing

manager Pieter. To support them on visits to advertising agencies, they spend a lot of time fine tuning their sales pitch. They take along similar informational materials as those used by the local marketers, but of course, these are supported by agency-targeted Power Point presentations. The two marketers Leon and Niël also write the advertorials, although they sometimes ask people “from the editorial side” to help them with this task.

The Limpopo Mirror has few local competitors vying for advertising revenue. As one marketer comments: “In a small town like this it’s easy for us as a newspaper to build strategic relationships with local advertisers.” There are two other local publications targeting the same communities, but these publications are not consistently available. A Limpopo Mirror staff member comments: “I haven’t seen them for a long time. I don’t think they have been here in the last year.” And to reach potential advertisers and readers, the Mirror is partnered with the local community radio station - Phala Phala FM. They have an arrangement whereby the radio station interviews one of their freelance reporters on a regular Thursday night slot. In return the Limpopo Mirror places a free advertisement in the paper for Phala Phala.

This is not to say that the market is without challenges. Adele notes: “We have had problems with big media groups especially when it comes to advertising and advertising rates.” Anton is a stickler for fair play and even though he says he is unlikely to triumph, on principle he goes about taking to task any of the big firms that implement anti-competitive practices. He goes on to discuss a current tussle. Even though “our standard rates are way less than anything [the large firm] has to offer,” he recently had a long standing local client poached because the firm was offering “a huge discount if he only advertised [with them]”. Anton is aware that in effect the printing side of [this business] is subsidising advertising prices in order

to increase sales. And he finds that “advertisers are extremely gullible”. Anton goes on to explain how [the firm’s] prices impact on the Zoutnet Group: “At the national level you get situations where at the bottom there is 25% discount. Now I can’t offer a 35% discount. I can’t even pay the printing bill with that. But they can afford to do that [even though] their [standard] rates are higher than ours.” Anton’s ex-client managed to push the firm to their best discounted rate, but this rarely happens. In Zoutnet’s view the fact that these special discounts are being aggressively marketed compounds the affront to the independents. Marketing manager Pieter observes, “All of us in business are driven by profits.” But as Anton says: “Sometimes it’s also not fair towards the small ones. Everyone is just pulling up their shoulders. If you’re just a small thing, they don’t care about you.” Adele remarks that “The advantage of the Mirror is that we’ve got an owner who is a good fighter for independent community newspapers.”

Another difficulty the Zoutnet Group experiences with advertising is a growing preference for inserts. As already discussed, inserts cause a decline in regular run-of-print advertising. A most thorny problem is that when government and municipals in the Zoutnet Group’s circulation area began producing their own publications, the Group lost a chunk of advertising revenue. Anton comments: “About three years ago they all wanted their own newspapers to boast about their achievements. That really hurts the local papers. They should be encouraged to support their local papers.” Despite these challenges the Limpopo Mirror secures enough advertising to produce 16 pages weekly at approximately 55% loading.

To increase national and international visibility of the Limpopo Mirror, and promote its success as a community newspaper, a considerable amount of time and expertise has gone into developing the

Zoutnet Group’s website²² which was launched in October 1997. It features online versions of the newspaper’s current and archived articles. Importantly, the website offers free downloadable versions of all the educational booklets designed by Bennie Barker for the Limpopo Mirrors ‘Science for Life’ project, which helps children to learn science and mathematics and to enjoy both.

This brings us to the Limpopo Mirror’s community outreach activities. Solid contributions towards social upliftment and active participation in community life are integral to the paper’s style. When finances permit it, the Limpopo Mirror gives free advertising to local non-government organisations. As Andries observes: “We have a best relationship with local NGOs and our support to them is part of the newspaper’s social responsibility function. A lot of newspapers don’t work like that. They don’t put NGO’s activities in the newspaper unless they’re paid for.” Besides the ‘Science for Life’ series noted earlier, the Limpopo Mirror has inserts aimed at raising learners’ knowledge and awareness of HIV and AIDS. Books and computers are also donated to local schools. And to the jail. Sport is a community favourite. The Limpopo Mirror’s soccer team always generates a lot of interest. And the paper teamed up with one of their advertisers, the Thohoyandou Spar, to organise a charity half-marathon. The paper publicises the event, gives it press, and mans a water point. An insert was also produced for the ‘Kremetart Cycle Tour’ fondly known as ‘The Local Tour de France.’

Editorial Content

Over the past fifteen years the Limpopo Mirror has developed a clear set of values to guide editorial content. Wikus Lee editor of the Limpopo Mirror comments on the newspaper’s principles and his autonomy to apply them: “it is my sole decision to make. If I have doubt I will talk to Anton. But I am happy to say that in the past 15 years they

have never queried my decision.”

- Maintain a high level of editorial independence. Andries asserts: “We are a fiercely independent newspaper. There are people who try to put pressure on us in terms of what we should print or not print, but most of the time we don’t care.” Wikus agrees: “Ja, nobody for the past 15 years ever told me what to do.”

- Content must be presented in a way that is sensitive to and considerate of the Zoutnet’s communities. Andries explains: “The advantage of a community newspaper is its ability to access the community and communicate with its members effectively, and this should not be abused by the journalists.” Wikus remembers one occasion that was “a big learning curve”. A few years ago the Limpopo Mirror covered a story about a bus accident and published a photograph alongside it that depicted dead bodies around the wreckage. Wikus recalls: “I had a whole queue of people here taking that picture and pointing out their family to me crying asking ‘Why we are using their pain to sell the paper?’ It was difficult and I realised that they are right. We try to be more sensitive.”

- Wikus is adamant: “Politics is out. We don’t write about it.” Nthambeleni elaborates: “Sometimes people, especially politicians, will invite you as a journalist over lunch hoping that you’ll write positively about them. We try to encourage our journalists to not honour those lunches because we don’t understand the motive behind them.” He expands this to include anybody who wants to influence his writing: “I know that as a journalist I have to abide by the journalistic ethics. I also know that it is very important to remain independent as a journalist, independent from influences such as financial tips from people in the community.” When a political event is covered, the Zoutnet Group has a careful approach. Andries, news editor of the Zoutpansberger, comments: “I’m not saying that newspapers are a soapbox for political parties, because it’s still a very dangerous ground, but today every decision made in the municipal

council is made on the political grounds; it’s a political decision. The duty of the newspaper is to reflect critically on those political decisions made by the council because at the end of the day they affect the lives of ordinary citizens. The important thing when covering political issues is to find and maintain the balance.” Frans, freelance journalist confirms: “I go to Musina every Friday. I take the newspapers there and then I also get news there. What I observe as an outsider is genuine impartiality as far as political matters are concerned. You know you get press releases from all and sundry. What I have seen happen here is whoever issues a formal press statement, that statement is processed on the facts.”

- Commitment to education is a shared Zoutnet policy. Andries comments: “Our duty is to educate, inform and entertain our readers. We publish the educational supplement because we try to uplift the standard of education in our schools.” Nthambeleni offers a different perspective on educating the Limpopo community: “People are no longer ignorant of reading newspapers. There’s a growing culture of reading among many people, especially among the adult members of the community. And most of the people who are reading the newspaper are educated. But you still find people who don’t understand the role of the newspaper, of journalists, and the constitution of the country.”

- “Report news truthfully and be objective,” says Nthambeleni. And Wikus concurs: “Don’t lie to people.” Factual reporting is a sound practice as it ensures that Zoutnet avoids legal battles. If an article has potential legal implications, the Group’s attorney is consulted.

- Keep a local identity. Nthambeleni comments: “Our newspaper speaks directly to the people.” And Wikus agrees: “We go deep into what is important for the people.”

- “We don’t just write about what we want but what the people want,” says Adele. Nthambeleni concurs: “We are a mouthpiece of the community not a mouthpiece of ourselves. We go to the com-

munity to listen to people's concerns and what they think should be done." Wikus steers away from religion "because there are so many". But one thing that is common in the Limpopo Mirror's circulation areas is magic, which plays a large role in its readers' spiritual belief systems. Wikus comments: "Magic and strange fires...spontaneous fire. And if everyone is talking about it I can't just decide it is nonsense. We listen to the community and perhaps that is the important thing. We give them what they talk about."

To ensure that the Limpopo Mirror remains local and of interest to all its readers, its circulation areas have been divided into sections. All seven journalists have been assigned to specific geographic areas in which they live. Wikus explains: "That is important you know, that they go down to the field and everyone is reporting in the area that they live. Everyone must go entirely into that area. So they attend the meetings of the chief with the community, schools sports, everything." Story leads are directed through the main office in Makhado, and information is routed to the relevant area-based reporter. This prevents duplicate reporting. Wikus explains: "Because they are freelancers we can't stop them. They may be writing for other publications as well." But when this happens, the paper only publishes the article from the reporter in whose area the event takes place.

In addition, the Limpopo Mirror has also divided its distribution area into three regions: Thulamela, Makhado and Giyani - each of which receives a localised edition of the publication. The three editions carry the same inside pages, but each has a different cover page. Cover pages carry news concentrating on the local communities in each region. Although the Zoutnet staff do the layout for these cover pages, the actual news collection is done by area-based reporters and marketers. There are some difficult aspects to collecting stories for the paper. One is a shortage of resources

such as cars and cameras. As freelance reporters do not have their own transport, they need to use public transport, which is time consuming and unreliable. Anton found a solution to the lack of cameras: "I say to them we'll buy a camera, and you work it off. Because we need them to have a camera, to take photos." Ethnic tensions between some of the tribal groups can also cause problems. If the Limpopo Mirror sends a reporter to cover a story in a turbulent locality and the reporter belongs to a different language group or perhaps even to one of the warring ethnic factions, he can be in serious danger. As Wikus says: "We have had problems in the past where we had attacks on our reporters."

According to Nthambeleni, the Limpopo Mirror generally focuses on "positive news and information". Andries adds: "We try to concentrate more on human interest stories." Sport is a strong local interest. Wikus declares: "I don't know of any other paper that publishes the soccer league from the under 12 league to the professionals. We have three PSL leagues and we have three guys that are specialising in that area". Apart from sport, the police are still the biggest source of news. There are a few police stations in the area but the Limpopo Mirror experiences some problems in that arena: "The police do not know how to treat the press. We got them still restricting us - say nothing."

But as editor, Wikus says, "My biggest problem is still the size of the paper. I would love a 20-30 page paper every week but our economy just does not allow for that."

Printing

In 1995, at the same time that the Limpopo Mirror and the Zoutpansberger moved into their current offices, they purchased three sheet fed presses in an attempt to be independent of

outside printers. Having their own presses also meant that the papers had more control over having all the production processes dealt with on site. The Limpopo Mirror's normal print order is 10 000 copies. This proved too big for the three sheet-fed presses to handle, so the paper's printing had to be outsourced. Anton recalls the long period when the Limpopo Mirror used to "shop around" every week for the best prices on printing services: "But we were in a fortunate position... They've known us for years we've never had any problems with that. Often we need to negotiate. I just phone one of the printers and say can you slot this one in and they always make a plan."

When Johann du Plessis sold the newspapers to Anton van Zyl in 2000, Johann opted to keep the printing side of the business. About a year later he sold the printing presses to an independent company, ClipXpress, owned by Deon Brits. In 2003 Anton's Group pooled resources with ClipXpress to purchase a web press. The press is owned by Zoutnet, but operated by ClipXpress. All Zoutnet's products are now printed by ClipXpress Printers. The acquisition of the web press means that the newspapers are able to maintain their independence and ClipXpress Printers can extend the number of services they offer.

Early every Wednesday afternoon the Limpopo Mirror's pages are sent to ClipXpress Printers, the papers are printed, any pamphlets are inserted and they are ready for the Thursday and Friday distributions.

Distribution

On Thursday mornings the Zoutpansberger's copies are signed over to the distributor who then ensures that they are delivered at various distribution points. All distribution points within a hundred kilometre radius of Makhado receive their newspapers on a Thursday and all the other areas receive

the newspapers before 9 o'clock on a Friday morning. The Limpopo Mirror is distributed on Friday mornings to an area extending from Giyani, east of Makhado across to Alidays, then along the northern border of Limpopo Province, and up to the provincial border. According to the Audit Bureau for Circulation figures released in March 2005, the Limpopo Mirror sells 8 213 copies per week. Each of the three editions of the Limpopo Mirror is distributed in a different area:

- **Thulamela Edition** – Thohoyandou, Sibasa, Shayandima, Vuwani, Levubu, Nzhelele and Punda Maria
- **Makhado Edition** – Makhado, Sinthumule, Kutama, Elim, Musina and Nancefield
- **Giyani Edition** – Giyani and Malamulele

Distribution is contracted out to Far North Media Distributors, that belongs to Pieter Jooste, the marketing manager, who runs it in his private capacity. The Limpopo Mirror is distributed via shops and street vendors. Distant readers with subscriptions, are sent their copies via the post.

The Limpopo Mirror aims to keep its distribution points to a minimum to ensure financial viability. As discussed earlier under 'Money Matters' (see p. 66) as an audited paid sheet the newspaper's distribution is tightly controlled and documented. Each shop keeper and vendor is required to count and sign for the newspapers on receipt and again if there are any returns. At one stage they had more than 40 shops in Makhado that received the publication. This has been decreased to 32. If a new shop opens in the area it is given the newspaper for a trial period to determine whether it is likely to be a worthwhile distribution point.

One benefit of being a paid sheet is that - to some extent - the Limpopo Mirror need not worry about wastage: "If you are a free sheet some people will take a bunch of newspapers to wrap up 'vetkoeks'

and glasses. They do not do that with a paid newspaper because it's going to cost them money." The Zoutnet group keeps the returned copies of the Limpopo Mirror for a week and then sells them at a discounted rate as waste paper.

How the Paper is Perceived

This segment presents advertisers' and readers' perceptions of the Limpopo Mirror, and staff perceptions of why the paper is successful.

Advertisers

Most of the advertisers who were interviewed found out about the Limpopo Mirror through its marketing consultants, and they had been advertising in the paper for years. Associated with this is clients' appreciation of the Limpopo Mirror's local identity: "I think their biggest strength is that they are local. So they know their market and they know the people."

The paper's wide distribution was also mentioned as an advantage: "The distribution is quite a big area that they're getting to." Some were sold on the design of their advertisements: "And the display must be good, so your advert must be quite good and I'm happy at the moment with the ones I've seen."

Advertisers' target markets are predominantly Black people. And regarding the response they receive: "Whatever I advertise in their newspaper people respond, so which means that people read the Mirror." Another concurs, and adds that the Limpopo Mirror's prices are very competitive: "I look at the budget and I look at the Mirror, and 90% of my customers are Blacks. I then say to myself that if I put my ad there I know that the message will reach the people sooner and I'm paying less." Another advertiser enthusiastically

proclaims the Limpopo Mirror to be "excellent, excellent, excellent. People read it, people buy it and people come with it." Some advertisers may not have a clear indication of how well their sales match with their advertising expenditure, so perhaps trust and the fact that the Limpopo Mirror has high visibility in the area motivates them to advertise in the paper: "I think they're doing fine at the moment. It's difficult because I'm not speaking to the people themselves so I don't know what they need."

Another mentions the Limpopo Mirror's community outreach activities: "The newspaper is very committed to the community...Like many local athletes and people in general are involved in its marathon [and] the newspaper organises the marathon from the beginning to the end."

Of the advertisers interviewed, none had negative perceptions of the Limpopo Mirror.

Readers

Readers like the content of the paper, which they find is mindful of their sensitivities: "I think that it is very good. It has good stories and I think there is no problem with our newspaper actually." And she goes on to qualify this: "If I can give you an example. If someone is dead and they were killed in their car and they were there with a woman and they were cheating on the partner. The newspaper will not go into detail about what they were doing in the car when the person got killed. They will just tell you that the person was killed." Readers also appreciate "the way that they write the news, their English is not too difficult to read."

The Limpopo Mirror is perceived as keeping communities informed about themselves and their world: "It gives us real news and lets us know what is happening around us. If I can find out something that is happening in the community I can come

here and tell the Mirror. We will publish in the Mirror to tell our community what is happening with us.” And the Limpopo Mirror’s news stories are unique: “The radio and the other papers all tell you the same stuff. The Mirror has different information.”

One reader appreciates the benefits of the Mirror’s contributions to the community: “A great thing to see because people like different things and if they do involve people, there will be improvement in all directions.” And many readers enjoy the sports coverage: “The soccer the league log and all the sports.”

There were no criticisms.

Staff perceptions of the paper’s success

The staff at the Limpopo Mirror have a holistic view of its success. They describe success in terms of an interaction of multiple factors that characterise the publication.

Editorial content that focuses on local people and their concerns was high on the list of shared perceptions of success. Andries says: “You will be popular if you write about what happens. People want to hear about the community’s own running. People like opening up a newspaper and being able to say: I know that guy! I know that guy.”

Community involvement was mentioned by almost all Zoutnet staff as a reason for its success. And there is a personal spinoff for them as a comment from Niël and Leon’s interview shows: “One of the nicest things of working for a community newspaper is that you are actually involved in community life.”

The paper’s reliability in terms of coming out on time is also often mentioned: “We know our

deadlines and we stick to them and we never want to break any deadline.” Many mentioned the tight, well organised and streamlined work processes from collection of the stories through to distribution. And the quality of service is reliable too. When dealing with advertisers, the marketing staff go back and forth to every advertiser who has booked an advertisement to ensure that they are satisfied with the final product. They believe that this commitment to their client contributes to their success.

Staff find the Limpopo Mirror’s IT system a boon as it helps them to produce a quality product in a short space of time: “[Other newspapers our size] have four times as many setters [layout artists] as we do and it takes them twice as long to accomplish the same tasks. I think it is the technology we have here. Our computers and software are really good.”

And there is general consensus that communication and relationships with colleagues and managers are “relaxed and informal” and “we check up on ourselves”. Anton comments: “We have staff members who can cope and work very well under tight deadlines. We try to do a job more quickly and more effectively without compromising the quality of the product. Everyone is really committed.”

To conclude this discussion, a summary follows, which shows the main findings from the case study of the Limpopo Mirror.

Summary

- Johann du Plessis (the founder of the Limpopo Mirror) had previous experience in the media business as the marketing manager for the Northern Review.
- He kept initial costs down by working from a

caravan and did everything himself.

- Anton has previous experience as a journalist for the Zoutpansberger and the Limpopo Mirror.
- The management style is described by staff as informal and relaxed. Staff members are afforded the opportunity to take initiative.
- The newspaper provides staff with on-the-job training by running internal workshops as required.
- They have a satellite office in Thohoyandou to keep in touch with readers and advertisers that are situated there.
- The newspaper was established without a loan or any form of funding.
- The advertising rates have been calculated by determining production costs.
- The Limpopo Mirror markets itself through approaching businesses and advertising agencies, its relationship with the local radio station, its participation with its community, and its website.
- All the paper's articles are required to be sensitive and considerate of their community and should not cover politics.
- Through focusing their editorial content and supplements the newspaper staff try to uplift the community and meet their needs.
- They get an idea of which articles their readers prefer from their website and from the vendors and shop keepers.
- The Limpopo Mirror has its own printing press that is run as a separate business.
- They have kept distribution points to a minimum to save costs. Distribution is done through vendors and shops. As it is a paid sheet they are not concerned about wastage.
- Advertisers found out about the paper from its marketing consultants. They support the paper because it has a good relationship with their target market and a large distribution. They feel that the publication is successful because it shows real commitment to its community and provides good customer service.
- Readers value the paper because it is written

in easy to read English, covers real news and provides them with information on local issues, is sensitive and respectful towards them, and they felt they are able to participate in the publication.

- Staff believe that the newspaper is successful because it focuses on local news and not on politics, has good relationships with both readers and advertisers, makes use of available technology, and has committed and hard working staff members.

Footnotes

²⁰ "Since the study was done a competing product was launched. [A large newspaper group] launched a competing newspaper in November 2005 in the area. The Zoutnet Group subsequently laid a charge at the Competition Commission alleging predatory pricing strategies. The case is being investigated." Says Anton.

²¹ Limpopo Mirror. Birthday Celebration. Power Point presentation

²² <http://www.zoutnet.co.za>

FACTBOX

Owners/Managers: Sindiswa Jam-Jam

Language: isiXhosa

Paid or Free: Free Sheet

Print Order: 5 000 copies

Date of First Issue: 1996

Frequency: Weekly

Who makes up 'the community' of the Ikhwezi News?

The community, or rather, 'communities' are "Black" "isiXhosa speakers" who "survive" in "townships" and "rural" areas in the "Eastern Cape" and "KwaZulu Natal". "Kokstad" forms the hub for people who, despite being "the new generation in the new South Africa", are often "voiceless". They "really struggle" against "barriers to get access" to "developmental" opportunities. But are stoic saying that "whatever difficult problem we face, we deal with it". The community finds in "family warmth" and "support" the "power and strength to go on". The communities want "economic, social and political information" about "projects and functions of the different municipalities" where they can "find help", often regarding "service-delivery issues". They find the "power and strength to go on" and "try to be independent as much as possible". They have "powerful stories" and enjoy "local stories". The people also like "stories which are creative to their minds". There are a "lot of politics that are playing around" and sometimes "fights between different groups living in the same community". But overall people "try to unite".

IKHWEZI NEWS

East Griqualand News

IPHLEPHA LESIZWE PRICE R1.00 INCLUDING VAT VOLUME 62 NO 07 Thursday, May 05, to Thursday, May 12 2005

Distribution Points : Kokstad, Matatiele, Cerdarville Umzimkhulu, Mt Frere, Mt Ayliff, Tabankulu, Qumbu, Tsolo, Umtata, Bizana, Lusikisiki Port St Johns, & Flagstaff

Sinazo zonke izinto zokwakha apha kwesi sitolo

* Zinc	* Purline
* Cement	* Gutters
* Windows	* Doors
* Fencing	* Wire
* Poles	

42 MAIN STREET
OPP BUS RANK, KOKSTAD

MAKUKHUSELWE INKULULEKO YELIZWE LETHU

MHLONTLO MUNICIPALITY



MHLONTLO MUNICIPAL BUDGET ROLL OUT

IConvention yamaUnited Methodist Church of Southern Africa yaseMfundisweni District yamaDodana neentombi eyayiqale nge 05-05-2005 ukuya kwi 08-05-2005

Lo mnyhadala wama UMCOSA wauhlanganele kwisithili saseMfundisweni phantsi koSihlalo waso uRev T.C.C. Msindwana B.A. kwiSekethe yaseMzimvubu phantsi koMongameli wayo uH.S. Nomvungu. Nazi ke isekethe zale District :- (1) Ib Palmerton (2) Mzimvubu (3) Lusikisiki (4) Butville (5) Bukazi (6) Ludeke (7) Brooksnek. Ezi ke zamkelwe ngalomhla weConvention nazi (1) Kokstad (2) Ntukai. Siyambulela uThixo ngale mingenelela mibini ucango luvulekile nakwezinye isekethe. Le convention yandulelwe likhwelo inkonzo



For many people living along the border of the Eastern Cape and Kwazulu-Natal, the Ikhwezi News provides the only source of community information written in their own language. The newspaper plays an important role in keeping people in and around Kokstad informed about developmental and social issues, but the owners have found that keeping the paper afloat has been a daunting challenge. With few large businesses in the area and advertising pickings lean, the paper developed a range of innovative strategies to continue serving its readers.

The weekly free sheet was launched in 1996 by Vincent and Sindiswa Jam-Jam who recognised there was no newspaper specifically catering for the needs of Xhosa-speakers living in the southern parts of Kwazulu Natal and the northern parts of the Eastern Cape. So they took the gap and began publishing Ikhwezi News from a small rented office in Kokstad. Like many small media entrepreneurs they put virtually everything they had into the publication. They knew they had to keep costs low to survive and ran the operation on a shoestring. Besides two old computers and a fax machine the couple had none of the usual resources required to run a newspaper. What they did have was a sound knowledge of the needs and interests of the communities they wanted to serve and some experience in the newspaper industry. Vincent had worked as a journalist for the Kokstad Advertiser, a local English language newspaper.

Six people were on board at the start of the venture: Vincent, Sindiswa, three journalists and a marketing manager. This small and dedicated team shared the load of writing articles, taking photographs, selling advertising, designing and laying out the pages. And because casual distributors were only recruited at a later stage, that task also fell to team members. At that stage the newspaper had a print-run of 2500 copies distributed in and around Kokstad twice a week. But the

Jam-Jams found that producing a paper at such regular intervals was not viable, so they decided to produce 5000 copies on a weekly basis.

The Ikhwezi News has not had it easy. The Jam-Jams' found it difficult to secure advertising as many local businesses in Kokstad did not believe the newspaper's readership had enough disposable income to buy their products and services. So to supplement advertising sales Ikhwezi News began to offer a variety of business services to the community. And Sindiswa tells how Vincent "proposed to the municipality that the newspaper can develop their newsletters and put them as inserts in the newspaper so that the municipality could be able to communicate with the people on the ground about developmental and service-delivery issues. Fortunately, the municipality bought the idea." Ikhwezi News was awarded the contract to produce the newsletters, and together with advertisements they now place in the Ikhwezi News, the municipality provides about 60% of the paper's income. Now the publication has a well established and good working relationship with the Kokstad municipality.

Vincent and Sindiswa's long hours and financial struggles were rewarded in 2003 when the paper was judged the best newspaper published in Xhosa at the Sanlam Community Press Awards. But in September 2004, less than a year after the Jam-Jams' efforts were acclaimed by the community press sector Sindiswa and the staff at Ikhwezi News were rocked by Vincent's unexpected death. From then on Sindiswa took up the reigns and with the help of her committed staff she continues to bring out the newspaper each week. The newspaper still faces many challenges, but staff are committed to serving their readers. Sindiswa feels that the newspaper goes a good way to "empower different communities with information: economic information, social information and political information...give people stories which are

creative to their mind and which can change the environment.”

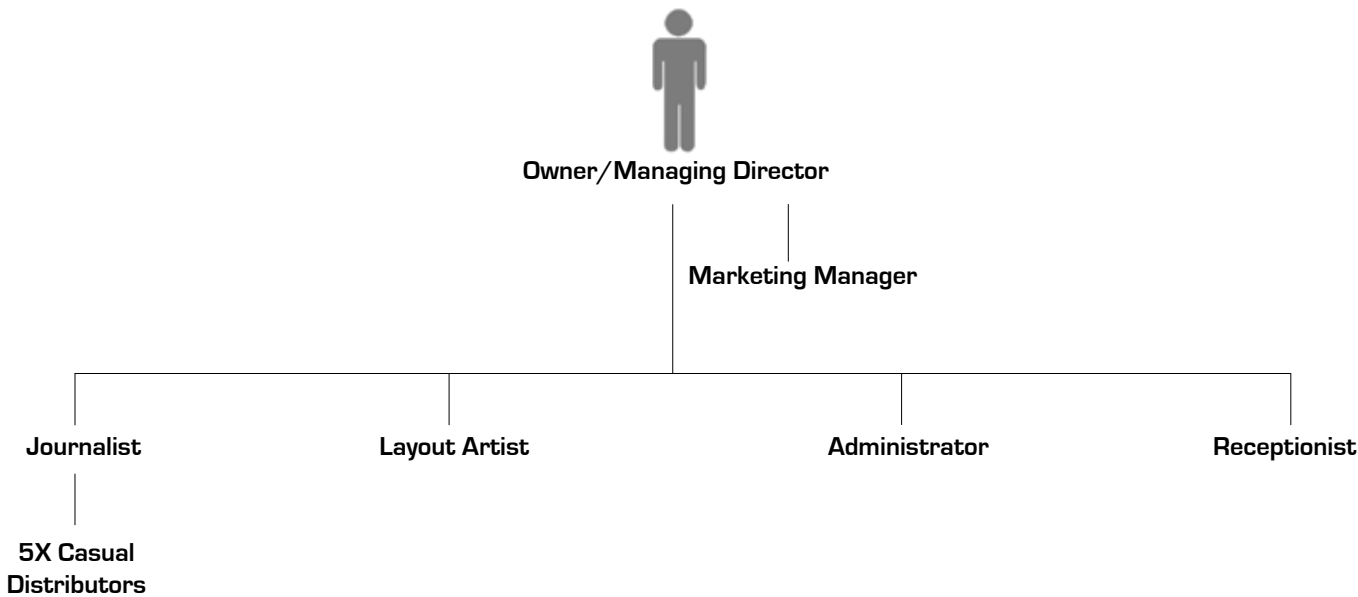
Organisational Structure

This segment of the case study focuses on how the Ikhwezi News is structured and managed. It is divided into three parts: In the first part a diagram illustrating the paper’s chain of command is presented, and the different tiers of staff and their responsibilities are listed. Next, the paper’s internal communication, relationships and management style are discussed. The final part deals

with money matters.

Responsibilities and the Chain of Command

The Ikhwezi News is produced from offices based in the main street in Kokstad. The publication is owned and managed by Sindiswa Jam-Jam and all the staff members report directly to her. All staff are employed on a permanent basis except for the casual distributors. Sibulele, the journalist, is responsible for finding five people each week to distribute the paper and they report directly to him.



Permanent staff:

- Owner/Managing Director – Responsible for the Ikhwezi News' staff and financial management. She is also responsible for editing the paper, laying out the pages and contributes some of the articles.
- Marketing Manager – Sells advertising space and markets the additional business services offered by the publication. He is also responsible for the training and development needs of the staff and writes articles for the newspaper.
- Journalist – Writes the articles and takes photographs. He is responsible for overseeing both the printing and the distribution of the papers. He also assists with the newspaper's additional community business services where required.
- Layout Artist – Designs advertisements and assists in the layout of editorial pages. As part of business services division, she also designs and prints promotional materials.
- Receptionist – Answers the telephone and receives clients and guests to the publication. She assists advertisers who come to the Ikhwezi News office, does the typing and dispatches and collects the mail.
- Administrator – Does the accounting, writes up the invoices for advertisers and does the banking. She also oversees the newspaper's business services division.

Non-permanent staff:

- Distributors – Responsible for delivering the newspaper to various distribution points.

All employees at the Ikhwezi News play multiple roles. As Luvuyo, the human resource manager, says: "Everyone can do any job when asked to do so and we are rotating jobs. For instance, a human resources manager also does the marketing and can write a story." Everyone needs to be willing to lend a hand in different departments so that production deadlines are met and the business runs smoothly. Multi-tasking also makes it

possible for the paper to keep the salary bill down. A difficulty associated with the need to multi-task is that staff have additional responsibilities, such as serving clients in the business services centre, and this may impact on their ability to focus exclusively on the newspaper's production. As with any newspaper that runs extra business services, the additional income is vital to the Ikhwezi News' financial survival, but care is needed to ensure that they do not detract from the newspaper's time.

Internal Communication, Relationships and Management Style

Staff say the management style at the newspaper is informal and based on trust, and that this contributes towards a pleasant working space. Luvuyo comments: "The style is not harsh. Decisions are made from the top, but we don't fight each other because we trust each other."

Employees view the management of the paper as open and willing to listen and say that when difficulties do arise in the work environment they are able to approach Sindiswa, who addresses problems promptly. Sibulele, the journalist, comments: "We don't have a formal communication structure and maybe its one of our challenges. For instance, if someone has a problem, we just tackle it straight". While most of the communication between staff members takes place informally, with staff members simply walking into each other's offices, the newspaper has two scheduled meetings that are attended by all permanent staff. These include a formal weekly production meeting and a monthly planning meeting.

The production meeting takes place each Wednesday and is attended by all the permanent staff. Sindiswa explains: "We usually hold monthly meetings where we discuss the paper: the layout, the stories, and the marketing style. There's no unilateral decision we take here, we consult

everybody and work collectively as a team to reach a consensus when making decisions. If someone has an idea on how we can do to improve the newspaper, we brainstorm the idea and see how we can fit it in the newspaper.” Once these decisions have been made Sindiswa finalises the layout and prepares the newspaper for delivery to the printers the following day.

Staff members also attend a monthly planning meeting, which they describe as space where people discuss difficulties faced by the newspaper and new opportunities. These meetings also focuses on planning editorial coverage of events taking place during the upcoming month and focuses on marketing strategies that can bring revenue to the paper and raise its profile. This meeting is also used to identify staff training needs and find ways of addressing them.

Training is, for the most part, on the job. Luvuyo remarks: “There’s no one who got any formal training in the newspaper business.” Sindiswa adds: “We used to have journalists which received training from MISA and MDDA, but unfortunately, they usually come and after they receive training they leave the newspaper. This is the problem which we are currently experiencing and we believe that is not only common to the Ikhwezi News. We don’t understand why the journalists leave after receiving training because we work here as a family and there is that warmth and love.” But people must move onwards and Ikhwezi News can be proud of one journalist who left to spread his wings. Sibulele comments: “We have produced journalists who managed to get jobs in the mainstream media. One of them, Sivuyile Sineke, is a Xhosa newsreader on SABC 1.”

Money Matters

Ikhwezi News started up with a donation of R10000 from the Roman Catholic Church in

1996. This money was used to cover the initial running costs and to buy some of the equipment the Jam-Jams’ needed to start the publication. Besides this donation the couple had no other source of income and this meant they had to ensure the newspaper was profitable from the very outset.

This was an enormous challenge for Vincent and Sindiswa and meant they had to be extremely careful to ensure their expenditure matched their income. They rented a cheap office, made do with basic equipment. Eventually the team could afford to move into larger premises. Today Sindiswa employs five full-time staff members and five casual distributors. All full-time staff are paid monthly salaries, while the casual distributors are paid for the days they work and are compensated for their transport costs. Thandi, who joined the firm a few years ago, says times remain hard, but “we come up with plans”. And importantly: “We can see that people support us and that gives us more power and strength to go on.”

Work from the local Mbizana municipality remains the largest revenue generating source for the Ikhwezi News. The newsletter updates community members about developments in their area and is distributed as an insert in the Ikhwezi News. The municipality also places advertisements in the Ikhwezi News. This relationship is not without some problems. Neziswa explains: “Because we communicate well with the municipality, the newspaper is able to secure advertising spend from them...but they don’t pay us in time. We really struggle to make them pay us on time so that we can settle our bills and be able to print the newspaper.”

When Vincent was still alive, he and Sindiswa had to develop the newspaper’s advertising rate card. They weighed production costs against the paper’s earning potential. They also took into account what other publications in the area were

charging and gauged what businesses in the area would be willing to pay. The newspaper does not have a formal editorial-to-advertising ratio that they work with, but it averages between four and eight pages a week with a 60:40 ratio. Regarding the number of pages the weekly publication will be, Sindiswa says: “We make a decision on Wednesday to see how many pages we will print depending on the amount of advertising that we have.”

While advertising remains the newspapers’ mainstay it does not bring in enough money to cover all of the production costs and the Ikhwezi News has developed a number of innovations to supplement its advertising sales. With no spare capital to invest, some specialist jobs are outsourced, but most of the strategies have to ride on the newspaper’s existing infrastructure.

One approach that has proved successful is the establishment of a small-scale business centre at the Ikhwezi News offices, where staff offer a variety of services to the community. Services include preparing typed documents for residents, such as employment application letters and CVs and other important letters. Sindiswa adds: “And we do newsletters, funeral programs, flags, posters, calendars, and requisition books.” And Sibulele will “occasionally do video filming at functions and events.” The business centre also acts as a clearing house for people, arranging for them to have documents bound, materials printed, rubber stamps made and photographs framed and enlarged. Ikhwezi News does not have the equipment to provide these services in-house, but they are able to outsource these to firms in neighbouring towns.

In terms of competition, Luvuyo names eight publications in the Kokstad area, three of which are English. But according to Sibulele, of the three newspapers that are written in isiXhosa, Ikhwezi News covers up to date news, not those “that oc-

cur three weeks back” and the publication has “a better and attractive design and layout, especially in the front page. The readers look at the newspaper in terms of how it is designed and they won’t even look at the newspaper if the design is bad and unprofessional.”

Production and Distribution

In this segment of the case study the marketing, editorial content, printing and distribution of the Ikhwezi News is discussed.

Marketing

Having launched the publication with high hopes, Vincent and Sindiswa soon found that convincing advertisers to buy space in the Ikhwezi News would not be easy. They made personal visits to all of the major businesses in town, but encountered an unexpected amount of resistance. The challenges they confronted are typical of small independent newspapers committed to providing news and information to people living in marginalised communities. A common thread running through the case studies is that while advertisers may recognise the need for these communities to have a regular source of news, they do not see the benefits of marketing their goods and services to people in the lower income brackets. The general perception is that people have no disposable income and that there is consequently no benefit in marketing products and services to people who can’t afford them.

Vincent’s proposal to the municipality in which he suggested that they use the Ikhwezi News to produce their newsletters, was the paper’s first strategic marketing tactic. They argued that these newsletters would afford the municipality the opportunity to communicate with the community at a grassroots level about developmental and

service-delivery issues.

Having secured a regular source of income through their municipal contracts, the Jam-Jams continued with their efforts to build up a local advertising base. As with all the small independent papers in this study, marketing is door-to-door. The marketing manager visits potential clients with back copies of the newspaper, and he describes to potential clients Ikhwezi News' target market, distribution area and print numbers.

While having someone full-time on the job has achieved some results, staff remain frustrated by the newspaper's reliance on municipal contracts and its inability to convince advertisers to buy into the product: "If it were not for the fact that we convinced the municipality to support us we would really be battling."

Sibulele comments: "Now we are engaging in a marketing drive to market the newspaper to government departments and local business advertisers. We also intensified our coverage of local news, for instance, if the President comes here, we would cover prominently such story. That is why we became stronger after years of struggling...Also because we have a good management we've got good relations with the government and we don't upset them when we are faced with tricky or difficult situations. Whatever difficult problem we face, we deal with it properly." Reliance on income from the municipality could impact on the readers' perceptions of the paper. Staff are concerned that people might see this close relationship as influencing their ability to provide independent information. Expressing this general concern, Luvuyo remarked: "Having most of our advertising coming from the municipality may give people the impression that we are not independent or have our own voice."

Ikhwezi News staff recognise that to secure more

advertising the newspaper needs to develop its capacity to market itself. They believe that if they are able to raise the publication's profile in the area and to build up the Ikhwezi News' brand, then advertisers will be more likely to take the publication seriously. However, they stress that this is an area where they lack expertise and require training. The paper has no budget for marketing and must identify cost-effective ways to enhance its profile. As Sibulele says: "We need to have training because we are dealing with the new generation in the new South Africa."

At present the Ikhwezi News' marketing strategies are boosted by their attendance at community functions and events. Sindiswa explains: "The marketing strategy is to make coverage of the projects and functions of the municipality which are attended by business people as well. From this municipality and businesses, people can reach and get to know about the newspaper." Sibulele adds: "If the community has an event and they want us to cover the event, we go there and take some pictures. They will then be pleased if they see the article in the newspaper. We also cover local sports matches and functions and the sports people will be pleased if they see their teams published in the newspaper."

Editorial Content

The majority of Ikhwezi News' articles are written by the journalist, although the managing director and marketing consultant also contribute some of them. The three staff members consult to decide which articles to include in the newspaper each week. Describing the newspaper's editorial policy, Sindiswa and Luvuyo say: "We don't have any written editorial rules or policies. But we believe that news should be truthful. We also know that we need to communicate with others in a respectful manner." While these two guiding principles serve as the measure against which all of the content

in the paper is assessed, the paper is working towards developing a more formal policy which will detail their editorial objectives and provide more formal guidelines to staff.

Some news staff perceive the newspaper as being independent and stress that they resist any attempt by outsiders to interfere with the content. Thandi, the administrator, remarks: "Sometimes a well known person in town did something wrong they will say please don't publish. If it's true then we publish it because people want to know." But Sindiswa and Luvuyo qualify this: "Is this story fruitful to the community? Is the community going to benefit from the story? We look at these things in order for us to succeed and establish a positive relationship with the community. If you publish negative stories to the community, the community will become disinterested and won't buy the newspaper." In Sindiswa's opinion: "Our main strength is to provide factual information to the people. We also double-check information before we disseminate the information to the communities." And Sibulelo elaborates, saying that the Ikhwezi News aims for impartiality in the way they cover stories: "We try to avoid a situation whereby we take sides when there are fights between different groups living in the same community. We really don't take sides, although we report what happened." Nonetheless, there have been occasions where the journalist is threatened by unknown people, warning that his life will be in danger if he covers a certain story. However it seems that more direct forms of manipulation are not tolerated. Sindiswa and Luvuyo assert: "There's no person who is trying to influence our editorial decisions. We try by all means to be independent as much as possible."

There is general consensus amongst staff members that the newspaper has developed a strong following among its readership, largely due to the fact that it concentrates on local news and community events which are not covered anywhere

else. Describing this strategy, Sindiswa says: "We mostly look at local stories. At what is happening in the community. We write and publish current stories. That's why we are the leading local newspaper." And she adds: "...we don't just put stories in the paper for the sake of filling the pages...we did not cover negative stories like crime stories, for instance, so and so has been stabbed in the tavern. Most of our readers want developmental stories and the stories which are creative to their minds and which can change the environment." Adding to this local focus in building reader loyalty is the fact that the paper deliberately highlights success stories emerging from the community. Ikhwezi News makes a point of presenting readers with news and feature articles that illustrate how people from disadvantaged backgrounds have been able to get ahead. The paper includes a regular feature about a prominent person in the community and a business section that provides news about successful businesses operating in the surrounding areas. Describing the motivation for this focus on positive news, Luvuyo said: "We want people to be aware of the success stories so that maybe they will realise that they can do this too."

Part of appealing to the local community is the format and presentation of the Ikhwezi News. Sibulelo describes how the style of the paper has changed: "Even [in early days] the newspaper was a tabloid, but the design and layout differs as compared to it today. We introduced a lot of colour in our designs and layout unlike before when the newspaper was using only black and white." He finds that the Ikhwezi News is now much more attractive to readers and so is a better foil for editorial content: "We now also cover powerful stories and lots of hard news, including politics, publishing columns, business news and sports news, letters to the editor." Sibulelo says the paper sources material from "advertisers and from the people [who tell us] what they would like to see

in the newspaper.” Luvuyo adds: “People invite us when they’ve got news events and stories. The police also call us if there’s an interesting story to cover.” Unfortunately, government officials are not always as accommodating. Sindiswa explains: “There are a lot of politics that are playing around, for instance, maybe if you want to meet and speak to certain government official about something there’ll be barriers to get access to that person.”

Printing

Since its launch the newspaper has worked continuously with the Highway Mail Printers in Pinetown. Staff members describe having a positive working relationship with their printers, saying: “The newspaper has a very good and long working relationship with the printers. We have forged a meaningful relationship with workers in the printing plant who take care of our needs and wants, even when we have missed the printing deadline.”

On Thursday mornings, using a public taxi, the Ikhwezi News’ journalist takes an electronic copy of the publication to the printers. He stays at the printers until the proof is ready for checking and signs it off. Once the newspapers have been printed and folded he returns to collect the copies and delivers them to the Ikhwezi News offices for distribution on Friday morning.

While this approach is time-consuming, the paper has found that it is cost-effective. The newspaper used to make use of a courier company to collect the papers from the printers, but found that this arrangement was expensive and the courier company did not always deliver on time. Ikhwezi News staff decided that late deliveries were impacting negatively on their credibility with advertisers and readers so they began collecting the newspapers themselves.

Distribution

The Ikhwezi News distributes 5 000 newspapers every Friday to the northern areas of Transkei and the southern parts of KwaZulu Natal. In Transkei they distribute to Umtata, Port St Johns, Qumbu, Tsolo, Bizana, Flagstaff, Lusikisiki, Tabankulu, Mt Frere, Umzimkhulu and Mt Ayliff and in KwaZulu Natal they distribute to Kokstad, Matatiele, and Cedarville.

The newspapers are distributed by the publication’s editor, a minibus taxi driver and four regular distributors who are employed on a casual basis. These people have divided the distribution area among themselves. The journalist and the minibus taxi driver deliver the newspapers to the distribution points in KwaZulu Natal, and the other four distributors deliver to the Transkei distribution points. The casual distributors rely on public transport to move from place to place and have sometimes resorted to hitchhiking if public transport is not available. Newspapers are placed at offices of the municipality where readers can collect their copies, as well as at the post office, and the local office of the ANC. Distributors are also responsible for collecting any remaining copies of the previous week’s newspaper. These returns are bundled and sold to local community projects who use the waste paper for arts and craft work.

How the Paper is Perceived

This segment presents advertisers’ and readers’ perceptions of the Ikhwezi News, and staff perceptions of why the paper is successful.

Advertisers

The advertisers interviewed said they learned about Ikhwezi News from direct visits from the marketing manager or from staff members or

business associates who recommended the publication. They say their main reason for advertising with the newspaper is the fact it has a wide distribution area and reaches people in rural communities: "Ikhwezi reaches rural areas and gets information where [other papers] do not."

They also highlight the fact that people have easy access to the publication, the fact that it is free and because the articles are written in isiXhosa. Another remarks on the degree to which the newspaper is in touch with readers: "The newspaper is very familiar with the people in this area and in the townships."

The paper's marketers provide quality service that is "professional" and "efficient". Furthermore, clients get good value for their money: "It's a good newspaper and is most affordable for the locals and their service is very good we like it very much." And advertisements yield a very positive response from their target market. One advertiser comments: "It's a community based newspaper that pertains to our target market. The adverts are well received and it's the perfect medium for our target audience."

Readers

The readers interviewed said they appreciated the newspaper because it is free and easily accessible. They find it convenient to pick up copies when they have to visit the municipal offices to make enquiries and to pay their accounts. Readers also enjoy having the publication written in isiXhosa and say this makes it easier to read.

The newspaper has a strong relationship with its readers, both through the newspaper staff's active involvement in their community and through the publication's editorial content. One advertiser said: "Ikhwezi News has employed guys who are friendly. It's easy for them to mix with people.

There are just fun people. And the newspaper is there for the community during good and bad times."

The Ikhwezi News provides people with information about "everything happening in their communities" and it reports on developments fairly and accurately. They also value the advice they get from the newspaper about accessing government services and the information they get about where to turn to for advice. The staff at the newspaper are viewed as part of the community and readers explain that they are very friendly and make a point of attending all the functions in the community.

There is also the perception that the additional business services - especially the video filming service - offered by the publication enables Ikhwezi News to reach into and relate to the community: "It's become bigger. They're involved in communities they don't only offer the news outreach. They do videos, so it's very easy for them to reach the communities."

Staff perceptions of the paper's success

The Ikhwezi News staff members say the main reason for the newspaper's success is the close relationship they have developed with the local municipality. They acknowledge that a large proportion of their advertising revenue comes from the municipalities and believe that both sides benefit from this relationship. Sindiswa says: "The government uses our newspaper to communicate with rural readers, which the mainstream press doesn't do for them and we are able to benefit from the money they spend on advertising."

Staff members also think that editorial content in the Ikhwezi News is vital for the people to access, and that the publication is successful in its mission to educate the people in as far as it focuses on

local news that has a direct impact on their lives. Sindiswa says: “Our writing style and the content appeals to our readers. We don’t just put stories in the newspaper for the sake of filling the empty pages. Most of our readers want developmental stories. We focus on local stories.”

The Ikhwezi News staff also feel that they have developed a relationship of trust with their readers as a result of their accurate and balanced reporting. Sibulele says: “We try to unite these three regions and create a common understanding between them.”

Because the newspaper has been around for a long time and is produced consistently, Sibulele points out that “our readers trust us.” And Neziswa adds that advertisers; “they are trust us that we’ll deliver what we promised them.”

An additional success of the publication that staff identified is that it is written in isiXhosa which makes it more accessible to their largely uneducated rural readers. This is a factor, as Luvuyo comments, that enabled them to secure municipal advertising: “Because we write in Xhosa the readers in the rural areas can understand us and we can offer advertisers something that the commercial newspapers don’t.”

Finally staff credit the publication’s success to determination, hard work and a willingness to persevere when times are tough. They say their eagerness to learn and their dedication to Ikhwezi News is what keeps the publication alive. Sindiswa evokes the struggle and the success: “We learn on the job and through the process. We manage to put the newspaper together because we love what we do.”

To conclude this discussion, a summary follows, which shows the main findings from the case study of the Ikhwezi News.

Summary

- Vincent was previously employed as a journalist at the Kokstad Advertiser before he started the Ikhwezi News.
- Initially he and his wife did all the production and distribution of the newspaper.
- The paper was started with two old computers and an old fax machine.
- To supplement the paper’s income Ikhwezi News offers additional business services.
- The management style is informal and trusting with managers being willing to listen to the difficulties staff are experiencing.
- The Ikhwezi News was started with a R10 000 donation from the Roman Catholic Church.
- The paper’s rate card was determined by calculating the production costs, looking at papers’ prices and an impression of what local business would be willing to pay.
- Marketing of the paper is done through door-to-door sales, approaching local municipalities; and handing out copies of the newspaper at community functions.
- The Ikhwezi News staff feel that their articles should always be truthful and respectful towards their community.
- The newspaper’s editorial content focuses on local news and community events, readers’ letters, success stories from the community and entertainment news.
- The paper is distributed through local municipal buildings.
- Left over copies of the newspaper are sold to a local craft project.
- Advertisers found out about the paper through the marketing consultant and through other businesses. They advertise with the publication because it reaches their target market, is distributed in the rural areas, is free and printed in isiXhosa. They believe that the newspaper is successful because it has a strong relationship with the community and provides them with a good service.

- Readers like the paper because it is free and goes to the rural areas, is written in isiXhosa and provides them with information about what is happening in their community.
- Staff believe the publication is successful because they have a strong relationship with the Mbizana municipality, they have good editorial content that focuses on local news and is balanced and accurate, the newspaper is published in isiXhosa and has hard working and dedicated staff members.

The North Coast Courier

FACTBOX

Owners/Managers: Bruce and Rose Stephenson

Language: English

Paid or Free: Free Sheet

Print Order: 24 000 copies

Date of First Issue: 1985

Frequency: Weekly

Who makes up 'the community' of the North Coast Courier?

For the North Coast Courier 'the community' appears to comprise some long standing residents who tend to "not trust outsiders" as well as an influx of non-resident, and extremely affluent "owners" who are inclined to be viewed as "foreigners". There are large populations of Black and Indian people in the area but the paper's target market is "mostly White people". They are "North Coast businessmen" and "housewives" who are "average" in relation to their "very upmarket" "resort environment". They are "services" oriented and interested in reading about "luxury", "sport" and "good news". Sometimes inward looking, the community also has a generous spirit and "good people" who extend "support" to "others" who are "wanting". "Opposition" is a right. It is a response to "negative things" such as degradation in "the environment", threats to individual "rights", and practices that are "fair game" for criticism.



The North Coast Courier was once a failed paper in a semi-rural town of KwaZulu Natal. Then in November 1985 Bruce Stephenson moved to Ballito and bought it for a token sum. He had worked in newspapers since leaving school and for a long time he had nurtured a desire to “go out on [his] own”. So for Bruce the purchase was “a natural step”. To start off Bruce had a typesetting machine, a bakkie, little money and the paper’s signature name. But he brought with him a wealth of writing experience to enrich his new venture: “I started a newspaper because that is what I do best, writing and taking photographs. And I felt I had an edge.”

Resurrecting the paper was, as he puts it, “no free lunch”. Covering the stretch from Umdloti on the southern border of KwaZulu Natal to its northern boundary at Mandini, Bruce, his wife Rose and one advertising representative put out 7500 copies of the eight-page free sheet once every two weeks. Initially, Bruce did the writing and took the photographs, Rose sold advertising space, and they shared the layout and distribution tasks. Gay Kennedy, who is still with them today, was their first staff member. She was hired to help Rose with advertising sales. There was also an artist, a girl from a local school who came in to work for four days every month. After enduring five months of struggling to get advertisers to pay up, the couple decided to employ a new staff member to collect debts and do the accounts. And to supplement personal income Bruce hired himself out as a photographer to the community. He did “whatever would bring money in. We had to get by. It was like getting a train moving - push, push, push, push. And then gradually, you start moving, and when it’s moving it’s fine. But when you first start you have to push like mad to get it going.” Bruce recalls that in the early days distribution was a time consuming process, the quality of printing was “not very good” and the layout was “terrible”. Despite these shortcomings the North Coast Cou-

rier was a first for its community and “to many...a great source of excitement”.

It took just over two decades for The Courier - as it is commonly known - to grow into a thriving business with a large client base and 14 employees. The Courier remains an English free sheet and it still circulates from Umdloti to Mandini, but now the paper is produced weekly instead of bi-monthly, and it distributes 24 000 colour copies in a tabloid format made up of 28 to 32 pages. In a more recent development, the Courier took a young Black entrepreneur under its wing. On completing school he approached them wanting to know how to start a newspaper. He came with his abilities, his dreams and the paper’s name: ‘The iNdlazi News’. Bruce and Rose allow him to use the Courier’s facilities to run his new venture and have contracted part of the Courier’s distribution to him. He also benefits by drawing on the expertise of Rose, Bruce and other Courier staff, who help him to sell advertisements and support him with many tasks involved in producing and managing a fledgling newspaper.

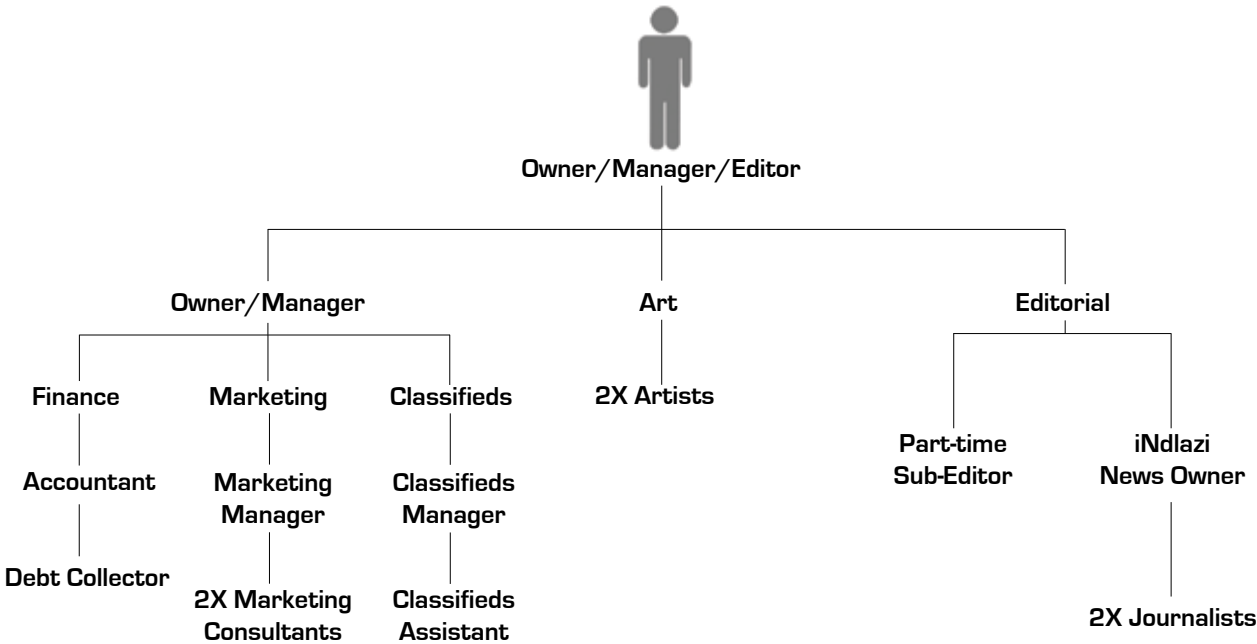
Bruce remembers the Ballito of 20 years ago: “I mean the focus of the activity here was the local farm stall.” With greatly improved roads and accelerating land development the now affluent town is almost like a suburb of Durban. Yet Bruce remains firm that the Courier should stay a locally focused community paper: “Sometimes you have a hard week getting news and it would be so easy to take a story from Durban...but I refuse to run stories about people or events not from this area. Everything must come directly from this area. And that really is my central thing.” Staff members are of the same mind. They regard the newspaper as being “a communication tool for the people of this area...because all our news doesn’t appear in the national newspapers. We feel that there is a great deal of power in a local newspaper.”

Organisational Structure

This segment of the case study focuses on how the North Coast Courier is structured and managed. It is divided into three parts: In the first part a diagram illustrating the paper's chain of command is presented, and the different tiers of staff and their responsibilities are listed. Next, the paper's internal communication, relationships and management style are discussed. The final part deals with money matters.

Responsibilities and the Chain of Command

The North Coast Courier and its annual community information booklet called 'The North Coast FastFinder' are published out of offices in the centre of town in Ballito. Rose started the booklet as an additional form of income for the Courier after it took on a second marketing consultant. The first marketing consultant inherited all Rose's clients when she decided to begin taking a less



active role in marketing. Although the Courier is co-owned by Bruce and Rose Stephenson, the overall production, editing and management of the newspaper falls to Bruce. There are 14 staff members: 13 are employed on a permanent basis and there is one part-time sub-editor.

Separate from but affiliated to the Courier is a publication called 'The iNdlazi News'. Bruce and Rose allow its owner, a young Black entrepreneur, to make use of the Courier's facilities and to receive assistance from their staff. Rose is very actively involved with helping the publication to find its feet. And in an attempt to lighten its young owner's financial burden, the Courier has also contracted out part of its distribution to him.

The North Coast Courier is made up of five separate departments: Finance, Marketing, Classifieds, Editorial, and Advertising makeup. Except for the Ad makeup and Editorial sections, each department is headed by a departmental manager. Rose oversees the Finance, Marketing and Classifieds departments, while Bruce manages the Ad makeup and Editorial divisions.

Permanent staff:

- Owner/Manager/Editor – Responsible for the North Coast Courier's overall management. Also runs the Ad makeup and Editorial departments and writes a weekly editorial letter.
- Owner/Manager – Oversees the Finance, Marketing and Classifieds departments. In addition, she assists with proof reading the newspaper and is actively involved in the publication's various marketing initiatives. Furthermore, she offers advice and assists with various aspects of the iNdlazi News, but particularly with layout.
- Accountant – Responsible for financial management, which includes all the accounting, administering staff salaries, and payments to creditors.
- Debt Collector – Writes up and sends invoices

to advertisers, does the banking and collects overdue debts.

- Marketing Manager – Sells advertising to national clients, plans the publication's overall marketing strategy, manages its implementation and co-ordinates the marketing consultants.
- Marketing Consultants – The two marketing consultants sell advertising space. They follow up regular advertisers and source new business. They ensure that clients are satisfied with the design of their advertisements and see to it that all advertisements get signed off properly. In addition, one of the consultants sells advertising for the iNdlazi News and for the Courier's booklet 'The North Coast FastFinder'.
- Classifieds Manager – Sells classified advertising and assembles the classifieds pages.
- Classifieds Assistant/Receptionist – Helps to sell classified advertisements, answers the telephone and receives clients and guests to the office.
- Artists – Responsible for the layout and design of the newspaper, its advertisements, inserts or promotional materials, and the 'North Coast Fast-Finder' booklet.
- Journalists – The two journalists write all the articles and take photographs. Also responsible for writing the advertorials.

Non-permanent staff:

- Contracted/ Outsourced – Distribution, some of which is done by the owner of iNdlazi News, and some of which is done by another contractor.
- Sub-Editor – Comes in the day before the newspaper is printed to edit and proof read all the editorial content.

Affiliated:

iNdlazi News Owner – Writes and edits articles and takes photographs for the iNdlazi News. Draws on the Courier's infrastructural and human resources to help produce and manage his paper. Part of the Courier's distribution is outsourced to

him.

At the Northern Coast Courier work is apportioned according to clearly defined job descriptions with little overlap between them. Because the paper has a large output for its relatively small number of employees, to meet deadlines everyone has to perform at optimum speed and efficiency. As Rose says: "In a bigger environment where there are more people...you breathe more easily during the day than we do. And in an environment like this, if someone isn't pulling their weight, we all feel it. It becomes very difficult to bring the newspaper out."

Internal Communication, Relationships and Management Style

Management style at the North Coast Courier is described by its staff as formal and autocratic on the one hand, and flexible and consultative on the other: "The management is quite autocratic by nature, but they can also be flexible." Management is autocratic in that employees have little say in how the paper is run, they are not provided with information beyond that which they need to complete their tasks, and are sometimes expected to fulfil tasks that go against their grain. The flexible and consultative quality of management lies in the degree of freedom that is given to staff to determine their own work processes. Heidi comments: "As a reporter they allow you to follow whatever stories you want, which you wouldn't get on a big paper. And you will develop as a reporter."

There is a monthly staff meeting that everyone must attend. This is when the publication's strengths and weaknesses are analysed and ways of improving it are identified. It also provides a forum for staff members to raise any workplace difficulties they are having and to air their perceptions and experience of the day-to-day running of the Courier. Given that employees are under a lot

of pressure - sometimes to the point of tears - and given that they are not always enamoured with their lot, these meetings can be stormy affairs as the researcher observed.

To avoid staff having to waste time sitting in on meetings that table issues not directly relevant to everybody present, additional weekly departmental meetings are held. These take place on a Wednesday after the Courier has gone to press. Flaws in the paper are mulled over and decisions are made for the next week's edition. Having separate meetings can be counterproductive, as information is not always channelled between departments and so sometimes fails to reach the staff members whose work it affects. Rose comments: "Sometimes I have been surprised that things haven't been communicated. So from where I am sitting things might appear more rosy than they are." On one occasion the editorial team received information about the official opening of the new highway. The marketing staff were upset that this information did not get passed on to them immediately because they wanted to run a supplement on the opening. Rose comments: "I heard about that by chance and we saved it in time. You need to be reminded all the time that we must tell each other what we are doing in advance." Heidi adds: "I wouldn't say there is a large amount of communication that happens between editorial and advertising...there should be more." It appears that breaches in communication occur because autonomy and dependency between departments and the people within them is uneven, but also because people are simply different. Rose remarks: "There is a little group in advertising that is sort of autonomous, obviously still reporting to Bruce. And the journalists are by their nature quite bolshy. They have to be to get their stories."

There is dissent from the ranks of the journalists regarding what they consider to be appropriate

work for their profession. Heidi, for instance, balks at working on advertorials: "I'm not a journalist to write pretty stories about business. And I fight against it every time I can...Ideally it shouldn't be a journalist's function. It shouldn't be on our agenda."

Interpersonal communication at the North Coast Courier is not all about division in the ranks. Rose comments: "It's mostly an office of women and they seem to get on so well. Quite a lot of them socialise together, so there is another level of communication going on there." Heidi debates the issue of gender in the workplace: "[Bruce] has a very dedicated staff. I don't know why, to be honest. Because he doesn't pay well." She qualifies this by pointing out that her motivation for working at the Courier is "not about the money, it's about the newspaper [and] I can only think that everyone derives a lot of pleasure from what they do...I think he is lucky in a way. And also, don't forget all the staff are women. So I can only think that women work harder...If you look anywhere in the world that's a norm." Bruce comments: "One of the biggest difficulties is staff. Getting and training and keeping staff." Staff at the Courier are not only "loyal", as Heidi and Rose agree, the majority of them also have prior experience in their fields. Those who come to the Courier with no relevant experience are trained on-the-job. A lot of time and effort goes into developing staff and bringing them up to speed, but the investment is lost when they leave to work elsewhere. As Rose remarks: "They go to the big papers. I think a lot of small newspapers end up being that. They train the reporters to go to big papers. So we perform a service for the industry that way." Rose has a generous response to their leaving: "We're quite proud of our reporters. That they've gone off and done well. Our first reporter went off to radio and she got quite high up." Bruce shrugs: "I don't blame them at all."

Money Matters

Bruce and Rose Stephenson took out a R20 000 personal loan to jumpstart the North Coast Courier when they bought the defunct publication in 1985. This sum only allowed the couple enough leeway to cover printing costs for about two months. It was their primary source of income so it was crucial for the publication to yield profit quickly. They kept overheads low and supplemented their personal income with Bruce's part-time photography work. Within the first five months the couple was battling to collect money from advertisers: "We gave out our little invoices and people didn't pay. We realised that people wouldn't pay until we asked them to." So they employed someone to collect the North Coast Courier's debts and to do the accounts. From the outset Bruce and Rose resolved that once they had paid off their start up loan, the business would not incur any unnecessary debt. To this day they are firm on this decision. Rose says: "We pay cash when we can. The only credit line we have is with the printer and they don't give us very much." Bruce recalls that in the first two years the paper did not extend credit "to people we couldn't trust, which was basically everyone...And in the first two years we probably got taken more than ever since." To get the paper on its feet and keep it there "we had to be very correct, straight away." Bruce acknowledges that in terms of financial savvy, "Rose is very capable. She picked it up early." He studied management at Damelin in the early 1980s and just prior to starting up the Courier he spent three years in newspaper management, so he also came in with an edge: "I was more aware than I think most journalists [are]. It's important to have money in the bank. Most journalists are quite airy-fairy about money." Heidi notes: "Bruce is very business orientated. It's a very profitable business he is running."

It is often the case that financial success is visible but the road leading to it is hidden. Nowadays funding avenues like the Media Development and Diversity Agency (MDDA) clear paths, to some extent, for small beginner newspapers. But in the early days when the North Coast Courier began, such funding was non-existent and the paper only had access to revenue it generated for itself. Reflecting on changing practices in changing times Bruce says: “A lot of private individuals feel that they should have access to government funding. For their print bill and that. And there is very little sympathy for that among the old school, of which I am part. Because we never had any help. If the government...wants to expand the media in the country, and they want to provide a certain amount of money for funding, to get it off the ground. Then sure. But they have to be very careful not to be taken for a ride.”

As the North Coast Courier's a free publication, advertising is its primary source of revenue. The advertising rates and the paper's number of pages are calculated using a special formula and an Excel spreadsheet. The Courier normally averages 32 pages once a week, with a 40:60 editorial-to-advertising ratio. The formula Bruce uses allows him to calculate the cost of producing an eight, 16 or 24 pager and enables him to change the editorial-to-advertising ratio so that the paper yields “optimum” profit. When he started Bruce examined what other publications were charging and then: “I took a stab”. Experience has taught him that making profit depends a great deal on how pricing is matched to different sectors in the advertising market: “You can't charge the property guys because they're used to paying low rates... You can charge higher for legals; the municipality has got to place its legals...What I think has been very important for our survival has been our classifieds.” Bruce makes sure that advertising rates for community services are reasonable: “We give all kind of deals to grow this. These aren't big

guys. They don't have a lot of money.” On a national level, the North Coast Courier is represented by an advertising agency, the National Advertising Bureau (NAB). The NAB secures advertising business for the Courier from big banks, corporate companies and government departments. This is a very sound financial arrangement as Rose confirms: “The biggest cheque that comes in every month is from the NAB.”

Except for the two marketing consultants, the Courier's staff members are paid a standard monthly salary. Marketing consultants are paid a relatively low basic, but they can earn commission on any advertising sales that they close. Their commission is calculated at 8.5% for the first R100 000, and thereafter it is worked out on a sliding scale with the top limit set at 11%. Bruce adds that his marketing consultants “haven't got a quota or anything like that. It's really impossible to set them targets and tell them you have to sell that much. It's just what the economy will bear at that time.” As Rose succinctly says: “Everyone is run by numbers.”

Production and Distribution

In this segment of the case study the marketing, editorial content, printing and distribution of the North Coast Courier is discussed.

Marketing

Heidi paints a picture of Courier country: “If you drive from Ballito and up to the Umboti toll plaza and you look to your right to the sea. Every piece of land has been earmarked. I mean they're talking about 40 000 more houses in this area. All that rolling sugar cane gone.” Rose points out that “The struggles over the years have been about establishing ourselves. Owning the area.” Bruce remembers: “There was no big competition

here. We had a chance to get established.” Thus far the Northern Coast Courier has been the “King Pin” in the area. But with the fierce competition that accompanies rapid land development the battle to “own” the area is likely to intensify. Bruce confirms: “[Ballito’s] a favourite now, everyone wants to be here. Now [they’re] all trying to push me out.” The Courier has managed to partner with some of their competitors. Rose explains: “We have an arrangement that we don’t go into one another’s areas, and they place ads in our paper. And we do the same.” But there is “strong” competition from publications in two areas whose distribution footprints overlap with the Courier’s. Other than that, there are only a couple of community newspapers that Rose says “limp along so you don’t notice very much.” And as Heidi observes: “There’s only one...that gives us any kind of run for our money...[although] in the last year there have been two papers that have come up that are of some value.” Rose is philosophical: “There has to be competition. It’s good for us. If they weren’t here there would be someone else.” To keep up with the pace of development Bruce increased the North Coast Courier’s circulation to 24 000 copies, but in Heidi’s opinion: “I don’t believe that’s enough.”

So far the Courier has managed to stay ahead of the pack. One factor that supports the paper’s success is its tight marketing strategy. Bruce makes sure his product is “better than the others in some way”. The Courier also sticks to its target market. Heidi describes its style as a “Good strong community newspaper. Telling people about what makes them tick.” Bruce puts it differently: “The core value is its funded area.”

And at the local level marketing of the free publication is very well organised. It is supported via a separate department headed by a manager who plans the overall marketing strategy and manages its implementation. She co-ordinates the activities

of two marketing consultants who sell advertising space. When new marketing consultants join the team they must develop a client base. They are not allowed to poach one another’s areas and a consultant can only claim an advertiser as a client once she has closed a firm sale with him or her. Potential clients phoning into the office are routed to the marketing manager who allocates them to a particular consultant. It sometimes happens that the marketing manager is not at her desk, in which case, whoever answers the phone gets the lead. Consultants also go door-to-door to sell advertising space and are expected to follow up existing clients. But as Rose explains: “There is always a gap in repping, because sometimes you just don’t click with someone. So they are your clients, but if you haven’t sold to them for six months...then you have to let them go. They are free game.” When a new business comes to town it can happen that consultants both arrive at the door. But competition between consultants is healthy for the business and despite the “odd scrap” Rose observes that “they seem to be able to work together”.

Within its distribution area the paper is very visible, partly because of its reliable distribution in well targeted sites over twenty years. But there are many other ways in which the paper has become well known. As discussed earlier (see p. 94), the Courier is represented by the National Advertising Bureau, which places the advertisements of national level clients in the paper, and in all likelihood, this promotes the Courier’s profile at this level. The Courier also reaches a wide audience via its annual community information booklet ‘The North Coast FastFinder’, which is aimed at visitors to KwaZulu Natal’s North Coast. On a more local level, the paper’s classifieds section is very popular with the community, and is growing fast. As Rose points out “that’s a good way of telling how the community are responding to the paper.” An extra advantage of the classified

section is that it allows the Courier's staff to keep abreast with what people in the community are doing. Bruce finds that "there is a big demand on to do advertorial. Because everyone thinks that their story is news." Initiated to keep advertisers happy, advertorials now bring in big revenue. Rose points out: "Bruce has a newspaper background. So he didn't go out to start something to put news wrapping around adverts. He wanted adverts to help put out the news." Nonetheless Heidi is not enamoured with advertorials generally, and more specifically when they "encroach on our space for stories". Partly as a solution to this problem and partly as an additional marketing tactic, the Courier runs supplements. Bruce declares: "No one does supplements like these supplements! I go out and I sell the [client an] advert, picture and write up - 200 words." And Bruce makes sure that he gives clients good press: "And believe me, they are so happy about this." At least once a month the Courier has a supplement of some kind. Usually these appear according to an annual plan. Rose explains: "The outdoor living one happens every May...We have a bridal competition all year and then in June we have the winners and the bridal supplement. And in July we have the agricultural supplement. So there is one for every month, except November, as then we build up to Christmas."

The Courier is very involved in the community. Although its involvement no doubt increases the paper's visibility, this interpretation does not meet the open and generous spirit that clearly guides its substantial contributions. A major philanthropic pursuit is Rose and Bruce's sponsorship of iNdlazi News. Without their help to bring the new publication to fruition, it is likely that iNdlazi News would have remained a dream for its young Black owner. The Courier also started an orphan fund, which it has been running for the last two years with the help of funds and people-power from four charity organisations and St Vincent de Paul, a local

church. Rose elaborates: "It was born out of the huge need. Young children are being orphaned all the time. And we really wanted to be able to do something. And the idea [was] that the public would sponsor an orphan. But mostly money comes from functions. The idea is to get money and not keep it in the bank account. But get it out to the children, because their need is so immediate. Government grants aren't getting through. Grandparents are trying to keep them alive, with pensions and things. We have requests all the time, and we try to analyse [them as they come in]. And then [our committee] meets every three months and [in the] fourth month we push the money out. As much of it as we can." More generally, Rose says: "If people are wanting support we write a story about it and ask for support and someone from the community will come forward." On a happier note, the Courier sponsors the local "unbeaten" rugby club.

Editorial Content

There is agreement amongst management and staff at the North Coast Courier that the publication is "strong editorially". Underlying the paper's strength are two main principles.

Rose and Bruce are adamant that "Our focus is very local. We have the policy that anything outside of our distribution area doesn't happen. People ask why we don't write about things like the tsunami. Unless the victim came from here, we won't." They believe that their strength as a community paper is that local news is very seldom covered by the larger publications or the television news. By sticking strongly to local news they are able to provide the community with information that they are not able to get from anywhere else.

Reporting should be factual, balanced, and unbiased. Part of maintaining integrity is not to sensationalise news. Rose offers an example: "We can't

avoid bad news...[but] we don't like pictures of car accidents with blood on the road. We will publish a story about the accident, but we will try to keep the gory picture out."

All final decisions regarding the North Coast Courier's layout and content are made by Bruce. Two journalists are responsible for writing the majority of editorial articles. Although journalists are free to choose what stories they want to cover, there is some negotiation regarding the form articles take: "We will discuss what news angle will be appropriate or relevant to the story." Bruce writes some of the editorial articles and advertorials. Readers' letters and special columns in the sports section are written by community members.

Editorial content is divided into various sections: general news, social roundup, a schools page, readers' letters and sports news, which includes a coastline page with fishing news. The general news section has information on newsworthy events in the area. This includes reports on crime, government activities and issues impacting on the environment. The social roundup section covers charity and social events and illustrates these with photographs. This section is also where readers can find a crossword puzzle, health and beauty tips, and see what is showing at the movies.

The letters section is a very popular part of the paper. The paper receives no payment for the letters that they print, but there is a good spinoff. As Rose says, the letters section is a way for the locals to "own" the paper, "I think that is really the secret." Bruce agrees: "Nothing's not good enough to print. If a guy wants to talk about porcupines let him write about porcupines. That's the community part. This is the paying part. A lot of journalists [are] particularly nearsighted about this...because they're idealists." In Bruce's experience, some people send in letters that are motivated by personal vendettas. Bruce remem-

bers: "I have got taken a few times. People writing rubbish. And it was proven that it was rubbish. And I thought no hang on." So he instated a rule to never publish anonymous letters. Firstly, in Bruce's opinion people "must stand by what they said." Secondly, if libellous things are written and people are named, Bruce can be sued.

The schools page uses photograph to illustrate pupils' academic and other achievements and announces the results of school sporting events. All the schools in the area are encouraged to send in their own photographs illustrating their activities and when they do so, it saves a journalist having to go out to the school. The sports section comprises a minimum of four pages, which is a substantial proportion of the newspaper. All the local sports clubs write copy for their own columns, and send them in before midday on Mondays so that the articles can be edited. Having community sports writers frees up time for journalists to source material for other stories. It also has the same spinoff as the letters section: it allows the community to actively participate in the paper and gives them a sense of owning it.

The North Coast Courier has to deal sensitively with the considerable pressure it gets from some of the advertisers in response to editorial content. Rose notes: "Advertisers are quite difficult sometimes." Some advertisers try to get the editorial staff to write news articles about their businesses. This problem has been solved by letting clients know that advertorials are different to editorials, and that if they want their adverts embedded in a write-up, then they need to buy a quarter-page worth of advertising space. Other advertisers try to twist arms by insisting that the Courier should refrain from portraying a negative perspective of them or their businesses. And this poses a real ethical dilemma, one which is shared by all the newspapers covered in this research. The tension between securing advertising revenue and edito-

rial independence causes problems at the personal and the interpersonal levels. On a personal level, most of us at some stage experience the dilemma of needing to remain silent on one level, and needing to speak out on another. On an interpersonal level, and in the context of the Courier, this dilemma can cause friction among editorial staff. There have been instances when Heidi has felt that advertisers use their financial or social power to coerce the paper into censoring certain information. She says: "Management is very business orientated. And they know where the bread is buttered. And they have gone out of their way to make sure that those clients are happy. At times this impinges on our editorial independence. At times I have been at loggerheads with [Bruce] about that." On one occasion the newspaper did not report a violent occurrence outside the shop of an advertiser because of the tensions between good business, bad publicity and the type of information that the community, as understood by the Courier, may or may not need.

Regarding the right to write on contentious issues, these instances should not be seen as a norm at the paper. Rose feels that "when [people] are in the public life, then they are fair game." In this regard she finds that "there is quite a bit of naïveté about what we can and can't publish." She gives an example: "Because our area is growing there has been a lot of development. And we have published stories and the developers get angry. They think we're out to get them." Rose emphasises that the Courier is not trying to victimise developers, instead the paper reports their views too, and by doing so tries to "give them the story." She asserts: "It's not like [these things] aren't happening. They are happening. And we do publish them." Estate agents resist editorial content on crime. Rose reflects: "They want the world to be such a nice place. They want everyone to come live here. And when we publish too much crime they think it's our fault...I'm thinking of one particular man.

He talks positive all the time, which is wonderful, but he gets annoyed with us."

Printing

When Bruce and Rose brought the Courier back to life in 1985, they printed at the Natal Witness. Bruce says: "I felt I had a good relationship with them. I had worked with them in 1971." Those were pre-software days when Bruce recalls that "all the newspapers were done on these big old typesetting machines, where you printed out on photographic paper and you developed it in a dark-room. And cut out strips from newsprint. Even your adverts were done like that. There was a machine that did headlines letter by letter." Although printing costs at the Witness were normally cash on delivery, the paper was "good to them" and Bruce and Rose considered themselves "very lucky" to get two weeks credit.

The Courier has a very streamlined printing process. It is currently printed in Pinetown by the Highway Mail. The Courier sends the made-up [ready for press] pages to the printer via an ISDN line. Once the newspapers are printed the Highway Mail delivers them to the North Coast Courier offices. The relationship between The North Coast Courier and the Highway Mail, which is owned by Caxton, is "good" and an occasional hitch aside, service and printing quality are up to standard. The relationship between the two businesses is mutually beneficial in more ways than one: it negates any competition which might otherwise exist between the two firms. Rose comments: "They are a huge company. We have come to an agreement not to poach in each other's areas and to work together on some projects. Newspapers are very territorial."

By close of day on Tuesdays the North Coast Courier's production is complete and ready for distribution.

Distribution

The North Coast Courier originally distributed 7 000 copies of its free sheet every two weeks. According to the Audit Bureau of Circulation,²³ the paper currently circulates 24 000 copies weekly from Umhlanga to Mandeni (Tugela), including the major centres of Tongaat, Ballito, Umhlali, Stanger and Mandeni. Up until last year - 2005 - the Courier only did bulk drops and so door-to-door deliveries are a fairly recent addition to their services.

To streamline distribution, the Courier divides its service area into two sections. The first is made up of Ballito, Zimbali, Chaka's Rock and Salt Rock. Here distribution is contracted to the owner of iNdlazi News, who delivers the paper house-to-house. Distribution to shops and public places is contracted to a semi-retired man, who relies on doing the Courier's bulk drops to sustain him as "it's his only job. He comes in, uses our bakkie. He takes a man and goes with him to offload." Deliveries are also door-to-door in this section and the contactor "gets young fellows to do this".

Getting the distribution numbers right has always been difficult. Being a free sheet means that sometimes traders use the Courier to wrap foods and other goods. But one advantage of being audited is that extra copies of old issues are returned to the Courier. And so the paper has old stock that is available to people for whatever purposes they require. Some readers take more than one copy when they pick up the new issue. Rose explains that if the edition is "smallish" some people may take five copies, and if it is chunky they may only take one, in which case there is an overprint. Door-to-door delivery in the Ballito and Sheffield area is a recent initiative, but some people are not yet accustomed to the service and out of habit they pick up a copy anyway. Rose says "You have to wean them off that." Bruce takes the issue of extra copies in his stride: instead of view-

ing it as loss he chooses to think of the Courier as getting out to the community and doing what it should do: serving advertisers and the general public. Another problem is that during the holiday season there is a large influx of visitors and non-resident property owners and the paper has to anticipate how many more copies are needed. Rose says: "We pride ourselves on being able to supply the influx as well, [and] to meet the demand of our advertisers." As Ballito is a resort environment, a further difficulty is telling which houses need regular delivery, as a pile up of newspapers in letterboxes is a signal for thieves. This can cause problems for non-residents and residents who work out of town, and by association for the Courier.

How the Paper is Perceived

This segment presents advertisers' and readers' perceptions of the North Coast Courier, and staff perceptions of why the paper is successful.

Advertisers

Asked about how they came to hear about the newspaper, most advertisers seemed a bit taken aback: "Well, I live here." Regarding the Courier's relationship to its community, the paper is seen as well established and solidly grounded in issues that are relevant: "Well, they started out as the only newspaper here and they inform and keep everybody up to date with everything that's going on in the local area."

The paper is most popular. One advertiser comments: "They have a good shelf life and good coffee table life and people always ask 'is the courier out yet' when they go into shops. So you know they've captured the market here." Another adds: "It is very popular in this area."

Commenting on the ability of the paper to reach target markets, one advertiser commented: "Well our target market is our area, we've an upmarket area. Very affluent...[and] I think it's full of the local stuff that people want." And there is agreement on the quality and reach of the Courier: "Their paper is substantial. It's got good value to it. It reaches the target market that I'm aiming at." The North Coast Courier's distribution is also perceived as one of its strong points: "You find it everywhere so unless you walk around with your eyes closed you see it everywhere."

Advertisers also appreciate the level of service the paper provides them. As one advertiser declares: "Professionalism. Obviously, never been late on a drop or on what ever they do. You know they're punctual, they're a professional outfit."

Ironically, in response to a question asking how the paper could improve, some advertisers answered that they thought that at times the newspaper carries too many advertisements! Regarding editorial content, the Courier has "substantial articles on surrounding events plus the letters column where people write letters with regards to our community. Fishing reports which show what's happening ...It's targeting the whole community and as soon as somebody comes from outside the community, they've got an idea what our community's about." Regarding editorial quality the Courier's approach is experienced as balanced and unbiased: "They try and report reasonably and fairly and that's what good reporting is supposed to be. And then let the readers make up their own minds."

Readers

Readers find the North Coast Courier informative: "It's got lots of information - whatever we need to know about the town. That's what we like about it. Anything that is happening we get to hear about

it." Readers also point out the paper's reliability in terms of a regular information flow: "You know what you will get from the Courier and they always come out when they are supposed to."

The social roundup section of the paper is well pitched to Ballito readers' interests: "The newspaper is not all just about the bad things that are happening. They entertain us as well. There is the crossword puzzle and information about the social events that are happening."

Responses to editorial content ranged from "the articles are quite nice" to a reader (who may be disgruntled by the fact that the paper is not delivered store-to-store in her area) who says "they come out every week. Sometimes I get so bored you don't want to read it." One woman commented that she found the paper "a bit flat", because "it doesn't have as much news as it used to have." Several readers experienced the Courier's editorial content as significant: "it makes you a lot more aware of what's going on around. The developments and things."

Some readers appreciate the adverts: "They advertise as a community. It's good for jobs and that. Its anything that you want to sell you can place it in the paper". But some felt differently: "A lot of the time there is a lot of duplication. You know when you're going through the paper. Spar has always got two pamphlets, and they're exactly the same, they're just in different formats." Regarding high promotional content one reader says: "There is a lot of it. It has an awful lot of advertising in it but then successful papers do."

Staff perceptions of the paper's success

Management and staff view the paper's success as attributable to a number of factors. Editorial content is one. There is general consensus at the

North Coast Courier that it is a “good strong community newspaper” that is locally focused. Rose adds: “It’s [for] the people here.”

Consistent and reliable distribution is another success factor. Bruce points out that the North Coast Courier’s distribution is good: “It’ll be on time, out on Wednesday, in the same shops. The same shops it’s been in last week, the same shop it’s been in the last twenty years. People know where to pick it up. In Ballito area, it’s in every house. And that’s what we’ve got. Our reputation. We’re reliable.”

The newspaper’s marketing consultants go out of their way to ensure that clients are given high quality professional service. People align themselves with the maxim that “the customer is always right” and staff and management “go out of their way” meet the needs and preferences of advertisers and readers.

Success is also credited to the hard work and dedication of the various staff members: “Bruce is very business orientated and he is supported by a very strong and dedicated team. We all work hard to make this newspaper successful.”

And to sum it up, Bruce adds: “There are three legs to this business. Good staff. A good product. Good distribution.”

To conclude this discussion, a summary follows, which shows the main findings from the case study of the North Coast Courier.

Summary

- Bruce has a background in journalism and has a certificate in business management.
- Bruce and Rose initially kept costs down by doing everything themselves – from production to

distribution.

- They feel that the lack of technology available at the time that they started the newspaper gave them the edge.
- Bruce took photos to supplement their income and help the newspaper get off the ground.
- Staff members describe the management style as autocratic, flexible and consultative.
- Most staff have previous experience although the opportunity for on-the-job development exists.
- The publication was started with a R20 000 personal loan (approx. two months print bill).
- The advertising rate takes production costs into account and includes a profit margin.
- The North Coast Courier markets itself through door-to-door sales, a classifieds section, monthly supplements, their involvement with the community, the bride of the year competition, and their relationship with the Highway Mail.
- The paper has an informal editorial policy to only cover news in the distribution area or that is about someone who lives in the distribution area, and to be honest and balanced.
- Their editorial content includes general news, a social round up section, a schools page, readers’ letters, and sports.
- The North Coast Courier has an arrangement with their printers that they will not distribute into each other’s area.
- The paper is distributed from house to house and in various shops.
- They deal with wastage by offering shops old copies of the paper to wrap breakables.
- Advertisers found out about the paper because they live in the area. They support the publication because it is a popular local paper, reaches its target market, has a large distribution and quality content. They feel that the paper is successful because it is meeting the community’s needs, provides them with a good service, and the editorial content is accurate and balanced.
- Readers view the publication as providing them with accurate information and say they enjoy the

social round up section.

- Staff believe that the North Coast Courier is successful because its editorial content is close and relevant to the community, it has a consistent and reliable distribution, provides its advertisers with a good service, and its staff are hard working and dedicated.

Footnotes

- ²³ As a member of the Audit Bureau for Circulation, the North Coast Courier's distribution is documented and audited twice a year. Each shop keeper and distributor (for house-to-house distribution) is required to count and sign for the newspapers they receive, as well as for those they return.

A Compendium of Success Strategies



This section showcases strategies that managers and staff at small independent community newspapers use to harness success for their publications. This section is organised using the same analytical grid as the case study presentations:

- **Organisational Structure** (with subheadings for Responsibilities and the Chain of Command; Internal Communication, Relationships and Management Style; and Money Matters).
- **Production and Distribution** (with subheadings for Marketing; Editorial Content; Printing; and Distribution).

Organisational Structure

- It is interesting to note that most of the newspapers are run by people who either have a marketing or financial management background or who have subsequently completed courses in these fields.
- In all the case studies family members feature strongly in organisational structure.
- In five out of the six case studies women hold positions at the top of the hierarchy, either as owners or co-owners.
- Owners are regularly described as being “strong”, all portray a high degree of tenacity and resourcefulness, and many are charismatic.

Responsibilities and the Chain of Command

Case studies show various ways in which independent community newspapers organise their people-power.

All six newspapers participating in the case studies have a predominantly top-down organisational structure where owners have the final say over how the paper is run. Staff members either report directly to the publication’s owner, or report to the owner indirectly via departmental managers or supervisors. There are, however, channels in place for feedback from staff members (discussed below under the heading ‘Internal Communication, Relationships and Management Style’). These communication channels dilute negative effects of top-down organisational structure, so that most of the case studies fall into a pattern of interaction described by Anton van Zyl, owner of the Limpopo Mirror: “From up it goes down, and from down it goes up. It’s not just top down.”

- Some newspapers have loosely defined job descriptions with a high degree of multi-tasking. In all six case studies at the start-up stage people multi-tasked. At the Southern and Soweto Globe, and to some extent the Ikhwezi News, this practice continues. Multi-tasking plays an important role in ensuring that salary bills remain within an affordable range. It also allows people to develop many different skills and discover their greatest strengths. But a common detractor of multi-task-

ing is that everyone ends up feeling stretched. Adrienne, owner of the Eastern Free State Issue, comments: "You can't really give a hundred percent to anything because you are laying yourself quite thin."

Other newspapers have specific job descriptions, with limited multi-tasking.

Andries van Zyl of the Zoutnet Group, which produces the Limpopo Mirror, says: "We have a structure here, and everybody knows where everyone fits in. Because of the structure everyone gets their job done." In case studies showing clearly defined job descriptions, many staff members indicate that they appreciate this approach as there is no confusion regarding their responsibilities and the division of work.

- Outsourcing is common practice in all the case studies, particularly when newspapers do not have the requisite skills to handle certain aspects of the business. Newspapers with few permanent staff members generally outsource specialist tasks to professionals such as accountants and marketing consultants.

Most of the publications outsource distribution, either to private individuals who handle the entire distribution process, or to casual employees who assist with distribution.

A common practice is to employ freelance journalists. The Limpopo Mirror, the Ikhwezi news and the North Coast Courier each have only one permanently employed journalist and all the others are drawn from communities within the paper's distribution area. Management at the Limpopo Mirror point out that this provides employment for otherwise unoccupied reporters who also benefit from in-house training offered by the paper. Their freelance reporters are area-based and only paid for published articles from within their designated

area. This ensures high quality work and prevents the freelance journalists from submitting stories on the same event or issue. The paper purchases cameras for the reporters, who then pay off this cost.

The Eastern Free State Issue has developed a partnership with their local radio station where the radio's news reporter writes articles for the newspaper. This is a successful resource-sharing tactic.

- Technology is used by most of the publications to maximise staff effectiveness.

A good example of this is the Limpopo Mirror's computerised advertisement booking system - the Ad Booker. It is a complete booking system with a report function accessible from any of the computers on the network. This program is then linked to the accounting software which ensures that the Group can keep track of all monies owing and owed. In turn, this helps the Group to manage its budget. The other program William developed that helps to manage the newspapers' production process, is the Press-Store system, a file repository on a web server accessible anywhere in the world. This system allows news correspondents to upload articles and photos from wherever they can get an internet connection. The system was also designed to facilitate the transfer of large files, which normally is not possible via e-mail. It is a browser-based system, meaning that no specialised software is needed. The Press-Store system is extensively used when assisting emerging publishers in other parts of the country to send and receive large files.

The North Coast Courier makes good use of technology to streamline the printing process. This is discussed further on, under the heading 'Printing'.

Internal Communication, Relationships and Management Style

In all six case studies managers have a hands-on approach and there appears to be a mutually beneficial flow of ideas and feedback between management and staff regarding workplace related issues. Most of the case studies researched show a good level of staff participation in workplace decisions and managers appear to accommodate the needs of individual people as well as the needs of their businesses. As organisational leadership author Wheatley²⁴ points out: "...an organization rich with many interpretations develops a wiser sense of what is going on and what needs to be done. Such organizations become more intelligent". Sometimes communication at the newspapers takes place during formal meetings and sometimes it is simply a matter of chatting. Sibulele of the Ikhwezi News comments: "We don't have a formal communication structure and maybe it's one of our challenges. For instance, if someone has a problem, we just tackle it straight."

- Most of the six case studies show that formal meetings are valuable times for staff and management to engage with one another, not only regarding the successes and possible avenues for improving the newspaper, but also to table disputes. As the North Coast Courier case study shows, meetings can be volatile, but group debate serves to balance multiple perspectives and to weigh traditional journalistic ethics against pressing financial demands. Adrienne Shepherd, co-owner of the Eastern Free State Issue, describes their consultative process: "Usually the majority wins unless the other person can put up a really good argument. Usually we come to a compromise or an agreement." Meetings may not be focused only on productivity in the instrumental sense of the word, they can also help to integrate staff, particularly when there are several different departments. The Limpopo Mirror has focused

as well as more informal meetings. Owner Anton van Zyl explains: "It works a lot better for communication channels if they all sit around on Monday morning. Even if it's only for five minutes. Often they don't have anything to say but at least they get the opportunity."

- Regarding the availability of management to staff members, Thobile, a staff member at KZN News says: "I take Sheila as my parent because I know if I have problem I can tell her, sorry my sister I have a problem...and she is very worried. [Once] I was really afraid...[and] she was trying to give me that love, like my mother would give me." Although she is "there and available" to listen to staff, owner Sheila Mhlongo sets clear boundaries. One staff member comments: "We cannot just walk into the manager's office. We have to make an appointment first." Another staff member confirms: "You write a letter formally." Congruently, Sheila notifies staff when she needs to speak to them. "She will write us letters...and we will know we have a meeting." Notification of a meeting is accompanied by an agenda and minutes are recorded.

- Discipline in all the newspapers participating in the case study phase of the research does not appear to pose a problem. Staff members are often referred to as "committed" and "hard working". In the majority of case studies, trust is often mentioned as a successful component of good working relationships. Samuel, marketing consultant for the Eastern Free State Issue, expresses a sentiment shared by most of the newspapers: "We don't have rules or policies in place, but we are ethical. The owner trusts our discretion." Shirley Govender of the Southern and Soweto Globe comments: "I've learnt how to keep staff in line. To check, to know you have caution...In any structure you get those workers who are delinquent. They just need to be told." Of all the case studies Sheila Mhlongo of the KZN News has the most formal

mechanisms for assuring staff are doing their jobs: at the end of each day staff members must provide her with a written statement of what they have achieved and records of the breaks that they took. Staff express no resentment in relation to this requirement. And despite, or perhaps because of, her enforcement of strict business protocols Sheila's staff are happy. Moreover she has a low staff turnover. Sheila remarks: "I manage to keep staff...Everybody feels comfortable to work...I don't remember any staff member just resigning. They finish their contract."

Most publications report difficulty retaining trained staff, particularly journalists. And the most successful response appears to be pride and delight in people moving onwards and upwards. The Limpopo Mirror encourages freelance reporters to spread their wings and source as much outside reporting and photography work as possible. Owner Anton van Zyl remarks: "We often lose the good correspondents to bigger groups, which is a pity. We train them and get them up to a certain standard, but then they move on". Rose Stephenson, co-owner of the North Coast Courier, agrees: "They go to the big papers. I think a lot of small newspapers end up being that. They train the reporters to go to big papers. So we perform a service for the industry that way." Rose also shows a generous response to their leaving: "We're quite proud of our reporters. That they've gone off and done well. Our first reporter went off to radio and she got quite high up." Likewise, the Ikhwezi News shows pride in staff going on to do well. Journalist Sibulele comments: "We have produced journalists who managed to get jobs in the mainstream media. One of them, Sivuyile Sineke, is a Xhosa newsreader on SABC 1."

Training is a persistent problem common to all the publications participating in the initial questionnaire as well as the case study phase of the research. Some publications have managers and

staff with previous experience in the field, but the majority have no formal training.

At all the newspapers in this study training is done continuously, informally and on-the-job. Some publications also encourage staff members to further their studies and to read up in their various fields. Mentorship is a success strategy used by the North Coast Courier to address needs in the wider context of the independent community media sector. The paper mentors a young Black entrepreneur in all aspects of running his fledgling publication 'The iNdlazi News', and he uses the North Coast Courier's premises and other resources.

Money Matters

All the owners and founders interviewed reported starting up with little and sometimes no capital. They used several strategies to keep their publications afloat and thriving.

- Success strategies common to all the newspapers interviewed for the case studies is to keep debts to a minimum, pay creditors promptly, and ensure that they have in place - and consistently implement - effective and efficient debt-collecting procedures. Sheila Mhlongo, owner of the KZN News, comments: "There is no one who owes us money without me knowing...I supervise and make sure that all the debtors are up to date. And the creditors. I make sure that we don't owe people and never get to pay them. I make sure that we pay our overheads in time. By the seventh everything must be paid."

Related to the point above, successful publications have effective financial systems and procedures in place, and where there are not appropriately qualified staff members to take financial administration to the point of producing final statements, the work is outsourced to specialist contractors.

- Staff payment is managed in many ways, but there are commonalities. Staff members selling advertising space are generally paid a small or no basic salary and they generate their income from commission on ad sales. This encourages them to sell well.

Journalists often double up as photographers. Some of the case-study newspapers employ reporters on a freelance basis and only pay them for articles that are published. This keeps salary overheads low and also assures good quality work. The Eastern Free State Issue calculates payments to freelance journalist/photographers in the following way. Articles are valued according to Martin and Adrienne's personal perceptions regarding their quality and newsworthiness, rather than by word count or column centimetre. This is done to discourage writers from bulking up articles for extra pay. Payments for news stories range from R40 to R80 per article. Features and columns, which are popular with readers, are paid at a higher rate of between R100 and R200. With most of the journalists having digital cameras, they are paid a flat rate of R25 per photo. These rates are not cast in stone and journalists can earn considerably more for an article or photograph if the managers feel they are exceptionally newsworthy or of an extremely high quality.

- Performance management is handled in different ways by each of the case study newspapers. Some papers, such as the KZN News, give permanent staff an end-of-year bonus, which depends on cash flow at the time. Some reward staff members with small monetary gifts or staff lunches as does the Southern and Soweto Globe. Nthambeleni, journalist at the Limpopo Mirror, says: "If you come up with a scoop, as a journalist you can expect an increase in addition to what you are paid every month."
- Except for the Limpopo Mirror, publications that

took part in the case study phase of the research are free publications. Irrespective of whether a newspaper is free or not, advertising is the largest generator of revenue for all of the publications. As Anton van Zyl of the Limpopo Mirror remarks: "Numbers are determined by the advertisers...the advertisers are the people who can make the business grow or not grow."

Most publications, when they started out, studied their competitors' advertising rates and spent a lot of time trying to figure out what clients might be willing to pay. But this is not an effective strategy in the long term. Shirley Govender, owner of the Southern and Soweto Globe, says that in the beginning she also examined advertising prices of other local newspapers. And then she made sure to charge less. But now Shirley understands that undercutting prices has the potential to destabilise the market and to either seriously compromise existing publications financially, or put them right out of business. She offers an insider view: "Because [inexperienced newcomers] think we're making money. They think they can come in for their slice of the pie. And every time they do that you lose revenue. They come in with something for R2 ...they come in at 25c. So we ride the tide, but there is a lot of compromising."

Successful publications soon develop systematic pricing methods for advertisements. In this regard Bruce Stephenson, co-owner of the North Coast Courier, notes that at start-up he also examined what other publications were charging and then "took a stab". Experience taught him that making profit depends a great deal on how advertising prices are matched to different sectors in the market: "You can't charge the property guys because they're used to paying low rates...You can charge higher for legals."

At start-up almost all of the publications were unclear about how to calculate their advertising-to-

editorial ratios. And successful publications either access help from more experienced newspaper owners to develop a systematic method of calculating ratios, or through experience and experimentation, formulate their own rate cards. All the newspapers in the study noted that it is important to secure national advertising clients. The North Coast Courier is represented by an advertising agency, the National Advertising Bureau (NAB). The NAB secures advertising business for the Courier from big banks, corporate companies and national government departments. This is a very sound financial arrangement as co-owner of the paper, Rose Stephenson, confirms: "The biggest cheque that comes in every month is from the NAB." Questionnaire respondents noted that competition among small independents contributes to financial problems. They suggest that small independent newspapers should find a way of uniting their efforts in an attempt to secure national advertising.

Work from the local Mbizana municipality remains the largest source of revenue for the Ikhwezi News. The municipal newsletter updates community members about developments in their area and is distributed as an insert in the Ikhwezi News. The municipality also places advertisements in the paper. This relationship is not without some problems. Neziswa explains: "Because we communicate well with the municipality, the newspaper is able to secure advertising spend from them...but we really struggle to make them pay us on time so that we can settle our bills and be able to print the newspaper." The Eastern Free State Issue also gets a lot of business from local municipalities. But a number of the publications report that municipalities have started up their own publications and that the small independent community newspapers - for instance the KZN News - lose a chunk of regular revenue as a result. Clearly it is important to diversify in terms of advertising clients.

The Eastern Free State Issue runs regular advertisements of their own aimed at educating readers about the vital role advertising plays in ensuring they receive a regular free newspaper. Readers are asked to support the paper by telling storeowners and service providers they are doing business with that they saw their advertisements in the paper. They are also asked to show their employers copies of the paper and to encourage them to advertise. Anecdotal evidence suggests that this strategy works. One of the EFS Issue's regular advertisers described how each of his staff members arrived at work with a copy of the newspaper to show him their advertisement. Flyers and inserts diminish the advertising revenue of newspapers. Flyers and inserts increase newspapers' labour costs and distribution timeframes and impact negatively on editorial space which is, in effect, paid for by advertisements printed in the actual newspapers. Most of the newspapers are reluctant to offer advertisers this service, although few refuse all inserts. Anton van Zyl, owner of the Limpopo News, explains: "I sincerely believe that inserts are killing newspapers. For each advert you take out, you take out another page of community news. You might end up with an eight page newspaper thick with inserts, but you have no money to sponsor the news. So it's not good for newspapers."

Supplements are another effective way of generating extra advertising revenue. These also raise the visibility of the newspapers and sometimes extend their shelf-life.

- Classified sections are identified as lucrative in terms of generating revenue. Moreover, classifieds increase the visibility of publications and enhance awareness of the publications within communities. Classifieds also benefit newspaper staff in terms of keeping in touch with who is doing what in their communities. Bruce Stephenson, co-owner of the North Coast Courier, makes sure

that classified advertising rates for community services are reasonable: "We give all kind of deals to grow this. These aren't big guys. They don't have a lot of money."

- Bruce Stephenson, co-owner of the North Coast Courier, notes: "There is a big demand on us to do advertorial. Because everyone thinks that their story is news." These advertorials generate very good revenue for the publication.
- Another way that some of the publications supplement revenue is by offering business services to the community. It should be noted that some staff members - notably those working at newspapers where staff do a lot of multi-tasking - mention that the time involved in delivering these services can interfere with the newspaper's production.

Production and Distribution

Marketing

A variety of marketing tactics contribute to the success of small independent community newspapers.

- As mentioned in the section 'Money Matters', marketers/marketing consultants/advertising representatives earn the bulk or all of their income from commission on advertising sales: this motivates them to market well, particularly where there are bonuses or sliding scales in place to reward high advertising sales rates.
- The most common practice amongst independent community newspapers is to send marketing consultants door-to-door selling advertising space. Marketers source potential clients this way and follow up existing clients. But as Rose Stephenson, co-owner of the North Coast Courier, remarks: "There is always a gap in repping, because

sometimes you just don't click with someone." The Courier has a system in place to address instances where a potential client may be ignored due to lack of personal affinity with a marketing consultant or due to the client's continued refusal to take space in the newspaper. Rose explains: "So they are your clients, but if you haven't sold to them for six months...then you have to let them go. They are free game [for other consultants to approach]."

To support door-to-door advertising sales, marketers usually take with them back copies of their newspaper, information that describes its target market, material or information that illustrates the publication's successes, and details pertaining to the paper's circulation numbers. Regarding the latter, one distinct advantage to being a member of the Audit Bureau of Circulation, is that validated distribution numbers can be given to potential and existing advertisers.

Formal auditing also enables newspapers to identify the most effective distribution sites for their publications: this assists them to better understand their target markets.

With the exception of the Limpopo Mirror, papers operate in a highly competitive market. Some publications have formed agreements not to market in each other's areas and some have arranged trade-offs with competitors to compensate for losses in advertising revenue.

Successful marketers follow up on existing advertisers and do not wait for clients to call them. They are also quick to contact new businesses in their areas. Successful marketers say that the consistency and care they take to give advertisers professional service and attention, and to meet their client's needs and requests, keeps advertisers coming back. This calibre of service builds high quality relationships with clients. Niël

speaks for marketers at the Limpopo Mirror when he says: "The newspaper builds loyalty with the advertisers. We need to treat our advertisers very well."

- Most of the publications that participated in the study are actively involved in the communities that they serve. It should be noted that although community outreach activities help to raise awareness and visibility of the newspapers, these activities are usually less a marketing strategy than a commitment to community upliftment.

The North Coast Courier mentors an emerging Zulu newspaper - 'The iNdlazi News' - and helps its young owner with all aspects of his business. They also founded and run, in partnership with local sponsors and churches, a fund for orphans in their community. The Southern and Soweto Globe co-hosts numerous fund-raising events including one which showcases the contributions of people working for social upliftment and one community member is honoured with a Human Rights Award. In 2005 the paper also co-hosted a comedy show called 'Chuckles for Charity'.

Several of the publications are involved in sponsoring, organising and participating in sporting events. The Limpopo Mirror's soccer team always generates a lot of interest. And the paper partnered with one of their advertising clients, the Thohoyandou Spar, to organise a charity half-marathon. The paper publicises the event, gives it press, and mans a water point. An insert was also produced for the 'Kremetart Cycle Tour' fondly known as the local Tour de France. The North Coast Courier sponsors the local "unbeaten" rugby club.

- Associated with community upliftment, many of the newspapers publish information that helps people to become aware of services and programmes that have the potential to help them in

some way with problems they encounter in their lives. It is often the case that a newspaper report highlighting a community member's problem leads to the person getting help. This positive outcome is reported by both the KZN News and the North Coast Courier.

- Sheila Mhlongo of the KZN News makes sure she attends the right marketing functions "where you need to be seen as a newspaper". Sheila represents the paper at these functions and also gets exposure as a businesswoman and entrepreneur. The Ikhwezi News also makes sure that the newspaper is represented at community events. Sibulele says: "If the community has an event and they want us to cover the event, we go there and take some pictures. They will then be pleased if they see the article in the newspaper. We also cover local sports matches and functions and the sports people will be pleased if they see their teams published in the newspaper."

- Supplements also help to extend a publication's visibility: some publications run educational supplements or those aimed at raising HIV and AIDS awareness, and others formulate supplements around a special community event or an important national day. The North Coast Courier has an annual community information booklet 'The North Coast FastFinder', which is aimed at visitors to the region.

- Other common branding strategies are competitions, posters placed in and around distribution areas, features such as 'bride of the year', painted walls that display a newspaper's name boldly and artistically, t-shirts, badges and other promotional materials, and so forth. Give-aways and prizes are also used as mechanisms to brand newspapers. The Eastern Free State Issue runs a regular bumper sticker competition, in which distributors hand out stickers with the newspapers for readers to put on their cars. This sticker says; 'I know

it all. I read the Eastern Free State Issue'. To encourage people to display these stickers prominently, the newspaper sends someone out each week to look for cars displaying the sticker. The paper awards a prize of R200 to the owner of the first car that is found displaying the sticker.

The newspapers also raise community awareness of their publication through schools pages and running debates at local schools about an article in the newspaper. Public opinion pages are also popular ways of securing community interest and participation. These either take the form of a regular readers' letter column or open invitations extended to community members to send in their own photographs and stories. The sections include photographs of community members that encourage the individual's friends and family to buy, read and keep the newspaper.

Showcasing community members' successes is another way of engaging community interest and many papers publicise the accomplishments of local artists and musicians.

- To increase national and international visibility for the Limpopo Mirror and promote its success as a community newspaper a considerable amount of time and expertise has gone into developing the Zoutnet Group's website,²⁵ which was launched in October 1977. It features online versions of the newspaper's current and archived articles. Importantly, the website offers free downloadable versions of all the educational booklets designed by Bennie Barker for the Limpopo Mirrors 'Science for Life' project. These help children to learn science and mathematics and to enjoy both.

The Limpopo Mirror's marketing strategy includes using their website to gauge readers' interests: the website is set up to register every time a visitor clicks on an article on their news page or in

their archives.

- Securing airtime with local radio stations is another successful marketing strategy. The Limpopo mirror exchanges airtime for advertising space in the paper.
- Some of the publications report using their vendors and shop keepers to gather information regarding which articles readers find more interesting.

Editorial Content

With the exception of the Limpopo Mirror, which has a predominantly autonomous editor, owners have the final say over editorial content. In fact, in most cases, the owner is the editor.

- The most commonly practised success factor, which is mentioned by all six publications that took part in the case study phase of the research, is that editorial content has a local focus and is relevant to members of the newspapers' communities. Heidi, journalist at the North Coast Courier, describes this style as a "good strong community newspaper. Telling people about what makes them tick."
- Rose, co-owner of the North Coast Courier says that the letters section is a way for the locals to "own" the paper: "I think that is really the secret." Bruce, the paper's other co-owner, agrees: "Nothing's not good enough to print. If a guy wants to talk about porcupines let him write about porcupines. That's the community part. This is the paying part. A lot of journalists [are] particularly nearsighted about this...because they're idealists."
- Editorial content is predominantly sourced through journalists and area-based reporters. The Eastern Free State Issue has developed a symbiotic relationship with their local radio station

where the station's news editor writes articles for the newspaper.

- All of the publications taking part in the case study phase of the research share the policy of non-sensationalising editorial content. They avoid publishing violent photographs or writing stories in a gory way. Instead, the publications work hard at nurturing sensitivity towards community members and emphasise positive aspects and developments in their communities. Politicians are rarely given the chance to use publications as a platform for rhetoric and the newspapers tend to publish what is done, as opposed to what is promised. Successful publications avoid perpetuating negative stereotypes, particularly regarding issues of gender. Furthermore, there is concerted effort to ensure that reporting is factual and unbiased and publications opt for giving airtime to multiple perspectives, particularly when an issue is contentious. Different belief systems are respected and in the cases of the KZN News and the Ikhwezi News, indigenous languages are given exposure. Care is taken, particularly in the case of the KZN News, to ensure that the quality of editorial gives the paper a good shelf life.

Printing

All publications, at one time or another, experience problems associated with printing. Problems range from serious ones to minor glitches. Publications generally start by shopping around for the best prices and over time, most papers develop good working relationships with a particular print service provider.

- The Limpopo Mirror purchased a printing press in an attempt to achieve complete independence. But management warns that it is not financially viable for a small independent newspaper to have a printing press for their purposes only and additional printing clients will need to be sourced.

- One newspaper has developed a working relationship with their printer, which happens to be a large newspaper company. They have agreed to not distribute in each other's areas.

- The North Coast Courier makes good use of technology to streamline the printing process. The Courier sends the made-up (ready for press) pages to the printer via an ISDN line. Once the newspapers are printed the Highway Mail - the company which prints the newspaper - delivers them to the North Coast Courier offices. This process saves time and frustration, both of which impact significantly on quality, particularly in terms of precision.

Distribution

Well organised and targeted distribution is a cornerstone to successful independent community newspapers. The degree of reliability with which a newspaper arrives at distribution points, and by association to readers and advertisers, is noted by both groups of people as a signal of a paper's success. The majority of publications outsource distribution to private contractors, sometimes to taxi owners, and sometimes to casual workers.

- Sheila Mhlongo, owner of the KZN Community Newspaper, struck upon an idea to streamline her distribution by making use of an existing government communication channel - the Government Communication and Information System (GCIS). She accesses this system in a way that is probably unanticipated in terms of formal operational protocols. Yet her strategy fits well with the principal idea underlying a Government Communication and Information System (GCIS), so her tactic lies within government's broader mandate. She utilises the GCIS in what is essentially a 'piggy back' arrangement. Each of Durban's Multi-Purpose Community Centres has a manager who attends weekly meetings in Durban's city centre. So she approached

the managers with a request to deliver 5000 copies of the KZN News on their return trips from Durban central to the Community Centres where they are based. She observes: "They do this for us because the GCIS is a government communication service. It's their duty to make sure that people get access to media. So we just take advantage of that."

- A common difficulty experienced regarding distribution is that shops use free sheets to wrap takeaways and breakables. Newspapers participating in the study either stopped placing their newspapers in these stores or offered people old issues to use as wrapping.
- Publications also try to ensure that distributors do not hand out bunches of newspapers to individuals. The Eastern Free State Issue offers distributors a bonus if they are still distributing at a certain time. By doing so they hope to avoid bulk handouts of the papers.

Another strategy to minimise wastage is house-to-house distribution, the Eastern Free State Issue, however, found several reasons for refraining from door-to-door distributions. This is explained at length in the EFS Issue's case study (see p. 55).

- The Limpopo Mirror aims to keep its distribution points to a minimum to ensure financial viability. As an audited paid sheet the newspaper's distribution is tightly controlled and documented. Each shopkeeper and vendor is required to count and sign for the newspapers on receipt of them and sign again if there are any returns. At one stage they had more than 40 shops in Makhado that received the publication. This has been decreased to 32, as the newspaper was not selling well in the other eight shops. If a new shop opens in the area it is given the newspaper for a trial period to determine whether it is likely to be a worthwhile distribution point.

This concludes this compendium of success strategies. The report ends with a very brief conclusion, which follows next.

Footnotes

²⁴ Wheatley, 1999: 67

²⁵ <http://www.zoutnet.co.za>

Conclusion



From all that has come before it should be all too clear that starting up and developing a small independent community newspaper takes considerable tenacity. There is a general perception in this sector that the value of these publications often goes unacknowledged. Shirley Govender of the Southern and Soweto News summarises how many of independents in this research appear to feel: “No one takes you seriously as an independent publisher...[we] feel that disadvantage is running through our veins.” In every single newspaper’s case study at least one person says they are in the industry for the love of it. Most are stoic regarding challenges they face. Some are more independent than others. Many form good and often interesting symbiotic partnerships to share resources and people-power. Some report on contentious issues, most do not. The majority use their newspapers in ways that work towards building a better life for themselves and the communities they serve. But few have the time and know-how to access and engage with media development agencies. And fewer still have the time and expertise to represent the voice of small community publications in the battle against unfair competition, inequitable practices and marginalisation.

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Appendix 1

Successful Small Independent Print Media Selection Questionnaire

1. Contact Details

- 1.1. Name of newspaper: _____
- 1.2. Postal Address: _____
- 1.3. Telephone: _____
- 1.4. Fax: _____
- 1.5. Cell phone: _____
- 1.6. E-mail: _____
- 1.7. Website: _____

2. Background Information

- 2.1. In what year was your newspaper established? _____
- 2.2. Who owns your newspaper? _____
- 2.3. Who is the main target of your newspaper? _____
- 2.4. How would you define this community? _____
- 2.5. What language is your newspaper published in? _____
- 2.6. What is your newspaper's circulation/sales? _____
- 2.7. How do you determine your circulation? _____
- 2.8. How often is the newspaper published? _____
- 2.9. Have you ever had to discontinue publication? If yes, for what reasons? _____
- 2.10. Do you foresee this happening again? Please explain. _____
- 2.11. What is the purpose of your newspaper? _____
- 2.12. What advertising/editorial ratio is your newspaper targeting? _____
- 2.13. What is your newspaper's actual advertising/editorial ratio? _____
- 2.14. How do you understand the role your newspaper plays in your community? _____
- 2.15. Does the community participate in your newspaper? If yes, please explain. _____

3. Staff Details

3.1. How many people work at the newspaper? _____

3.2. What is your staff composition? Please indicate the number of staff that fall into each of the categories on the table below:

Staff Categories	Total number of staff in category	Gender		Race *				Disabled	Part-time, Full-time or volunteer?		
		Male	Female	B	C	I	W		PT	FT	VOL
Senior Management											
Management											
Reporting Staff											
Technical Staff											
Service Staff (e.g. cleaner, driver)											

* B = Black C = Coloured I = Indian W = White

4. Financial Information

4.1. Do you regard your newspapers as financially sustainable? Please explain your answer. _____

4.2. From which sources do you receive income?

	Source of income	Percentage of budget	Funding period	Comments
Advertising				
Sales				
International Donors				
South African Donors				
Government Funding				
Corporate Social Investment				

5. Opportunities and Difficulties

5.1. Drawing from your experience, what difficulties are small independent newspapers in South Africa faced with? _____

5.2. Drawing from your experience, what kinds of resources and support are available to small independent newspapers in South Africa? _____

6. Further Information

6.1. Is there any other information that you feel would be valuable in terms of this study? _____

6.2. Would you like to make any comments with regards to the study? _____

Appendix 2

List of questions for small independent print media staff members.

Background Information

- How do you see your role as a journalist?
- What is your newspaper trying to achieve? What are your newspaper's goals?
- Could you please tell me about the history of your newspaper?
- What do you think makes your newspaper successful?
- What are the difficulties faced by your newspaper?
- Which other newspapers exist in your area? How do they compare to your newspaper?
- What made you decide to work for the newspaper?

Business strategies

- Documentation – annual report, meeting minutes, business plan, etc.
- What is the newspaper's organisational structure (different departments, reporting structure/hierarchy)?
- Do you have a board? How is your board constituted? Who selects your newspaper's board members? What impact does the board have on the running of the newspaper?
- How would you describe the newspaper's management style?
- Communication – who tells who what to do? Between departments, between management and staff, between individual staff members? Meetings? Methods of communication?
- How is work divided amongst the various staff members?
- Are their criteria in place/standards that are used to assess the standard/quality of your work? What performance management systems do you have in place?
- How do you know you have done a good job? Bad job? What reward systems do you have in place?
- Do businesses in the area know about you? What marketing strategies does your newspaper employ?
- Describe your average day.
- How would you describe the staff capacity/competency?
- How would you describe your working conditions?
- How is the newspaper distributed?
- Who does the newspaper's finances? How does the financial side of things work? Please describe your financial management systems.
- Do you have a business plan?
- Who prints your newspaper? How would you describe this relationship?
- What technology does your newspaper have access to? Other facilities? Does your staff have the capacity to use this technology (or have access to people who can)?
- Does your newspaper have a technology plan attached to your business plan?
- Do you have rules/policies that determine how things should be done? What rules or policies do you have in place?

Editorial strategies

- How do you make decisions relating to editorial content?
- Do you have an editorial policy?
- Is your editorial policy aligned with your business plan?
- What kinds of content does your newspaper include?
- What are your sources of information? (internal, NGO partnerships, airtime sales, other)
- Are there any people/organisations that exert financial pressure on your newspaper in relation to editorial content? Ask both about advertisers and funders if appropriate. To what extent do your funders/advertisers influence the content of the newspaper? What difficulties do you experience in relation to your funders/advertisers?
- Please describe the political environment in which you operate. (Both governmental and societal/town)
- How does this political environment impact on the work you do? Positive and negative.
- Do you see your newspaper as independent?
- What strategies do you have in place to ensure editorial independence?

Community needs

- How do you see the newspaper meeting the needs of the community?
- Do you see yourself as a member of this community?
- How does the community participate in the newspaper?
- What do you think the needs of your community are?
- How does your newspaper address these needs?
- Have you done any research into the community's needs?
- Anything else you can tell me about your community?

Attracting advertisers

- Has the newspaper got set proportions of advertising/editorial ratio? What is the actual ratio? What percentage of your newspaper is dedicated to advertising in relation to editorial content? How did you choose the ideal ratio? How do you understand the ratio difference between actual and ideal?
- What about the newspaper, do you think attracts advertisers?
- What businesses are there in your area? Do they advertise in your newspaper? Where do they advertise? Why do you think they advertise here?
- Do any businesses outside your community advertise in your paper?

Partnerships

- Is your newspaper a member of any network or does it derive support from any other service provider?

In Summary

- What are your newspaper's strengths? Weaknesses?
- What difficulties are newspapers in South Africa faced with?
- What kinds of resources and support are available to newspapers in South Africa?
- What can be done to make your environment more enabling?
- Is there anything else you feel I should know about?

Appendix 3

List of questions for readers.

- What would you like from a newspaper?
- Why do you read the newspaper?
- Who do you think the newspaper is aimed at?
- How often do you read the paper?
- Do you buy/get it yourself or do you get it from a friend?
- Which other newspapers do you read?
- How else do you receive information about what is happening in your community?
- Do you feel that you are able to participate in the newspaper? Is the newspaper providing you with a service?
- What is your favourite/least favourite thing about the newspaper?
- How do you think the newspaper could improve?
- What do you think the needs of your community are?
- Do you feel that the newspaper is addressing these?
- Does the newspaper accurately report on events within the community?

Appendix 4

List of questions for advertisers.

- How do you view the newspaper?
- How did you find out about the newspaper?
- What made you decide to advertise in the newspaper?
- What is the newspaper's target market?
- Does this align with your target market?
- How do you think they are meeting the community's needs?
- What do you think is the newspaper's strength/weakness?
- How much on average do you spend on advertising each year?
- Where else do you advertise? What other advertising mediums are you currently making use of? Why?
- What are the critical factors that play a role when advertisers select a media channel?

