

Community media need 'to be wary of adspend'

Community and small commercial media need to maintain their independence, despite receiving preferential adspend from the government, Media Monitoring SA director William Bird says.



William Bird: Lines of editorial independence must not be blurred.

His comments came as the government revealed plans to dedicate 30% of its advertising budget to community and small commercial media to promote diversity in the industry. "It's a positive step in trying to make community media sustainable. We, however, need to be careful that the lines of independence won't be blurred," Bird said.

Due to their small audiences mainly in outlying areas and often with little purchasing power, community media battle to attract advertising. The State-Owned Entities Communicators Association (SOECA) and the State-Owned Enterprises Procurement Forum (SOEPF) have pledged their support for community and small commercial media as defined by the Media Development and Diversity Agency (MDDA) Act.

Parliament's portfolio committee on communications had called for a minimum of 30% government advertising to be allocated to community and small commercial media.

In 2011 the Government Communication and Information System committed to work towards this goal. The SOECA and the SOEPF said their decision to support community and small commercial media was a response to the call made by parliamentarians. "Community media is a very strategic platform for state-owned enterprises (SOEs).

"Most of our SOEs and their programmes are fairly well known by consumers of mainstream media, but the same cannot be said about the consumers of community media," said SOECA president Congress Mahlangu.

"We have a responsibility as SOE communicators not to cut off community media audiences, wittingly or unwittingly, from

the flow of information about SOEs," he said.

MDDA CEO Lumko Mtimde said: "The agency applauds the leadership of SOECA and SOEPF on giving meaning and effect to both the MDDA act and the call by Parliament's portfolio committee on communications."

Mtimde also said the move would ensure that community and small commercial media became sustainable, and continued to educate and provide information to communities.

Last year, Deputy Communications Minister Stella Ndabeni-Abrahams threatened to withdraw licences from community television stations that had adopted a commercial model.

Source: Business Day, via I-Net Bridge

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