

Media Awards 2012: Never a dull moment



By Gill Moodie

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The looming Mangaung conference meant that ANC politics was THE big story of 2012 while the news hounds were kept very, very busy covering tumultuous events such as the numerous service-delivery and wage protests throughout the country and the Marikana massacre.

Declining circulation dogged most in the print industry as ad spend shifted to television while the change in ownership at Avusa and the impending sale of Independent Newspapers dominated the media grapevine. Broadcasting had a better year, for sure - talk radio was booming while DSTV and e.tv grew audiences and ad revenue. The SABC managed to hang on to one GCEO throughout the year but it remained mired in controversy while financial turnaround was elusive. We live, as they say, in mighty interesting times.

Most Interesting Move of the Year

Peter Bruce was one of the country's longest standing editors when he moved from *Business Day* in September to be publisher of BDFM, the owners of *Business Day* and *Financial Mail* that is jointly owned by Times Media Group (previously Avusa) and Pearson. This was an intriguing move on so many levels. Firstly, because it means Bruce has to work more closely with Mike Robertson, the acting CEO of Times Media Group (TMG), and it's no secret that the two are hardly bosom buddies. Secondly, the future of TMG really does require that BDFM and TMG work together even though the corporate cultures are so different. Thirdly, it raised the question of who would fill Bruce's considerable shoes at a time when *Business Day* is venturing into the digital-first arena and it can expect to lose quite a bit of revenue next year when the JSE drops its requirement that financial notices be published in print. (BDFM announced in November that it was embarking on a round of voluntary retrenchments.) There was talk that Phylisia Oppelt, editor of *The Times*, was offered the top job at *Business Day* while there was also speculation that *Financial Mail* editor Barney Mthombathi might get it or that it might go to the quiet but well-regarded acting editor, Pearl Sebolao. We wait and see.

The Grapevine Award

When Avusa became Times Media Group, there was much talk in media circles about the changes the new regime - headed by Hirt & Carter's Colin Cary - might bring. We didn't see anything too dramatic this year on this score but [click here](#) for a very interesting piece by *Business Day*'s Tim Cohen on "The strange case of the invisible annual meeting". Mostly, media luvvies such as myself were preoccupied this year by confirmation from the Irish owners of Independent Newspapers that SA's largest newspaper group was indeed up for sale. Iqbal Survé made an offer while [other names being touted around](#) as possible bidders included Cyril Ramaphosa, Patrice Motsepe, Groovin Nchabaleng and the Gupta family. All agree that local owners can only be better than the ruthless Irish. The word is that the heavily indebted Irish are determined to get a good price for the group but, on the other hand, they are under huge pressure from their banks so it's likely that will see some action here soon.

Surprise Move of the Year

BDFM MD Mzi Malunga's [abrupt departure](#) was a surprise in August but Moegsien Williams really got us scratching our heads when he gave up one of the top jobs at Independent Newspapers to become editor of *The New Age* in September. Why go from being Gauteng editor-in-chief of Independent Newspapers to a small two-year-old paper, we all wondered, unless he knows something we don't? The conspiracy theorists spoke of the Guptas, owners of TNA - the parent company of *The New Age* - getting their ducks in a row in preparation for a bid for Independent Newspapers. After all TNA CEO Nazeem Howa was the Indie's powerful operation chief for many years before moving to TNA but then we also heard on the grapevine that the Gupta's bid was too low for the Irish.

Saddest Departure



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We said goodbye to magazines such as *Shape*, *Sports Illustrated*, *NewsNow*, and *SA Gardening* this year and to the excellent [Chris Gibbons](#), who left the *Midday Report* show on Talk Radio 702/Cape Talk to run his own business full-time. But many of us really felt for Alec Hogg, when in October he walked away from Moneyweb, the business he built from nothing to become one of the most respected brands in journalism today. Hogg left, he said, because he and the majority shareholder, Caxton, had "different values". It must have been an incredibly difficult decision but in his characteristic philosophical way, Hogg told me in [this frank interview](#) last week: "Corporates have a different mindset - a different culture - to the way that the entrepreneur thinks. An entrepreneur is somebody who wants to build something because they think that they can do it better. They don't really want to be told what to do. A corporate on the other hand is there to live off

momentum and take the low-risk option. It has a relationship with its employees that is: 'We will give you a job and we will pay you well but you do what we say you must do'. So we had this clash of cultures that made it inevitable that at some point Caxton and I were going to fall out although."



Alec Hogg.

Most Innovative Company

We have some excellent media companies run by thoughtful, innovative people in SA - such as Primedia, Kagiso, Ramsay Media - but what really caught my eye this year was the start of Media24's big play for e-commerce: Sarie.com. The online store launched quietly in March for *Sarie* magazine - SA's biggest glossy women's magazine with more than 120,000 circulation - is a pilot project for the company. If it works, it will roll it out to its other magazines - which in today's world of declining advertising revenues is surely the way to go... or at least experiment with. ([Click here](#) for an in-depth interview with Sarie.com CEO Louna Lohann to find out more.)

Publishing Coup of the Year



Gisèle Wertheim Aymés.

Gisèle Wertheim Aymés put one in the corner for the little guys when she unseated TMG [to snap up the local licence for *Stuff* magazine](#) from Haymarket UK. She also brought *Stuff* editor Toby Shapshak with her and is to take the title - one of the few in the country to show consistent circulation growth since its launch in 2007 - monthly next year. It was a real vote of confidence in the abilities of Wertheim Aymés, who worked for TMG for many years herself and left the company in 2010 to join her family's medical business. Later that year, she bought *Longevity* magazine off TMG, brought it back to health and is growing its circulation plus deftly building its brand through eventing, social media and the like.

Bucking the Trend Award

This goes jointly to Independent Newspapers' isiZulu daily newspaper, *Isolezwe* - and its Saturday and Sunday editions, *Isolezwe ngoMgqibelo* and *Isolezwe ngeSonto* - and Media24's fortnightly Afrikaans *Kuier* magazine. While most print titles suffered declining circulation this year, *Isolezwe* and *Kuier* just kept growing: in the most recent ABC figures (for the third quarter of this year) *Isolezwe* was at 107,628 total circulation and *Kuier* 78,896. Both titles have filled a gap in the vernacular market - for *Isolezwe* it's isiZulu readers and *Kuier* mid-market coloured women. Having a very focused idea of the target market and what it wants in terms of content has given these products traction - as has the fact that both are

constantly examining their value propositions.

Chutzpah of the Year Award

Kudos to veteran *Business Report* journalist Ann Crotty, who with others founded a workers' trust this year aiming to acquire a stake in Independent Newspapers if and when it is sold. This may never come to pass as the trust has no financial clout but well done to Crotty for putting important issues to do with the health of the company and the value of its journalists on the table -and for asserting her belief that even though the Indie newspapers have been woefully under-resourced, all is not lost for the future. "I think there's been this sort of willingness to assume that print media is dead - and there's nothing you can do except sit back and let that happen," she told me in [this interview](#) in October. "I think we need to look at things in a different way and be more aggressive... Whatever happens, (the group) does need investment... They have been starved and that's done them a lot of damage but if you consider the cost of establishing a new title, that gives them a lot of value - and not just in a print format but also in digital. We've just got to try and fight back."



[click to enlarge](#)

Fantastic Mr Fox Award

This goes to TNA Media, owners of *The New Age* paper, for pulling off a sweet deal in getting the SABC's *Morning Live* show to screen its business breakfasts with prominent politicians for free. That's millions of rands worth of free exposure - [revealed by the Sunday Times in October](#) - which TNA CEO Nazeem Howa explained as a CSI initiative along the lines of Lead SA. But then Tech Central got a [great exclusive](#) saying it had documents that showed that Telkom paid TNA R1m in sponsorship for each breakfast. Now that's nice work if you can get it while the benefits for Telkom were questioned. "If one of my clients came to me and said they were sponsoring some breakfast at R1m a pop, I'd tell them they are out of their minds," marketing guru [Chris Moerdyk](#) told Tech Central.

Posthumous Lifetime Achievements



Alf Khumalo.

It's very rare that the ruling ANC elite AND hacks across the land pay tribute to the same person but that's just what happened when we lost two titans of our industry, [Zwelakhe Sisulu](#) and [Alf Khumalo](#). Both the legendary photographer Khumalo and Sisulu, the founder the *New Nation* newspaper and the first SABC CEO of the democratic era, were highly respected and liked enormously by all who met and worked with them. Khumalo's reputation travelled far beyond South Africa - as [this extensive obituary](#) in *The New York Times* tells us - while, considering the moribund state of the SABC pre-1994 and today, this comment by Max du Preez about Sisulu's time there speaks volumes: "What he did was make it what a public broadcaster should be. He made it a place where people were proud to work and he inspired the very best out of them."

Tantrum of the Year Award

Good Golly, Miss Molly but *The Times* editor Phylcia Oppelt really threw her toys in June when she laid into 702 presenter John Robbie; Yusuf Abramjee, head of news at 702 owners Primedia; and Katy Katopodis, editor-in-chief of the group's Eyewitness News, for not letting one of her reporters the chance to rebut Gauteng Police Commissioner General Mzwandile Petros immediately after the commissioner was on air. (The journalist went on air 40 minutes after Petros to defend his story that claimed that a special team set up to investigate the "blue light" gang had been disbanded.) It proved to be a storm in a teacup, [ending in a slap down](#) for Oppelt from TMG's public editor, Joe Latakomo, but not before we all have a wee titter.

Hopeless Twit of the Year

Talk about not thinking before you speak, former *FHM* cover model Jessica Leandra was catapulted into instant notoriety in May with [a racist tweet](#). She quickly started trending on Twitter in South Africa, with one wry user pointing out: "Jessica Leandra got more famous from being a racist moron than when she pouted for cameras in her knickers. Oh the irony." Not

exactly a career-enhancing move for Leandra.

Anonymous Twit of the Year

It's easy to be nasty when you're anonymous but not many are quite this loopy. [This March story](#) in *The Star* told us that the 259 written submissions to Parliament made by South Africans on the Secrecy Bill were overwhelmingly AGAINST the Draconian legislation - except for "a single anonymous contributor proclaimed on an undated and unsigned sheet of paper that the 'promulgation of the Protection of State Information Bill has been bedevilled by forces that derive pleasure from peddling sensitive state information which has the potential to harm the national security of the Republic'." LOL, as they say, no prizes for guessing where this reactionary missive might have come from.

Story of the Year

We had the Zuma Spear saga, the Cato Manor police death squads, Richard Mdluli, the missing text books, EduSolutions, the violent mine and farm protests, Marikana and Nkandlagate but one single story stands out for how it shifted the news agenda so distinctly: [Greg Marinovich's September piece](#) for the *Daily Maverick* in which he traced in photographs some of the events of the day of the Marikana shooting and raised the question of whether some miners were killed in cold blood. Before Marinovich's piece, the news agenda was largely being set by the authorities - with [an analysis](#) by journalism professor Jane Duncan showing that of the news sources in 153 articles about Marikana or Lonmin published between 13-22 August (the massacre was on 16 August) the miners only made up 3% of the total. Marinovich's piece seemed to spark something in the media to start asking more probing questions about the shooting and a lot of [excellent work](#) was subsequently done investigating the wretched lives of the migrant mine workers.

Picture of the Year

It was an action-packed year with lots of drama but I'm a sucker for pix guys who are able to take a step back and capture something offbeat and unusual - like [this positively Vermeer-like image](#) of Western Cape Premier Helen Zille having her hair done before her State of the Province speech in February. Pity there's no photographer's name on the *Cape Argus* website! For the same reason, I also really loved the stillness of [this AP pic of New York taxis](#) swamped by slate-grey flood waters after Hurricane Sandy hit the US and this Reuters image of Oscar Pistorius congratulating Brazil's Alan Oliveira after he won the 200m at the Paralympics in London. For me, [the Pistorius/Oliveira pic](#) really captures the incredible achievements of these elite athletes, who run on prosthetic legs, and it oozes sci-fi awesomeness. But it is also prescient in that there is a glimpse of the shadow to come: Why is Oliveira not smiling? Possibly he was aware that Pistorius took a dim view of the lengthening of prosthetic limbs, which he raised soon after the race?



Helen Zille.

Quote of the Year

Top honours goes to the fabulously contrarian Afrikaans rap duo, Die Antwoord, who told MTV in March that they had refused an offer from none other Lady Gaga to tour with her. "Lady Gaga asked us to tour with her and we were like, um, no thanks," [said Ninja, Die Antwoord's lead singer](#). Referring to a record label the duo had left, he went on to say: "They were looking at Lady Gaga and The Black Eyed Peas and that type of shitty pop music, and were thinking we could like twist into that." Classic!

Oddest Quote of the Year

Talk about champagne socialists! Deputy President Kgalema Motlanthe really [hit the wrong note](#) at the ANC centennial celebrations in Bloemfontein at the beginning of the year (while clinking champagne glasses on stage as ordinary members looked on) with this toast: "Those of you who don't have champagne in your hands, at least you have... clenched fists." But how bizarre was this utterance by Magwashi Phiyega in June while [defending her appointment](#) as national police commissioner even though she had no police experience: "I've never been a police [officer], but I want to say that you don't need to be a drunkard to own a bottle store. Judge in 12 months' time whether I have a poor capacity to learn, or not." *Joh!*

The ANC spin doctors must have been crying into their bubbly - especially after the Marikana massacre.

Best Neologism

Who are the wags who come up with these magic little nuggets, I don't know, as they move around Twitter and Facebook so fast that it's hard to find the origin. I loved Danny Boyle's opening ceremony for the London Olympics being called a "Brollywood spectacular" (because of the 30-odd Mary Poppinses who swooped down to fight Lord Voldemort) but there was nothing to touch "randela" - for our new rand notes emblazoned with the face of Nelson Mandela. You don't get smarter and sassier than that.

Most Interesting Olympic Stories of the Year

On the subject of the London Olympics, the very best of the world's media sharpened their pens for the event and we had some fascinating stories from many quarters. For my money, [this story](#) from *The New York Times* - on the trials and tribulations that pole vaulters face transporting their lances across continents - was one of the best as it was so unusual. *The Atlantic* did a [fantastic piece](#) on how the sound at the Olympics is captured and engineered for broadcast while *The Guardian* tickled my fancy with this [alternative medals' table](#) that you can reorder by factoring in GDP, population size and team size. Simple but genius!

Most Interesting Feature

The Brett Murray Spear saga really got us going this year - and led to a lot of soul-searching and highly intelligent analysis by South African journalists - but [this piece](#) in *The Atlantic* in the US by an Australian professor of evolution really got us thinking. The piece - on President Jacob Zuma's polygamous marriages and how there is a link between inequality and misogyny - was shared endlessly by South Africans on social networks and cropped up in many conversations and dinner-party debates on the Spear issue. Likewise for this feature from *The Atlantic*: ['Why women still can't have it all'](#) by Anne-Marie Slaughter, who gave up her job as the first female director of policy planning at the US State Department to spend more time with her children. It may be a tad long and meandering but it really touched a nerve and was much discussed by many women I know.

Meme of the Year

This goes to [Gangnam Style](#), no contest! The hilarious, highly styled music video from South Korean pop singer PSY got more 8-million views in the two weeks after its launch in July and then spawned many, many spin-off YouTube vids throughout the year. The funniest thing about the original is the fact that you can't be sure if he's taking the piss - and then there's that's goofy horsy-shuffle dance he does. But mostly this became such a hit because it was such a hit - you had to check it out because everybody else had - and that's the crazy nature of memes for you.

Meme Teen of the Year

Thanks to Memeburn, we [discovered in September](#) that Knysna teenager Caspar Lee was fast becoming a global superstar with his deadpan but endearing "vlog" - that mean video blog for those over the age of 18. Nine-million YouTube viewers and more than 100,000 Twitter followers - based mostly in the UK - is really impressive for a Garden Route *boytjie* but, even more intriguing, was writer Sarah Britten's take on what makes Lee so popular. "As it turns out, there's an entire obsessive vlogger subculture, where the same girls fantasise about the same group of Bieberesque boys, screeching and swooning in tweets whenever one of them deigns to follow back... What's interesting about Lee and others is that they're exploiting the kind of matinee idol niche that used to be accessible purely to pop singers and movie stars. Now that YouTube has given a channel to anyone with an ego, a video camera and internet access (which means almost everyone), anyone can be a star."

Only in South Africa Award



[click to enlarge](#)

What an extraordinary story we had in February when a man claiming to be a dead maskandi star "returned" to his family in rural KwaZulu-Natal after his soul was captured by evil spirits. About 30,000 people came from all over the province and from as far afield as Gauteng, Swaziland and Mpumalanga to see the "arisen" singer, Khulekani "Mgqumeni" Khumalo. In the end the man was proved to be an imposter, allowing the *Daily Sun* the opportunity to write the fantastic headline: "THIS ZOMBIE IS A FAKE!". The *Sun*, *Isolezwe* and *Ilanga* all posted huge sales on the back of this amazing story. But even more fantastic - or fantastical - is that I found when, when I [looked into it for Journalism.co.za](#), that one of the reasons so many people descended on Mgqumeni's far-flung home was that it had official confirmation: a KZN police spokesman said in an Ukhozi FM news bulletin that the police were sure the man was indeed the dead singer! Clearly, it does take a drunkard to own a bottle store.

For more:

- *Bizcommunity*: [Media awards 2011: Rock\(y\) and roll](#), December 2011.

ABOUT GILL MOODIE

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