

The independent publisher strikes back

 By [Leigh Andrews](#)

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The digital independent publisher, having endured most of the disruption of recent years, has emerged into the sunlight with its true worth being recognised and a champion in the form of the ACME network by its side.

ACME is a recently launched South African publisher network, by independent publishers and for independent publishers. It was conceptualised as a method of aggregating advertising opportunities, but has come to represent a large publisher network with rich commercial opportunities, cross-marketing and significant buying power.

Representing brands such as *BizNews*, *The Daily Maverick*, *Junk Mail*, *Tech Central*, *MoneyWeb Today* and over ten other hand-picked South African and International titles - including *Bizcommunity*, partnering with the platform - ACME delivers over seven million unique browsers to advertisers with top-end LSM, brand loyalty and viewability metrics, as well as comprehensive retargeting and audience buying benefits. ACME has a top-tier seat on the Google Ad Exchange and is setting up select Private Marketplaces as well as a strategic deal with content marketing service 8Bit, which will deliver marketing and native advertising initiatives.



The concept originated over two years ago when [Styli Charalambous](#), publisher of *The Daily Maverick*, realised that his competitors were not those sitting around the table with him, but the large international platforms that were responding faster to advertising tech and constantly innovating. When [Derek Abidinor](#) left Times Media, they picked up on some of their earlier conversations and soon had put together a strong network of independent publishers and unmatched value propositions.

“We’re building a sustainable business future for independent publishers,” says Charalambous. “No one understands the challenges us publishers have. The upside is that no one else has understood the real advantages we can unlock.” Abdinor agrees, adding: “Audiences have come into their own and ACME builds on that diversity as a publishing strength. We will sell the large, bespoke campaigns and the really effective programmatic deals. It may be niche, but it’s niche at scale.”

In this exclusive interview they shared just how their new network – named for both its *Looney Tunes* reference and the disruptive tendencies and quirkiness from a team that does a little bit of everything – will help local independent publishers build organically.

Collaboration over competition

The idea of collaborating is nothing new; we’ve seen it in other industries like agriculture and wine, where some sort of co-op idea benefits all. It just needed someone, in and amongst the 20 other main jobs that they have, to drive it. Someone who could actually look at the challenges and opportunities and dedicate the required effort, time and resources to it.

A network where local publishers could get best practice advice and feedback ideas from other publishers, who before weren’t really sharing stuff as they didn’t have the time or a forum to do so, or any benefit to doing so and viewed each other as competitors. This will result in better content-sharing, improving everyone’s product in the long-run with increased traffic and long-term thinking – all of which a sales network isn’t really interested in, as it’s not short-term enough and they can’t charge you commission.

Complete digital universe

Charalambous adds that it’s about creating a complete digital universe that could cater to any kind of advertiser at the end of the day, whether it has a focus on classifieds, business, news, lifestyle or women’s interests – the whole spectrum, along with the audiences that brings. ACME will put together large campaigns, provide a ready-made content marketing platform and aim at creating quality outcomes for dynamic media buyers through their Ad Exchange seat. Agency feedback? They love the idea. It’s a rich soup they can advertise in and retarget and offers them new users that haven’t actually been reached before through publishers that haven’t practically had the chance to tell their stories before. So, while it benefits the publishers, agencies conversely have that opportunity to reach new audiences.

ACME’s vision is becoming more relevant with economic, and often political, pressure on independent publishers playing out simultaneously. “To date, most foreign platforms don’t pay South African VAT. We don’t think they are completely vested and therefore are not likely to defend South African free speech.” And if the transactional fees stay here, says Abdinor, profits from those transactions will flow back to publishers to invest in newsrooms and other aspects of their businesses. Charalambous adds this will drive investment in newsrooms and job creation. It ticks all the boxes of why it’s also good to be a proudly South African initiative.

With the first direct campaign kicking off in June, this looks like the smartest place for independent advertisers to be. ACME is open to new publishers as they roll out the next phase of network features. For more information on ACME, visit the website on <http://acmedigital.co.za/>.

ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

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