

# Mainstream media platforms are communities, too...

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I was reading Chris Moerdyk's [take on South African media](#) and, while he has a point on the substance or courage issue, I'd suggest that the mainstream media could learn some valuable lessons from the much-maligned business-to-business (B2B) or trade media.

For one thing, I don't think it's a SA problem. I believe the commercial pressure is being felt internationally, as evidenced by a [tweet](#) from the incoming editor of a prominent international publication, indicating that a paywall was being planned as a revenue generator.

## Reminded of the disdain heaped upon us

This then reminded me of my years in B2B media; I was also reminded of the disdain heaped upon us 'business journalists' by our illustrious mainstream journalist colleagues, when we attended press conferences.

The fact is that the mainstream media could learn lessons from the much-maligned trade media in SA.

For instance, the trade media have been giving away their magazines for years. They understood a long time ago that their readers didn't want to spend money on subscriptions, postage or cover prices. Instead, they sold advertising space and carried content that was relevant to readers. They created advertising features, supported by advertising support.

Some mainstream media have cottoned onto this business model, and it makes commercial sense. A focused topic supported by focused advertising - the nirvana that most clients look for when placing their adspend.

## Readers respect the brand

The trade media also realised some time ago that they have a brand and that its readers respected the brand because it brought them relevant content, insights and commentary.

So what did the publishers do? They extended the offering to their readers. They realised that you couldn't make real money from subscriptions or cover prices. So they invented conferences, workshops, seminars, featuring speakers and topics that were relevant to their target market, and charged appropriately.

It's my contention that content is a means to an end. It's not the be-all-and-end-all. It's a means to building a community of people interested in a particular issue or topic. While this might seem an almost impossible task for a mainstream media

title, consider the beats in a media platform.

Readers or consumers of that media platform generally go to a particular page in the paper, magazine, newspaper first. It's their primary interest. That might be international news, community news, and sport... *There* is the start of the community and it's *here* that publishers should be focusing on adding value to their reader/viewer minds. It could be an event hosted by an expert in that topic, an exhibition of products or services related to the topic...

### **Editors spend a disproportionate amount of time**

Many editors will at this point be beating their large oak desks in frustration and wondering how to comment without flinging expletives at the author.

The fact is that many editors spend a disproportionate amount of time adding credibility to a range of event organisers' events, while missing a huge opportunity to build their own media platforms and, importantly, 'getting the cash registers ringing', keeping the publisher and management happy - and, more importantly, interacting with their readers or consumers.

I would gladly pay to attend an event initiated, hosted and run by my favourite media platform, because I trust it to provide content and insight that adds value to my life... And no - it doesn't detract from the editorial integrity of the media platform; I would be so bold as to say that it enhances it.

On a business level, it also doesn't make sense to outsource the event and surrender a large proportion of the revenue generated, does it?

### **The bottom line**

Substance, courage or commercial sense - the bottom line is that the media I consume plays an important role in my life, whether it be the 'fluffy' stuff, hard core business news or community information.

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