

Media awards 2010: we fight for freedom and farce



By Gill Moodie: @grubstreetSA

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2010 proved to be a year of great drama (and farce) for the media industry in South Africa. Who would have thought that 16 years after the dawn of democracy that journalists would be pulling together to fight for media freedom?

But there were also many moments of high comedy (the ANC Youth League president Julius Malema the source of many of them), huge stories to wrestle with (such as the murder of AWB leader Eugene Terre'Blanche) and the 2010 FIFA World Cup. There were surprises - the launch of *The New Age* was pretty left field - interesting moves, winners and losers.

Certainly not a dull year - here're my thoughts on who's top of the pops of the media industry this year.

- **The song remain the same award**



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The replacement of General "Five Star" Siphwe's Nyanda by Radhakrishna "Roy" Padayachie was [welcomed](#) by many as a much-needed breath of fresh air for the moribund communications department and as someone who actually knows what's he's doing.

And then it was [revealed](#) that he, too, had been wasting tax payers' money living it up in luxury hotels. There we all were, thinking Padayachie might finally usher the country into the age of broadband and sort out the terminal -and boring - mess that is the SABC.

A massive thumbs down to "Room Service Roy"!

- **Biggest disappointment**

The [dismantling](#) of the savvy little *Daily Dispatch* online team that was punching way above its weight and winning online awards with interesting web investigative packages was a crying shame.

They showed us what a properly converged newsroom could do and also what could be achieved on a shoestring budget, with very few people and open-source platforms such as WordPress. Professor Anton Harber called their work "the future" of news. Sob, that's past tense now.

- **Most interesting company**

Caxton, for its [deal with Moneyweb](#), which makes Moneyweb the developer and manager of the online presence for its extensive stable of community newspapers. This may well see South Africa's first big play in the hyperlocal arena.

The company also showed it has balls with the 33% [cover-price drop](#) of *The Citizen* newspaper at the beginning of the year. The bold move seemed to pay off, with *The Citizen* picking up circulation. In the second quarter of 2010, for instance - when most newspapers suffered a drop because of the dampening effect on street sales of the soccer world cup - *The Citizen* was at 71 757, compared with 64 685 the corresponding period in 2009.

- **Oddest redesign**

[IOL](#), the news portal of Independent Newspapers, took the one thing it had going for itself - its busy, busy smorgasbord of national news - and reduced the offering with its new design.

Pretty though - and then I thought the same of News24's redesign in 2009 so maybe this is just a case of getting used a new look.

- **Balls-up of the year**

This was true of 2009 and, still, things haven't improved: The SABC. Need I say more?

- **Chalk and cheese award**

One can't help but compare the fiasco that was [not the launch](#) of *The New Age* in October 2010 - when editor Vuyo Mvoko and four senior editorial members walked out the day before launch - with the incredibly capable *Mail & Guardian* publisher Trevor Ncube, who [launched a new daily newspaper](#) in Zimbabwe, *NewsDay* - complete with a new web press - in June.

NewsDay's launch was done so smoothly and so smartly - tokens were even issued for people to buy the paper to get around the fact there were no coins (the paper's cover price as US50c) in circulation in the country.

The New Age miscarriage, however, did provide one choice insight into the future relationship between editorial and senior board member, Thabo Mbeki's former enforcer, Essop Pahad, in this [diary](#) of the events leading up to the staff exodus penned by an "anonymous insider".

- **Surprise move of the year**

There was many a raised eyebrow when it was announced that [Nazeem Howa](#) was moving from the powerful chief operating officer's position at Independent Newspapers to become CEO of *The New Age's* owners, TNA Media - a job with uncertain prospects, considering conventional wisdom says it takes between three and five years for a new newspaper to turn a profit and that the boss is Essop Pahad.

But then, if anyone knows how to deal with ruthless bosses, it's Howa, who has for years weathered the Irish's unwavering demand for a set profit margin regardless of currency or economic changes.

- **Most interesting newcomer**

[Memeburn](#), South Africa's answer to Mashable, started by [Matthew Buckland](#), when he went on his own after heading up 24.com's innovation unit, has grown incredibly quickly.

Started in April, the site has been on the new-media ball from the beginning, with authoritative and well-written content - and it's picked up audience and advertising revenue as a just reward. By last month Memeburn was averaging 150 000 page impressions and 150-250 tweets day (and advertising stock was sold out till January 2011). Nice one, guys!

I'm also pleased to see that last year's most interesting newcomer, [The Daily Maverick](#), started in late 2009 by [Branko Brkic](#), is still going strong with its quirky and intelligent mix of content.

- **Story of the year**

There was Lolly Jackson, Bees Roux, Jacob Zuma's lovechild with soccer boss Irvin Khoza's daughter, the First Lady's alleged love affair with the bodyguard who later committed suicide... but even those couldn't beat the enthralling breaking news story of AWB leader Eugene Terre'Blanche murder over the Easter weekend.

In life, Terre'Blanche had been the cardboard cut-out rabid right-winger but then his death revealed so many shades of grey to the man. We discovered that he had built meaningful relationships in prison with inmates of other races, for instance, and then the details of the crime scene took on sexual overtones. It threw the spotlight on the [state of race](#)

[relations](#) in South Africa, as well as on the grinding poverty of rural areas and labour relations of farms.

- **Gob smacker of the year**

The *Cape Argus* stunned us media luvvies in July with [revelations](#) that Ashley Smith, a reporter for the *Argus* until he resigned amid a disciplinary enquiry in April 2006, had confessed in an affidavit to the National Prosecuting Authority that he acted as a spin doctor for Ebrahim Rasool, then the Western Cape premier.

But then came the real gob smacker: the [ANC saying Rasool](#) was punished over the alleged bribery scandal by being fired as premier - and promptly made the South African ambassador to Washington! Pull the other one, why don't you.

- **Quote of the year**

It's hard to beat Julius Malema's priceless Mugabe-style rant when he threw BBC reporter Jonah Fisher out of a press conference while admonishing: "This is the building of a revolutionary party. Here you behave or else you jump...Bastard... you bloody agent".

And then along came Winnie Madikizela-Mandela, who got top honours for a totally Bizarroland remark at the ANC's National General Council when asked what she thought of the proposed media appeals tribunal: "My views are my views," said the mother of the nation inscrutably, "but I like Al Jazeera."

- **Coolest world cup spirit**



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The Mercury [festooned](#) its masthead with Portuguese and Brazilian colours for the big Portugal-Brazil game in Durban and, in the same edition, ran some of its pages in Portuguese and paid tribute to the sizable Portuguese community in South Africa. It was mightily festive and welcoming towards the foreign fans and plans. Very cool.

- **Only in South Africa award**

The totally loony [Thembuland secession saga](#) dominated Eastern Cape newspapers at the beginning of the year - and made the national press - and, no wonder, it was a lark from beginning to end.

KwaZulu-Natal, the Eastern Cape, Western Cape, Northern Cape and parts of Gauteng and the Free State were all claimed as part of the independent AbaThembu kingdom by Nelson Mandela's traditional monarch, King Buyelekhaya Dalindyebo.

It all began when the king's lawyer demanded that the state compensate the AbaThembu nation R80 billion and the royal family R900 million for the humiliation suffered as a result of Dalindyebo's criminal conviction (for kidnapping and culpable homicide, among other serious charges). Failure to do so would result in the nation seceding.

The government and the ANC tried to stay aloof but the traditional leaders were drawn into it. It later fizzled out, as it seems, when someone had a quiet word with the king - and probably promised to pay his legal costs for his appeal.

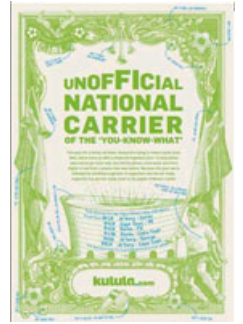
- **Only in tabloid land**

Neither the delights of the *Daily Sun* or the *Daily Voice* came close to Britain's *Daily Star* when it declared that British football fans were facing a machete bloodbath, fuelled by a race war during the world cup after AWB leader Eugene

Terre'Blanche's death.

If South Africans were outraged by this, then the same paper ran a front-page story saying there was a threat of earthquakes during the soccer tournament.

I established that the *Daily Star* [never actually spoke to](#) the South African geologist quoted in the story. It appeared that an enterprising *Daily Star* hack had been noodling around on the web and came across a 2009 opinion piece by the scientist in the *Cape Argus*, in which he warns that South Africans need to be more aware that we do infrequently have earthquakes and there needs to be contingency plans in place to deal with a future disaster.



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Yislaaik, is all I can say - don't let the facts get in the way of a good story.

- **Advert of the year**

The fantastic, very funny, very South African Wimpy Impi ad by MetropolitanRepublic (that went viral in a big way) stands head and shoulders above all:

And then Kulula gets the smart Alec award for its brilliant "[Unofficial carrier of the you-know-what](#)" print ad by King James that sent up FIFA's paraat protection of sponsorships during the world cup.

- **And, finally, the viral clip of the year award goes to...**

I can't imagine there's many South Africans netizens who didn't see this - when AWB leaders Andre Visagie had a hissy fit on live television that quickly descended into farce as he and e.tv presenter Lebohang Pheko engaged in a bit of ineffectual pushing and shoving.

Famously, Pheko proclaimed (over and over again): "Don't touch me on my studio". Just one iteration of the clip on YouTube had had 336 000 views by the end of last month and then there were the many remixes. We, of course, can't resist putting it up again:

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