



# Debate on media monitoring services value in South Africa

According to a recent debate hosted by Ashraf Garda on Media@SAFM on the state of the media monitoring industry in South Africa, the industry needs to start being more proactive on services offered and communicate better with public relations firms if it is to keep pace with changing customer expectations.



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## Keeping media monitoring on track

"Media monitors have become lazy and simply track and send clips to their clients. However, it is our responsibility to become more strategically involved and informing clients of what the coverage they receive mean. There needs to be a clear shift from a quantity-based approach to one of focusing on quality," says Jaco Pienaar, chief knowledge officer of Professional Evaluation and Research (PEAR).

Galia Kerbel, MD of public relations firm Greater Than, agrees, "The South African media monitoring on offer are not necessarily providing agencies with a proper service. Even 'easy' things like tracking and delivering clippings are not happening quickly enough. Monitors have adopted a lazy approach. Given that clients expect monitoring services to come out of public relations budgets, we need to start getting more bang for our buck. Our monitoring service providers should provide us with the tools to analyse data and speed up strategic insight to our clients."

## Double-edged sword

Wadim Schreiner, an independent media analyst representing the South African Media Monitoring Association says that this is a double-edge sword, as some clients prefer monitoring services that just provide data and do not have the specialist skills and knowledge to do analysis.

"Dwindling public relations budgets are challenging especially when costs are rising for monitors. Clients need to understand that insight costs money and if value-add is demonstrated then additional budget can be made available for monitoring and analysis."

While Pienaar agrees that budgets are an issue, the point of contention in the monitoring industry is about being completely inflexible when it comes to the services provided to clients.

## Improving the industry

"There needs to be open communications with public relations firms to look at what is required and how best the client can be accommodated. It should not be an 'us versus them' scenario."

The consensus seems that if service delivery is improved and communication between monitoring and public relations companies improve, the industry will benefit.

"There needs to be more transparency and honesty in this industry. For example, if a clip is missed then often it is the fault of the monitoring agency. However, if it explains why it was missed and the steps done to fix it, clients will understand. It has now reached a stage where the monitoring industry needs to take a hard look at itself and evolve to meet the demands of clients. The alternative is not something that many would like," he concludes.

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