

EXCLUSIVE: *NewsNow* to close; *iMaverick* coming right

By Gill Moodie: @grubstreetSA

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NewsNow, the weekly magazine [launched](#) by Media24 a year ago, is closing.

John Relihan, Media24's head of magazines, did not want to comment yesterday but Bizcommunity has reliably learned that the title is shutting up shop and a press release will be sent out later this week regarding this sad event.

And it is a sad event. I personally always fancied *NewsNow* - the idea for which was to give busy people a digested, aggregated version of the local and international news of the week that they might have missed (so not a local *Newsweek* but more of a *Huffington Post*).



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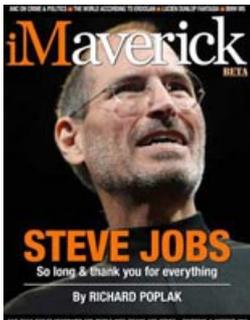
The writing has been on the wall for some time, with subscription discounts being offered and founding editor Waldimar Pelser moving to a senior position at *Rapport*. Pelser, previously the news editor of *Beeld*, is one of the rising stars of [Media24](#), so when he was moved out of *NewsNow*, it did seem that the magazine's star was on the wane.

In the end, *NewsNow* may have been just too unusual a product for the relatively small South African market - or even ahead of its time. Or, maybe being aggregated news, it would have been better suited to online (like the *Huffington Post*). There was certainly nothing wrong with the quality of the content (it had some top journalists such as Andrew Donaldson working for it) but there were weeks when it lost its shelf-life fast (when there was a big breaking story on a Friday or the weekend) and the covers got formulaic pretty quickly.

Media24 has learned its lesson

You can bet, though, that Media24 has learned its lessons from this experiment and these will be pondered over as it tries out new products in the future. Media24 has won a reputation as an innovator - it is happy to experiment with new products (think of the [Scoop! tabloid launched late last year](#) and shut in February this year) and services ([Sarie.com launched in March this year](#)) or new ways of structuring its own business (corporate reshuffles are very common).

All innovations are continually assessed, however, and if it's not working the company will move boldly to change things or close it down. Who knows? *NewsNow* could reappear in a different iteration in the future - just as I got the distinct impression that *Scoop!* may be back one day in a more refined mould.



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Last year I reviewed *NewsNow* along with another innovative product, *iMaverick* - the country's [first-ever iPad-only daily newspaper](#) launched in October 2011 - so I thought it was time to see how that was doing, especially considering it changed from a daily to weekly a couple of months back.

Some were quick to carp and saw the change in *iMaverick*'s frequency as a weakness in the business model but, quite frankly, I always [thought it was better suited to being a weekly](#).

And, as it turns out the, move has been a good one, *Maverick* CEO [Styli Charalambous](#) told Bizcommunity yesterday. The small team led by founder [Branko Brkic](#) has been released from a gruelling daily grind of note and are able to focus on quality, rather than quantity.

Existing subscribers actually welcomed the shift - many said they were too busy to read *iMaverick* on a daily basis - and

they also had their subs terms lengthened to make up the change in frequency. In fact, says Charalambous, there were no cancellations of subscriptions at all.

Looking for more partnerships

iMaverick subscribers are now at a healthy 7800, a number partly boosted by a recent deal with FNB (whereby customers who bought tablets through the bank also got a three-month *iMaverick* subscription) and, Charalambous says, *Maverick* is looking for more partnerships such as these.

The stats for the [Daily Maverick website](#), which is now almost three-years old, are also very positive: there are 180 000 unique visitors a month and it remains a high-LSM audience, with 70% having a tertiary education and 40% having a household income of R50 000 and above. The daily newsletter has 12 500 subscribers.

Charalambous says he has noticed a positive trend in that the website picks up new users whenever there is a big news event on - such as the recent Marikana violence - which then tails off but with some of the new users coming back to the site afterwards on a regular basis.

"It's been a long haul," he says. "It's been a difficult one - fighting for the really small piece of the [advertising] pie that digital seems to have in South Africa, which is way out of sync with the rest of the world.

A quality independent outfit

"We've just completed a case study and our click-through rate on Daily Maverick is operating at about four times the South African average. So the advertisers we have had are making repeat booking because they're seeing the results coming through. It's really been a case of getting in front of as many media planners and agencies as possible to let them know we're out there and it's still the highest LSM readership of any news site in South Africa. So it's starting to take hold and as Daily Maverick grows, *iMaverick* comes along for the ride."

iMaverick is starting to get advertising from the kind of brands Charalambous and Brkic originally envisaged for the product, such as FNB Private Clients, Nebank, Investec and Audi.

"There are very few [online and tablet] titles out there that give that glossy-magazine-advertising platform," Charalambous says. "Other apps may have pop-up things at the bottom of your screen. But the big boys don't want to be on an AdWords-type advertising platform. They want the big, beautiful full-page advert... And the good thing about it is that the ad spend per campaign (for *iMaverick*) is several multiples of what we see on the website, so people are starting to recognise it as an alternative to print, which is what we always wanted it to be."

So sad news about *NewsNow* but some good news from *Maverick* - and it's particularly *lekker* to see a quality independent outfit such as *Maverick* becoming sustainable.

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- MediaSlut: [Review of NewsNow](#), Sep 2011
- Bizcommunity: [First Brkic's iMaverick, now Media24 to launch new news magazine](#), Jun 2011
- Bizcommunity: [Kindle loves M&G; iPad loves less](#), Feb 2011

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