

THE SUNDAY TIMES

Market

A Sunday newspaper may seem like any other broadsheet on any day of the week because it covers similar topics, but it fills a different set of needs. Classified advertising, for instance, produces better results on a Sunday when readers spend more time reading their papers. Likewise more analytical articles, horoscopes, crosswords, fashion and music columns, and an exciting children's section have enabled *The Sunday Times* to carve a niche for itself in a growing market in Sri Lanka.

The Sunday Times, designed to meet the needs of a largely urban, English-speaking readership, enjoys an estimated 40% share of the English-language Sunday readership. Its readers are both children and those over eighteen years, from double-income families and, by and large, represent the business community. They are modern, educated and have families; they have sophisticated lifestyles, and the majority reside in major towns and cities. They subscribe to the newspaper for employment opportunities, political and defence commentaries, economic reviews, sports coverage, entertainment, and arts and cultural features.

The Sri Lankan market demands a circulation of around 125,000 Sunday newspapers, which accounts for some 750,000 readers. *The Sunday Observer*, *The Sunday Island*, *The Sunday Leader* and most recently, *The Nation* and *The Weekend Standard* are new entrants aiming to compete with *The Sunday Times* for this readership on Sundays.

Achievements

The Sunday Times pull-out business sections was a first by a Sri Lankan newspaper as was its children's pull-out *The Funday Times*. It was the second newspaper in the country to launch an internet edition in 1996. And its hi-tech digital technology is so advanced that it is in a position to present news as news – adding a last-minute story from anywhere in the world, minutes before the broadsheet goes into print.

And the leading Sunday newspaper in Sri Lanka has, perhaps, won more awards than any other in recent years.

In 1994, it won the International Press Freedom Award from the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ). The award was presented to the Consultant Editor and veteran defence journalist Iqbal Athas, in recognition of his commitment to the protection of press freedom in Sri Lanka. Athas was also the first Editors' Guild Journalist of the Year in 1998.

The next year, *The Sunday Times* produced the following winners: Gemunu Wellage (Photographer of the Year), Dilshika Jayamaha (Best Photograph of the Year), M. A. Pushpa Kumara and Sajeewa Chinthaka (for reporting under special circumstances), and Kumudini Hettiarachchi (Human Interest Reporting).

The award for Foreign Report of the Year in 2000 was won by Thalif Deen. In that year, J. Weerasekera was recognised for a photograph capturing an emotional moment; and Nilika de Silva was the Young Journalist of the Year. The Best Designed Newspaper of the Year also went

to *The Sunday Times* in 2000, whilst Dilrukshi Handunnetti won an award for Young Reporter of the Year.

Iqbal Athas was amongst the achievers again in 2001 – he won the B. A. Siriwardene award for Columnist of the Year, whilst the Best Designed Newspaper of the Year was *The Sunday Times* once again. Young Reporter of the Year was won by Shelani Perera that year and the D. R. Wijewardene award for Earning the Appreciation of Peers and The Public was won by Neville de Silva. Dilrukshi Handunnetti took



the award for the Best Environment Report of the Year.

The Upali Wijewardene Feature Writer of the Year in 2002 was awarded to Kumudini Hettiarachchi, whilst the Photograph of the Year was taken by Daminda Harsha Perera. And the newspaper was once again the Best Designed Newspaper of the Year in 2002.

In 2003, the Mervyn de Silva award for Journalist of the Year was won by Kumudini Hettiarachchi, whilst Rajpal Abeynayake and Chris Kamalendran won the B. A. Siriwardene Columnist of the Year and Best Journalist of the Year (English language) awards respectively.

The award for Best Sports Journalist of the Year in 2004 went to Marlon Fernandopulle, and the Upali Wijewardene Feature Writer of the Year award was shared by Priyanwada Ranawaka and Renu Warnasuriya.

And at the Developing Asia Journalism Awards 2006, presented by the Asian Development Bank Institute, Dilshath Banu Noordeen was first runner-up in the development agencies and development category.

History

The newspaper was launched at a time of turbulence in Sri Lanka, with its very sovereignty and territorial integrity threatened by a brutal insurgency in the north and east. There was also a nascent militancy raising its ugly head in the south. On June 7th 1987, *The Sunday Times* was resurrected by Wijeya Newspapers – nine years after its demise at the hands of the then defunct Times of Ceylon.

It was a time when the fortunes of the print media were at a low ebb, with only the state-run Associated Newspapers of Ceylon (ANCL) and two independent groups – Upali Newspapers and Independent Newspapers – and one Tamil-language media house in operation.

Wijeya Newspapers Ltd, whose proprietor owned the Lake House Group until the state nationalised it in 1974, started business in 1980 with two Sinhala leisure weeklies. In 1986, it launched the *Irida Lankadeepa* as a Sinhala weekly, after acquiring the titles of several newspapers of the Times of Ceylon. The launch of an English-language Sunday newspaper took place a year later, in 1987.

When the first issue of *The Sunday Times* hit the stands, it made quite a splash. Its news stories, analyses, commentaries and feature articles dominated conversations in political circles and social gatherings – and so word-of-mouth publicity helped swell its readership. Equipped with offset printing technology, the newspaper competed with the then market leaders; and within a short time span, it was the largest-selling independent English-language weekly newspaper in Sri Lanka.

The first issue comprising three sections – an eight-page broadsheet main section, the eight-page broadsheet PLUS section and the sixteen-page *Mirror Magazine* tabloid – was rather slim in comparison to the present paper, which can run into ten sections with as many as 200 pages.



The first section in the early days carried local, foreign, business and sports news, analyses and commentaries. The PLUS section consisted of feature articles and columns by well-known journalists, while the *Mirror Magazine* – with its focus on entertainment – catered to the youth.

From the outset, the newspaper was committed to upholding the principles of freedom of information and the people's right to know. Maintaining its independent stance despite pressure from different quarters was tough, especially in the dark days of two parallel insurgencies and countless curfews.

As its circulation climbed, a new pull-out business section was added in August 1992, followed by a TV magazine in 1994. This was followed by *The Sunday Times* in 2000, *MediScene* health magazine, *ST-1*, the monthly *Kandy Times* – and in 2006, *The Sunday Times international*.

Product

What gives *The Sunday Times* an edge over its competitors is not just its news value, analyses and layout, but also its willingness to change with the times while maintaining strong principles of journalism. Its reputation is one of credibility and as a wholesome independent family newspaper.

The Sunday Times has the following sections which cater to the entire family.

News section: twenty pages of local news, investigative reports, interviews, an editorial, a political and defence column, comments, points of view and sports including world sports news.

PLUS section: sixteen pages that include features, letters to the editor, appreciations, a people's forum, travel, art, book reviews, cartoons, a crossword, fashion, people and events.

The Sunday Times international: eight pages of international news, features, fashion, art, book reviews, a reader's corner and sports.

Financial Times: special reports on financial markets, news, comments, features and analyses.

TV Times: a magazine with a weekly TV guide, entertainment news, features on the local music arena, travel tips and leisure.

Hit Ad classified: a tabloid with classified and photo-classified sections featuring property, vehicles, automobile accessories and services, computers, phone accessories, a garage sale, matrimonial announcements and leisure activities.

Mirror Magazine: a glossy magazine for young people.

Funday Times: a tabloid section for children.

ST-1: a monthly tabloid for motor enthusiasts.



Recent Developments

The *Hit Ad* classified section – printed in tabloid format and introduced recently – has been a huge success. Other recent value additions to the leading Sunday newspaper include the *MediScene* health magazine, *ST-1* motor magazine and the *Kandy Times* – an exclusive monthly section for readers in the Central Province.

In addition, *The Sunday Times* recently introduced an international section, which has become very popular among locals as well as expatriates in next to no time.

Promotion

The newspaper's first publicity campaign at rugby matches featured its female employees in T-shirts sporting a daring message, "We will reveal all!" The newspaper regularly sponsors school drama, professional theatre and musical events featuring local and international stars such as Bryan Adams, Engelbert Humperdinck and Shah Rukh Khan. And its promotional



activities have included fashion shows and seminars – the latter targeting both the state and private sectors.

The Sunday Times is also the official newspaper of CIMA and ACCA annual awards. The Country Road show has been sponsored by the newspaper for over a decade now. In 2006, it was the official newspaper of the first ever Chillies Advertising Awards.

Banners, pennants and 30-second video clippings form an integral part of its promotional tools. On Sunday, it engages in TV and radio campaigns for its *Hit Ad* classified section. The newspaper undertakes CRM activities such as fund-raising for the Wijeya Tsunami Fund, which provides medicine for tsunami survivors and scholarships for tsunami-affected children. It has also provided a library for the tsunami-affected school, Ahangama Rohana Maha Vidyalaya.

Brand Values

The Sunday Times – which has gained a reputation for bringing news and information rapidly, accurately and responsibly – has become a colourful, vital and indispensable ingredient in the lives of the reading public of Sri Lanka. It has something of interest for just about everyone.

The newspaper is also highly regarded for its print quality and layouts.

www.sundaytimes.lk

THINGS YOU DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT

THE SUNDAY TIMES

- ▶ The city edition of *The Sunday Times* goes into print at 2 a.m. on Sunday and is on the streets by 6 a.m.
- ▶ The newspaper is printed in two separate presses – one in Colombo and the other in Biyagama.
- ▶ Its senior journalists are not only very well known locally – they are internationally recognised not only in journalism but also in fields varying from conflict resolution and politics to peace studies and sociology.
- ▶ The Wijeya Group is the business successor to the former Times of Ceylon, which was liquidated by the government in 1978. Wijeya Newspapers acquired its titles, including *The Sunday Times*.
- ▶ Access to the newspaper's web edition is strictly by subscription – an issue which is hotly debated by journalists... and *The Sunday Times* is soon due to be available, free, online.