

Build relationships, don't send bland or brand-bludgeoning press releases

 By [Britta Reid](#)

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The editors of three of Media24's news brands recently explained how to tell brand and corporate stories effectively at in the invitation-only Storytelling for Brands webinar, presented by Ads24 and Media24.



Image source: [123RF.com](https://www.123RF.com)

“We chuck out press releases because they often tend either to be bland or brand-bludgeoning,” Editor-in-chief: *Daily Sun*, Mapula Nkosi stated frankly and argued that the *Daily Sun* team was best positioned to tell brand stories “from the heart”, in informed and well-packaged formats that resonate with their readers’ interests. Not only does the *Daily Sun* team intimately understand the challenges of blue-collar workers, but they make sure that they communicate to them in their language with respect for their belief systems.

Readers value a trusted environment

Nkosi’s counterpart at *Rapport*, Waldimar Pelser, agreed, saying when his team tackled brand stories they produced “the kind of copy we produce for our news pages; we try to ... construct stories that are compelling and relevant” to the readers. Furthermore, he stressed, more than ever readers need to be able to recognise the stories they read as the truth. Editorial teams fight to get the stories that matter to their readers and strenuously check and corroborate them. Brands that appear in a trusted context have an advantage.

However, this requires well-capacitated newsrooms: the editors stressed the importance of commercial partnerships in ensuring these. Reader payments alone cannot support them.

Relationships facilitate impactful brand storytelling

Mondli Makhanya, *City Press* editor-in-chief, expanded on the issue of trust in the context of brand storytelling, saying it was important for a publication’s journalists to be free to explore and interrogate brand and corporate stories, to see them through their own eyes.

In the case of corporate endeavours to improve the lives of South Africans, the news brand should be able to assess the

impact of the initiative. However, he conceded that for this to happen required a solid relationship between the news brand and the client. Nkosi endorsed this view, talking of the dynamic relationships her publication enjoyed with the brands that partnered with the *Daily Sun*.

Different solutions and formats

Such partnerships allow brand and corporate stories to be packaged in different and effective formats. Makhanya mentioned the example of the Money Makeover, where Absa partners with *City Press* to run a six-month financial bootcamp for six readers to help them achieve their financial goals. Not only did the participants succeed, but readers following the initiative were enthusiastic about the learnings they took from the programme. Pelsner mentioned the work Rapport had done with the Ombudsman for Banking Services to educate their readers on how to avoid falling prey to online scams. Nkosi outlined how the *Daily Sun* improved the lives of the blue-collar community in very real ways through interventions such as Mr Fixit and SunPower.

Solutions and stories of hope

In this time of gloom and doom, all three editors concurred that they needed to provide their readers with stories of hope and optimism to counter the slew of negative news. They agreed that recovery would take time and it would require an active citizenry working in collaborative ways, looking for innovative solutions.

ABOUT BRITTA REID

In her role as MediaCom South Africa MD, Britta Reid has been responsible for the operations of the agency including executive oversight on buying.

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