



STATEMENT REGARDING UNFAIR CRITICISM AGAINST POST-PRODUCTION PROFESSIONALS

As is now well known, there has been sharp criticism levelled at a locally produced version of a reality television show, and in particular, the quality of the post-production. On the one hand this is good news. South African audiences exposed to world-class series and movies have increasingly high expectations of all aspects of a show from casting and locations to sound and lighting quality, and these expectations should be met. However, as the South African Guild of Editors (SAGE) we would like to focus our comments on the critical role that editors play in the process and how short cuts in the pre-production and shoot structure itself have a significant and negative impact on the final product.

Most editors work long hours in a financially unpredictable industry out of passion for their work and commitment to excellence. But increasingly we are seeing a worrying trend in which post-production teams often face insurmountable obstacles to delivering quality work. These include reduced fees, 18-hour working days, six-day working weeks and impossibly tight schedules. But it is when this demand on human resources meets inadequate technical infrastructure and pre-production planning that the process goes irretrievably awry.

The audit of any production that has come under fire is likely to expose fault-lines early in the process. Whether these include on-set technical problems, inexperienced producers or the absence of a senior technical engineer, the net result is a critical bottleneck for a post-production team. The franchising and re-versioning of international reality shows for the South African market is not new, nor is producing these shows with half the number of editors in a fraction of the original timeframe compared to their international counterparts. This latest backlash to the post-production professionals working beyond what are considered safe and healthy conditions, is an accurate reflection of a system that urgently needs re-evaluation.

What has been aired therefore, can in no way be judged as a true measure of competence and calling for editors to be fired and publicly naming them in social media posts is unfair and potentially destroys reputations and livelihoods when the real responsibility lies much further up the line. There is nothing to be gained by this and a great deal to lose not the least of which is the reputation of the South African industry as a whole.

It is disappointing that both the production company and broadcaster did not speak up for the post-professionals whose reputations were publicly defamed. All they could muster was a public apology claiming they "are working tirelessly to fix things". It is unfortunate that the statement failed to acknowledge that the issue was not with the degree of physical effort needed, but with the sanctioning of an unachievable timeframe proportionate to the number of people hired.

The reputational damage caused by decisions made beyond the post-production professional's control is part of a bigger industry picture of abusive employment and contracting practices. This recent situation only mirrors the serious problems that beset the South African film industry today.

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