

Avusa fires journalist for blogging

By [Andrew Trench](#)

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The firing of *Sowetan* sub-editor Llewellyn Kriel yesterday, Thursday, 29 November 2007, by Avusa (formerly Johncom) is a huge talking point in the media community and has been picked up by Arthur Goldstuck's Amablogoblog, where he has highlighted how the case illustrates the conflict of new and old media. His insights make for thought-provoking reading.

I'm not going to comment on Kriel's case in detail but I will say that his blog posts make for fine and entertaining reading. The frustrations he refers to are, I'm sure, shared by many people across our industry. I know there are sub-editors on the newspaper I work for who would not disagree with what he has to say. That said I do think there are many more reasons to explain these frustrations than those he offers and rather than simply blaming managers (I would say that I suppose, since I am one of those managers).

But I'm more interested in Arthur Goldstuck's comments where he hits the nail on the head when he looks at the dilemma that blogging and other forms of new media can create for traditional media companies.

It is something I have thought about a lot as I have thrown myself into blogging and helped colleagues get theirs going.

Intellectual property ownership

I think the media world is confronting some pretty fundamental issues around intellectual property ownership and other questions around the rights of an employer and the rights of an employee.

Without a doubt, blogs can help writers who know what they are doing create powerful media brands for themselves, quite apart from the publications that employ them.

What would stop someone like David Bullard for instance (had he not renounced blogging) from establishing himself as a blogger and writer quite independent from the *Sunday Times* or any *Times* publications? And, as unlikely as this might be, if he wished to make such a move could the *Sunday Times* claim to own the Bullard brand or induce restraint of trade to curtail such a move?

Will we see employment contracts in media restricting staff from blogging without the permission of their employer, much like freelance writing clauses which are pretty standard in contracts these days?

What if a staff writer developed a popular blog independently within their own time and was able to sell advertising to generate income from it? How would this be dealt with? There are a million other questions which could lead to conflict in

our business over the coming years and I think we need to be hammering out some guidelines pretty quickly to anticipate these potential problems.

Built on content quality

It's stating the obvious, but successful media companies are built on the quality of their content and never before have writers and other "content producers" (to use a ghastly phrase) been so important – and in such short supply.

Those with an ability to produce engaging content no longer rely on newspapers, magazines, radio stations or whatever, to provide them with a platform to find an audience. They can – and are – publishing themselves and creating their own audiences.

This creates enormous challenges for traditional media whom I see in future finding themselves no longer simply offering jobs but having to bid and aggressively compete with new media to attract the powerful brands of individuals to keep their audiences.

I see newspapers and other traditional media of the future more as managers and marketers of the brands of individuals within publishing platforms. The days of iconic brands in media which can exist in their own right are numbered, I believe. The parts are about to become greater than the sum.

As Goldstuck points out, traditional media can use new media platforms like blogs to extend their reach and deepen their engagement with existing readers but by doing so they also open the door to enormous power and influence for individual writers who are no longer face-less individuals subsumed by powerful traditional brands.

I agree with Goldstuck. There is no way to prevent this and we shouldn't even try. We should be embracing these moves, but we definitely have to start thinking of signposts to help guide the way.

• Adapted from original blog post on Dispatches from the Trench: [Blogs O' War?](#), published Friday, 30 November 2007.

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- Matthew Buckland [Matthewbuckland.com]: [The blogger who got fired](#)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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