

# Media24 to provide digital training to independent publishers

Independent publishing is alive and kicking in the small towns and rural areas of South Africa. This is one of the main findings of a recent fact-finding mission into the robust local news sector led by a team from the Association of Independent Publishers (AIP), Ole Media Group and Media24.

## **MEDIA24** Training initiative

The trip formed part of a larger programme to establish the training needs of the more than 200 independent publishers dotted across the country. The training drive is central to a Media24 initiative to actualise the recommendations of the Print and Digital Media Transformation Task Team (PDMTTT). The aim of the week-long field trip was to establish the readiness of publishers to make the transition to digital publishing.

The fieldtrip went through Limpopo, Mpumalanga and the Eastern Cape and forms part of an ambitious plan by the AIP to build the capacity of independent publishers and develop a syndication platform for local news.

"What we have found is that some of these publishers - even in remote areas - are already far down the line in terms of digital publishing," said the head of the Media24 Academy, Adam Cooke. "Some of them have designed clever apps, others have developed their own content management systems and many have linked into community social media forums in ways that only local publishers can. A few shining examples have completely embraced new technologies."

## Transforming the industry

Of course the picture is not all positive. Many publishers battle with tech skills and Media24's training programme, partly funded by the Fibre, Processing and Manufacturing Seta, aims to work with AIP members to address this need. The training drive is informed by one of the key recommendations from the PDMTTT which found that major publishers should contribute to the transformation of the industry through digital skills training with independent publishers, a role Media24 has taken seriously. Many of these publishers also face an uphill battle to get local advertisers to come on board and they operate with small teams on shoestring budgets.

"Overall we have been excited and encouraged by what we have seen," said project manager at AIP, Bongzi Bozo. "But it is not easy as the margins are small and it requires publishers to take great risks - often to their own personal safety. These publishers play a crucial role in our democracy especially in disseminating important information, creating debate and promoting diverse views."

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