

NPL transforms Malawi newspaper industry

 By Gregory Gondwe: @Kalipochi

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Nation Publications Limited (NPL) has made a bold move by purchasing a brand new 'Hong Hwa 'Newsfaster' Web Offset Press', a printing machine that has given room to more newspaper business innovations set to transform the newspaper industry in Malawi to stand shoulder to shoulder with the global standards.

CEO for NPL Mbumba Achutan says the 'Newsfaster' was only manufactured in January this year.

"So it's literally 'hot off the press' and our company is one of a few in this part of Africa to own and use such type of a printing press," says Achutan before adding, "Our acquisition is timely and demonstrates our will to entrench Malawian media and our own company on the world map."

With the arrival of the machine, innovations which the country used to hear about will now be experienced in Malawi.

"For our newspaper subscribers in [the cities of] Blantyre, Lilongwe and Mzuzu you will have the benefit of getting your copy to read as you drink morning coffee or tea at home through our house subscription delivery service," says Achutan. "If you have an office newspaper subscription with us, then you will find your copy waiting on your desk as you arrive in the mornings."

Rumbidzai Bere, NPL's media planner responsible for corporate graphics and advertising, says the web print machine is the best development in the history of advertising in Malawi.

"It will deliver an attractive and high quality product to readers, thus enhancing the image of the different brands that communicate through the newspapers," he said.

Global media landscape is changing

Achutan says at NPL they realised that the world is changing and the global media landscape is changing along with it.

"Our readers are world-savvy, and our advertisers' and partners' brands are fast penetrating the global market. None of us can afford to be left behind in these changing times," she explains.

She says this is why they have purchased the 'Newsfaster' Web Offset Press - to ensure that readers, subscribers, advertisers, suppliers and partners have the best platform from which to do business and interact with the world.

"With the Newsfaster you are assured of better print quality, higher production speeds, more flexibility in the layout and design of the paper, reliability, efficiency in the use of raw materials and a broader range of products that we can now produce," she explains.

Increased quality of print

Achutan says this means NPL readers and advertisers now stand to benefit from the consistency in the print quality of their newspapers and reduced production time.

"Our flexibility in colour advert positioning and added editorial content in various sections of our newspapers improves the look and feel of our newspapers, making reading a sheer pleasure for you," explains Achutan.

Initially NPL was using a Linoweb printing machine that was installed at their headquarters in Blantyre

Achutan says the old machine is manual in its operations, arranged in linear fashion; thus, using a lot of space. It also prints only eight pages per print run with four pages in black and white, and four in full colour.

"This has meant limited colour spaces in each edition being shared between advertising and editorial content," she said.

The latest acquisition has eight heavy duty units arranged in vertical towers that ensure efficient use of space and improved colour registration.

The new machines has stairs and platforms necessary for safe movement of operators around the press at all times and was manufactured from only the highest quality materials with every part of it designed for long life performance and high efficiency.

"Our Newsfaster Web Offset Press incorporates the latest technology including features like remote controlled inking and can print 16 pages per run with a capacity to print virtually every page in full colour," says Achutan.

More space for colour advertisements

"This means news pages for your reading pleasure and more space for your colour advertisements," she adds.

The latest machine has the capacity to produce 40 000 copies per hour and Achutan says this makes it easy for their clients with extra large quantity printing needs such as branded notepads and note books, flyers, leaflets, special pullouts, posters, inserts, calendars, text books and other communication materials.

"[This] will all be well taken care of and delivered to you in the shortest time possible and at competitive prices," she says.

NPL's production manager, Alfred Mtaula says the Newsfaster Web Press came with two standard manual reels and NPL has gone a mile further by investing in two brand new splicers that can load two reels at a time to ensure sustained and uncompromised print quality through continuous printing.

He said the company has invested heavily in acquiring the equipment, relocating the print hub from Blantyre to Lilongwe and training their production staff.

NPL's new print machine works off a CTP system that uses chemi-free pre-press processing system, producing up to 70 plates per hour and has automatic plate punching and bending features; which is in contrast with most CTPs in Malawi which process only up to 4 or 8 plates per hour.

"These features combined with cylinder registration pin system on the Newsfaster Web Press gives less room for human errors and produces perfect colour registration of text and graphics within the shortest time during make ready,"

Mtaula says besides the new machine, NPL also acquired a newspaper folder with an automatic counter for accurate counting and bundling.

Since the old machine was based in Blantyre, Achutan says the new machine is centrally-located in Lilongwe and, with its high print speed that offer us quick turnaround in production, they are now able to flex their production deadlines both on the advertising and editorial fronts.

"Such that we will distribute our newspapers in the four cities of Blantyre, Zomba, Lilongwe and Mzuzu by dawn," she says.

She says the newspaper will now also reach beyond the cities to other remote districts across the country much earlier than was the case in the past.

Bere says NPL has a daily run for *The Nation* ranging from 15 000 to 18 500 with variations with its two dailies and a bi-weekly published in local languages distributed for free as a corporate social responsibility.

Saturday Weekend Nation produces the highest number of copies between 25 000 and 32 000 while *Nation on Sunday* from 12 000 to 15 000 and the biweekly called *Fuko* produces 15 000 copies.

"Combined readership of these print and online products average 1.66 million readers per week," said Bere.

Readers thanked

In a special editorial titled *When only the best will do for you* published in *The Nation* on 6 November 2012, Achutan thanked the company's readers, subscribers, advertisers, suppliers and partners for being with them through what she called 'thick and thin, in good and bad times.

"As you have journeyed with us, we have grown with you. For this we are truly grateful," she said before making a pledge.

"Our promise to you still stands and our mission remains, ultimately, to make freedom of expression a reality for everyone today and tomorrow," she says referring to the newspaper's tagline 'making freedom of expression a reality'.

"We thank you our readers, Subscriber, advertiser, suppliers and partners for your dedication and support these past 20 years and we look forward to providing you with better and differentiated services as we embark together in this new and exciting chapter of NPL," she said.

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