

# The year to take a long, hard look at the quality of news content



By [Avashnee Moodley](#)

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Over the past three years, South Africa has seen many print publications bite the dust. Undoubtedly this has been because some of them couldn't survive the impact of Covid, but if we're honest with ourselves, there's more to it than that. This decline has, in many ways, epitomised the quality of news reporting across the board.



Avashnee Moodley head of marketing, Oppo South Africa, says 2023 is the year to chart a path back to solid media reporting

There are a few areas that need to be considered to chart a path back to solid media reporting in 2023.

## Not the end of journalism

The decline of print is not the end of journalism, but a lack of solid journalism skills and experience is taking its toll on the quality of media content.

There are fewer and fewer specialists who have the depth of knowledge and understanding to produce well-researched, in-depth coverage in critical subject areas such as mining, economics, energy, environmental management, banking and technology, some of which may be out of depth for journalists who are new to the field.

Consumers who used to depend on quality content – at least from well-known newspapers and magazines – have long since begun to question what they read. And that can ultimately mean the death of a print publication.

It's also naïve to think that the decline in print readership and the demise of many publications is solely attributable to the advent of digital media.

There are many more fundamental issues to consider, and if publications and mainstream media platforms are to recover lost trust and credibility, 2023 brings with it some notable challenges.

## Solid journalism

The print media needs to create and publish quality content - content that has been properly researched, compiled by a specialist journalist, subjected to rigorous fact-checking, and, not least, has been through a thorough sub-editing process.

I'm often taken aback by some of the content that makes it to publication because it's clear to me that an experienced sub-editor hasn't even had sight of it.



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## A return to specialisation in the newsroom

There's a place in the world for specialist journalists. In the same way that specialist skills need to be brought back into sectors like energy and manufacturing, specialist skills need to be brought back into the newsroom.

Reporting on the current load shedding crisis is a perfect example of why this is necessary.

Everyone knows we're going through the worst load shedding period in 15 years, and its impact has been immense.

As consumers and citizens, we don't need this information to be regurgitated over and over again.

Expert journalists should be initiating and engaging conversations about why we find ourselves in this situation and about solutions available in the short, medium and long term.

We need the critical insight that will enable us to hold Government and Eskom to account and plot a viable way forward. The health and sustainability of our economy depend on it.

Specialist journalists and sub-editors also bring a subtle but important skill to the content challenge: the ability to balance native content and sponsored content.

This is essential if media platforms are to deliver premium coverage characterised by impeccable facts, accessible storylines and in-depth analysis.

In an ideal world, the newsrooms are not on their own in this regard. There is a level of accountability that we should expect from government and government communicators to raise and bring issues to the fore so that audiences and South Africans have a good understanding of what is happening in the country.

This makes a good case for why we need strong journalists.

## Where PR and newsrooms meet

While much has been written about the grey areas between PR and journalism, the newsroom's challenge is to create the sweet spot where PR and journalism meet.

If we're clear about this, it creates an opportunity for PR practitioners and journalists to engage on a different level of trust.

With a cooperative approach, journalists can benefit from PR's access to corporates and brands, enabling them to create real news based on PR content.

On the flip side, PR practitioners need to be stringent about developing and distributing impeccable content because the quality of the media coverage we receive depends very fundamentally on the quality of the input we provide.



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## Of course, not everything is news

The way in which people live and work is changing rapidly, and digital channels are undeniably powerful.

The content we develop, therefore, needs to be tailored with the intended channel and audience in mind.

As much as we rely on the mainstream to get our messages out, the different needs of digital and social media have to be taken into account, especially as influencer marketing has become as important as media relations.

That said, building on a solid foundation is good practice.

PR has always been about creating and managing reputation – and that needs to be the north star by which we navigate.

Relationships are as important as they have always been, whether we're communicating with the newsroom, an influencer or directly with target audiences through social media channels.

ABOUT AVASHNEE MOODLEY

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