

Local papers continue to dominate as SA's top-performing print media

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Despite tough economic pressure, local media continues to outperform daily, weekly and weekend newspapers.



Local papers continued to show year-on-year growth in the last quarter of 2022, despite load-shedding, political uncertainty and economic pressure.

This is reflected in the Audit Bureau of Circulation of South Africa's recently released Q4 2022 figures.

Total audited circulation of print media in South Africa decreased from 6,710,995 copies in Q4 of 2021 to 6,607,939 copies in Q4 of 2022.

This decline is due to the declining sales of daily, weekend and weekly newspapers. The drop could have been worse, however, had it not been for the growth in the local newspaper sector, which grew by 20,933 copies, to an impressive 5,772,136 copies.

The combined daily, weekly and weekend newspapers dropped by 123,989 copies, to 853,803 copies. Looking year on year, the decline in daily, weekly and weekend newspapers seems small and almost insignificant. It has almost become background noise. But, when one looks at the daily, weekly and weekend papers in their heyday, the fall is dramatic. For instance, in Q4 2022, the total circulation of all daily, weekly and weekend newspapers combined was less than the combined circulation of only four daily papers in Q4 2007, when *The Star*, *Sowetan*, *Daily Sun* and *Isoleswe* sold a combined 911,209.

Another example is the stark reality that in 2000, the combined circulation of two newspapers only – City Press and Sunday Times – was 830,000, which is a mere 20,000 more copies than the Q4 2022 combined circulation of 42 newspapers (853,803).

"What is even more surprising is the number of marketers and advertisers who still believe that the daily, weekly and weekend newspapers continue to offer a viable route to market," says Chris Halstead, the head of sales of Spark Media. Spark Media is Caxton Local Media's national print sales division and Caxton is the largest local newspaper publisher in South Africa.

A closer look at local papers

In Q4 of 2022, local newspapers circulated seven times as many copies as daily, weekly and weekend newspapers combined (5,772,136 vs 835,803 copies).

Conditions for local papers are tough. Yet despite this, many local titles have increased their circulations. In particular, sold

local papers in the coastal, Limpopo and Mpumalanga regions have shown consistent growth over the past few years.

Hybrid publications such as *Lowvelder Friday/Lowvelder Express* continue to grow. This is proof of the success of their innovative approach to meeting readers' need for local news and advertisers' need to extend coverage to informal areas, says Spark Media head of marketing Jacqui Hansen. "The growth of hybrid newspaper circulations may seem moderate at 2,751 copies (from 34,152 in Q4 2021 to 36,903 copies in Q4 2022), but in light of the performance of daily and weekly papers, this growth is impressive."

"It is fair to say that sold local papers remain under pressure, but are showing resilience and continue to provide readers with a product that meets their needs," adds Hansen.

With its online offering, Caxton Local Media continues to have a strong presence in the local market.

Servaas de Kock, Caxton and CTP Group executive digital, says Caxton Local News has 54 local news websites and have seen an increase in users of 26% year on year, totalling 10.4 million users. Page views have also grown 4% year on year, to 28.3 million page views (source: Google Analytics, Oct 22–Dec 22).

In addition to its web offering, each news site has various social channels with large followings.

"It is evident that our main focus is still quality, local news and that we have a strong audience engaging with us daily. These platforms remain one of the best vehicles to deliver marketing messages to a local market," says De Kock.

Future outlook

Irma Green, group editor of Caxton Local Newspapers, says local papers and news sites are here to stay. Their unique offering of locally relevant news in a trusted environment is one that many readers rely on, she says.

"As South Africa continues to navigate rough political waters, the independence of local newspapers and news sites, their editors and journalists will undoubtedly remain key"

"Many readers have also come to rely on the convenience of having locally relevant advertising in a trusted reference point; one that is delivered week after week and which can be accessed even during loadshedding," Green says.

With buoyant circulations and growing online editions, local newspapers and news sites continue to provide an effective route to market for small businesses operating in local markets, and national brands and retailers who are fighting for their share, store by store and area by area, in local markets across South Africa.

For any media-related queries and business offerings, contact the corporate affairs manager, Kamogelo Aphane: ka@sparkmedia.co.za

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Spark Media



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