

content analysis

The New Age not so new...

WADIM SCHREINER, MANAGING DIRECTOR, MEDIA TENOR SOUTH AFRICA

FIRST IT ANNOUNCED THAT IT WAS coming. Then it cancelled on the eve of its first publication. A few weeks later, it was ready. *The New Age* (TNA) eventually hit the shelves in December and was eagerly awaited by fellow journalists and media academics, most of whom could not stop declaring it "dead on arrival", a "governmental mouthpiece" and not worthy of belonging to the elite fraternity of journalists.

After all, with an owner that does business with the president, what good could come of it?

It is too early to tell if peers were right or wrong. It might survive, it might not – but it is there, and there are a few people who are reading it (I am one of them – for professional reasons, of course). For one, it seems to strive for perfection; I am getting a call almost every day to see if I've received my copy. Second, it brought out an iPad app – one of the first media organisations in South Africa to do so. The app sucks, but at least it has one.

At Media Tenor, we analysed the content of political and governmental coverage of TNA in January 2011 and compared it against coverage in other dailies and television news. We found that TNA had almost four times as much coverage on government as other media; in statements that is, not actual articles.

TNA has in-depth, long articles compared to much shorter reports in other press. And the coverage does carry a bit of opinion – and, in fact, slightly more negative than

positive, but in line with the opinions of its peers. Its governmental focus is slightly different. While other media had a 40% share of governmental coverage focused on national and 33% provincial, TNA had a much greater focus on provincial government – almost 40% of total governmental reporting. Then, 48% of comments in TNA were from governmental sources – similar to other media, which had 51% of quotes on government attributed to governmental sources.

While the 'other' press largely quoted national ministers and some Gauteng MECs, TNA gave space to MECs and premiers from North West, Limpopo and the Eastern Cape. The current billing crisis in Gauteng had been a major focus in January in all media, but TNA is slightly less negative towards the City of Johannesburg than other media, but addresses similar issues to its peers.

So yes, TNA has a greater focus on government than other media. But it does not seem to ignore criticism and just give credit, as alleged by many prior to the launch. It chooses similar sources, it reports about similar issues.

Granted, these are early days – but perhaps the overzealous established press can focus on its own challenges now that TNA is here, and perhaps even here to stay. Only readership and advertising figures will determine this, not peer review.

I, for one, am looking forward to how local press – and particularly TNA – will be dealing with the upcoming local elections. Will it get the balance right? <<

media hits



Newsworthy without being vulgar



RIEKIE GREYLING IS THE DAILY SUN'S PRODUCTION EDITOR. SHE HAS WORKED AT VARIOUS PAPERS AS A COLUMNIST, JOURNALIST, LAYOUT ARTIST AND EDITOR AND HAS WON SEVERAL PRESTIGIOUS AWARDS, INCLUDING THE INDEPENDENT 2000 INTERNATIONAL FELLOWSHIP.

This front page of Daily Sun – published days after schools reopened this year – speaks directly, without being patronising or offensive, to the ordinary working-class man, woman and child in the community the newspaper targets.

With at least five strong entry points, the main picture is used as a strip above the lead and the simple image draws readers' eyes into the rest of the page.

The picture is used effectively and emphasises the harsh realities and shortfalls of an imperfect education system, as well as the tragedy and impact of the excessive rain

the country is experiencing. The two-word lead headline – in bold white letters on a black background – is straightforward but hard-hitting and is illustrated by a simple face of pain, anguish and despair.

In true tabloid style, the main headline does not give away too much, while the sub-head is more revealing regarding the shooting incident. The informative page one is both colourful and newsworthy without being vulgar, as generally presumed of tabloid newspapers. <<