

Mediatoday's Reporter received 10% of public service TV funds in 2008

Matthew Vella

MEDIATODAY, the company that publishes MaltaToday and produces TV programme Reporter, was handed 10% of the Extended Public Service Obligation (EPSO) funds for 2008-2009.

EPSO figures tabled in parliament and passed on by the Ministry of Education to this newspaper shows that contrary to what The Sunday Times reported on 28 June, Mediatoday is not the recipient of the bulk – 68% – of public funds for broadcasting.

Where's Everybody was allocated a total of €121,294 – 14.5% of the €834,075 in EPSO funds for 2008-2009 – for the production of current affairs programme Bondiplus and the documentary Bijografiji.

Next in line was the Church's Media Centre, with €108,583 for producing 506, Il-Kelma Tal-Mulej, and Qalbinnies.

Mediatoday was allocated €88,540 from the EPSO funds for 193 editions of Reporter, which is aired five days a week.

However, as agreed in negotiations with the Public Broadcasting Services, Reporter gets no form of advertising revenue for its 10-minute programme, in which presenter Saviour Balzan interviews public personalities.

TV productions are restricted to a maximum of 12 minutes of advertising for each hour of programming. That would mean that programmes such as Bondiplus – despite getting €30,000 from EPSO funds – have enough space to generate considerable advertising revenue. When contacted, Where's Everybody director PJ Vassallo declined to enter into details about the programme's commercial arrangements.

The Ministry of Education declined to reveal which of the EPSO beneficiaries were allowed to retain advertising revenue.

Other programmes on PBS, such as Xarabank, do not get any public funds, which is why they are not included in the EPSO.

Some programmes also have agreements on whether they pay or not for their airtime on PBS.

TV programmes that receive EPSO funds are decided by the PBS board of directors after requests for proposals.

In 2007-2008, the biggest recipient of EPSO funds was Dee Media with €126,750 to produce drama series It-Tmien Nota and children's show Tini

5. Where's Everybody was allocated €113,257 to produce Bondiplus, Tikka, and X'Qala l-Bahar.

Mediatoday was allocated €88,487 for Reporter for 2008-2008.

In its unsigned report, the Sunday Times also hazarded production costs for Reporter at just €800 per week, an incorrect estimate intended to downplay the actual costs involved in airing the daily programme.

But the newspaper also omitted to mention that between 2002 and 2007, Reporter received very minimal public funds. For the 2006/7 season, Mediatoday was allocated just €11,205 in EPSO funds – just 1.8% of the total €599,100.

That year, the bulk of funds – €165,558 – went to Where's Everybody programmes Bondiplus and Misrah Kola. Next in line were Dee Media for Tini 5, which received €82,346, and the Media Centre for Il-Kelma Tal-Mulej and Qalbinnies (€65,521).

Mediatoday reply

In a letter to The Sunday Times, Mediatoday managing director Roger de Giorgio said the story appearing in the STOM did not give a complete picture of the facts of the case.

De Giorgio said the contract awarded to Mediatoday came after a call for applications, and was awarded after negotiations with PBS.

De Giorgio said the costs to produce the daily programme was a "a commercial matter to be decided between the producer and the media house chosen"; and that Mediatoday does not receive money from sponsors, to the contrary of other programmes which benefit from public service obligations funds, but which are allowed to retain advertising and sponsorships.

"The Times did not seek to list all programmes benefiting from the PSO funds... It did not list the expenses involved in the production of other programmes, or how much money in advertising they get to retain..."

"This pick-and-choose method of reporting leads me to suspect that the Times, while appearing to be intent on tarnishing our editor's credibility, is really dead set on directly targeting the commercial interests of a competitor," de Giorgio said.

The Mediatoday director added that the STOM story came at a time when Mediatoday was negotiating with PBS following a public call for programming.

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Extended Public Service Obligations Funds

2006/2007			
Production House	Programme	EPSO contribution	TOTAL
Where's Everybody	Bondiplus	€144,498	€165,558
	Misrah Kola	€21,060	
Dee Media	Tini 5	€82,346	€82,346
Media Centre	Il-Kelma tal-Mulej	€5,125	€65,521
	Qalbinnies	€60,396	
Citadel Video	Zmeraldi Teens	€29,548	€59,345
	Ghawdex Illum	€29,797	
Brainbox	Miskin Mike	€10,443	€40,371
	Hawn Fejn Qeghdin	€29,928	
26 th Frame	Muftieh	€34,449	€34,449
Mariella Pisani Bencini	Meander	€28,670	€29,116
	Encore	€446	
John Demanuele	Hawn Taht Jinsab	€12,350	€18,632
	Niltagghu Abbord	€6,282	
Four People	Passju	€18,230	€18,230
Doris Zammit	Bagghu Maltin	€17,400	€17,400
J. Zammit Cordina	Waltzing Matilda	€16,313	€16,313
Media-Coop	Storja Tinkiteb	€15,600	€15,600
Matilde Cordina	X'Gara	€13,289	€13,289
Eileen Montesin	Dejjem Tieghek Becky	€11,726	€11,726
Mediatoday	Reporter	€11,205	€11,205
TOTAL EPSO FUNDS			€599,100

2007/2008			
Production House	Programme	EPSO contribution	TOTAL
Dee Media	Tini 5	€78,015	€126,750
	It-Tmien Nota	€48,735	
Where's Everybody	Bondiplus	€30,742	€113,257
	Tikka Fuq Kollox	€79,258	
	X'Qala l-Bahar	€3,257	
Mediatoday	Reporter	€88,487	€88,487
26 th Frame	Il-Kristu tal-Kerreja	€6,701	€76,507
	Muftieh	€4,200	
	Teen&Co	€361	
	Tghannieqa	€59,470	
	X'Festa Kellna	€5,775	
Citadel Video	GhawdexIllum	€31,359	€69,883
	Malta Grajjietna	€11,322	
	Zmeraldi	€27,202	
Cynthia Sammut	Kinderklabb	€66,544	€66,544
Media Centre	Il-Kelma Tal-Mulej	€6,538	€58,655
	Qalbinnies	€52,117	
Claire Agius	Mhux ghal Kulhadd	€53,916	€53,916
Liquorish Productions	Kif	€43,549	€43,549
Mariella Pisani Bencini	Encore	€527	€43,105
	Meander	€38,898	
	Meander Short	€3,680	
Media-Coop	Project News	€13,624	€30,185
	Storja Tinkiteb	€16,561	
Eileen Montesin	Dejjem Tieghek Becky	€26,236	€26,236
Matilde Cordina	X'Gara	€25,335	€25,335
J. Zammit Cordina	Waltzing Maltilda	€18,820	€18,820
Doris Zammit	Bagghu Maltin	€11,560	€11,560
Motion Blur	Karrieri	€6,674	€6,674
Moir Delia	Pussinboots	€2,152	€2,152
TOTAL EPSO FUNDS			€861,618

2008/2009			
Production House	Programme	EPSO contribution	TOTAL
Where's Everybody	Bondiplus	€30,060	€121,294
	Bijografi	€91,234	
Media Centre	506	€46,769	€108,583
	Il-Kelma tal-Mulej	€5,863	
	Qalbinnies	€55,951	
Mediatoday	Reporter	€88,540	€88,540
Dee Media	Tini 5	€83,615	€83,615
Citadel Video	Zmeraldi	€29,598	€82,347
	Malta Grajjietna	€26,240	
	Ghawdex Illum	€26,509	
Claire Agius	Mhux Ghal Kullhadd	€81,524	€81,524
Mariella Pisani Bencini	Encore	no sum included	€55,664
	Meander	€55,664	
Cynthia Sammut	Kinderklabb	€47,359	€47,359
Audio Vision	Il-Mera	€35,069	€35,069
Eileen Montesin	KC	€33,425	€33,425
26 th Frame	Ix-Xhud Li Ma Deherx	€32,992	€32,992
Media-Coop	Project News	€26,836	€26,836
J. Zammit Cordina	Waltzing Matilda	€21,727	€21,727
Doris Zammit	Bagghu Maltin	€15,100	€15,100
TOTAL EPSO FUNDS			€834,075