

"Repetition is a dirty word"

By Leigh Andrews

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Associated Media group CEO Julia Raphaely talks us through the collaborative benefit of shifting from silo structure and instead having creatives work with other creatives, as well as how they continue to innovate and shine despite market conditions on the downturn...

While the recent Audit Bureau of Circulations of South Africa's newly released circulation figures for the period April-June 2016 (ABC Q2 2016) indicate that industry figures are down across the industry, Associated Media Publishing (AMP) is fairing significantly better than its competitors in some areas. For example, the ABC figures now include digital stats. This was a big breakthrough as they've been focused on growing their overall audiences across all platforms for a while. As a result, she's very happy with the growth and engagement shown on AMP brands because: "While newsstand continues to be under pressure, we're holding our ground on that platform, and showing growth on *Cosmopolitan* and *Good Housekeeping*/*Goeie Huishouding* magazines."



Associated Magazines' September 2016 covers.

This continued growth can be attributed to their new business model, which includes the use of matte paper and the creation of thematic hubs around beauty, fashion and commercial work. This creative 'hub' transformation may result in a shift to more integrated, open premises soon. It was needed to adapt to the changing business landscape, as it creates an environment that concentrates creatives in one place: immediately surrounded by sales, production and other staff whose job is to bring briefs to the hubs and take concepts, proposals and ideas back to the various brands online and in print, as well as to advertisers.

The business benefit of creatives working creatives



Raphaely

"Collaboration across the business is absolutely central to the success of this new structure," confirms Raphaely, as the concept comes from the advertising industry, which is shying away from the 'silo' model and encouraging collaborative work structures – and it works. Creative people blossom when they are in constant contact with other creatives, and the AMP company, which has always thrived on creativity and connectedness, will benefit from the new systems and processes put in place to support these new hubs. As a result they've created a new staff structure, which is focused on creativity, innovation, cooperation and agility.

It's a strategy that works, with their target audience sending in 'love letters'. Raphaely explains this is a huge file of reader's letters and emails with their comments, including complaints and suggestions. She calls it a treasure trove of research and information because, "In their finest form, magazine brands and websites become best friends to their readers, not just sources of information. The relationship works both ways, and results in information flowing both ways. The more we learn about people who pay good money and spend valuable time with our titles, the better we can serve them. Love letters are also very encouraging for all our creatives and extremely useful to sales staff. You can't fake a love letter!"

And with such a perceptive, passionate and prescriptive audience, you almost don't need research as you're constantly in the loop on what works and what misses its mark with your audience.

Touching on how to keep things interesting when you have established brands in a constantly evolving industry, Raphaely says "'Repetition' is a dirty word at Associated. Discovery, innovation, inventiveness, fresh thinking, going where no one else would dare, match-making, and the ability to keep secrets until they hit the shelf or are unveiled online are the kind of qualities we look for in our creatives."

Why content 'atomisation' is a good thing

AMP's lead content editor for digital, Mimi Thurgood, explains that print readers are 47% Millennials at the moment, and this will increase as readership moves through their life stages and into new titles. That's why 24/7 messaging is an important part of the marketing mix and proof that magazines have shifted from their monthly production cycle.

Thurgood adds: "On the younger titles, we stay current by being platform-agile. Instagram Stories and Snapchat may seem like a waste of energy to traditional publishers because their beautifully crafted and curated content literally disappears after 24 hours, but this is counter-intuitive. While these new platforms may not have the metrics and insights other digital platforms offer, we're meeting our audience members where they're playing."



Thurgood

She calls this industry-wide trend the "atomisation" of content. Where social media channels used to be used as a funnel to lead audiences to websites, now the audience has evolved and expects content to be crafted and curated specifically for each platform. This builds the brands, keeps them top-of-mind and creates emotional resonance. But remember that digital strategy shouldn't just be aimed at Millennials, as new platforms allow for richer content than ever before – "videos, recipes you can access on your phone and searchable content are just some of the features digital offers our audiences. We also report live and join social conversations in real time, something magazines are unable to do by nature."

That's how you stay ahead of the curve. [Click here](#) for my previous interview with Raphaely on how embracing all things online can actually boost print sales and readership, and follow Associated Magazines on [Twitter](#) for more.

ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

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