In 1990, when the last definitive guide for journalists was published in the form of Kelsey Stewart’s ‘Newspaperman’s Guide to the Law’ (Durban: Butterworths 1990), Nelson Mandela had just been released and emergency regulations were still in place. There were only four television channels available in South Africa and the internet was in its infancy.

Much has changed since 1990. Emergency regulations are no longer; South Africa now has a Constitution that guarantees freedom of expression, this has impacted the law of defamation and the realms of privacy; and legislation has been introduced entitling members of the public access to information. Additionally, the internet has fundamentally changed the way we think. Citizen journalism and blogging are now matters of course. The number of television channels has mushroomed well beyond the four that were available in 1990.

With all these changes, there was clearly a need for lawyers and journalists alike to have a definitive guide to media law. No longer could this be limited to the ‘newspaperman’. Step in, Dario Milo and Pamela Stein. They have now written what is, in essence, a replacement to the ‘Newspaperman’s Guide to the Law’. This book details advances that have been made in 1990 arising from the changed political dispensation and the tremendous advances in technology. In the sphere of communications and media law, the book is everything that the title says it is - a ‘practical guide to media law’. It is well structured, well written and accessible to all - not only lawyers practising in the field.

The book not only deals extensively with the significant developments that have taken place in defamation law but also the impact of the protection of freedom of speech as contained in the Constitution, legislation dealing with access to information and the concept of hate speech. Detailed chapters outline the impact that the Constitution has had on freedom of expression and hate speech, as well as recent developments in the law of defamation. There is sufficient guidance not only for ‘newspaper journalists’ but broadcasters as well. Sufficient guidance exists in the book dealing with the practicalities of court reporting and, importantly, the protection of sources and contempt of court.

In short, the book is a must have for journalists and fledgling media lawyers and a good starting point for those well-seasoned in the field.

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