

This issue

HOW to keep our eyes on the ball and which ball. That's the issue at the heart of this edition of *Review*. How does a journalist make sense of the media's movements when so much is happening? There have been editorial charter debates,

changing print ownerships, Comtask deliberations, satellite TV launched, digital technologies ... and so on. Where, then, should we focus?

Actually, it's quite straightforward. You can see it in the common concern of *Review's* contributors: namely, journalism. Focussed. Professional. Credible. Independent. And a journalism which serves this society successfully.

To begin with, digital technology is indeed taking the media by storm - but it's secondary to our journalistic mission. That's the watchword in articles by Monty Cooper on the Everest expedition, Mike Zajakowsky on digital photojournalism, Pieter Malan on picture manipulation, Kerry Swift on the World Wide Web and Guy Berger on mining online information sources.

Then, there may be a lot on the go in the media milieu, but the professional ethics of journalistic storytelling don't go away. Fairness comes under focus from Cathy O'Dowd, while Mike Morris pleads for the unfashionable notion of objectivity.

Substantiation and avoiding stereotypes as ingredients for credible story-telling comes up in Margaret Legum's criticism of the English-language press. Credibility is what motivates Anthony Sampson's controversial call for the custodians of truth to come clean about complicity in apartheid.

These themes reflect an underlying concern for press freedom, and interest in what South Africa's media is making of its new political latitude. Arthur Maimane's article makes us measure journalism against the bad old days, while Bojosi Othogile points to the problems still plaguing independent journalists just across our borders. An optimistic pitch for press freedom comes from *Independent's* Ivan Fallon. But he also sounds a sobering note by pointing out freedom has not been a boon to newspaper circulations.

Concentrating on what it takes to raise South Africa's miserable circulations are the *Sunday Times'* Brian Pottinger and independent consultant Chleo Ehlers.

Broadcasting is also wrestling with how to serve and secure audiences simultaneously. Community radio has many models, says Bill Siemering. SATV's own public service model suggests a different view of audiences and quality journalism, as explored in Larry Strelitz's interview with Jill Chisholm.

Credible and professional journalism is key ingredient in the appeal of any medium. And yet the first of these qualities attracts too little attention.

You can see this, for example, in the way discussion of editorial charters has been defensive, reactive and racially polarised. Certainly, journalists do need editorial autonomy from untoward commercial influences and from day-to-day political interference. Credibility is the first casualty of journalism that mouths commercial or political agendas. And media without credibility are not going to make it in the marketplace - nor contribute to democracy. All this is true.

But neither will media succeed if they don't provide pointed relevance and pleasure to potential audiences. Credibility needs to be compelling.

The challenge ahead is to combine professionalism and credibility with a catchiness that will attract the mass of South Africans whose attention is otherwise occupied at present.

Keeping our eyes on this ball is basic. If we don't, the public will be focussed elsewhere.

● *Review* pays tribute to outgoing editor, Charles Riddle, who consolidated its role as South Africa's premier forum for journalists.

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