

Getting to know the ABCs of the ABC

 By Leigh Andrews

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You've encountered the phrase 'ABC' if you work in this industry, but what actually goes into getting that Audit Bureau of Circulation (ABC) certification? General manager Charles Beiles clarifies...



A quick browse of [the ABC website](#) reveals that ABC also stands for 'accurate, reliable and consistent'. Simply put, this non-profit organisation's primary function lies in the certification and provision of accurate and comparable circulation figures to simplify your media planning.

Of course, a lot more goes into it than this relatively simple explanation makes it sound. That's why general manager Charles Beiles took the time to answer a few of my questions on its background and how the ABC functions...

■ *When did the ABC form and what was the impetus behind it?*

Beiles: The ABC was founded in 1947. It is a bipartite agreement between advertisers on the one hand and advertising agencies and marketers on the other. The impetus behind it was the provision of accurate circulation data to the advertising and marketing industries. To quote our mission statement: "The ABC provides unique information to the advertising and marketing industry, to aid them in media planning and buying. It does this by issuing the only independently audited, accurate, consistent and regular circulation data for a wide variety of print data. The ABC provides the 'currency' for circulation information."

■ *Definitely a boon to the industry. Take us behind-the-scenes - what's the ABC's day-to-day functioning like?*

Beiles: The ABC comprises two areas -administration and audit. Administration is responsible for the actual capture of the data, which is done electronically by our members via the website, as well as issuing circulation certificates and preparation of the quarterly report. Administration is also responsible for all the amendments that result from changes to publishers, publications and personnel responsible for ABC data, and handles queries by members, requests for information, as well as the financial aspects of the organisation.

Then, the audit function is responsible for circulation audits of members' titles, where members have opted for the ABC to audit the circulation data or to check audits of circulation data, where members have opted for [IRBA-registered](#) auditors to audit the circulation data. In most cases circulation audits are done twice per annum, and check audits on a cycle of 12- to 18 months.



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When it comes to attracting advertising, the ABC also issues a [Grassroots certificate](#) - this certifies the print run. It was instituted to assist small township, rural and start-up publishers to compete for advertising.

■ **Sounds quite labour intensive. Talk us through the actual ABC membership criteria.**

Beiles: Membership is entirely voluntary. The only requirement is that at the time of application, the publisher must have published at least one issue of the publication. Provisional membership is granted until the submission of the initial set of data. Then, once the initial certificate is issued, full membership is granted, allowing the use of the ABC logo. The ABC requires that all members abide by a code of conduct. Non-payment of fees, or non-submission of data, will lead to suspension and possible termination of a title's membership.

■ **Makes sense. Each ABC release sees fluctuations. Are the actual results usually a surprise or a trend that can be predicted from release to release?**

Beiles: The ABC merely collects the data, issues the circulation certificates, and prepares the report, then trends the data at its releases. I can't comment on whether these trends can be predicted.

■ **Fair enough. Lastly, explain the ABC's partnerships with other industry bodies.**

Beiles: Well, PDMSA is responsible for appointing 50% of the directors to the ABC. Another 25% is appointed by the advertising industry and the remaining 25% by the Marketing Association of South Africa. The AIP has observer status on the board. And while MPASA no longer exists, it was a requirement that MPASA members were also ABC members.

There you have it. For more on the ABC, [visit their website](#) or [dedicated FAQ section](#).

ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

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