

# Are media retrenchments justifiable?

 Bylssa Sikiti da Silva

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Given that some of SA media's editorial departments are seriously overstaffed, retrenchments are justifiable during this difficult economic period, Gordon Patterson, Audit Bureau of Circulation (ABC) VP and Starcom SA MD, told Bizcommunity.com on Tuesday 7 April 2009.

"With a number reaching around 50, I believe that is too much and clearly it shows that some of these editorial departments are overwhelmingly overstaffed. Therefore it is justifiable that companies get rid of other employees out of financial concerns and for rationalisation purposes," Patterson said.

Reports of news staff retrenchments continue to hit the media scene like a tsunami, with every company's staffers reportedly spending sleepless nights and wondering what the future holds for them.

"The situation is critical," Patterson said. "These decisions are primarily made out of financial concerns. You cannot streamline your business solely by increasing cover price and cutting marketing budget, there must also be a combination of restructuring and retrenchments if inputs costs are to be controlled."

Makhosazana Zwane-Siguqa, *Move Magazine* editor, told Bizcommunity.com: "Fortunately for us at *Move*, no one has been retrenched. But we can't help sympathise with all our colleagues who had the axe fall on them. It is unfortunate indeed, but we take comfort in knowing that Media24's leadership has taken every step possible in ensuring that these retrenchments are kept to an absolute minimum."

Asked to comment on Patterson's allegations that certain newsrooms are overstaffed and some people had to be forced out, Zwane-Siguqa said: "I do agree with him to some extent. There are some titles that carried heavy structures, which meant the editorial processes had to be streamlined.

"I also think that given the unemployment rate in South Africa, retrenchments should be a last resort. I do believe that in South Africa it always is given our legislation."

Media24 said that its financial and business publications have been merged into one unit called FinMedia24. Former Fin24 GM and now editor-in-chief Rikus Delpont has been put in charge of managing the FinMedia24's editorial department.

Patterson said: "Decisions such as these are also made by taking account of the growing skills shortage. So it only makes sense that when retrenchments and restructuring occur, talented people are placed in strategic higher positions to control the business so that the company can benefit and that their work can have a growing impact on the company."

Asked whether restructuring can have an impact on circulation, he said: "Not at all. Circulation is purely driven by consumers. When readers don't like the content, they won't buy your title."

Commenting on Ferial Haffajee leaving *M&G* for *City Press*, he said: "As you rightly say *M&G* has done well and hence the departure of Ferial. I'd suggest her departure has little if anything to do with the performance of the title."

"Sometimes I've found that change is necessary not only for the person but for the company as well. You've heard the old saying that every cloud has a silver lining and I really believe this. In fact some eastern cultures suggest that once you've realised your potential in a particular pursuit, it's morally correct to move on to something else. This attitude gives another person an opportunity as well as forces self-improvement."

## ABOUT ISSA SIKITI DA SILVA

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

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