

Telling stories of hope through news and brand partnerships

 By [Britta Reid](#)

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As South Africans ride the coronacoaster, they need news, information and advice they can trust. There is a unique opportunity for commercial brands and corporates to partner with these news brands to communicate meaningfully with their sizable audiences.



Newspapers are more than the words on a page. For Mondli Makhanya editor-in-chief: *City Press*, they are "news organisations, peddlers of credible news, influencers of society"; they need to help readers make good decisions in their lives.

His counterpart at Rapport, Waldimar Pelser, said that bewildered readers were looking for "news they can believe and analysis they can trust, content that reflects their experience of the world".

Multiplatform brands

Mapula Nkosi, editor-in-chief: *Daily Sun* highlighted how this publication changed the local media landscape by providing a voice for the blue-collar worker and addressing the "real politics of the reader", the day-to-day challenges they face, such as a burst sewerage pipe that prevents them leaving their yard.

It was clear that the participants in the invitation-only webinar, *Storytelling for Brands*, hosted by Gayle Edmunds, strategic projects editor at Ads24 on behalf Ads24 and Media24, had been rethinking their purpose long before the Covid-19 crisis struck. They had transitioned into multiplatform brands using words images and video to tell their stories and adapted swiftly to the challenges of remote publishing.



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All three editors concurred that successful news brands could not talk down to their readers. The *Daily Sun* pioneered the

use of the unique kasi and township lexicon and gave legitimacy to the traditional and indigenous belief and knowledge systems of its readers. Pelser said the *Rapport* platform was the readers' platform. He stressed that while *Rapport* catered for people who wanted to consume their news in Afrikaans, it was not only about Afrikaans people.

The editors stressed that their brands earned their readers' trust by 'corroborating and confirming and checking and checking facts again' and said they were held to account in a way that social media was not.

They were also in agreement that, while they would be derelict in their duties if they failed to report stories of corruption and malfeasance, they could not bludgeon their readers over the head with negativity. Readers need stories of hope and guidance to find solutions to their own lives.

Opportunities to collaborate

This presents commercial brands with a unique opportunity to use these trusted media brands as a vehicle for their messages. It was not about simply booking advertising space or providing bland or brand bludgeoning press; it was rather about collaborating with the news brands to allow them to explore and tell these stories in the language of the brands and through interrogative journalistic eyes.

Nkosi announced that the *Daily Sun* had partnered with 1Life and Mzansi Wethu to launch *Sun'Ceda*, a TV programme providing solutions and assistance to readers who have reached out for help. Another example of the *Daily Sun's* constructive engagement with its readers was Mr Fixit, a duo who traverse the country to attend to issues, and in so doing embarrass the municipal and council officials who have failed in their duties. She spoke too of SunPower which showed that SunReaders were a community geared to solving their own problems and helping each other.

The "jewel in the crown" for Makhanya, is the long-running partnership project *City Press* runs with Absa - Money Makeover, a six-month financial boot camp which takes six readers who were failing in their financial goals and puts them under the guidance of the publication's personal finance editor and Absa financial advisers. Not only did the six manage to achieve their goals, but many readers told the publication that they had been able to resolve their problems after following the lessons shared during the series.



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Pelser stressed that when *Rapport* entered into these partnerships, the team produced the kind of copy they would produce for the newspaper, constructing construct stories that are compelling and relevant to their readers. He cited successful collaborations with the Department of Environmental Affairs, the Industrial Development Corporation of South Africa, Coca-Cola, Grobank and the Ombudsman for Banking Services. In the case of the last mentioned, they had provided advice on

how not to fall prey to online scams.

The editors agreed that South Africans cannot simply rely on politicians to provide the solutions to the problems which have been exacerbated by the pandemic. This presents commercial and news brands with opportunities to collaborate to find solutions and shape the way forward.

To view the webinar, click [here](#).

ABOUT BRITTA REID

In her role as MediaCom South Africa MD, Britta Reid has been responsible for the operations of the agency including executive oversight on buying.

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