

Laura du Preez *Money*tizes Tiso Blackstar Group's publishing game

 By Jessica Tennant

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The *Sunday Times* recently launched *Money* - a new personal finance section which appears every weekend in the *Business Times* - which is edited by Laura du Preez, former editor of Independent Media's personal finance publications, who joined the Tiso Blackstar Group in May this year.

Money content will soon be extended to other titles including the *Sowetan*, *Business Day*, *Financial Mail*, as well as the [BusinessLive website](#) in the near future. "Many of the editors are eager to include some personal finance content," explains Du Preez. "This provides very exciting opportunities to spread what we call 'news-you-can-use' through multiple channels and to reach a much broader audience with a positive, useful message. The opportunity to diversify in this way creates new energy at a time when journalists can be forgiven for feeling demoralised about the decline of print."

Here, Du Preez shares how she feels about joining Tiso Blackstar Group at such an eventful time for the Group.



Laura du Preez



Times Media has a new name

12 Jun 2017

■ Tell us about the new section?

The aim of the new section is to educate and inform ordinary South Africans about their personal finances so that they can be empowered to make better decisions about their money. It is about making, protecting and growing your money. We also have an advocacy role and campaign for change when practices in the financial services industry do not serve the consumer.

The topics we will cover include banking, retirement, saving and investing, life assurance, medical schemes and healthcare financing, home and vehicle financing, estate planning, managing debt, financial planning, short-term insurance, investing in property and tax.

We have launched the new section in the *Business Times* but plan to also introduce a *Money* section in the *Sowetan* shortly. Our third focus will be online, and phase two will be to introduce personal finance content in other publications in the Group.

We are also talking to sponsors about some events aimed at engaging readers on their personal finances.

■ Comment on the level of responsibility your new role entails.

Writing about subjects that could affect reader's personal finances is something that demands a high degree of

responsibility. As consumer journalists, we have to put the reader's interests first and foremost above all else – even at times tempering a 'good story' because the message is not the responsible one.

You have to be alert at all times to the fact that you work in a lucrative industry which employs lots of very clever people, who, unfortunately, do not always act in consumers' best interests when designing and selling financial products.

Like most media publications, we have a role as a watchdog, in this case, of the financial services industry and its regulators, and to raise awareness among the public and policymakers of practices that need to change because they negatively affect our personal finances.

Putting the readers' interests first gives you credibility as a consumer or personal finance journalist, but in return for your trust, you owe it to your audience to do your utmost to ensure your content is accurate and relevant.

■ ***What are your plans for the section?***

We want the *Money* section to be the leading personal finance publication in the country and to provide high quality content that is also engaging and entertaining.

We want to cover the full range of personal finance topics with unique and insightful articles that readers will find invaluable.

We want similar content to live online and to provide a resource that readers will consult whenever they need to make decisions on personal financial issues.

■ ***You were with Independent Media for 20 years. How do you feel about joining Tiso Blackstar Group at such an eventful time for the Group?***

The Group is well positioned for the changes that are taking place in the media industry, as it has diversified its print offerings, includes television, has a well-functioning events division and strong digital platforms.

This is exciting for me because I have long-wanted to take personal finance beyond the long-form print articles and television talking heads and to bring it to life in a much more interactive and entertaining way.

The range of audiences also gives us an opportunity to direct content to specific audiences rather than to try to speak in one voice to readers and viewers with vastly different financial needs.

■ ***What do you love most about your career, and why the interest in personal finance in particular?***

I have the opportunity to empower people to help themselves, to be constantly learning and mentally stimulated by both academic and ethical issues, as well as to glean information that is valuable in my personal life.

I have always had a love for numbers, but chose journalism because I had too narrow a view about where a career in that field could take me.

Finding myself writing about personal financial issues brought me back to my love for numbers but with the ability to fill a social need, and as well as the opportunity to keep learning and growing.

■ ***Using jargon-free language, especially when you're an expert in the field, can be challenging. Please elaborate.***

The more you know about the financial services industry, the more you start to talk the language and to lose sight of the need to write in a way that is accessible to the reader without any knowledge of the subject.

You have to constantly remind yourself who your audience is, what terms they may be unfamiliar with, what they might misinterpret and to temper the need to impart everything you know against the need to keep the message simple.

Putting content in plain language is a key part of what we do and that involves testing the articles on the uninitiated and, if need be, refining it to ensure that the reader gets the message. Balancing this against the need to keep articles short and

engaging is a constant struggle. It is also difficult to do when your audience is very diverse, and that is what is exciting about being able to target different audiences with different content.

▣ **What's at the top of your to-do list?**

To find the right pitch of articles and mix of content that will engage readers and also entice them to read the articles they would ordinarily prefer not to read, but should read.

I believe there is a huge need for personal finance content, but the cost of getting the message out has to be funded. In a media company, that funding comes through advertising and sponsorship.

Facilitating advertisers to see the benefit of placing their messages in an editorial environment that supports and reinforces their messages, in order to ensure the sustainability of the publication, is therefore also top of the to do list.

▣ **What motivates you?**

Spreading a message that gives people the ability to improve their finances.

Finding out something that I don't know, particularly if it is complex, finding a way to simplify the information and pass it on to others in a way that can benefit them.

Contributing to making the industry more accountable so it serves consumers better.

▣ **What are you currently reading/listening to for work?**

To stay informed and to get ideas, I read and watch a wide variety of personal finance and financial services industry publications, podcasts and videos published in South Africa and in other countries. I am currently reading Malcolm Gladstone's *Outliers* and Greg Smith's *Why I left Goldman Sachs*.

▣ **Tell us something about yourself not generally known.**

I am experiencing being the sandwich generation first hand. I had children later in life – they are still school-going – and my mother now needs full-time care. It is a journey that I believe will give me greater empathy as a personal finance writer, as many South Africans find themselves in a similar situation.

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