

# Media24 and Nollybooks double up on romance

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*In the January/February 2011 issue of the CL we introduced our readers to a new phenomenon in the publishing world, namely romance novels for the black market, published by Sapphire Press (an initiative by Leisure Books, Kwela Books, an imprint of NB Publishers as well as the publishers of True Love, Move! and Real.) This month we introduce you to another player in the ever-expanding market, Nollybooks.*

'The launch of our romance series of books, in partnership with Nollybooks, through both Shoprite and CNA, is a first for a South African magazine media company,' says Jonathan Harris, general manager of Media24's Developing Market Division. 'It represents this division's most serious push into the book market and also the beginning of what I expect to be meaningful growth in this segment.'

With a mix of romance and chick-lit set against familiar back-grounds, the books have already attracted a lot of media attention both at home and overseas. Moky Makura, Nollybooks publisher, believes the push behind the titles comes at the right time. 'Nollybooks proved to be popular at our initial launch, but awareness levels need to grow in order to develop the brand and generate the volumes needed to keep the books affordable. With Media24 and Shoprite coming onboard, readers will see a significant difference in Nollybooks pricing and accessibility,' she says. 'It's an exciting proposition for our market and one that I hope will continue to expand the reach of books further into the African market.'

Four titles became available this winter. In **Looking for Mr Right**, a wedding dress designer gets caught up in the misadventures of cyber romancing with hilarious and heart-warming results. A down-to-earth hotel receptionist gets a chance to live out her dreams when she becomes assistant to a hot shot film director in **Lights, camera, love**, an evocative love story set in KwaZulu-Natal. For those with a penchant for glamour, **Unfashionably in love** sweeps readers into the world of high fashion and high drama from the moment the heroine sets foot into a designer boutique. **Finding Arizona** explores the provocative relationship between an aspirant journalist and a bad-boy financial whizz.

A feature style of all the titles is the equally matched characters, according to Dorah Sitole, Head of the Books Division at Media24's Developing Market Division. 'The heroes are strong, handsome, dynamic, upwardly mobile go-getters and the women are similarly ambitious, sexy, successful and assertive. More importantly, these are modern, relevant South African characters. It's important that readers can empathise with the hero and heroine and buy into the romantic dilemmas of the storyline.' She adds that relationships, especially the romantic type, are always explosive and intricate. This is the reason women gravitate towards the romance genre.

The Nollybooks series takes the reader into a fantasy world filled with intrigue, irresistible hunks, feisty women and moments that will melt her heart, whether those moments are tinged with love, heartbreak or comedy.

## Why Siphon won't read

MOKY MAKURA

Publisher, Nollybooks

I recently spoke to a group of teenagers at an orphanage in Johannesburg about entrepreneurship and reading – my two pet subjects. During the talk, I did a poll across the audience to find out who reads books. About six hands out of 50 went up. Past experience tells me, that of those six hands, probably only about half that number were telling the truth. You see, lying about reading is one of those acceptable lies people tell.

One young man whose name was Siphon, explained to me he didn't like reading because 'reading was boring'. And in that simple sentence he laid out both the problem and the solution to the conundrum of why we read so little in this country and in Africa generally.



To Sipho, reading was boring because the content he was being asked to read was not relevant, not compelling and not of interest. The same teenager enjoyed watching television – he loved soapies and going to the cinema when he could. He loved that because he enjoyed the story lines. He didn't see that books were no different – that they were just another vehicle for conveying a story. Like his soaps and movies, some were good, some were bad and some were just plain boring.

I asked Sipho what he did if he came across a soap or a movie on TV that he didn't enjoy and he said he switched to another channel. I realised that somehow, no one had told him he could do the same with books. Instead, 'they', (whoever 'they' were), for his own good, had probably tried to force him to read the boring book with the boring story and consequently helped him develop his contempt for books. No one had given him permission to 'change the channel' and look for a book that appealed to him. The reality was that there probably weren't 'other channels' for him to switch to and his negative image of books was sealed.

That day, I gave Sipho permission to stop reading books. I gave him permission to stop reading books he found boring but pleaded with him to keep looking for books that appealed to him. Just as he

spent time channel-hopping on TV for stories that attracted him, I let him know he could do the same with books. That day, I asked him to view books as vehicles of entertainment that were there to serve him, not the other way round. I told him it was his challenge and mine to continue to search for content in books that appealed to him, made him want to turn the page and made him want to read.

I remember reading books that transported me to different worlds, books that I didn't want to end and books that changed my way of thinking. I remember enjoying reading because I found things I wanted to read, not because someone told me that reading was important.

By only really having access to books in schools, typically written for educational purposes rather than for

Aimed at the young (16-24) urban mass market, Nollybooks bookazines are so much more than just books. Each title features a compelling and entertaining novel written by a South African writer. Each one contains colour book club pages which include discussion points from the novel, a mini-dictionary, word puzzles and quizzes as well as a celebrity interview. The twin pack comes at the highly affordable cost that's been described as 'twice the spice at a far better price!'



entertainment, and because he probably only read because teachers told him to, coupled with the fact that there were no books at home to encourage leisure reading, Sipho had simply given up on books. Based on his limited exposure he had wisely and correctly concluded that books were boring.

In our attempt to push the benefits of reading we have forgotten the essence of why some people read and others don't. We have side-stepped the issue of finding interesting stories that appeal to young adults in favour of politically correct content that educates rather than stimulates. Reading is not and has never been about improving grammar; helping to pass matric and securing a job. People who read do so because they enjoy it. They enjoy it for many reasons but mainly because, I believe, people love stories.

80 percent of the books printed in South Africa go straight into the education system. They are textbooks and readers developed especially to educate, not entertain. The other 20% which go in to retail as trade are aimed at the book-buying public, and in South Africa these are white middle-class women. Sadly, books have become elitist and irrelevant to the teenagers, the young adults, the Africans who make up the majority of the population of South Africa.

Once upon a time, in lands far, far away, books were written for the masses. Penguin, the British publishers, made its name by selling inexpensive literature on the streets to the masses in Britain, stories that were relevant and interesting and entertaining. The great British playwright, William Shakespeare, wrote plays with great stories that were performed for the masses. Back then it was all about the masses.

In Africa, we relied on our great oral tradition to tell our stories and pass on our past to the future generations. But that was then, and in a world where books compete with Facebook, texting, BBM, television, movies, music, computer games – reading has simply not made itself relevant enough to the mass market. Sadly, in South Africa many of the books to which young people are exposed are simply not entertaining enough for them to want to read.

So what do we do? We need to start at the basics if we want to develop this elusive reading culture. In simple economic terms we as publishers need to create demand for our content and the only way we can do that is by better understanding what the market wants, at what price they will buy and how they will consume it. There is no doubt that as Africans, we want to see ourselves reflected in the media we consume. The success of Nollywood movies in Africa and the Ekasi movies screened on e.tv proves beyond doubt that we want interesting content that mirrors our lifestyles and values. We want content that showcases our heroes and inspires, makes us laugh and makes us cry. Above all we want content that entertains – and books are merely the delivery vehicle. It took a young man from an orphanage in Johannesburg to remind me why we don't have a reading culture in South Africa. But the same young man provided the solution. The challenge is on for publishers and writers.

Let's turn that young man and the thousands, millions of young South Africans out there into readers. We know what to do.

## Meet Moky Makura

Moky Makura was born in Nigeria, educated in England and since 1998 has lived in Johannesburg, South Africa. A TV presenter/producer, writer and a successful entrepreneur in her own right, Moky holds an Honours degree in Politics, Economics and Law from Buckingham University in the UK.

With a wealth of marketing communications experience gained from over 18 years in the PR industry serving almost every aspect of specialist communications across the continent, Moky's field of expertise extends across most market sectors and industries. Moky formed her own agency – Red PR – early in 1999, with the vision of becoming the first pan-African PR network. In 2002, she sold her business to Draft FCB – then SA's largest communications agency. Three years later she left to set up as an independent consultant and pursue her media passions.

From 2001 to 2006, Moky was the African anchor presenter and field reporter for South Africa's award-winning news and actuality show, *Carte Blanche*. She has presented numerous field reports on Africa; including stories on the Nigerian film industry; Zimbabwean farmers in Kwara; people trafficking in Edo State; child soldiers in the DRC, and democracy in Zimbabwe. She has conducted interviews with Namibian President Hifikepunye Pohamba, Chinua Achebe, Femi Kuti, Danny Glover and Seal.

In 2004, Moky presented an hour long interview-format show called *African pioneers* which was syndicated to commercial stations in five African countries. In 2005, she produced and hosted

a 26-part marketing show on the South African business channel, Summit TV.

In 2006, she played a leading role in the ground-breaking and very popular MNet Pan-African drama series, *Jacob's Cross*.

In 2007, she conceptualised, co-produced and presented a lifestyle TV series for MNet called *Living it*, which focused on the lifestyles of the African continent's wealthy elite. The series has been re-run on several occasions across the DSTV bouquet.

In November 2008, Moky completed her book, **Africa's greatest entrepreneurs** (with a foreword written by Richard Branson) which tells the success stories of the top entrepreneurs on the continent. The book featured on the Exclusive Books' top 10 best-selling business books in South Africa. It was selected for the Exclusive Books Homebru promotion which showcases the best of South African writing. The book has been covered extensively in the local media and is currently in its third print.

Moky has been invited to speak on numerous occasions at various institutions on her research around Africa's greatest entrepreneurs. She is an editorial contributor to various magazines on African-related subjects and has had her editorials published in a number of South African publications including *Business Day*, *Maverick*, *O*, *Elle*, et cetera.

As part of her passion to present a positive image of Africa and showcase its heroes and achievements, she started a web site where visitors can contribute to creating a repository of positive facts about the continent. Visit the web site at: [www.africaouraf-rica.com](http://www.africaouraf-rica.com)

For further information, please contact Moky Makura at 082 561 0096.

