

## ***The Witness* celebrates 175 years of news publishing**

*The Witness* celebrates 175 years of continuous news publishing on the 27 February 2021, securing its place as the oldest daily news platform in South Africa. In the media world, such a milestone is not achieved without clarity of purpose and a well-developed ability to adapt to a changing ecosystem.



Since 1846, *The Witness* has been committed to delivering “the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth” to its readers. *The Witness* editor Stephanie Saville explains, “Our audience relies on the fact that we know KwaZulu-Natal well and they know that the news we produce will be relevant and important.” Readers see *The Witness* as a champion of day-to-day issues of local and provincial importance; Saville affirms, “We take our watchdog role very seriously and regularly investigate and expose issues where government and local government have failed their people or where active corruption has taken place.”

*The Witness* balances investigative coverage by shining a light on what is good in the province and giving credit where it’s due. Many articles have showcased the good work done by the Pietermaritzburg-based international aid organisation Gift of the Givers, both nationally and abroad.

*The Witness* seeks to empower its readers with the knowledge they need to make important life decisions: where to buy a house or whether they should invest in a generator to deal with power outages.

## **Adapting to the times leads to growth**

News consumption has transitioned from the newspaper to the computer screen to the mobile phone; readers want access to events and stories around them, where they live, in real time. Thus, on 1 October 2020, *The Witness* launched its new digital presence delivering impressive results: in a mere three months both its average daily Unique Browsers and Page Views quadrupled according to Narrative data. Across mobile, desktop and social media platforms, it achieved a digital footprint of 1,741,095. This figure continues to grow.

This growth continues as the publication promotes its content across the social media sites of a host of Media24 local newspapers across the province, drawing in audiences from around KZN. By December 2020, *The Witness* had drawn more than double the number of Unique Browsers than the nearest competitive local news and radio brands in KZN.

However, January Narrative figures show that 28,73% of the Unique Browsers are to be found in KwaZulu-Natal; the bulk are to be found in Gauteng (36,17%) and the Western Cape (14,80%). With KZN being one of the most significant and influential provinces, the uptake of political stories nationally has been strong.

The online audience is younger than their print counterparts; they want breaking news as it happens and are always on their phones checking in. They want to be part of the conversations around the news and enjoy sharing, tweeting and commenting on stories. They also want to be able to read an opinion piece or look at the cartoons and download the puzzles.

The print audience, largely comprising traditional subscriber base of older readers, have the time to read a newspaper at their leisure; they want in-depth news, features and thought pieces.

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