

Publishing's maverick strikes again

 By Herman Manson: @marklives

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[Branko Brkic](#) is South Africa's best-known maverick publisher. He puts out the content every editor (and reader but not necessary advertiser) dreams of getting past the bean counters and corporate lawyers upstairs. He also loves throwing the publishing dice. It often brings him fame, less often fortune, but always sees him pushing the boundaries of modern publishing (and at least from a distance, sometimes, fiscal sense).



Maverick publisher Branko Brkic.

First there was *Maverick*

First there was [Maverick](#) - the best business magazine ever published in South Africa (I heard *Leadership* mentioned, *seriously*). It quickly became the thinking business man's must-read.

Then Brkic wanted to push his success into trade niches and for some reason picked the overtraded media sector to do it in. He launched the consumer-trade hybrid [Empire](#) to cover media business and he did it exceptionally well.

I still remember a conversation with Brkic at the time, in which he told me he was betting the farm and that *Empire* had better work. *Empire* was thick, it had fantastic content under the able hand of editor Kevin Bloom, and it didn't make it. Because fat magazines with great content cost a ton of money to produce and trade spend in that sector is disappointing, to say the least.

THE DAILY MAVERICK Next came [The Daily Maverick](#), Brkic's ass-kicking daily website that has emerged as the go-to source for analysis of South African politics and media (with a good dose of sport and a bit of culture thrown in). It took only 19 months to build an audience of 100 000 and Brkic says the site is on the point of breakeven (maybe even as soon as next month).

Just months after News Corp

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iMaverick**

In the meantime, he is launching a daily iPad newspaper. Just months after News Corp (market cap US\$29 944.42 million) launched the world's first dedicated iPad newspaper, The Daily, Brkic is doing the same in South Africa with his new daily newspaper [iMaverick](#).

To be published five times a week, iMaverick, which Brkic describes as a daily reading menu for people with brains and money, will cover business, politics, sport, lifestyle... well life, promises Brkic. It will still aim to break news, but in a world where you no longer have a day's lead time on rivals - in fact, you no longer own a story for more than a couple of minutes - the value of breaking news in the newspaper world is in decline. Social media and the web breaks news these days - where you go for insight and understanding is where Brkic wants to be with iMaverick.

iMaverick, which is expected to launch mid-August with an editorial staff of 25 (Daily Maverick has a full time staff of five at the moment), will come bundled with an iPad 2 and a 24-month contract, as Brkic tries to kick start a market.

Brkic says there are currently 50 000 iPads in the local market but he projects a total tablet (all makes, not just iPads) market of 500 thousand to a million in three-to-four years. He needs to sign up 8000-9000 subscribers to get into the black on his current costings and expects 20 000 - 25 000 subscribers signed up in his first year of operations.

Costings

The whole project will cost less than the R30 million Brkic initially hoped to raise and is financed by a host of small shareholders and former iBurst MD Alan Knott-Craig Junior's investment company [World of Avatar](#). (Andrew Trench did [some costings](#) on the project, admittedly on a Media24-sized scale, and seemed quite pleased with the results.)

To get your hands on iMaverick and an iPad 2 will set [subscribers](#) back R395 a month over two years and works out at around R17 a copy per day. As Brkic point out, it's not a pricing model you can compare with traditional newspapers, as it includes the iPad (16GB wifi, or 32GB 3G at R499 pm). You get a paper, the web, etc etc all included in the deal. A stand-alone subscription deal will be announced for those who already own an iPad, or some other tablet, in the near future.

Brkic is also betting on a decent take-up from South African expats - a market traditional newspapers don't have a hope of capturing. iMaverick is working closely with iPad distributors Core and, since the announcement of its launch, Brkic says a number of telco players have approached him to offer bundled services to their subscribers.

Brkic makes it clear that he isn't marrying his product to the iPad. He is a publisher, and iMaverick isn't being designed to bring gizmos to the people, but the iPad, for the moment, offers the best platform for iMaverick. It will work across tablets, though, and is being designed in html5.

Making money

Back to money for the moment, and making it.

Apart from subscriptions, iMaverick will rely on advertising for revenue. Brkic describes a tablet newspaper as a golden solution for advertisers. On the one hand, it retains the print frame; on the other, it offers interactivity to advertisers and the ability to action on the part of the consumer.

iMaverick will only sell full-page ads, but at a significant discount to the traditional press. It's a frame readers and advertisers already understand and, if he gets the readers, he is betting that the advertisers and their ad agencies should follow.

Will his latest roll of the publishing dice pay dividends? We will know in a year from now. In the meantime, expect more of the same from Brkic and his team: some rocking content, and eye for detail, general industry envy, and - with a bit of luck, finally - well, fortune.

See also:

- Bizcommunity: [First African daily iPad newspaper, iMaverick, launching soon in SA](#)
- Bizcommunity: [Is Maverick op die regte iPad?](#) by Chris Moerdyk
- Daily Maverick: [The Next Generation of a dream: iMaverick](#)
- Bizcommunity Search: [iMaverick](#)
- Google News Search: [iMaverick](#)
- Twitter Search: [iMaverick OR iMaverickZA](#)

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