

## media coverage

# A breakdown in trust

WADIM SCHREINER, MANAGING DIRECTOR, MEDIA TENOR SOUTH AFRICA, SHOWS THAT TWO WRONGS NEED A NEGOTIATED SETTLEMENT.

**AS A MEDIA ANALYST, I LIVE AND BREATHE news. As a rule, I snub people who complain that they no longer read papers because it depresses them, but recently, I caught myself having similar thoughts, brought on by the inherent breakdown in trust between media and government.**

To be honest, the war of words and principles between the media and the government is desperately unproductive. The government distrusts the media. As stated in the ANC discussion document, "media continues to adopt an anti-transformation, anti-development and anti-ANC stance". The media distrusts the government due to its regular delivery of irregularity, corruption and abuse of funds, a reality that is unfortunately contrary to what government preaches. In the ensuing slinging match, the media is hated by government, which in turn has retaliated with a myriad of accusations.

The irony is that both consider themselves to be communicators, but both are failing to communicate effectively. In 1999, the "Investigation into racism in the media" resulted in the media learning little from this first warning shot. Though the SA National Editors' Forum (Sanef) undertook two research projects on the quality of journalism and role of management, their findings do not seem to have resulted in any significant improvement.

Sanef's second research project clearly defined a lack of mentorship and management in print media. It is not surprising therefore that journalists were caught embedded in the Cape Argus.

Corruption has two sides: the corruptee and the corruptor. Corruptees are used by government as an example of the state of the media, ignoring that it promoted the beneficiary to ambassador.

In 2008/2009, the media made another fatal "mistake". It chose political sides. Pre-Polokwane, the media became a political pawn, with freedom of the press tolerated because it served a purpose. In my view, tensions rose as a result of the media continuing its confrontational stance, focusing on the lavish lifestyle of politicians and abuse of taxpayers' money for accommodation and luxury cars and so on by those that had "played" the media before.

There are many things that the media has got absolutely right. But there are a number of incidents in which the media has got it wrong. A few years ago, an Afrikaans artist was accused of downloading child porn on his computer. It turned out that he had not, but through the work of the media, his career and life were severely affected. In this case, government is correct. The press ombudsman is neither effective nor fair. First, if you go the press-ombudsman route, a journalist presides over his peers. How is that independent?

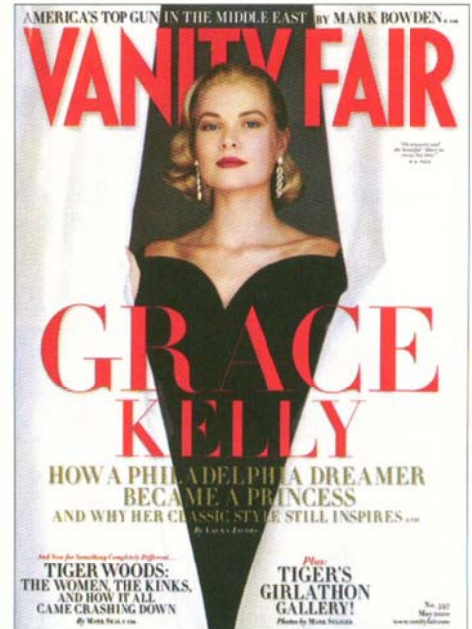
How can trust be rebuilt? The media should host a summit, to which government is invited, and it should send representatives trusted by the media.

The media should offer the first compromise by offering to overhaul the ombudsman system and replace the journalist with a judge. Punishment for unethical reporting must move beyond a printed apology.

The media fraternity should commit to a series of workshops that focus on ethical writing and the danger of corruption. Codes of conduct should be developed and signed, and internal mechanisms formalised to deal with any transgressions.

In return, government should withdraw the MAT and the Pol Bill should be returned to the drawing board. <<

## media hits



## Classic elegance

*My favourite 2010 cover goes to VANITY FAIR's May issue featuring Grace Kelly - more for what the art director didn't do. The glacial Grace, framed by two white drapes, is a most arresting image and is brilliant in composition. It could have been Lady Gaga and not Grace, as the sitter is less important than the pose that captures the eye. Those flanking drapes create two pillars of white space which VF has avoided the temptation to clutter with barkers. Only three other features got coverlines - one in a strip above the masthead and the others (both Tiger Woods related) across the bottom. A lot of people would have bought that issue to see Tiger's girlathon gallery - a coup for the publication that got exclusive glamour shots of his mistresses. Yet Graydon Carter resisted the tabloid impulse to splash pics of "the other women" across his magazine's cover in favour of a very classic, elegant cover composition. It was a triumphant success in long and short focus.*

MARCUS BREWSTER IS CHAIRMAN OF MARCUS BREWSTER PUBLICITY, THE 2010 FINWEEK ADFOCUS PR CONSULTANCY OF THE YEAR. BREWSTER HAS BEEN A VF SUBSCRIBER SINCE 1991, THE SAME YEAR HE FOUNDED HIS AGENCY.



SHINE PORTRAIT