

Navigating the evolving media mindscape

 By [Kim Polley](#)

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Like so many sections of society, the media landscape has changed in the last six months and I think it's worth taking a moment to reflect on what it means for companies, and the communications professionals working to engage journalists on their behalf.



Image by [Mahesh Patel](#) from [Pxabay](#).

A quick step in consumption

Going back to the early days of lockdown, we saw one of the most dramatic and instant changes in consumer behaviour and media consumption we have ever witnessed. Netflix subscription levels rocketed as consumers craved entertainment, and news outlets saw readership rise as consumers followed how the pandemic was unfolding – sometimes even second by second!

While media consumption reached record highs, especially at the beginning of lockdown, it was not all plain sailing as companies dramatically cut advertising revenues, the lifeblood of many media outlets' income. Added to this, a decline in newspaper and magazine circulation was inevitable as it became harder to distribute physical copies in lockdown. Some publications even stopped printing completely (some for a few weeks and others forever) and focused on their online offerings.

While it's true that over the past few years we have seen print media slowly shifting to deliver a digital offering, Covid-19 changed the playing field, forcing companies focused on survival to facilitate a move to online at lightning speed. In fact, according to the recent "The Print & Digital Publishing Media Industry in South Africa 2020" report, South African online news site traffic has grown by 76%. However, digital platforms bring with them a new challenge; the unending appetite for fresh content to capture audience interest and appease the algorithms of the omnipresent search engine results pages.

Media modality

When it comes to engaging with the media an understanding and appreciation of the changes that have taken place in their environment is crucial.

The retrenchments at Media24 and Primedia are already well-known, and SABC has also announced that there are a potential 600 jobs at risk. The closure of Associated Media Publishers (AMP), and also that of about 80 small print media publications across the country, organised under the umbrella of the Association of Independent Publishers (AIP), along with the selling of the magazine division of Caxton, creates further uncertainty in the industry. In fact, so much so, that the South African National Editors Forum (Sanef) has launched a relief fund for journalists who have lost their livelihoods as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, as well as calling on government and private sector to support the media industry.



BREAKING: Media24 considers closures, reduced frequencies and accelerates digital due to Covid-19

7 Jul 2020



Primedia Group starts retrenchment process

17 Jul 2020



From an editorial point of view, the pressures have escalated astronomically. For example, prior to lockdown, the website of most news platforms would not change until 12pm or so - now pieces are updated much more regularly, some starting as early as 7am in the morning. What is more, with so many people working from home and continuously trawling for content online, many news media are trying to add breaking news in the afternoon to keep audiences clicking on their platforms.

This means that there are fewer journalists working harder to develop more content than ever before. And many reporters are covering additional beats for retrenched colleagues, so have limited knowledge of the company or sector they are writing on. Unfortunately, this is not likely to change any time soon - and is a large part of the reason why we are seeing such a fundamental shift in how our media engage and respond to the advances of organisations looking to seed, or share, a story.

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