

How data journalism could save the media



By [Craig Wilson](#)

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Knight International journalism fellow and open-data advocate Justin Arenstein says the rise of digital platforms holds big surprises in store for SA media.

Justin Arenstein, 42, is an award-winning journalist, digital media strategist and media rights activist who believes the media's role may become less one of reportage and more one of analysis as digital media grows and traditional media is forced to adapt or close shop.

Key to the shift that Arenstein believes is already underway is "data journalism", which requires data of all kinds to be made available to the public.

...Kenya-based Arenstein spends about a week a month in SA and the rest of the time travelling around Africa working for Google and the Washington-based International Center for Journalists.

...Arenstein then started African Eye News Service (AENS) and worked for the *Sunday Times* and the *Mail & Guardian*. Sharon Hammond, another former Caxton employee and now Arenstein's life partner, resigned in protest at Arenstein's dismissal. The two sued, won, and used the money to grow the news agency.

..."We established ourselves as a staff-owned, journalist collective," says Arenstein. "Then we started signing up members in 16 countries all over sub-Saharan Africa, as far north as Kenya." It wasn't long before big news agencies such as the SA Press Association and Agence France-Presse were picking up AENS content.

Media activism

Arenstein shifted his focus to media activism and to creating networks and organisations to improve the quality and sustainability of investigative journalism.

This led to him cofounding the Forum for African Investigative Reporters, the Association for Independent Publishers - a township association of media owners seeking equal access to premium rates - and Safrea, the SA Freelancers Association, which seeks to set minimum rates for freelancers and set up guidelines for issues like copyright.

..."It's not just publishers or broadcasters that control the public's access to information," Arenstein says. "Behind each media vehicle are advertising procurement agencies, distribution companies, or even printers that are owned or beholden to large media companies. If you're a small player and you're not in one of the big cities it's a struggle to get any face time

with these gatekeepers."

Read the [full story](#) on www.techcentral.co.za

ABOUT CRAIG WILSON

Craig Wilson is an ICT journalist and speaker based in Johannesburg. He is deputy editor at TechCentral, the South African source for technology news, reviews and opinion, and regularly provides insight into the technology industry for radio and television. Email him at craig@techcentral.co.za, follow [@craigwilson](#) on Twitter and connect on LinkedIn.

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