

**COMPETITION COMMISSION OF SOUTH AFRICA**  
**In the matter of**  
**MEDIA AND DIGITAL PLATFORMS MARKET INQUIRY ("MDPMI")**  
**held in hybrid format at**  
**Dtic Campus, Sunnyside Pretoria and virtually via MS TEAMS**  
**on 07 March 2024**

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**Chairperson: Chief Economist and Acting Deputy Commissioner:**  
**Competition Commission: Mr. James Hodge**

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PANEL MEMBER:

Ms. Paula Fray

Day 4:

Mpumalanga Mirror

Maroela Media

Limpopo Mirror

Izwe Lomphakhati

START OF PROCEEDINGS ON 7 MARCH 2024

CHAIRPERSON: Welcome back. We will be restarting in 15 minutes. We just have to set up some additional technical facilities for translation. So we'll resume at 2.15.

ADJOURNMENT

CHAIRPERSON: Welcome to the inquiry and I just wanted to give you  
10 an opportunity to start with any opening remarks and obviously just tell us a little bit about Mpumalanga Mirror and what you do in the community and then Paula and myself will have some questions to follow.

JABULANE KHUMALO - MPUMALANGA MIRROR: I just want to double check if I'm audible.

CHAIRPERSON: Yes, you are.

JABULANE KHUMALO - MPUMALANGA MIRROR: I'm Jabulane Khumalo I'm from Mpumalanga Mirror. We welcome the inquiry to the [unclear] in particular community media versus commercial media.  
20 We believe there are some critical issues regarding space at [unclear 0:15:25.6] as opposed to the commission. So Mpumalanga Mirror is a provincial newspaper. We cover all three districts, [unclear 0:15:48.8] and we are a community newspaper. We focus a lot on community development, we focus a lot on service delivery and community issues, so we're a community centred publication in

essence. We've got a fully-fledged website. Our newspaper goes directly to communities and community health centres, filling stations, police stations, specifically in the rural and township communities because we actually provide for that community so we believe that the newspaper should go directly into those focus areas. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON: Thanks Jabulane. You said the inquiry is timely, why do you say that. What are the issues that you face, as I suppose we move into the more digital economy?

JABULANE KHUMALO - MPUMALANGA MIRROR: A lot of  
10 community-based media is struggling to migrate on traditional media into the digital space. Primarily because maybe there are elements of not understanding the details. Because you know [unclear 0:17:45.4] and you know we've got a lot of people, we've got a lot of media positions where journalists in particular in the journalism space know how to navigate through digitisation in making sure that content is not only in the newspapers, physical newspapers but is also available on social media. It is also available on the website, so there is that I can say it's a struggle but it is slowly but surely getting there. I believe that with training and workshops continuously will ensure the journalists  
20 on all community media will be able to make that transition. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON: I mean that transition, I suppose the crisp question that's being asked by many in the media to us this week is the transition of the audience is happening already to social media and websites. The costs are low for distribution which offers an opportunity

but the challenge has been monetisation of that digital audience.

What is your experience of that?

JABULANE KHUMALO - MPUMALANGA MIRROR: Well the monetisation part as far as my experience is concerned has been somewhat a struggle right across whether you're in community media or whether it's Media 24, independent. There has been that what can I say, how would we translate audiences, readership, from online and turn it into revenue. So in as far as I'm concerned, maybe from a commercial point of view, maybe they've gotten around how they  
10 generate revenue, or they are able now to translate audiences from their content into revenue. Merely because maybe they've got the expertise to do so but from a community media point of view, we bargain with, you know our following, our reach. Our engagements, however, the question remains how we do now, translate that to income for publications to be sustainable. Yes, we do get advertising now and again, I mean, to advertising to advertise on our platforms. But it's not often enough that you would get an advertiser coming on board, saying we want to campaign, we want to advertise this particular product on your website. Ja, basically.

20 CHAIRPERSON: I just want to unpack that a little bit. As I understand the Mpumalanga Mirror has over 15000 Facebook followers, is that right?

JABULANE KHUMALO - MPUMALANGA MIRROR: Yes, that's correct.

CHAIRPERSON: And how would you say is the level of engagement

with your content on Facebook? Do you get quite good engagement with your content?

JABULANE KHUMALO - MPUMALANGA MIRROR: It differs from time to time; it depends on the type of content. I feel also it depends on the relevance of the particular content at that particular time that you would get a lot of engagement or disengagement but in our case, more often than not we find that people engage a lot on community chests, service delivery [unclear 0:23:25.5] we know that whatever content that we put with respect to that, definitely we're going to get  
10 engagement, because some of the [unclear] we can express their self-support or the satisfaction or dissatisfaction about service delivery issues for instance. Community issues.

CHAIRPERSON: Jabulani just to pick that up, I mean are you, are people engaging with the Mpumalanga Mirror's Facebook page on these issues, apart from the fact that you're posting stories about it and so you're getting engagement, but is it, to what extent is it that people feel that engaging with the community media means that voice will be heard, as well.

JABULANE KHUMALO - MPUMALANGA MIRROR: What we  
20 normally do, I mean for instance on one particular post, I just want to make an example of, let me just, one particular story, it gets a lot of reaction. Probably gets 150,000 plus likes. It gets about 200 comments, it gets plus minus 200 shares so in one way or another you would find, people in a position of power, specially some of them, such as municipalities, [unclear 0:25:45.7] there will come to trust our

content, and then what or how do you add to it, it's something that we think, if we see that it is something that is a pressing matter and then we escalate or send media inquiries to the relevant municipality to get to understand what the problem is and we go most of the time to the community to find out and investigate, this particular issue and get a sense of what it's about, what the concern is about.

CHAIRPERSON: Jabulani, I mean 150,000 likes, that's a fairly substantial amount. How much revenue do you generate from Facebook every month on average from all of these engagements and posts.

JABULANE KHUMALO - MPUMALANGA MIRROR: To be honest with you at the moment we're not getting any revenue. Last month I was going through Meta and checking what clients, Facebook, when I clicked on the monetisation category on our Facebook page, we didn't qualify as yet, so what being the reason, I don't know, but our numbers are saying a different story, our engagements are saying a different story. So I don't know what the explanation would be in terms of Facebook to us, but we are hoping that it will change soon. Yes.

MS. PAULA FRAY: Thank you very much Jabulane. It's Paula here. I'm on your Facebook page now and I'm just trying to get a sense of do you promote your content on your Facebook page in order to get a broader reach? When you're talking about 150,000 likes, and shares of 200, are those promoted posts?

JABULANE KHUMALO - MPUMALANGA MIRROR: No, no, no. They're not promoted posts. They are generic. They are very generic

in genuine numbers. I believe we are quite strategic with our content and we have studied what our audience likes, what our audience reacts to, what they like to read, what they like to engage on so we leverage on that because we know if we put particular content, we definitely know that we'll be getting traffic. What we do promote, is sponsored content. Maybe say advertisement, some of their content, so advertorials, online. It's part of what we charge them.

MS. PAULA FRAY: Jabulane could you give us a sense of what kind of content then your audience likes. I see there's a post about an  
10 elephant in the Kruger National Park roaming around houses that got, I think 47 comments and 34 shares. What kind of comment actually goes viral then, the posts that you're talking about. What kind of content actually fuels this engagement?

JABULANE KHUMALO - MPUMALANGA MIRROR: Normally it's human interest. Human interest stories. They usually drive traffic. The elephant one is one of them. In fact, the numbers there, it's one of our contents that's, I would say has the least of engagement, or likes if I may put it that way but those are the kind of stories that trigger our readers. Because remember Mpumalanga province is a rural  
20 province. 70% of the province is rural. So if you find a community for instance like Matsulu, which is right next to the Kruger National. So when an elephant crosses the fence it's a big thing for the community. It's huge. In one instance in 2022 a leopard crossed the fence and one community member [unclear 0:32:09.7] and fortunately he didn't die but he did sustain injuries and he was hospitalised. So that type

of content resonates with the people and the communities and people on the ground because we reflect directly what happens in the community and therefore it's easy for them to engage on issues that directly affect them.

MS. PAULA FRAY: And then Jabulane could we talk a little bit about your revenue business model. On your website you've got your newspaper, it publishes one sometimes, it publishes twice sometimes. Is that purely based on advertising, that when you've got sufficient advertising, you'll go to print?

10 JABULANE KHUMALO - MPUMALANGA MIRROR: What it is when we do not have enough advertising, we do not print but we do create a digital one or an e-newspaper, gives more content, stories and then we – however if there is enough revenue in advertising then we do print. We are a bi-monthly publication so we print twice a month, at the beginning of the month and the last week of the month.

MS. PAULA FRAY: Does the advertising actually also happen online. Are you able to sell online advertising?

20 JABULANE KHUMALO - MPUMALANGA MIRROR: We are able to but not, the results are not as we want them to be. I don't, I wouldn't necessarily know if, the clients, let me put it, other clients are not so big, other clients, especially traditional media of the newspaper they feel has a broader reach and is more credible as opposed to online but time and again we do get clients that want to advertise online. What we also do is that when we created what we called a marriage. Actually we've got a publication, digital and then we put it together.



We offer [unclear] 0:35:29.7 includes online as well. So that digital also works as much as the traditional newspapers.

MS. PAULA FRAY: You're breaking up a little bit Jabulane, I'm not sure if you can still hear us. I know that today is quite a big news day for your newspaper. Your team is out livestreaming and doing coverage of the Presidential Imbizo. I wonder if you can still hear us, if you're able just to give us a sense of how often you're out there doing direct reporting from the community and the kinds of stories that you're able to cover as a community newspaper.

10 JABULANE KHUMALO - MPUMALANGA MIRROR: We go out as often as we can. We're here on the ground at all times, like how we are here now in Emalahleni for the Presidential Imbizo. We will be engaging with the residents of the various municipalities getting an understanding of what their concerns are. The president has come to the area with his cabinet. The provincial leaders are also here, the municipalities are also here, so we will be getting a sense of what the community's needs are and how the president, of his cabinet and also the province will be responding and will be addressing some of these issues that will be spoken about here.

20 MS. PAULA FRAY: Thank you very much.

CHAIRPERSON: Jabulane I know we've only got a few more minutes. I just wanted to ask about Search. Do you get much referral traffic from Search or Google News or Google Discover.

JABULANE KHUMALO - MPUMALANGA MIRROR: I'm not quite sure. I'm not quite sure about that but I do, I do check, now and again

if there are any reference, but I, not as quite often.

CHAIRPERSON: And what sort of level of traffic are you getting to your website every month, the number of page views or just visitors.

JABULANE KHUMALO - MPUMALANGA MIRROR: We get quite a lot. We, in the last 90 days we had about, [breaking up] and primarily that traffic comes from social media. People share our content, people engaging. On my analysis, we get analytics, our, readers [unclear] 0:39:27.4 to the website, so I get a sense that [unclear] it's, so ja -

CHAIRPERSON: Thanks I don't think we had enough audio but based  
10 on your submissions I have at the last 90 days in the order of 1.5 million site visits which is a huge amount. Maybe as my last question because you need to go and I'm sure the president is more important that we are, you said you bundled your ads between your print and your digital, I mean how much digital only revenue do you make a month from advertising on the website that's not also sold on your print edition?

JABULANE KHUMALO - MPUMALANGA MIRROR: [breaking up]

CHAIRPERSON: I think Jabulane we're not getting any, much audio.

JABULANE KHUMALO - MPUMALANGA MIRROR: Can you hear  
20 me?

CHAIRPERSON: That's a little better. Maybe continue, let's see.

JABULANE KHUMALO - MPUMALANGA MIRROR: How's now?

CHAIRPERSON: That's much better, much better.

JABULANE KHUMALO - MPUMALANGA MIRROR: Yes, as I was saying to answer your question, we go months without online

advertising. We can go up to six to nine months without advertising. Maybe it's because the competition is tough between us and mainstream media, if I can put it that way. Because the likes of News 24 and the likes of various Caxton newspapers, they also offer competitive prices, rates, In terms of online advertisement.

CHAIRPERSON: Just a last question, do you sell through the so-called ad tech, like Google AdSense or do you only sell direct for website advertising.

JABULANE KHUMALO - MPUMALANGA MIRROR: We sell direct,  
10 however we have started to look into Google ads. Our online developer is looking into that and we're trying to formalise that.

CHAIRPERSON: Thank you very much Jabulane, I'm not going to keep you any longer, and ja I think there is a challenge with what you're saying with about half a million website traffic a month, 15,000 Facebook followers and no money it seems that at least at the moment it is definitely a challenge to make the digital transition. I think our phone in has also highlighted other challenges that have been made about rural areas and digital connection and the quality of that but thank you for making your submissions and we'll definitely factor  
20 this in and be in touch with any more requests that we have.

JABULANE KHUMALO - MPUMALANGA MIRROR: Thank you so much, thank you for having me.

CHAIRPERSON: Thanks and you're free to go and serve your community. Cheers.

JABULANE KHUMALO - MPUMALANGA MIRROR: Cheers, thank you so much.

CHAIRPERSON: We're going to take a five-minute break now and then we'll resume with Maroela Media. Thank you everyone.

ADJOURNMENT

CHAIRPERSON: Welcome back. We now welcome Maroela Media.

10 We have Kobus Bezuidenhout and Sune van Heerden joining us. Welcome Kobus, welcome Sune. I'm James and I'm joined by Paula, fellow panel member and you have a presentation so I'm going to let you run with the presentation and then we'll have some questions afterwards for you.

SUNE VAN HEERDEN- MAROELA MEDIA: That is perfect thank you. Baie, baie dankie dat julle 'n tolk gereel het vir my gereel het vir my vanmiddag. Dis net so veel makliker om n mens eie taal te gesels oor die dinge waarmee jy elke dag besig is. So ek wil julle dalk 'n bietjie agtergrond gee oor Maroela Media. Ons is 'n aanlyn gebore media  
20 publikasie, nuus inhoud en leefstyl inhoud. En ons bedien ongeveer 2 miljoen maandlikse lesers.

CHAIRPERSON: Kobus, we apparently have a slight technical issue getting the sound to the interpreter, so I think we just quickly try sort that out and then we resume. But –  
[sorting out sound for translator]

CHAIRPERSON: Welcome back, we think we've tried to abandon our technical solution, it seems. We may need next time Bukhosi to come and give us an AI Solution. But welcome Maroela Media and I apologise, we couldn't get this to work but – I believe you'll try go through in English and we'll take it from there.

KOBUS BEZUIDENHOUT- MAROELA MEDIA: Thank you so much for the opportunity. Thank you to the panel for also trying to give us the translation services today. We'll try again next time, but for today if you'll excuse my broken English sometimes then let's give it a go to  
10 answer your questions in a good manner. So my name is Kobus Bezuidenhout. I'm the web and IT manager here at Maroela Media. Joining me also from our team is Sune van Heerden, she is the brand manager and she also specialises and coordinates all the marketing and stuff that happens on Facebook social media and those types of platforms. So if I can give you a brief overview of Maroela Media, can I firstly ask is my sound okay.

CHAIRPERSON: It is.

KOBUS BEZUIDENHOUT- MAROELA MEDIA: Perfect, thank you. So  
20 Maroela Media was started as a digital network nature publication online only in 2011. Our main focus is to provide news and lifestyle content to about roughly 2 million monthly readers. That is on both our website and app and we mainly use social media and Search advertising for marketing but we'll get there. So just to give you an overview of the subjects I'll be covering today as per the questions and themes I received earlier, so I'll be talking about trends in news

media, revenue generation and ad tech stack, then also the competition for ad revenues, subscription revenues and user data and then also consumer choice and the participation of SMEs, HTPs in the online distribution of news media and then lastly measuring news and its benefits on Search and social media platforms. So to start off with when we share our experiences of a digital native publication, figuring out -

CHAIRPERSON: Sorry to interrupt you, your slide presentation isn't moving, I don't know if that's on your side or my side –

10 KOBUS BEZUIDENHOUT- MAROELA MEDIA: I have switched slides on my side, if you are unable to see it, let me share the screen and try again. You may be seeing the wrong page now, it should be fine. Let me just show this one and that should be fine. No worries about that one. Are you ready for the next slide, do you see that?

CHAIRPERSON: Yes, go ahead.

KOBUS BEZUIDENHOUT- MAROELA MEDIA: Perfect, thank you. So I was talking about our experience of entering the market as a digital native publication and we developed and learned from the market to get a business model that is still developing over the years to be, so  
20 our business model for online is quite, is different to an extent than print media. I have very little experience in print media if any at all. I was a web developer first but our business model is optimised for the online distribution of our content. We have a very wide distribution of our content because it's on the internet and we are very dependent on social media and search engines for the distribution of that content.

We receive real-time feedback from our readers and as such we know our community very well. We know what they want to hear, but also, but what they need to hear and what their day-to-day news needs are. And then also we serve targeted ads, which gives a better value to our advertisers and then that's data driven marketing where we collect personal information from our loyal readers with their consent and then ask them for donations. Actually this is something that happened from our readers side and they asked us could they maybe contribute in some way but more on that later. The next slide, monetising our  
10 online presence, mainly rests on principles. The main source of income are advertisements, that is banner ads on our website. We also publish promotional content in partnership with clients and advertisers and then the third one is the supporters that gives us contributions and donations. So just a quick overview of the community, or the distribution of our content online so our social networks, the source of traffic to our website mainly comes from Facebook, that's about 55% of all our readers come from Facebook and then search engines mainly Google is 18% of those and then also we have an online news app on android and ios that accounts for  
20 about 2% of our readers although they are very loyal and they generate about 40% of our page views per month and then serving this loyal community is a big responsibility for us but we know them well and they keep coming back so that's great for us. Okay so talking about the business model again, so there are a few difficulties and sustainability is an issue currently but mainly our business model is

put together like this. We receive contributions from our stakeholders. That together with our other sources of income helps us to generate dependable content that's trustworthy but also free to read by anyone and that widens our distribution. We also place promotional articles like I said before and then when people come for the content to our website and to the app they also see advertisements. Our loyal readers also give the support in the form of donations. That is monthly recurring or once off. We are always looking into alternative income sources. So our use of social media is that it, links with our digital

10 marketing strategy in that our website is central to the whole strategy. We want people to visit our website and from there we can serve them ads and bring them to other types of content that they necessarily wouldn't see normally. It's quite interesting the different social media platforms have certain types of audiences. The people on certain types of audience like certain types of content more. We have adapted our social media strategy to serve, on Facebook we share all of our content as well as on Twitter but on Instagram it's a slightly different strategy where we cover not the hard news, and do not really post that but we try and publish more lifestyle content and nostalgic

20 subjects. And then on YouTube that's used for videos and hosting the videos and that gets embedded on our website and app. So access to capital, other sources of funding. So we have a fixed budget every year and the amount of capital we receive each year is fixed. It's one of our challenges that the capital received from our stakeholders, is supposed to get less every year. We need to become sustainable and



that is a big challenge for us. The best potential for growth in income we see, that being advertisements, it has reached a certain platform so far, but I'll cover Google ad exchange in a bit, in short advertisements have the biggest potential for a bigger income. And then we also are looking for new sources of income. So regarding the user experience in digital use and experience in digital advertising, we have been serving ads on Maroela Media since the start and it is quite an old method of advertising online. The trick is that for a campaign to be successful, the click through ratios are very low, it  
10 only needs to be 0.2%. That's quite a challenge for us but it still works to a certain extent and that is why we keep doing. So the ad stack we use is Adform. They serve static banner ads as well as they have a programmatic ad exchange. But the relationship with our clients advertising on our websites and platforms are very important to us. We currently do not have access to Google Ad exchange. I see a big potential there, if we can unlock the use of Google Ad Exchange. But the problem is that they do not support Afrikaans as a language so it's a bit of a puzzle for us to unlock that. We have been in contact with Google to discuss it and hopefully in the future we can work with them.  
20 Our strategy for delivering the banner ads is that we target certain types of content, so for example the news, category on the website would receive the most views in our experience. So there's a big potential for banner impression but when you want something more relevant like for instance under agriculture you can target that category as well. And then paying for performance versus paying for

content distribution on platforms. I interpreted the notes I received beforehand as the performance I understand as giving incentives for journalists when their stories go big on social media. I don't know if that's the correct interpretation but at Maroela Media our journalists and everybody gets a fixed package of salary. They don't get any bonuses according to the content that they produce. We are currently advertising on Google Search through Google Ads, we have the same, we have one campaign that's active. The other campaigns weren't able to get verified because of the language barrier. The  
10 campaign that is live currently has not been changed for the past six years or so since Google started to impose the language support as a barrier for verification. And then sometimes we would publish or promote posts on Facebook but we do not do that that often. When we compete with mainstream media online and in print, we think of all the content we produce that is text video and audio. We have placed more of a focus on video content the past two years or so where we produce all the more video content to be distributed online. We also produce audio interviews with celebrities, writers, and important people. But we distribute to more than 70 community radio stations  
20 that broadcast Afrikaans content so that gives us exposure to the different communities across the country and listening in on the internet while we help the community radio stations by giving them the content as they are run by volunteers. Then Maroela Media is one of the contributors to mainstream media when it comes to the Afrikaans language. So competing with advertising, we have an

advertising team that sell the advertising space and we use the statistics that gets collected by Google Analytics for a tariff card and for our rates card and then this team also talks to advertisers which has relevant products for our community, and then normally the reaction of the community is positive and we build our relationship with the advertisers. Regarding access to data, our readers, they take part in competitions and other types of campaigns where they provide us with their personal information to win a prize or to take part in something so with their consent, we use this information to contact

10 them and ask them for a donation. It is not something that would prevent them from seeing our content in any way. Our content remains free but then it's just a chance for them to contribute to what we do. We also do targeted Facebook ads every now and again using Facebook tools. And then platform algorithms we experience limited visibility on Facebook because of their focus, as I understand that posts from friends are more important than posts from pages or news outlets, I don't know and then the other challenge regarding algorithms is the frequent updates in guidelines for SEO optimisation that your search results rank in Google Search for example.

20 Regarding news aggregators, this was an interesting perspective I didn't really think of before I submitted our initial report to you guys when you asked about it, it was something I didn't realise this could be good for us. Our digital marketing strategy dictates we want readers on our own website to give them content and to give them what they need but we want to control the environment on our own

website so for us to aggregate our content to other platforms is not really useful to us so we don't really mind that Google News and MSN don't really redistribute or republish our content. Search engines do have complete access to all our content for indexing and then just, Google Ads that doesn't support any African languages is currently a hurdle to overcome. So we use YouTube, as our main hosting platform for our videos that gets embedded on our website and app and then the most traffic views we receive from embedded videos rather than directly on YouTube. We do not currently have a TikTok strategy. It's something we are thinking about and seeking opportunities. I think that currently TikTok is more of a short form video platform that is not suited to news content in my opinion. There was a question about data bundle discounts or lower data pricing for social media usage. The biggest impact I can think of the two of them are that many readers on Facebook will comment underneath our posts will say that sure this is the photo and they see the name of the article and maybe a short excerpt but they are reluctant to click through to the website because they do not have enough mobile data available. This creates a few things. Users get used to only reading titles and excerpts and then it's which does not contain all the facts and that is quite a challenge when they comment on our posts then that needs to be moderated, but they don't have, it's not an informed opinion that they form. So the community media value proposition in digital platforms is basically the fact that we publish our content on Facebook helps Facebook to regain loyalty from its users. People

come back again and again to Facebook. That's the one place you can see all you want, not only from your friends but also all news outlets that you follow. That loyalty and repeat visits have some value from the platform. When we post that content there's a large amount of interaction on the posts and then that could give certain analytics and data, usage data for these platforms. So regarding the misinformation and credibility, it could be quite a challenge to manage that. Social media makes it possible for anyone to post content and it could be false news, it could be, there are examples of even copyright  
10 infringement or corporate identity that gets stolen. There's somebody on the internet that copies our content and then also our corporate identity and then they try and sell Bitcoin with our logo displayed alongside it. This is a problem not only for us but also for other publishers like News 24 and Netwerk24. There are a few adverts on Facebook that is used for this purpose. So that's just in short an overview of everything and the notes that I received. Are there any questions?

CHAIRPERSON: Thank you very much Kobus for making that effort and it's certainly quite fascinating. We looked at some of the statistics  
20 on your digital presence. It seems like it's 5 million page views a month at your website and you have –

KOBUS BEZUIDENHOUT- MAROELA MEDIA: Sorry that's not correct.

CHAIRPERSON: Alright maybe you can give us that then. It's Sune here. The stats are actually 50 million, so it's 5 – 0 million. So 50

million pages searched out of every month and then that is read by approximately 2 million readers.

SUNE VAN HEERDEN- MAROELA MEDIA: All right even more impressive and then on Facebook we have 581,000 followers.

KOBUS BEZUIDENHOUT- MAROELA MEDIA: That's correct.

CHAIRPERSON: And the kind of levels of engagement you get on Facebook in terms of likes comments, reactions.

SUNE VAN HEERDEN- MAROELA MEDIA: It is such a pity that Facebook pages when they switched to the new format of the Facebook pages they disabled the analytics that we used to get, to see exactly how many comments and so forth but I can give you the engagement on Facebook, I'm so sorry let me just open it up. Engagement per month is about 4.3 million, for February, 4.4 million for January. Ja.

CHAIRPERSON: Again very impressive numbers. Can I just get a sense and we do ask people not to reveal confidential information, you can just indicate orders of magnitude, but you say you're battling for sustainability and it's a challenge and that you have some capital backing you but you need to get to that sustainability but these are huge numbers. Is' massive reach so why is sustainability a problem, what sort of revenue are you getting out of the website and social media.

SUNE VAN HEERDEN- MAROELA MEDIA: The sustainability, I think if you have something like a paywall then okay, you know 2 million readers every month is a great income but since we distribute our

content for free and since we also distribute the content free to those seventy, community radio stations, there is no actual income, fixed income from readers so we rely as Kobus indicated in his presentation mainly on advertisers, through advertisements or advertorials, also through campaigns that we do in connection with partners to get income like that. Also as Kobus said voluntary donations from readers. So it's difficult to form an exact business model and to get a business model that works for a free online news website. We are constantly investigating new means of getting that income stream and

10 to be able to rely less on our stakeholders so we are grateful that we do have stakeholders that started Maroela Media and the idea at first was okay within 3 – 5 years Maroela Media should be self-sustainability but it's 13 years later and we're still relying on our stakeholders but we do have a fixed budget so we try to save money where we can, but it takes a lot of capacity, human resource capacity so there's a lot of expenses, that the more we grow the more expensive it becomes to run this engine. So that's the sustainability so we are definitely not in trouble at all but to keep this going and to say in 20 years' time what's going to happen so it's more important to

20 get a business model as soon as possible.

CHAIRPERSON: You say you're still getting support from your stakeholders, is this from people who've put money into the business or are you talking about the people who make donations.

SUNE VAN HEERDEN - MAROELA MEDIA: This is the shareholders, so we at Maroela Media is part of the bigger Solidarity movement. So

Solidarity is one of our shareholders. We also have an Afrikaans trust that is also one of our shareholders that provide4s an income for us to at least maintain our capacity.

CHAIRPERSON: So Sune is it correct that at least your revenues are not fully compensating for your cost, but your shareholders and patient and keeping you growing.

SUNE VAN HEERDEN- MAROELA MEDIA: Yes, that's correct.

CHAIRPERSON: And just as a matter of interest how much is advertising out of your total revenue?

10 SUNE VAN HEERDEN- MAROELA MEDIA: I don't know, Kobus do you know?

KOBUS BEZUIDENHOUT- MAROELA MEDIA: I have some statistics here. Let me quickly check. I need to work out a percentage. So that is about, about 41% of our income is currently generated through advertising.

MS. PAULA FRAY: Do you have a sense of how much additional income you would be able to generate if in fact you were able to use Google AdSense?

20 KOBUS BEZUIDENHOUT- MAROELA MEDIA: Difficult question to answer. We used Google Ad manager before the language, supported language issue was brought forward, but that was a few years ago. I suspect our advertising team would know better. What we are doing is we're reaching out to agencies, ad agencies that represent major brands and then we ask them there's this Afrikaans community which has a lot of buying power. You can reach them



through Maroela Media. We realise that they only use Google Ad Exchange for their advertising needs. We have done it previously but it is quite a mission and it's not always worked that we create a connection between Google Ad Exchange and the programmatic platform on ad form and then those ads get served on our platform as well but that, I suspect it hasn't been successful every time but to answer your question about what's the potential gain I'm really not sure. Google Ad exchange is an industry standard when it comes to programmatic ads being served on websites and online in South  
10 Africa as I understand, so we would get access to most major brands if we were able to use Google Ad Exchange.

MS. PAULA FRAY: So if I understand what you were saying earlier on your app has the smallest audience but they stay the longest on your page, on your website.

KOBUS BEZUIDENHOUT- MAROELA MEDIA: That's correct yes.

MS. PAULA FRAY: The stay is much longer or much deeper.

KOBUS BEZUIDENHOUT- MAROELA MEDIA: yes.

MS. PAULA FRAY: And are you able to monetise that? Are there ads on your app, I've just had a look at it. There are specific ads on it.

20 KOBUS BEZUIDENHOUT- MAROELA MEDIA: Yes.

MS. PAULA FRAY: For YouTube, you're using YouTube as a hosting platform, you haven't monetised YouTube.

KOBUS BEZUIDENHOUT- MAROELA MEDIA: We are trying to monetise YouTube. We have created an AdSense account but we're still struggling that.

SUNE VAN HEERDEN- MAROELA MEDIA: Sorry Kobus, so we have monetised YouTube and we are already receiving an income from YouTube, but, since we only use that really as a hosting service, we direct people directly to come and watch the videos directly in an article on Maroela Media because we need the pageviews so that we can attract advertisers.

MS. PAULA FRAY: Your Facebook is really huge and I'm just wondering have you been able to in any way create income or revenue on that platform.

10 SUNE VAN HEERDEN- MAROELA MEDIA: The problem with opening up your Facebook page to other advertisers is that you have a very loyal community following you on Facebook and suddenly fi there's some strange advertisement or something under Maroela Media's name it almost negates the purpose of building that loyal community so we are very strict on the types of advertisements or the types of content that we allow on our Facebook page so I know that there are Facebook pages that make a lot of money and just throwing the gates open and everybody can pay a lot of money to post there but we are strict about the content that we publish on our Facebook  
20 and our Instagram and our Instagram also has more than 100,000 likes which is a lot specially for an Afrikaans website to have. So even on Instagram we are also very strict on the specific type of content that we distribute, to make sur for our readers experience, to make sure that they have a pleasant experience on Facebook and Instagram.

MS. PAULA FRAY: Your presentation was very detailed and thank you for that. I'm just wondering top level what are the major impediments against vernacular media being able to build sustainable media models online in your view.

KOBUS BEZUIDENHOUT- MAROELA MEDIA: I think the language issues at Google is currently an issue for the potential income that we lose there at this stage. Ja, it's a bit difficult to say in total as an overview. Sune do you maybe have any contributions.

SUNE VAN HEERDEN- MAROELA MEDIA: I don't think there is a lot  
10 of challenges, I think the main challenge will be for the team that is interested in doing that or a team such as Maroela Media is to make sure that you are going to have persistence and that you will keep on going even though you face challenges because you know that you serve a specific community and if, you know if you don't do that work, if you don't serve that community with the content that you provide then that community will not have that content. They won't have access to that content. It is the same with us with the 70 community radio stations that we have work, with. We have a good relationship with these radio stations that have Afrikaans as one of their broadcast  
20 languages. Some of these stations have very few people. They sometimes don't even get paid for it. They have so much passion and they have such a loyal listenership and for them to keep having a license from the broadcasting corporation they need to broadcast certain types of content. We can provide them with that content so we know that even beyond Maroela Media.co.za we've got this whole

community that we are serving country wide and for us it's the community and that's why we will keep on going. You persevere through challenges. If Google can't understand Afrikaans then we will make another plan and we will make another plan. So we will keep on persevering.

KOBUS BEZUIDENHOUT- MAROELA MEDIA: If I can add to that, one of our strategies is for example to become less dependent on Facebook and social media in total and to focus on our app, to promote our app specially to loyal readers so that they aren't  
10 dependent on social media or other platforms to see our content. When you wake up in the morning, where usually you open up a newspaper, in the same way you can also open up Maroela Media's app. You don't need to go to social media or Facebook to see us so for us to become less dependent on other platforms is important.

CHAIRPERSON: Kobus and Sune, just on Adform. I hadn't heard of Adform before. Are they a sort of international ad server.

KOBUS BEZUIDENHOUT- MAROELA MEDIA: Yes, they are, a Scandinavian company. I'm not sure I think it's Sweden or Finland. They have serviced us very well. They have the advertising lingo tricks  
20 me sometimes but they have the publisher side as well as the buy side and also the exchange or their programmatic platform and then one of their products that we maybe will use in future or are looking into is a DMP, data management platform where you can manage the advertising identifiers for your readers with the phasing out of third party cookies, they have serviced us well and they are less expensive

than Google Ad Manager were years ago. We have tried a few Ad platforms for example Aqua and Turbo, but Adform is a very robust solution for us.

CHAIRPERSON: You said you used to use Google Ad Manager. Did you switch because of the language policy change?

KOBUS BEZUIDENHOUT- MAROELA MEDIA: That's correct. They notified us that our website isn't supported anymore because it's in Afrikaans so both our ads need to be in English and we need to switch our website to English as well.

10 CHAIRPERSON: That's quite a challenge. Just quickly what we're hearing from others is that the programmatic come at a very low cost per thousand but the direct sales are substantially higher. You're nodding so I assume that's your experience too.

KOBUS BEZUIDENHOUT- MAROELA MEDIA: It is, correct yes but seeing as we have a large volume of impressions available, usually, that would generate some income for us.

CHAIRPERSON: And how much of your inventory sales are direct at the moment.

20 KOBUS BEZUIDENHOUT- MAROELA MEDIA: Most of them, I don't have that percentage right now but as a rule most of our advertising is done from direct clients, so I think it's maybe BMW and one or two others that gets serviced from programmatic. I can maybe just highlight another ad platform that we use. That is Vicinity. Vicinity is an ad agency that does geolocated targeting and what they do is if you are on a device that is able to give your location, then and the

user gives contents then they are able to target you according to your location to serve you a relevant ad where you are at that stage. So Vicinity is also doing well for us but programmatic percentage is quite low.

CHAIRPERSON: And you mentioned the data management as we move from third party cookies, do you expect a big drop off with the end of third-party cookies in your advertising.

KOBUS BEZUIDENHOUT- MAROELA MEDIA: I think most publishers are awaiting action from ad platforms to give them  
10 guidance on how to proceed. I don't, I suspect that most publishers do not know the exact impact that it would have on the publishers. What we are trying to do is promote our readers to create a free profile on our website so that we can get to know them better and get to know their habits. That's not the type of information that we currently take note of, but it's something we would do in future so that we could serve them better and target them better with relevant advertising as well.

CHAIRPERSON: Great then just two last questions. I mean it seems the common scam at the moment is about using someone's brand and then selling an investment or something. Do you engage the different  
20 platforms where this happens to tell them and then is it taken down.

KOBUS BEZUIDENHOUT- MAROELA MEDIA: Most definitely. The social platforms we do engage and Facebook has been reactive and they are successfully removed, profiles and ads that didn't – that didn't comply so I think Facebook is quite okay but it's very reactive. It's not the big problem is that people create anonymous profiles to start with

and they probably use different generic email addresses that isn't checked for is this a unique person, so as far as I understand, Facebook's terms and conditions say that you may only create one profile for yourself if you are a real person. And some people use more than one profile. But I do understand that that's a challenge of enforcing that. But they have been reactive. They have also engaged with hosting companies, hosting our corporate identities and cloning that and using it for their means but ja, it's, we move on and we still keep doing, we do what we do to provide unique content for our  
10 readers.

SUNE VAN HEERDEN- MAROELA MEDIA: I think it's also important to note that we constantly have to publish articles with screen shots of those ads to inform our readers that there are scams like that. Regularly we also receive emails with questions from readers to ask are you involved with this, specific company or something because it looks like our website but it doesn't feel to them like our website and then we will publish another article or republish the previous one to say this is a scam, be on the lookout and please report that on Facebook. So it's almost like those games at the arcade that you try  
20 to – whack and as soon as report this one there's three more. So that's definitely an issue.

CHAIRPERSON: And then just a last question. We're sometimes told that people aren't interested in news on social media. What's your experience from your Facebook page?

KOBUS BEZUIDENHOUT- MAROELA MEDIA: I would say 2 million people begs to differ. It's interesting that you can see that there's almost – ebbs and flows of the statistics and I think after a big news cycle, people are sometimes tired of the news and then they will walk away but then something new will happen and they will come back. I think the way that Maroela Media publishes our content is to make sure that we don't only focus on the hard news. We really try to focus on other content and content that, is uplifting and content is that, like also like lighter news. Softer news and lighter content. Stuff that  
10 people can just for a moment after you've read the dreadful story, just to come back and read something that's not so tough. The way that our app is laid out, that's the reason we have so many page views on our app yet so few app for the amount of app users, it's disproportionate the amount of pages they read. But it's literally they open up the app and they page through the whole and they literally read every article that we've published since they last opened the app. The way it's laid out, hard news and then you get all the softer news and the other content so that at least when you close the app, you don't feel so bad and anxiety ridden, you feel it's not so tough and it's  
20 going to be alright.

CHAIRPERSON: I suppose that's the skill of an editorial team. Knowing their audience and knowing how they response. Kobus and Sune thank you very much for coming and apologies again that we didn't get that translation working but I hope you continue to engage



with the inquiry and thank you for all your submissions to date and well done for building such a big following.

SUNE VAN HEERDEN- MAROELA MEDIA: Thank you for the opportunity. Have a good day.

KOBUS BEZUIDENHOUT- MAROELA MEDIA: Thank you, bye.

CHAIRPERSON: Bye. So apologies we're running a little after time but we will be moving to Limpopo Mirror and Anton van Zyl will be joining us. He's also kindly sent us a video which we can run while we get the connection with him. I think it's designed to give us many  
10 answers to many of our questions. And introduce what Limpopo –  
[video running]

ANTON VAN ZYL- LIMPOPO MIRROR: This is where I spend my days. Inside the offices of the Limpopo Mirror and the Soutpansberger  
[unclear 2:00:58.8] Our two local newspapers are much the same as what you would find in many parts of our country and also in most parts of the world. We report on events in the [unclear] region which is the northern part of the Limpopo province. It is an area that we have served for well over three decades. The office where I've worked for more than 30 years was filled with passionate people who worked  
20 long hours and do a lot of hard work under difficult circumstances. Today is Thursday which means it is distribution day. Just after daybreak this morning the activities already started. Here we have [unclear] who drops off the latest newspapers. He does this distribution in and around town. At the same time the other teams are doing routes that take them from Elem in the East and to Musina in

the North and to towns such as [unclear]. It's a vast area that we cover which includes dozens of small rural villages. Distribution is focussed on the towns and bigger shopping centres. [unclear] job as a newspaper distributor has been putting food on the table for more than 20 years. But let me take you on a quick tour through our offices and tell you what we do. The question we all grapple with is whether there is still a future for independent news outlets like ours. Are they not outdated like the old cameras that we display in our little photographic museum. All of these had to make way for a new digital era. Will we

10 also be the collateral damage in the war that wages to conquer the eyeballs. Let's drop in at the newsroom where some of the people who are responsible for the content that we publish gather. First up we have [unclear] who also writes the online publication Groundup.

MALE - LIMPOPO MIRROR: I do focus on stories that led to the impact of the communities in the district. For example last week I did a story on the [unclear 2:03:01.2] and I believe that story would inform leaders on how they are going to be affected so that they will plan their journeys in advance.

ANTON VAN ZYL- LIMPOPO MIRROR: Then we have [unclear].

20 Yesterday he attended the Makhado Municipality's council meeting. His career, stretching over several decades, he has attended more such meetings that he cares to remember.

MALE- LIMPOPO MIRROR: I was reporting about the squabbles between the Makhado Council and [unclear] were fighting with the speaker of the Makhado Municipality. They accused him for being an

arrogant speaker. Since I reported the council 17 years ago this was the first time this happened. The council collapsed for three times in a row without going forward.

ANTON VAN ZYL- LIMPOPO MIRROR: And yes. I'm yet to find a reporter from Google or Facebook at such council meetings. It has left the people like Kaiser to be the watchdog of the community and attend such meetings. This is just something we do to promote the local vernacular. It is important at least to us that Tshivenda be used in a written form as news medium. Here we have Kathu Ralepashwe.

10 Kathu is responsible for translating articles into Tshivenda.

KATHU RALEPASHWE- LIMPOPO MIRROR: I am the one responsible for translating articles from English to Tshivenda. On one of the articles I'm going to translate this week is an article about Tshipise, a Forever Resort that is temporarily at a standstill after guests complained about expired food.

ANTON VAN ZYL- LIMPOPO MIRROR: Limpopo Mirror makes use of several news correspondents spread out over the Venda region. Most of them link in remotely and post stories and photos on our news filer system. By now some of you may have started becoming  
20 uncomfortable. This is after all an inquiry into media and digital platforms. Should we spend this much time discussing local reporters? My response would be absolutely but to show that we're not totally antiquated, here's a framed version of one of our first websites. We made our first digital appearance way back in 1997. This is the home page of July 1998. That was two months before the

first search was done on Google so yes, we are one of the very few publishers in the country that can claim that they are older than Google. But back to what we think we do well, the inside of our offices reflects a long history and involvement in the community. It is a history that we are extremely proud of. The two newspapers and reporters have collected just about every top accolade in the local news industry. What we are especially proud of is the fact that so many of our correspondents came through the ranks to compete against the best journalists in the industry. During last year's FEJ awards, the

10 journalist from the Mirror in Soutpansberg scooped up most of the top awards. Considering that they write for a small independent outlet operating in a rural area it is exceptional but one can argue that after all the news business is just like any other business. Some businesses may be better than others but if they disappear another will simply take its place. Then the certificates will just gather dust and later be discarded. We should be blunt and ask will we be missed if we're no longer here. To answer that question we should look at what our journalism has achieved throughout the years. It's not that widely known that the Limpopo Mirror's journalists were instrumental in

20 exposing rot at the National Lotteries Commission. This is an article dating back to November 2017. At this stage, the media was attacked by the NLC, and our own reporting was slammed as being unbalanced and sensational. We're obviously persistent and in February 2018 we stumbled on another fraudulent NLC project. This one went to the court of the corruption and linked several of the top NLC officials. This

article also triggered further leaks and we received valuable information from whistleblowers. During this time we started working with Groundup to reach a wider audience and it also took a lot of pressure off us. However, a local media outlet needs to focus on news and the people in the area that it serves. It is primarily a local watchdog and not a national one. The question may be what we have done to protect our local communities. In October 2022, a legal battle that lasted several years ended. It stemmed from the Makhado Municipality's refusal to make information available about a dodgy tender deal. We filed a prior request, which was refused. And the matter went to court. This was the first time that a magistrate's court was asked to rule on a pyre matter. The municipality was ordered to make the information available but they appealed. The matter went to the high court where the municipality was ordered to give the information. This was another in a series of battles to fight against corruption and lack of transparency in local government. We admit to having some weaknesses. One of these is Ponzi schemes. We simply hate them because the damage they inflict on the economy of a small community is simply enormous. Whenever we get notified of such dubious schemes and there is a local angle, we expose the schemes. But this comes with its perils because many of these schemes are driven by people who are well known in the community. It also happens that the journalists become the target of social media lynch mobs. Throughout the years we have published thousands of articles all focussing on this region and its amazing people. The articles varied from obituaries to reports about

school events. We are the only news medium which carries weekly reports on the local sports leagues. We are still the ones people call when society lets them down. WE are the trusty messenger who reflects the struggles and desperation and every now and again we even report on a success story. Like this one about the [unclear] who took on Checkers to get her money back that was lost in a cash transfer transaction. Although we embrace technology and are excited about the possibilities of the world of online news brings it is a merciless place filled with lies, deception and ruthless business models. To be able to make money you have to flout  
10 around the big numbers. The advertising cake is reduced to crumbs where the big groups get extremely fat and the small players quickly starve. The revenue models are not meant for independent content providers that focus on small communities. The world of online news is also a place where very few rules are in place or enforced. It's a place where your content gets stolen, twisted, and used to make money for others. To use and example, this was a well-researched article that focused on the effect that corruption has on a community. Two local cyclists were invited to take part in the 2024 Cape Epic cycle race where they will have the opportunity to compete against the best cyclists in the world. Their challenge was to  
20 find funding to get to the Cape. This would not have been necessary had the funds provided by the National Lottery for such teams had not been stolen. The story was shared with Groundup to give it a wider platform. Not long after the article appeared online it showed up very high on a Google Search. The only problem was that the Google Search did not display either Limpopo Mirror or even Groundup in the search results. It

channelled users to a clickbait site where AI is being used to sensationalise the content. Not only did another site plagiarise the story and use it without consent but the facts were also distorted. To top it off, the story was monetised through Google's ad programme and attracted money from major South Africa advertisers such as M and G Investments, Land Rover, Shoprite and even Apple. All these advertisers not only took funds away from local news providers, but actually assisted in the spread of click bait and fake news. Is there a future for local news? The short answer is that there has to be. Local news is not a luxury. It is a necessity. Local newspapers will completely disappear in the next few years. Rise in printing distribution costs means it cannot compete for a slice of the advertising cake. It is simply too costly a medium to compete in the local digital sphere. Local content providers can cater for a digital audience, probably even better than they have done in print. If viable revenue alternatives are found, the messages will disappear. The thought of that happening is scary. Thank you for watching this short video showing how a small local outlet operates and also what it has achieved throughout the past three decades. The fact that set ups such as ours are fast disappearing is not in dispute. It happens throughout the world and also in our country. The reasons why it is happening and why it will also happen in our case unless things change pretty quickly have been vented on numerous platforms. The question remains is it worth protecting small local media companies. Let me just one example and tell you why I think it is. In our little video reference was made to the court that we uncovered with the lottery funding. A special investigation unit told parliament a month ago

that this fraud is estimated to be well over R2.1 billion. That means that more than R2 billion was stolen that could have been used to improve the lives of people in areas such as where we operate. The national media did not pick up on the fraud. It was later revealed that some major publishers even benefited from the fraud. The lottery also spends a lot of money advertising with the national media groups local and investigative reporting. It was left to local journalists to scratch around. It needed a local journalist to ask where the project were at places like Mila Village, Fabrum. Moraleni where millions were supposed to be spent but local journalism is

10 about so much more than just uncovering fraud. It's about reporting the few others it is important enough to report on. To us it is important. Let me end this presentation with five points I think it's important to consider. The first one is that news, specially local news should be considered an essential commodity. A healthy society depends on a strong and independent media sector. Social media cannot fulfil this role and sort of plug that gap. Proper journalism should always be considered not a luxury that only the wealthy can enjoy. The news needs to reflect the diversity of the community. It needs to be fiercely independent and it needs to hold those in power accountable through objective reporting. The second point

20 is to say that the advertising model as a main sponsor of news is broken. This model that we've used for decades to subsidise news and especially local news is completely broken. It's also probably beyond repair. It is simply impossible to compete for the crumbs against millions of others which include anything from a fitness app to a social media brand. Perhaps the advertising industry should be punished for what they are currently



doing. If any one of us get caught buying stolen goods, we get jail. If we buy counterfeit goods, we should feel guilty for encouraging criminal behaviour. We accept that it is our responsibility to ensure that we don't buy stolen or counterfeit goods. Yet in the advertising industry, specially with programmatic advertising anything seems to go. If the advert appears on a site that promotes hate speech, the advertiser argues it's not their responsibility. Maybe if the advertising industry stops financing such credits of click bait and fake news it will start to diminish. But even if the advertising industry develops some sort of conscience, it will not offer a

10 solution to small local publishers such as us. The third point news should be protected as a scarce commodity. By allowing news to be copied and shared without any checks and control mechanisms can only add to the problem. News should be treated as many other products that are the result of intellectual input. Treat news content the same as for example music. If you add a song to the YouTube video and you don't have the permission to do so, it will be flagged and you'll be sanctioned. The same should happen if you copy and paste a news article on a platform such as WhatsApp without the necessary permission. The fourth point, create a culture of paying for content. For news to be liberated from advertising it

20 needs to stand on its own and be valued for what it is. Proper journalism needs to be appreciated as being something that adds value to people's lives. Last point, in South Africa news needs to be subsidised. WE must accept that news is an essential and valuable commodity and not exclusively meant for those that can afford to pay for it. In South Africa many communities are simply too poor to pay for news. To add to this there

is no culture for paying for news. This means that someone else must step in to assist. Let me use an example, if there's a drought in the region, organisations such as Gift of the Givers and governing decisions will step in to assist. The solution will not be to dump a lot of fruit in the centre of the destiny. That will only lead to a situation where the biggest and the strongest grab what they can. Knowing South Africa's reputation as being prone to practices the solution will also not lie in giving food or money to a local business to distribute. No the solution may lie in finding the end receiver via something like a coupon system. Such a coupon system would

10 allow the poor to go to a specific outlet and collect what is needed to help them to survive. In South Africa we need to look at similar models where the end users get subsidised to purchase essential news items. Conclusion, time is fast running out for local publishers and if things don't turn around very quickly, there will not be a Limpopo Mirror in a year or two's time. These are not idle threats. It's simply a reality. Thanks.

CHAIRPERSON: Thankyou Anton for that incredible video. We are honoured that we got to have benefited with a whole production and welcome to the inquiry.

ANTON VAN ZYL- LIMPOPO MIRROR: Thanks. From my side I must

20 actually start and thank you for what you've been doing. Throughout the years I attended many conferences, I've listened to a lot of people in the industry speak about what they're doing in projects and to me this was the first, very honest straightforward sort of session. I mean if you go to a conference, you listen to people and they, they never disclose numbers and they all sort of paint a rosy picture. I mean when

I listened to the Mail and Guardian presentation yesterday. I felt humbled, that to me was so sincere and for the first time it feels to me like people are really addressing the problem, not lying about figures, saying we've got a problem, we have to deal with it. For me coming from local media sector it's always been my passion, it's been, sort of a local journalist for 34 or 35 plus years and its sort of part of my DNA. We are so much more vulnerable where the big groups, listening to Maroela Media, with those type of numbers, small little bits and pieces can probably make a difference and you can pay your bills but it  
10 cannot do it for small media specially ones like ours that target a very small sector of the community. But yes, but maybe just from my side, it was, it might have been an unintended cause but what I've seen in the past few days, I've never seen it before in any of the big conferences.

CHAIRPERSON: I think you're absolutely right and I think Paula and myself have been quite overwhelmed by the message coming from the media that this is, maybe is an existential threat and your right humbled by publications like the Mail and Guardian that have been a standard and done so much for the country and it sounds like yours  
20 has done so much for your community over such a long period, that in many respects it would be a shame. You've chronicled life in the region. Your archives are what has happened there. So I mean I don't know how you feel about what sort of what would be lost almost if you say in one or two years you're gone. Would someone step in or what would happen to that community even.

ANTON VAN ZYL- LIMPOPO MIRROR: Not a lot of people really understand local media. Specially if you look in academic circles in South Africa, we don't even treat it as a separate part of the media. We tend to be thrown in like all the others. But it's completely different and I think that's what will be lost. Firstly just the basic things which were touched in the little video. Someone like Kaiser [unclear], I've attended dozens and dozens of council meetings. Someone needs to attend that. Google and Facebook are not going to do that. None of your like social media activists are they going to do that. Just  
10 attending sports meetings, just small little things but more than that, our Soutpansberg which focuses more on the Afrikaans community, the smaller town community. One thing that we've always been strong on is obituaries. If you lose obituaries, who is going to write them. No one on social media is going to write an obituary about you. This week we had, one of the true gentlemen of this region, he's a wonderful farmer. What he did for the community is actually exceptional. If it's not for us who will write that obituary. Who will pay that last respect to them and just sort of leave something for the next generation but I suppose we have to; we have to face the reality times are changing.  
20 People consume information in a different way and a lot of it is actually good. A lot of what we did 20 and 30 years is actually redundant. We don't need to do that anymore. Social media actually allowed us to actually step towards something that is more insightful, add value to the news, not just report, take the press release of the police and just print that. We, as reporters can be so much more. The problem of

course, I think it came out in many of the sessions, what's the worst. What is the incentive to do that, because in the end, we are also a business and we are quite proud of the fact that we pay the journalists and the correspondents. I think we pay them better than anyone else in this region. Not that that is extremely good, but you want to compensate them for their work because they really work hard. They go into all areas. The area that we serve is not that you get in your car and quickly go there and attend a meeting. Most of them use public transport, it takes them a couple of hours to get to a certain  
10 community, listen to the people, wait and then come back and we use a small report. But that's what I'm worried about we'll be losing. You've, a lot of sort of figures, reported in the session that I had with the members, of the competition commission, I discussed reports, we sent them our figures. The long and short of it is that with the industry, programmatic ad buying where everything is going there is no way you can even get to close to minimum wage. You will lose them. Why should you continue to write obituaries or attend council meetings. They'll all start doing something else. And we see it. We lost a lot of good journalists.

20 MS. PAULA FRAY: So Anton you have two newspapers, but you also have Zoutnet which is online, the online, your website. In your discussion with that team you spoke about the fact that there'd been a huge drop on referral traffic from Facebook. Could you just give us a sense of your online profile and then where people are coming from.

ANTON VAN ZYL- LIMPOPO MIRROR: Okay we've actually got three websites, all sort of on the sideline if you don't mind me looking sideways. Zoutnet was the first one that we started in 1997. I sort of, that was in a small place like Louis Trichardt I have to do it myself. It was fine. We tried to just have a web presence so we combined our two web presences into one website. A couple of years later we then separated them. I bought the company in 2000 and one of the first things we did was obviously we renamed the one newspaper to the Limpopo Mirror but that was prior to the province being called  
10 Limpopo. It was still Northern Province. So there's also a bit of confusion. People think we cover the whole of the of the province which we don't. We just cover the most Northern part which is the Venda area. But anyway we've got the two, the Zoutpansberger and the Limpopo Mirror and then the Zoutnet one, it's still there, it's sort of a catchall so because the Soutpansberger will have Afrikaans articles and then on the Mirror side we also have a Tshivenda part where we translate a lot of these articles so they've got distinctly different characters and then the Zoutnet, like that's the combination one. Oddly enough if you do Google Search, for some of our news,  
20 you will always pick up Zoutnet, but you won't pick up the other two, although they have space, they get the most visits and they're the identity. But you ask about referrals and that is quite interesting, it's quite a new development. About a year, less than a year ago. I'm like a lot of other people I like my statistics comparing the figures and see what's happening, how many views we get. Now to give you some

information there, I think you might have some of these because I did send them, but we do on average between the three papers about 200,000 pageviews, let me just go to my stats. It's round about there, it's probably about 60 – 70000 unique users. On Facebook on the Mirror we've got 61 or 62000 followers. The Zoutpansberger, being a really small market. If you look at the Afrikaans market int eh whole Vendi area, I don't even think it's, the latest census, you're not even going to get to 15000 people. So that's not even households so it's very small but it's a very loyal market and we've been serving that

10 market for many years and we'd love to continue doing that for another few decades. But I'm deviating. Back to the referrals. About a year ago, the reach, of Facebook would have been in the region of about 30%, it would maybe drop to 25%. In the last two months that reach has dropped dramatically and this morning's one I normally sort of gather all the info and put it together on a Thursday morning it was 4.81%. That means of the 61,430 followers that we've got in the Mirror combined with the 7,255, that was this morning's figure, only 4.18 % of them actually see the posts that we sort of put out. Now what we do is we use social media to try and channel traffic to our websites

20 where they read it. We can try and monetise them but we're not really good at that. But yes, the idea has always been, we've got all these followers. My view is they said we'd like to see what you're doping because that's why we're following you, so we said okay well here are the articles that we've published. We roll it out over a three-day period. Also what is happening is the news follows the newspaper's sort of

printing day. It sounds a bit strange but again in the past they've done it slightly different with this news first concept but you know online news really adds so little to our product that we'd rather for now where we do get money from is the printed product. We'd rather sort of protect that and then roll out the news later and also trying to get news that it's not like only an hour or two sort of news value, which means like there's an accident on the N1, what is happening, we would rather do on the interpretation. Easier said than done but this is what we're aspiring to. But yes, the Facebook reach has gone down so low and  
10 that's got nothing to do with us, we don't control the algorithm that we're actually reconsidering and saying should we not just totally drop Facebook I mean for 4.18 percent it's a whole morning's work, and really even it's just not worth it. But ja I hope that answered your questions, Paula.

CHAIRPERSON: I mean Anton I was discussing earlier that when Facebook in 2018 said they were going to deprioritise news, what followed that was we're going to prioritize community news because the reason we're deprioritising news is because we wanted to focus on community and social interactions and what happens in your  
20 community impacts you directly. It seems what you're saying is that's not your experience, or the algorithm.

ANTON VAN ZYL- LIMPOPO MIRROR: No, not at all.

CHAIRPERSON: But you're a community newspaper.

ANTON VAN ZYL- LIMPOPO MIRROR: No, also most of our traffic on the website that's also shifted, where a lot of that actually came via



social media, I think the latest had something like 43% of our traffic to the website has come direct and round about that 30% comes via Google. Let me just see if I can pull up more precise stats, because I actually had it somewhere here. But yes, it's changed a lot and obviously if it comes direct, we're still doing the same, it now and again drops slightly but in general it's much the same which tells me people will search for us. They don't depend on Facebook or social media to channel the traffic. They're in a pattern when what is the news in the Mirror and that's why the direct traffic. I've now got this, okay this is  
10 last year's, I didn't do a new one, it will probably be more now. I think that was last month when I did this, 43.5% was direct and then organic search was 28.38% and organic social 27. So yes, it's I don't think personally I think Facebook probably just simplified it. We normally what we do is we would do a posting that would be the link with just an intro about the story and from what I understood is like Facebook deprioritise any postings where there is a link. We discussed it in the AIP sustainability committee of a few weeks ago and the advice was don't put your links in the body of your post, put it in the comment section and you know really I don't want to play that game, like they  
20 changed this, and now we're going to do this and, you know we're just publishers. If I put on social media, the idea is to make it available to community that showed interest in this product, to say this is there, now you can have a look at it and read the story. So well, ja, small publisher to try and keep up to the games that the big ones play is just impossible so we just try and stick to what we think we do fairly well.

CHAIRPERSON: And Anton, I mean 28% from Search. That hasn't been from what we've seen the experience of many communities. I mean is that purely Search, are you on Google News, feed or are you on Google Discover?

ANTON VAN ZYL- LIMPOPO MIRROR: Not deliberately from our side. Again because we use multiple languages on our website, I think they're not that discoverable but again as much as we try and keep up to date with technology, it's very difficult because the whole debate about the crawlers. I mean the crawlers slow down our site so we  
10 disable some of them, but you can also not disable all of them. In a lot of cases we are reactive. In terms of Google Discover, I've never, someone asked me about it yesterday and I said I don't know. I use a very old Apple phone. It doesn't have Google Discover, I actually found out it does have it but I never used it and I've never seen anything like that. I do think we, the Limpopo Mirror and the Zoutpansberger websites possibly because of the language never really feature high on Google searches where Zoutnet features quite regularly. If you do a search now for, or you do a search for something that happened here, the chance of you seeing in the top 10 would be  
20 quite good. I don't think Google treats us badly on one of the sites, on the other two it's not that spectacular. But it's almost impossible to try and keep up to date with what's happening with technology.

MS. PAULA FRAY: Just to clarify Anton is Zoutnet purely English or is it just a combination of all the stories.

ANTON VAN ZYL- LIMPOPO MIRROR: No, it's a catchall with all the stories. Let's say for instance per week we would publish around about 35 – 45 articles. Sometimes if something is breaking, sort of that would sort of add to that or there's a specific school event, you know, what we often do is like a school event, let's say a marathon race, we would have a like photographer there and we'd put a lot of photos on there. Between 35 and 45 articles would be added to the database on the website per week but the three websites share the same database. So it's not as if they're completely sperate. They pull  
10 from the same, pool. In the case of the Mirror it would basically just say give me something for the Mirror, say the latest one on top and then there's categories and flags to just separate them. So the Zoutnet one is a collect all. Everything goes in there, and it displays them as well but it wouldn't for instance display the Tshivenda articles because the Tshivenda articles would be displayed on the Mirror one. It can, we can just set it, but we don't do that. We like to treat the two websites as separate entities and sort of have their own identifies. You will see for instance the Zoutpansberger has got quite an incredible history section and it's just one of those things which fills  
20 passions in you. When you write history articles, quite lengthy articles or series and we keep them but that's like a bonus, you want to go to Zoutpansberger, you'll get the history articles but you won't find it in any of the other two, but they're all the same database.

MS. PAULA FRAY: Okay thank you.

CHAIRPERSON: Maybe on that Anton, I don't know if you saw yesterday, we had our, AI data scientist from University of Pretoria talking about not just the Search crawlers but the AI crawlers and the value of the archives that exist. I mean is that something you've been aware of that you've thought about and how you deal with that.

ANTON VAN ZYL- LIMPOPO MIRROR: I think very much so. At the end of the presentation, you know, I tried to sort of address where I think the future of journalism, specially local journalism is going and to me it's a fairly sort of new concept that a few months ago and saying  
10 okay well where are we going. there's no way we can attach it to the advertising model. It's even worse than Nathan Geffen from Groundup and I wrote an article that was published yesterday in Groundup and in there I mention that with programmatic advertising, you're lucky to get R70 – R80 per thousand and then I was called by someone who deals with this and said well okay Anton you're very generous. The most that he deals with big clients, would offer him R30 per thousand and that's what they would be willing to pay. That's not what the publisher gets. No matter how you look at it, if you want to play that game, you're going to end up with not even crumbs. It's less than  
20 crumbs with that advertising cake. The point is I don't think that is the future. Where is the future then. See news as a necessity, if you see news as a necessity then you can say okay well this group specially where we function, I mean we love the area where we operate in, I love the people, I love the whole sort of environment, it's beautiful which means I have to cater for them and if they cannot afford to pay

for news and I know that I need to charge for news, I need to find other mechanisms, which might be a subsidy system. In such a system if you can say okay well news has got value. People should pay for news, if they can't pay for news, we need to find something else, a sponsorship, subsidy but news has got value. People should pay for it. Now suddenly you say okay we've got a massive inventory and someone like us can then probably use that inventory and say well instead of charging you 30 or 50c per article, which the other model, because I would favour a micropayment model, you know I  
10 can charge you 10c. We've got thousands and thousands of articles. We've got 30 years' worth of articles, since all of those dating back to 1997 sits in our database so yes, I definitely think that inventory can be turned into something that is of significant value to us.

CHAIRPERSON: Particularly if it seems that you're translating articles to Tshivenda, you have what Bukhosi was talking about a match, which might assist in things like translation services or just language development.

ANTON VAN ZYL- LIMPOPO MIRROR: The sad thing about the local vernacular, and to me I've always loved languages, to me it's such an  
20 important part of us that we must protect and that takes effort, but the sad part is that it's not really popular. If you look at the figures on our website, the latest sort of initiative has already gone for, it's going now for a year and a half, where a normal article per week, I'm saying normal on average, get 1000, 1200 views and that's using our own internal counters, not Google, which are not too bad. I think they're

fairly okay, it might be a few duplications but not much. The same article translated into Tshivenda might get 80 or 100 views. It's not being read that frequently or not the same as was the English article. Perhaps we're not marketing it well enough, can also be a problem but it's certainly something that we experience that people are not consuming news in the local vernacular. It's different in Afrikaans though. Afrikaans is very popular. It's probably more popular than English but in the Tshivenda market, it's not yet where we'd love to see it but we will continue because I think it's not a ... it's a process  
10 where you have to make it available and try and improve the quality. It's a living language, it needs to be used as a news medium as well.

CHAIRPERSON: I just want to go back to your point about the breaker advertiser model and I think you have an astute observation and I think in essence we've been flooded with inventory in the last 15 years online. It's completely degraded the value of inventory. And yes, your R70 per 1000. I think we've heard it's a 10<sup>th</sup> of that the publishers are getting to listen to Moneyweb and others. So I suppose the idea was scale on the size of Google and Facebook can work for you at that rate. But it's not going to work for a local community newspaper,  
20 you're trying to generate audience on social media to drive them to your website to monetise it but it's crumbs. You're selling direct but gradually advertisers might be migrating to what's cheaper but there are some loyal advertisers that will stick with you but news has value. So you said you need to create a culture of paying. Who should pay. I don't think you feel your community can pay.

ANTON VAN ZYL- LIMPOPO MIRROR: I think it's, like everything else, if you, I'll use the example of there's a drought in an area or some other natural disaster. You would sit there and say okay well we've got a situation where people cannot buy food but the plan would not be to do that indefinitely. Well I hope not. Hopefully, it will recover and I do believe that we can nurture a culture of paying for content. Obviously, the content needs to be good. You're not going to pay for fake news and crap. So you can nurture that. If you look, I've got a couple of friends in the industry throughout the years, most of them in  
10 the US, a useful source is the international society for weekly newspaper editors, but there are also some in Europe and five to seven years ago they were battling with, what do we do, people are not going to pay for news. I spoke to a friend of mine in Belgium a few months ago and he said nowadays it's sort of a standard practice, they subscribe and they pay for news. What I'm trying to say is I don't think it's unrealistic to say that we can also have that in South Africa but there would be a culture of paying for news. And you know it's not like people tend to think it's like in that specific community they don't want to pay, or that language group doesn't want to pay for. It's all  
20 about, I admit I'm not subscribing to anything, but I think it's wrong, but perhaps if there's a model that appeals to me, I'll say well I don't mind. I'll put 2 – 300 per month extra, I'll put it in a little subscription model you know but then I choose what I read. I'm using that as an example of a model which I think it's realistic. It can be achieved, but the, so the point is I think it can change. I think patterns can change

and I think people can sort of get into a way where they say I appreciate, much is the same with music. I mean, maybe sort of, when I sort of grew up we went through varsity and you know you were, very quick to sort of copy the music onto the tape and distribute that. But a couple of years later you started feeling uncomfortable about that and said I need to respect the music industry and now if someone tells you we're just pirating music, I for one would feel like no don't do that. I think perhaps we should feel the same about content. It takes a lot of time and effort to prepare. Yes, I do think it will be possible to create  
10 such a culture but the in between period and this is the one where we're sitting now, are we going to be able to survive until that happens. I don't think we will unless something happens and this is where I say that we need to look at something that says we have to finance this, we have to set up a system where someone can subsidizes a person sitting in Maradonga or [unclear] village and say okay well yes I understand that you want to consume news, you need to consume news. We don't want you to just stick on social media platforms, because I mean it's like little bubbles and it's simply not correct. You need to expose people to proper journalism. Done by  
20 people who are serious about it. Done by people who respect the press code. Who respect the laws of the country, whose got the transparency to tell you listen I'm Anton van Zyl. I wrote this article, if you've got a problem with it, come and speak to me and we sort of sit and discuss it and sort it out, but yes, so where is that money going to come from. That's probably a lot of people's questions, If I say you



need to subsidise and I think this is where I see the competition commission also addressing that. You now, as a small publisher, you look and you see what's happening in Australia, Canada, France, Google needs initiative paying money into a central fund and it's almost impossible for it to trickle down to someone like us. Yes, it can make a noise probably but what about the next one sitting in Thohoyandou or Giyani. They don't make such a lot of noise as I do. They're not going to get that money and that money is needed for development so a system needs to be in place that also encourages  
10 developments for the ones who not in the picture now. I might be a bit idealistic but I think we have to try different things to move towards the future because what we've got now is not good.

CHAIRPERSON: Anton I'm aware we're about to run out of time, but just to pick that up, because we're looking at pay walls, memberships, all of these things, which is an audience relationship. But I was quite struck by the submission by Courtney Radsch that said look at radio and look at music. It doesn't work like this. You don't get a revenue share from advertising of what advert appears. You pay for the song and pay a fixed fee for play and you must figure out a  
20 business model of making the radio station work on that basis. I mean do we need to rethink, that relationship as well. Is given the revenue which we do see emerging in some platforms like YouTube and even Facebook for video that revenue share of crumbs is still not going to do it and should the value be recognized and the platforms figure out how to monetise that.

ANTON VAN ZYL- LIMPOPO MIRROR: Again a lot of the models would be fine for the ones doing the big numbers. We do not do clickbait, we do not do cat videos, we should be focussing on a really small group and looking at our area, the Venda area has got about 425,000, 430,000 households. You look at educational levels, you look at a few other things, the market that we target it's relatively small, but that's good. It's the way it should be. We should even be able to make a living with messages and society with smaller groups. So my personal feeling is a lot of these models are only going to assist  
10 the big players and I've got nothing against that. The big players also need to be assisted. What some of them are doing it's just absolutely amazing. But I'm sort of coming with a plea from the real small messenger saying a model needs to cater for someone who does not do the hundreds or the millions of views. It's just a quality small section of the community that we serve.

CHAIRPERSON: Thank you that's a point well-made and I think at this stage, we're just throwing ideas around. That's the benefit of a public hearing, is that what we hear from one we can test with another and, but I think you've put across well the benefit, also the long history  
20 of servicing a community and being a community's go to, for what they need when they need a voice, when they need to recognise the community and commemorate it and so I think it's been incredibly useful for us, certainly and thank you for that and thank you for that insight and I think some of the journalism that you're pushing through to the national is also interesting because it shows exactly like your

lotteries, things happen in these communities are also of national interest and would not be uncovered otherwise, if community media disappears so there's two dimensions to that. But Anton thank you for all the effort you've put in for the video, for seeing us and also the other articles you've written, so we very much appreciate it.

ANTON VAN ZYL- LIMPOPO MIRROR: Thanks.

MS. PAULA FRAY: Thanks Anton.

ANTON VAN ZYL- LIMPOPO MIRROR: Thanks Paula.

CHAIRPERSON: So next on the programme and the last stakeholder  
10 for today is the publication Izwe Lomphakhati and we've got Langelihle Chagwe who's joining us, and hopefully soon from KZN.

#### ADJOURNMENT

CHAIRPERSON: Welcome back and we have Langelihle Chagwe from Izwe Lomphakhati joining us from KZN. I believe you've had a storm come through. But welcome Langelihle, just checking that you can hear me.

LANGELIHLE CHAGWE- IZWE LOMPHAKHATI: Yes, I hear you.

20 CHAIRPERSON: My name is James and I'm joined here by Paula Fray and we constitute the panel for this inquiry. But thank you very much for making yourself available and also despite the challenges of the weather making it for this session. We had asked you to join just to share some of your experience as an isiZulu community newspaper operating in the Newcastle area. I don't know if you wanted to, you

wanted to start by giving us a little bit of context about Izwe and the community you serve.

LANGELIHLE CHAGWE- IZWE LOMPHAKHATI: Izwe Lomphakhati was established immediately after the Covid 19 pandemic. The fact of creating Izwe Lomphakhati is to disseminate information regarding about the community around us, what their needs, their wants, the audience is, all age groups. What I'm saying is that I'm having more than 21 years' experience working for various newspapers. So the fact of the matter is to disseminate information about what is  
10 happening around the community which I served. I worked for as I said I worked for various newspapers like Sowetan, the New Age, Northern Natal Courier, Daily Sun, the other community newspaper as well because I established my own newspaper. Are you still there?

CHAIRPERSON: Yes, we're still here. Carry on.

LANGELIHLE CHAGWE- IZWE LOMPHAKHATI: Yes so, the fact of the matter is I decided to apply for Compensation Commission because I needed funding, what I needed for to, for that funding is that, to employ, to create job opportunities and to disseminate information because people they have to know what is happening around them.  
20 So another issue, another fact of the matter as I said Izwe Lomphakhati s a paper which catered all age groups, youth, cultural then we are also promoting the indigenous language as well. Because why I'm saying so is that people, they need to understand what is being written because we write a language that they understand.

CHAIRPERSON: So Langelihle, can I just ask, you put this in after the Covid pandemic, you have made it isiZulu for the community, I mean did you feel that that community was not being served in their language and this is why you wanted to start it?

LANGELIHLE CHAGWE- IZWE LOMPHAKHATI: What I'm trying to say is that the community need to understand what we are talking about, what is happening around them. I decided to open the news with their own language so that even, that's why I'm saying it caters for all age groups. Even grannies, even all those people, they should understand  
10 and learn what they will be understanding rather than if, I write something a story about somebody else who does not even understand what I'm talking about, it's a language which they will understand better than other languages. Like for instance take for instance SABC is having all languages. SABC is in isiZulu, Metro FM [unclear] but all the languages even Venda, they understand, maybe if there's news in Siswati, there's news in, they understand their language.

MS. PAULA FRAY: Langelihle congratulations on the product and I understand that you've got the website, which has got quite a lot of  
20 stories, and I see the stories are quite varied. You've got the floods, you've got campaigns in schools, you've got community news, things that are happening. You've got opportunities for matrices to rewrite their exams and everything so really quite important stories for the community you serve. I wonder if we could talk a little bit about how you're able. I mean you publish an eight pager, I think. Printed

publication. Where are you getting funding from, what is your business model.

LANGELIHLE CHAGWE- IZWE LOMPHAKHATI: At the moment I'm not having funding. That's why I did apply to the compensation commission. What I did do, I did try to apply to MDD, the Media Diversity and Development Agencies, then I was roped in by SANEF because I've got, having a lot of experience, because as I said I worked with so many media houses, Northern Natal News Newcastle advertiser, Caxton newspapers ... The fact of the matter that inspired  
10 me to ask for the funding is that I'm not yet funded by any funders. That's why I'm looking forward to getting a funding so that printing, distribution and I'm still intending to hire youth, especially those graduates who doesn't know how journalism works, how journalists will go around, what is the need and purpose. My audience is that each and every person understands what is the role of the media in this South Africa, because we are in the industrial, in the fourth industrial transformation so that when we are here in that fourth industrial, we are always to get informed about what is happening around us. Because what I believe in is that journalism transformed  
20 the new South Africa because there are so many media houses which were there to develop South Africa because now, we are in the upcoming general elections. If you understand that each and every person, they must understand that we go out, and interview people, because we now, there are some, all the political parties are being going for manifesto. Manifesto is something we tell the people what

we have. So we need to cover all those stories. Even IEC must understand and be clear that we are covering all the things because we are in a democratic country.

MS. PAULA FRAY: So certainly one of the things that this panel is trying to do is to really look at the state of media in terms of its online presence and what can be done in order to make media more sustainable. The impact of the platforms and the way we have to use the platforms in order to reach our audiences. Why is being online so important for you and your audience Langelihle. What do you think  
10 you're bringing online that isn't there at the moment?

LANGELIHLE CHAGWE- IZWE LOMPHAKHATI: What I could say is everything is in digital platform right now so we are phasing out DTE, we are phasing out newspapers, because everything is online, what I'm looking at people need to read recent news. Like for instance the breaking news, they should have to know about what is happening at that particular time. Because you know in the print media, maybe I myself I used to publish on a monthly basis depending on the advertising space but if something is happening now, they need to get that information at the right time, at the right place, knowing them,  
20 informing them, dissemination information, at that particular time. If I can write a story which happened today, I'll write it tomorrow it will be not in the public interest.

MS. PAULA FRAY: Langelihle you're part of the South African National Editors Forums digitalisation project, can you tell us a little bit about your experience there and what you're hoping to be able to

get out of it in terms of making sure your publication is competitive and able to actually get money in order to survive online.

LANGELIHLE CHAGWE- IZWE LOMPHAKHATI: What I will say, as I'm a part and a partner of SANEF, to me SANEF they did very well to me because training and then they developed my website, they develop anything because SANEF is being run by the senior editors like for instance Reggie Malusi, he was part and parcel of it. I know before it was [unclear], all those people, I will be, I'm happy because they engage us. And then –

10 MS. PAULA FRAY: Langelihle are you still there?

LANGELIHLE CHAGWE- IZWE LOMPHAKHATI: Through the project which was successful then I'm wishing all those people maybe who can be engaged and then trained and then develop the website because as I've said the website in our days we are no longer going to be able to print because we are all phasing out everything. Everything is online because you can read the story at the same time. You can even like for instance, social media, Facebook, Twitter and stuff, YouTube and stuff, you can get the answers at the very same time.

20 MS. PAULA FRAY: Langelihle what are you focussing on. Are you focussing on getting, keeping the website update and up to date or are you focussing on social media?

LANGELIHLE CHAGWE- IZWE LOMPHAKHATI: I'm focussing on keeping my website updated. Because social media as I've said is



that you need to be updated each and every day, each and every time. As soon as you get a story you must upload it right on the website.

MS. PAULA FRAY: And I see on your website that you've got a big campaign to try and attract advertising. Could you tell us more about that and what kind of advertisers you've been approaching and what their response has been?

LANGELIHLE CHAGWE- IZWE LOMPHAKHATI: What I could say, I'm still trying to generate the traffic of readers, and then the advertisers, the targeted audience, I'm targeting each and everybody who can  
10 advertise, the issue of an advertising space, at the same time generates revenue but the advertisers I'm looking at are not specific because even government people, I'm approaching them. I've got proposal I've got everything to try and market my newspaper as well, together with the website. Because my website, I'm still trying to generate a traffic. A traffic like for instance, those municipalities they understand that they have to advertise in my newspaper because I'm saying we are talking about economic development upliftment. So as, I'm a publisher, I'm always just engaging, all the government spheres to place adverts in my newspaper. Even though small businesses, I've  
20 got their price list as well. If you want to place an advert, in this amount. Then I'm always telling the people what is the importance of advertising. Because you said, how many people they know the business. Do you have the clients or the limit of the clients. That's why I'm always trying to tell the businesspeople that advertising is important.

MS. PAULA FRAY: Absolutely. Could you speak a little bit then about how you intend to use social media to drive people to your website?

LANGELIHLE CHAGWE- IZWE LOMPHAKHATI: At the moment let me say too driving the people to my website is that I have to make them aware and to boost my revenue meaning that we have to put everything, it's YouTube, it's Facebook, WhatsApp and stuff. Driving the community to the website because I've got some groups as well where I used to chat with but driving the people too on the social medias is that I'm still trying my level best to engage them. Using all  
10 the social media platforms as a transformation, so that there's nobody who would be left out. There's nobody who is going to not reading or seeing what is happening around, because according to myself media educates, media transforms, media

MS. PAULA FRAY: Are you still there Langelihle?

CHAIRPERSON: Our connection with Langelihle has just frozen, so we're hoping to return him soon. We seem to have lost Langelihle but certainly I think the experience Paula, you see the challenge of community media in the digital age. Just a decent connection seems to be problematic and obviously for many of the community as well.  
20 But this is the reality I suppose.

MS. PAULA FRAY: Mmm and I think it's something that we often don't think of. I mean this is not the only community media who has had this issue since we've started but also when you think about things that you can monetise like video etc, very often those aren't, I think it was

Anton who said you're dealing with 2G, and so very often those options don't feel very attractive in the communities that you serve.

CHAIRPERSON: I think what we have seen as well and you put into a question is there is a SANEF digitalisation project and it has two focuses. The one is digitalise on the news gathering front to improve the news gathering but it has the flip side of finding new revenue streams, new audiences for community media but the website is, has no advertising and I suppose the difficulty of attracting traffic to that website is what Langelihle was talking about, and we have heard  
10 though that attracting organic search when you're in a vernacular language is difficult. Near impossible.

MS. PAULA FRAY: I think today has been particularly interesting against the backdrop of us in mainstream media in the first two days, the variety of community media not only in terms of content but also in terms of business models today and the challenges that they're having.

CHAIRPERSON: Absolutely and I think all of them seems to be battling and some have done better than others. The communities they serve may be wealthier and more willing to donate or more able  
20 to donate but those that are less able, there is a timeline but something like the Limpopo Mirror that has this massive history and has been online before Google, that they are facing a one or two a year horizon at most I think is a frightening prospect and brings home that this is now fairly serious. And we may be standing on the edge of a cliff. But we have unfortunately completely lost Langelihle now and

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we'll see if at another point we can pick it up with him. But otherwise that's the end of the day and tomorrow we will return to big media and to two very different models I suppose. We start with Arena Holdings of course home to the Sunday Times, the Business Day, the Financial Mail, some of the real blue chip publications in the South African context and then move onto Daily Maverick which is a digital native and has been successful in building its audience and its presence but we'll hear from both how digitalisation has impacted them and on some of the issues we face. But with that we end the fourth day of the

10 hearings and we'll see you tomorrow morning at 10 am.

END OF PROCEEDINGS ON 7 MARCH 2024