

Innuendo and the power of the pen

 By [Chris Brewer](#)

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Very sad that Tiso Blackstar is about to close *The Times* because it remains unprofitable.



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When it launched ten years ago I, and other media commentators, said it was doomed because it could never cover its costs (in our collective opinions) but the publishers continued irregardless and I suspect they did so more out of obstinacy as their main motive. At the time there were many titles snapping at the heels of the *Sunday Times (ST)*, which was in danger of losing its status as the widest read and circulated newspaper in the country.

So they launched the daily *Times*, which they gave away to subscribers of the *ST* – in a move they hoped would take some of the sting out of the massive increases in audiences (such as *The Sun*, for example).

Well, it seems that the bottom line continued to look grim and somebody had to pull the plug eventually.

Nevertheless, it was a fine newspaper – and a major bonus for subscribing to the *ST* because it had insightful stories and powerful commentators – and it was free every day.

I personally thought they were doing a great job – mainly through the high standards of their columnists. I shall especially miss Justice Malala every Monday morning. What with him and the other contributors it made it one of the best papers in

South Africa. It's a great pity it's closing.

It will be replaced by a new “digital-only daily” and perhaps they'll keep the banner waving and maintain the high standards? I certainly hope so – we need professional opinions like those at this time of change in the country.



Tiso Blackstar Group considers closure of *The Times* print edition

3 Nov 2017



This announcement comes at a time when, ironically, I'm writing about the power of “innuendo” and the rather low-standard story, which was published in *The Times* last week about the Van Breda case.

For me, it was a sneaky way of manipulating public opinion against Henri van Breda and, in what I believe to be, a rather nasty and vicious way.

The centre of the front page was taken up with four pictures of Van Breda – all showing his “nice” side (in an attempt to paint him as an uncaring man) and subtle sarcastic comments.

The reporter concentrated on his lack of stuttering – as if that has anything to do with the matter in hand – other than, perhaps, an attempt to show him to be a liar (his lawyer had asked for his testimony not to be televised because this “speech impediment” became more pronounced when he was under stress).

Well, the story made a big thing about this.

Then they kind of accused him of “sticking to the story” – what else did they expect?

Finally they criticised his evidence as being “paint-by-numbers”. Of course he would have repeated, almost verbatim, the statements he made to the police. Again, what did anyone think he was going to do?

Is that **all** the writer could get out of his appearance in the dock (not stuttering, sticking to his story and “painting by numbers”)? Why not do some background checking and report on what he had for breakfast? It's all silly.

But is it really “silly”?

The pen is truly powerful and this story set out to do as much damage to the man as it could – without crossing, or running foul of, legal issues.

It's all very clever and, perhaps, sinister. All reporters should remember to stay within the realms of decency.

Innuendo is very dangerous – and effective, depending on which side you're on. But it's cheap journalism.

It's the job of the reporter to **report**. You don't need an opinion (in fact, we don't want it – leave that to the columnists). Just get to the crux of the matter and tell your readers, truthfully, what's going on.

Report the facts as they are. Do not let your bias show through – as that writer did.

ABOUT CHRIS BREWER

Having joined the ad industry in London, Chris Brewer spent most of his career in media analysis and planning - but has performed just about every advertising task from Creative to Research. He's an honorary lifetime member of the Advertising Media Association and regularly advises agencies and clients regarding their media plan costs and strategies. He is also often asked to talk at industry functions. Email: chris@brewers.co.za. Twitter: [@brewersapps](https://twitter.com/brewersapps). Read his blog: www.brewersdroop.co.za

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