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The media landscape is shrinking



Imagopress

Journalists have to contend with increasingly shorter deadlines: a report is quickly written up over lunch.

BY GABRIELLE KELLER

The Swiss media industry is in crisis. Last year several media companies downsized and announced redundancies. The main reason cited was a drop in advertising revenue.

SWITZERLAND is one of the top consumers of newspapers in Europe. But for how much longer? In recent months the media landscape has suffered a number of severe blows. Mergers between media enterprises and job shedding in the wake of restructuring measures have almost become an everyday occurrence. The "Neue Zürcher Zeitung" is aiming to shed 80 jobs, DRS TV 45 jobs, and the Zurich "Tamedia" publishing house (whose publications include the "Tages-Anzeiger", "Finanz und Wirtschaft", "Facts" and "Annabelle") 28 jobs. The situation in Francophone Switzerland is not much better. "Edipresse", the publishing house in western Switzerland which owns 87 percent of Swiss French-language media, is also downsizing and shedding 13 full-time posi-

tions. These cuts mostly affect publishing, editorial, technical and back-office staff.

Even the "Ringier" group, which among other things publishes "Blick", "Cash", "L'Illustré", "Schweizer Illustrierte" and "L'Hebdo", is cutting down. CEO Martin Werfeli has already announced redundancies in the management, editorial and administrative areas and talks of an "economic slump".

Fewer advertisements

The declining trend in advertising revenue is primarily affecting the major newspapers. At the end of last year the total advertising volume for Switzerland was 13 percent down on the previous year. With a drop of 18.9 percent, the Ticino is hardest hit, followed by French-speaking Switzerland (-16 percent) and German-speaking Switzerland (-11.4 percent). Daily newspapers with large circulation numbers have suffered most from this trend (-17.6 percent), while smaller dailies have actually registered an increase of 7.7 percent. The decline is mainly attributable to the reduced volume of job ads.

Fears of uniformity

While media are subsidised, the diversity of the press is far from assured. BaZ publisher Matthias Hagemann criticises the fact that

there are now only three regions where Zurich's publishing houses do not call the shots: north-western Switzerland, Aargau and the Grisons. Everywhere else in Switzerland Tamedia, NZZ or Ringier have a stake in local and regional newspapers. The official organ of the Swiss Association of Journalists (SAJ), "journalisten.ch", talks of the "flexibility of the journalistic backbone", referring to the fact that more and more journalists are being obliged, for economic reasons, to enter the arena of PR and tabloidism. The press council also claims that the distinction between editorial and advertising operations is gradually being blurred, and denounces the insidious trend towards market focus. Structural convergence coupled with personal and economic dependencies in the journalistic world have led to subtle forms of influencing media content.

According to Zurich-based media analyst Werner A. Meier: "Media diversity is a sign of uncompromising vitality, but I believe it is fundamentally threatened."

Translated from the German.

