

Tell your audience what to think about, not what to think

 By Leigh Andrews

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Another day, another politics-fuelled headline. Here's advice to journalists on how to ensure you provide your readers with accurate coverage as the media world goes increasingly more digital, from *The Jerusalem Post's* former editor-in-chief.



Steve Linde

Steve Linde currently serves as senior features editor at *The Jerusalem Post*. He has strong local roots, having been born in Harare and raised in Durban, where he was head boy at Carmel College, but his love for Israel 'cemented forever' during a four-month *ulpan* or Hebrew learning experience at Jerusalem's Kiryat Moriah at the age of 15. He then immigrated to Israel at the age of 27, and has had a keen role in the country's media ever since.

Not your average deadline chaser, Linde's passion and 'all-hands-on-deck' enthusiasm for the industry is clear – from the fact that he received the *Rand Daily Mail* Scholarship for being an outstanding student during his bachelor's degree in journalism and media studies at Rhodes University to his 21-year career in radio broadcasting, covering everything from director to editor, reporter and news reader, before taking on the reins at *The Jerusalem Post*, where he served as editor-in-chief from 2011 until earlier this year.

As someone who has interviewed global influencers and raised *The Jerusalem Post's* international stature, he talks us through the state of media and journalism in SA vs Israel below, and shares his experience in editing the most widely read English newspaper in the only democratic country in the Middle East...

1. Give us a glimpse into your 'average' work day.

Linde: One thing about Israel is that no day is average, and nothing is predictable. Almost every day brings new, unexpected challenges and huge stories. As editor-in-chief, I had to make sure that all the big stories were being covered in the news section, and that we were as balanced as possible in our 'views' section. I also chose a topical editorial subject together with the editorial writer, unless I did it myself, and discussed what position to take. I would generally work from 10am to 10pm but really, **the job of the editor is 24/7; you always have to be available.** I was getting an average of 5,000 emails a day – I tried to answer all of them – as well as dozens of calls and visits. It's pretty intense, which is why I decided to step down after five years and do something less stressful. Now I'm enjoying my new job as features editor, which involves writing reports and editing the magazine on specific issues. I am currently writing a series on Jewish communities around the world, starting with the Jewish community of South Africa, which hosted me in August.

2. What are the specific challenges of editing the most widely read English newspaper in the only democratic country in the Middle East?

Linde: The most difficult challenge is seeking to be accurate and quick on our website, JPost.com – which is the most popular English-language news website in Israel and the Jewish world – as well as publish a balanced, fair newspaper with both good and bad news. Although a newspaper cannot avoid showcasing the terrible and tragic events happening in the Middle East, including terrorism here, the violence in Syria, Iraq, Iran and the rise of ISIS; it is also important to share with our readers all the amazing developments in the fields of hi-tech innovation, cyber security, medicine and science, agriculture and water, and most recently, the discovery of large amounts of natural gas off Israel's Mediterranean coastline. **Part of being a strong democracy is having a strong press** that is ready to report on corruption and erosion of democratic values in our society, while at the same time showcase its wonderful advances and achievements.

3. Share your personal best and worst interviews so far, and what made them so.

Linde: The highlight of my career was returning to South Africa, where I was raised, and addressing the community there about my amazing experiences as editor of *The Jerusalem Post*. My best interviews were at our last annual conference in New York on 22 May, at which I interviewed the brilliant Hollywood actor and producer, Michael Douglas, who identifies himself as "a member of the tribe," even though his wife is not Jewish, and the legendary Dr Ruth, who spoke about her love affair with Israel. When I returned to Israel, I also interviewed virtuoso violinist [Itzhak Perlman](#), who is inspiring and charming. But I also would say [Shimon Peres](#) and [Elie Wiesel](#) were two of my favourite interviews and personal heroes.

The low point of my career came at the beginning of my editorship, when I wrongly quoted Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in a public forum about something he told me off the record. Thankfully, he forgave me, and I learned my lesson!

4. An important lesson to learn! How has journalism changed the way we cover breaking news events, which seem to be on a larger scale than ever before?

Linde: Journalism is undergoing nothing short of a revolution. Our website, like others, tries to break news as soon as it happens, and together with social media, such as Twitter and Facebook, it's hard to stop the spread of good and bad news like a wildfire. Unfortunately, this often means there is no gatekeeper, no professional journalist or medium checking it out, and this can not only lead to misreporting but can do enormous harm to people. My inclination is always to take a deep breath and consider what we're reporting before just putting it out there. Once harm has been done, it is difficult to repair, so my preference is to **always investigate something thoroughly before reporting it**. Once we reported on our front page that Harry Hurwitz, a former South African and adviser to the late prime minister Menachem Begin, had died... and he called me the next morning. Luckily, he had a sense of humour, and said it was a rare privilege for him to read his own obituary.

5. Another important lesson learnt. Elaborate on current global media trends and the changing face of journalism across print, broadcast and online.

Linde: The print media are going through a crisis as more and more newspapers lay off workers or even stop their printed edition. This is sad, especially for those of us who like holding a newspaper and paging through it. The broadcast media, radio and television, are also undergoing changes, and unfortunately, serious journalism and documentaries are often replaced by reality TV and game shows. The younger generation prefers to garner news online, and the vast majority do not seem to be ready to pay for this privilege.

While I do think journalism is morphing into something completely different, and digital media's the name of the game, I still think there will always be a place for good writers and broadcasters. So I encourage young people to study journalism and the media, hoping beyond hope that they will find a place for their talents that will reward them financially as well as in other ways. I think we all need to think out of the box. For example, at the moment, I am ghostwriting an autobiography of a well-known South African immigrant to Israel named Morris Kahn. This allows me to use my interviewing and writing talents, and

enjoy doing a different kind of journalism.

6. Looking specifically at Israel and South Africa then, how does the media differ and how is it the same?

Linde: There are still strong media outlets in both countries, and there are some good newspapers, as well as a few great radio and television shows. Still, many people seem to be moving toward digital media, which is a worldwide trend. Both Israel and South Africa are thriving democracies, and yet the media increasingly take stands on issues, and supports particular political parties and agendas. I don't like this trend. When I first became editor of *The Jerusalem Post* five years ago, then-President Shimon Peres told me it was my job to **tell people what to think about, and not what to think**. I think that was very wise advice.

Although we all enjoy reading opinion pieces by good writers, and it's essential to have several credible news sources you can trust, but as time goes by, these seem to be rare in both Israel and South Africa. A newspaper, for example, is often for or against the government, and this becomes obvious in its reporting. At *The Jerusalem Post*, we have tried to be fiercely independent, and not aligned to the government or any political party or politician. I don't think newspapers or other media should endorse parties or candidates. That's not their job. During the most recent elections in South Africa, I found most of the coverage in the newspapers balanced and interesting, although some did not hide their political leanings, especially in postings on social media. I have witnessed a similar phenomenon in Israel. **If you're going to take a stand, at least be honest about it.** The media should not preach to the public, but rather seek to provide their audience or readership with as fair and balanced a picture as possible, so that they can make informed, intelligent decisions.

Wise words to take forward as the media landscape continues to evolve. Follow Linde [on Twitter](#) for further insights.

ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

Leigh Andrews AKA the #MilkshakeQueen, is former Editor-in-Chief: Marketing & Media at Bizcommunity.com, with a passion for issues of diversity, inclusion and equality, and of course, gourmet food and drinks! She can be reached on Twitter at @Leigh_Andrews.

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