

# Tiso Blackstar's Scott Peter Smith on the importance of multimedia in modern journalism

By  Juanita Pienaar

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Tiso Blackstar's MultimediaLive team has been producing engaging content - bringing new, fresh insights into current news stories gripping the country - through videos, as well as podcasts.



Head of multimedia at Tiso Blackstar, Scott Peter Smith. Image supplied.

So much so that the company received significant funding from YouTube last year to boost its video production across the group and many of the videos that it has created not only being nominated but also winning awards.



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We caught up with the head of multimedia Scott Peter Smith who shared with us why the volume and quality of multimedia production and the speed at which it can be created are making it a very useful and valuable addition to the newsroom and the importance of multimedia in modern journalism and how it's affecting the current state of the industry.

**■ Please share more about the evolution and importance of multimedia in modern journalism.**

I'm not one for talking about 'pivoting' to multimedia, whether it be video or audio, but it's increasing presence in journalism in a useful and effective way is exciting.

We are getting to the point now when the volume and quality of multimedia production and the speed at which it can be created are making it a very useful and valuable addition to the newsroom. The economics are making more sense too.

The multimedia department isn't just some sideshow anymore where budget is grudgingly made for it – we have our own diary, we manage our own publishing platforms, we find our own audiences and we are developing our own revenue models. As journalism everywhere is looking to sustain itself, those factors are an important addition to the arsenal.



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The fact that every day I have someone new – whether it's a journo, a salesperson or even someone in dev – talking to me about our multimedia in one way or another is a testament that it is going to prove itself very important for journalism.

#### ■ ***What do you love most about your career in multimedia in particular?***

I absolutely love the problems I am trying to solve. While creating the right content can often be a moving target, the mechanics behind creating video and audio are actually pretty easy – the challenges lie behind the technology and workflows to store, serve, distribute that content, not to mention make some money too. It's not a clear answer.

Solutions are often specific to the particular newsroom you work in. But that's what I love – it's hard, it's unclear, you need to innovate and you have the chance to create some of the coolest content in news, not to mention work with people that are just as excited about it as you are.

#### ■ ***Comment on the current state of the industry and what do you think it can improve on.***

I think it's just young. Simple as that. Everyone is trying to figure out what works and what can be sustained. We know we want good visual and audio content but without clear models, it's often hard and tricky to convince the bosses which direction to go in and why.

Projections in audience and revenue are just that, projections; we don't have historical numbers yet so you have to work hard to make sense, get your business logic on point, build trust that you'll get the job done and be accountable to the results so you can build on the successes and know where to shift direction with the failures.

Have a healthy scepticism for agencies or new platforms that promise they have found the solution, but create the space to give it a go.

#### ■ ***Tell us a bit about your experience and other highlights you're particularly proud of?***

Over the last couple of years in this position, we have just kept growing. It's been difficult but amazing at the same time.

I immediately saw gaps and clear opportunities to create fresh news products from the wealth of journalism talent in the newsroom. We created an audio division from absolutely nothing to now, about 18 months down the line, we have [10 weekly podcasts](#), some new limited series' productions I can't tell you about just yet and a slew of external partnerships coming on board. Even the salespeople are excited about podcasts and we have a stable and growing revenue stream.



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Video has also done amazingly. Production has improved, our daily content is sharp, relevant and consistent and while you may already be aware, [we received significant funding from YouTube](#) last year which we have used to bolster our video production across the group, including from the regional titles. In addition, we invested in visual investigations which have done incredibly well with many videos not only nominated\*\*, but [winning awards](#).



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### ■ **What are you most looking forward to?**

Pinning down the mechanics and revenue models to make sure we can keep creating the amazing content we have without needing outside funders to carve out the costs. The sooner we can be a self-sustaining department, the sooner this multimedia department can show just how valid and impactful it can be for the future of the journalism we make.

### ■ **What's at the top of your to-do list?**

So much. I've alluded above to some of the productions that are on the go. We've recently re-jigged our technical backend for video and audio, making that repository of content so much more useful, manageable and scalable for a number of new ventures.

### ■ **What are you currently reading/watching/listening to for work?**

I consider it my job to consume as much as I can. I was recently a judge for the upcoming Online Journalism Awards being held in New Orleans in September and the kind of work being produced out there is simply amazing. The talent and clear cross-departmental work between the journos, videographers, designers and developers is astounding.

I read, a lot, but I also watch a lot. Netflix has amazing docu-series and it alludes to what I said earlier – the demand for this content, it's distribution and the models to support them are within reach. SA is behind, our market isn't developed yet but, watch this space – so much movement and so many good things on the go.

I'm also impressed by some of the podcasts coming out in SA. Picking up very nicely. A recent example is *True Crime SA* – a one-woman show with just simple and great storytelling. I listen to all the usual podcast suspects such as the *NY Times' The Daily*, but am always pressing play on random shows.

### ■ **Tell us something about yourself not generally known?**

Uhm, that would probably be quite a lot. I live smack centre of downtown Johannesburg and have for nine years now – that often surprises people. I guess I don't look the part.

*Listen to podcasts and similar audio content from the Tiso Blackstar group – Sunday Times, Business Day, The Times, Sowetan, etc., by visiting the MultimediaLive [website](#) and catch up on fresh news and updates in video format by visiting its [Youtube channel](#).*

Juanita is the editor of the marketing & media portal on the Bizcommunity website. She is also a contributing writer.

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