

## Arena Holdings invests in human resources, technology, and training to elevate the quality of their digital journalism

Arena Holdings is a South African English-language print and digital publisher. Its print titles include the Sunday Times (South Africa's top-selling newspaper), Business Day, the Financial Mail, and Sowetan. Websites include TimesLIVE, SowetanLIVE and BusinessLIVE. Together, the sites have a digital audience of ~10M unique browsers per month.

### OPPORTUNITY

Arena Holdings recently moved away from creating short, viral videos to producing polished multimedia news features and investigations, and they wanted to better set up their digital workflow for the sustainable, long-term production of quality content. They saw an opportunity to invest in skilled human resources, training, and equipment so they could improve the quality, integrity, and output of video on YouTube.

### APPROACH

Arena Holdings laid the groundwork for long-term digital video success by investing in human resources, technology, and training. They were then able to experiment with new formats to uncover what might drive audience engagement.

**Define areas for growth and how to achieve them:** First up, they developed a new digital video strategy, highlighting the need for more in-depth, long-form, and quality content. To achieve this, they needed to hire new digital video specialists and purchase industry-standard filming and editing equipment.

**Training staff up for success:** As a next step, they invited external experts to run staff training sessions on creating video content for digital. They focused on AfterEffects, shooting and editing, Photoshop, and audio. Arena Holdings also ran internal training, where they had senior staff work with junior team members to review videos, give editing recommendations, and provide story and pitching feedback. In addition, the organization ran mobile journalism workshops for employees and digital reporters all across the country. This assists them in gathering quality footage when they can't shoot in the office. After the extensive and ongoing training, the team was more confident to innovate with digital video.

**Experimenting with new ways of presenting and delivering content:** The team then looked into new ways of presenting content so it would resonate with audiences. They wanted to tell more in-depth stories and explain daily news in a fun way, so they looked at ways of storytelling they had not used in the past (e.g., investigative features, explainer series). They drew inspiration from respected global news organizations and also worked with a graphic designer to help package multimedia content in different ways.

**Use data to make decisions:** Finally, Arena Holdings incorporated insights into their decision-making process. The team uses video analytics to see what audiences are responding well to, and where there might be room for improvement. They look at total views, but also watch time and engagement metrics to ensure they can measure the quality of audience engagement.

### RESULTS

Arena Holdings have seen vast improvements in their workflows, which has translated into producing higher-quality videos — they've even won a couple of awards for their digital video reporting! But perhaps most importantly, awareness of (and excitement about) multimedia across their newsrooms has also improved.

- **Nationwide, they trained 15 new reporters and digital employees**, and about half of them regularly contribute on-location video footage.
- **They have four multimedia team members** fully trained for shooting, editing, and AfterEffects.
- **While it has been challenging to balance content experimentation** with uploading regular videos, views have grown by 5%.

### LEARNINGS

**Data can help you make decisions:** Understanding audience is key in deciding what kind of content you should be producing — there's no point spending a month on a video that your audience isn't going to watch! So, lean into analytics and insights to better understand your audience and find what resonates with them, then put those findings at the center of your digital video strategy.

**Slow and steady wins the race:** Viral videos are easy to produce, but they're not always the answer to driving long-term engagement and brand loyalty. If you're used to getting lots of views with viral content, expect those numbers to drop a bit when you start moving into more in-depth and investigative reporting — you're going after different viewers, so it's just a case of growing your new audience. Stick to your strategy, produce quality content, and your audience will reward you.

**If you're repackaging content, make it YouTube friendly:** Most of Arena Holdings' content is developed for their websites, and while they don't currently do made-for-YouTube content, they work hard to repackage videos so they'll appeal to a YouTube audience. This includes tweaking formats, presentation, and length. By understanding what works on YouTube (versus a different website) they're able to increase watch time and view numbers on their YouTube channel.

“ **This project has embedded new ways of thinking around visual journalism, not only within our multimedia team, but also in our broader newsroom culture, which has helped us transform our news organization into one where top-quality content receives equal consideration across media, devices, and audiences.** ”