

Digital Media Europe: Extending brands digitally

LONDON, UK: As newspaper publishers launch digital initiatives and experiment with various business models, they should not underestimate the power of their brands, the importance of creating value from their customers, and they should make the audience's user experience top priority. Those were some of the key takeaways for the nearly 300 media executives from 50 countries who attended Digital Media Europe 2012 in London last week.



"You have to invest in your brands and make them resonate across all the emerging digital platforms," said Andrew Miller, CEO of Guardian Media Group. "We have to be unique, absolutely relevant and open to our audience to embrace all opportunities. ... We are not fixated on our perceived competitors, we are fixated on grabbing the ground in front of us."

The conference, organised by the World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers (WAN-IFRA), examined the core issues in digital publishing: the business trends, paid content strategies, mobile platforms, global innovation, and new products and developments for the future.

Summaries of speaker presentations can be found at http://www.wan-ifra.org/dme2012_blog

'Tired of talking about paywalls'

For sure, paid content strategies were heavily discussed and the conference offered a number of the high-profile publishers who shared their results and plans.

Kicking off the conference, Arthur Sulzberger Jr, chairman and CEO of *The New York Times*, said the company's year-old digital subscription model "provides us with incredible audience data and behaviour that will help us immensely as we go forward with our digital strategy."

A total of 454 000 people have subscribed, not including print subscribers. Sulzberger encourages publishers to experiment, constantly innovate, and take risks during this transformational time.

He said *The Times* is focusing on four specific areas for investment in the future: mobile offerings, social media, global reach, and video. "We believe that there is real growth potential in each," he said. "To build an R&D mentality is critical to what we do - knowing that we have to take risks and accepting that we might fail."

Tom Whitwell, editorial director of *Times Digital* for the *Times of London*, which launched a paid online strategy in summer 2010 that gives no access to non-subscribers, said: "I am bored sick of talking about paywalls. Instead of debating payment models we need to learn how to build digital products that people are willing to pay for."

Despite all the naysayers, the paper can now boast about 130 000 paying digital subscribers, including 60 000 people who buy the iPad edition each morning, he said.

Other highlights and advice from the conference:

- When it comes to launching tablet and mobile apps, "the experience is everything," says Greg Taylor, UX Strategy Director for Tigerspike, which developed *The Telegraph* in the UK's successful mobile and tablet apps. "I am interested in how people feel after they put that device down. And please make everything you do on these devices as simple as possible."
- All speakers stressed the need to be innovative, fearless and courageous. The RBS Group in Brazil embodies that spirit.

"It is a fantastic time to be in Brazil and it is an incredibly fantastic time to be a media company in Brazil," says Eduardo Sirotsky Melzer, chief operating officer and executive vice president of RBS, which has embarked on an aggressive digital transformation strategy that includes setting an entire separate digital business.

"Despite our supposed comfortable position in the market, we are well aware of all the changes in consumer behaviour around the world and here in Brazil. So, we are not just waiting, we are acting. We think that the digital transposition of traditional business is NOT enough for our customers nor for our overall business."

Be innovative

In this age of digital innovation, it often pays to look outside the usual media bubble, says Sam Duncan Brown, head of innovation at A&N Media in the UK, which comprises *Metro*, the *Daily Mail*, MailOnline, Northcliffe Media and more.

"We are so totally uninterested in what other media companies are doing to generate innovation and ideas for our consumer product innovation projects," he says. Instead, they constantly monitor Starbucks, Virgin Atlantic, and others. "These companies are real specialists at this."

WAN-IFRA is organising a Study Tour from 25-29 June next visiting some of the most digitally savvy media companies in London, Paris and Berlin, under the title of "Key lessons for digital growth, from the experts." For more information, go to <http://www.wan-ifra.org/node/44909>

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