

Q4 2021 ABC/ VFD summary

The print category has become quite the divergent one. Local newspapers have a disparate trajectory from its daily and weekly/weekend counterparts. In fact, the tables have turned in the past 20 years and local newspapers are now dominant force in the print media landscape where they used to be the small players.

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To illustrate: in the year 2000, 53% of all newspapers were daily and weekly/weekend papers and 47% were local newspapers. In 2022, a remarkable 83% of all circulating newspapers in the country are local publications. This means that in 22 years, 50/50 has become 80/20. This equates to local newspapers circulating almost five times the number of daily and weekly/weekend newspapers (5,747,987 vs 1,212,749 copies in Oct–Dec 2021).

This is not a pandemic story; local newspapers have shown resilience and stability in the past two decades and the dailies and weekly/weekends have been on a steady decline since they peaked in 2020 at a circulation of 3.8 million copies (combined). Covid may have accelerated the decline, but it was already in motion.

For example: in the local newspaper sector from Q3 2021 to Q4 2021 there was an increase of 18.5%. Year-on-year, local newspapers have increased by 22%. For daily and weekly/weekend newspapers from Q3 2021 to Q4 2021, there was a decline of -4%. Year-on-year, the daily and weekly/weekend newspapers have declined -11%.

Free local newspapers have attained pre-covid stability in Q4 2021 back to the high 5.5 million mark (which is where the category was in Q1 2020 before lockdowns).

The total number of local newspaper copies (including free, sold and hybrid publications) in Q4 2021 is now 5,747,987 up from 4,722,119 in Q4 2020. This substantial increase in circulation compared to the same period in 2020, proves the need for this localised print category in the SA media landscape.

A closer look at free local papers

The titles that have seen the most growth in the free local newspaper category include: *North Coast Rising Sun*, *Vukani* and *Tabletalk*. The average increase in their circulation figures is $\pm 3,000$ copies.

In contrast, the title that has seen the sharpest circulation decline has been *Go & Express* with a variance of -4,951 copies since Q4 2020.

New members have boosted the category; a publication such as *Vuk'uzenzele*, a government-owned newspaper delivering LSM 1-5 groups, in mainly rural and peri-urban areas nationally.

Evaluating sold local papers

Sold local newspapers have fluctuated in a similar way to sold daily and weekend/weekly titles, with localised content and regional news as their foundation – they are still in demand. The year-on-year comparison shows a -7.7% decline in sold local newspaper circulations. The sold local titles that have decreased the most in the past quarter include *The Weslander*, *Worcester Standard*, *African Reporter* and *Paarl Post*. The highest decline was at most 1,186 copies.

The titles that have shown the largest growth include *Witbank News* and *Middelburg Observer* which is consistent with Q3 2021, these titles are making positive progress with over 4,000 additional copy increases.

Hybrid local papers

The category of hybrid local newspapers is continuing to be an effective one. Titles such as the *Lowvelder Friday/Lowveld Express* are securing circulation stability, increasing by only 251 copies.

Other noteworthy changes

The Star, *Business Day* and *Cape Times* reported circulation increases of more than 10%, while *Rapport* and *Daily Sun* saw significant declines (13% and 30% respectively). The *Daily Maverick* has curtailed its print order by 17,347 to a circulation figure of 7,441 in from Q4 2021.

In 2022, a press schedule of every ABC'd daily and weekly/weekend titles can provide ± 1.2 million copies countrywide with a local newspaper strategy can distribute ± 5.7 million newspapers a week. Using smart combinations of local newspapers, advertisers can reach specific areas or target specific audiences, effectively. The robust nature of local newspapers makes the case for the category to be considered a desirable, modern-day print media solution.

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