

Is the print business still feasible?

 By [Rose Setshoge](#)

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One can almost declare the death of consumer magazines. Whenever editors of these are interviewed on any medium, one can always predict where the conversation will lead even though the subject has already been established: declining circulation and readership figures.

The interviewer always wants to establish, from the editors' perspective that is, if the print business is still viable or conducted out of tradition. This is the same question that keeps media buyers awake at night as their main duty is to justify their advertising spend to their limited and disloyal clients.

To maintain current advertisers and - hopefully - attract ex and "potential" advertisers, the response to this question remains conservative and rehearsed.

Online and print are rivals!

Is the debate: online will never replace print mediums, familiar? Perhaps it is not the case for the next decade and the discussion should really be around "if print media will in future have enough readers and circulation to justify advertising spend compared to other mediums, hence would it generate sustainable profits as it did previously?"

Despite the fact that online publishing is the most cost-effective and sustainable way, most traditional publishing houses need to start thinking digital and rebuild their business cases around technology if they haven't already done so. This catch-22 is totally universal, even in the education sector, there is a debate around whether technology will replace text-books, (not that text books are able to reach schools). Eventually, online media will replace print from a business perspective.

Some industry players are adjusting

Frighteningly, newspapers don't break news anymore, online channels do! The next generation might not even understand the concept of newspapers. *Business Day* is a recent perfect example of this shift, launching *BDlive*, which they label as a "significant development in the history of the newspapers since the first copy in 1985". It clearly understands that a bulk of its audience has changed and to stay in business, sustain and grow the brand it has to transform.

Technology changed the publishing industry

It is no longer one-way communication where piles of newspapers are printed to report to the masses, but interactive. Readers want to be involved via providing feedback on articles expressing their opinions, interacting with other readers, creating profiles, posting pictures, etc. They become more than readership figures but part of a community, which simultaneously works in favour of the media owner as he is able to paint a real picture of who his readers are to media buyers.

Advertising vs other income generation methods

What is currently trending is the collaboration between publishers and the private sector through sponsorship. A company would invest on a publication to penetrate an intended market in return for endless branding opportunities, naming rights, etc. depending on the contract. Then the publisher would ensure print of countless free-to-distribute copies to encourage circulation. A huge disadvantage to this though, is that the publication would be less independent as investors might want to "control" editorial. But, what the heck if they are sustaining the product?!

Recycled content contributes significantly to declining figures

Content is more than key. It is the core of every publishing business and consumers' expectations are absolutely simple and reasonable: They want something new. If publishers cannot produce and maintain this, then they risk going out of business. Consumer magazines, especially those with international branches, are perfect examples of recycled content and I would bet my savings that this impacts negatively on the figures.

ABOUT ROSE SETSHOGE

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