

AutoTrader moves to fully digital magazine, drops print

AutoTrader has announced that it is closing its print version of the magazine, after 25 years in production, and only producing a digital version.

AutoTrader CEO, George Mienie said, “The magazine was the start of our business and was the heart of the business for 15 years before the transition to digital started in 2008. At one stage, it was so popular that our printers told us we had to hold off as the magazine size was going to break the binder and there were several instances when it was late to retail shelves because it did so. However, today we live in more exciting reality. There’s no doubt that it’s time to embrace the digital age.”

The move to online only is the result of thinking and extensive research, a process that has been in operation for nearly ten years.



AutoTrader timeline

“We launched our website in 1998 but it was in 2008 that we realised our magazine had a shelf-life. The internet was developing so fast and the possibilities of what could be done online were vast.”

Tracking responses

Mienie and his team put the process in the consumers’ hands, monitoring changing consumer preference, as a guide to when it would be time to make the full digital jump.

“We had to let our customers decide, as it is their platform. We created two unique sets of telephone response numbers, one printed in the magazine and the other on our website. We then knew whether our users were responding via the magazine or the website and, through tracking it month-by-month, we could see how quickly their preference was changing.”

“In 2008 it was 95% magazine; by 2013 we hit the midway point. At the beginning of 2016, we thought we had another six months. It was only in January 2017 that the low consumer demand for the magazine no longer made it viable, and we were able to make the call.”

Having a finger on the digital versus print pulse allowed the company to transform itself in step with consumers' changing habits. As user loyalty slowly shifted to digital, the company was able to train its staff for the eventual jump.

Larger numbers

To put the power of the internet into perspective, compare the 1.4 million magazines *AutoTrader* sold in 2006 with 2016, when the website had over 50 million visits and the company sent over 3 million leads connecting serious car buyers and sellers. One magazine could host 8 -10,000 cars. Today 68,000 cars are listed at any one time on the website.

The total online package has empowered buyers and sellers in a way the magazine never could. The website today offers financing, insurance, history checks, buyer and seller validation, geographic location services and a dedicated content hub, which houses motoring news, reviews & videos from our in-house experts to help car buyers make the best purchase decision. Strategic digital partnerships have further propelled the business into digital stardom, such as the company's motoring show *#AutoCentral*, hosted on *CliffCentral.com*.

Growth of online automotive industry

Effective Measure has observed *AutoTrader's* contribution to the total growth of the online automotive industry.

“Online searches for vehicles in South Africa have experienced tremendous growth in the last few years and *AutoTrader* has been at the forefront of this growth and innovation,” said Greg Mason, Effective Measure's Sub Saharan regional lead. “From January 2015 to March 2017, *AutoTrader* experienced an 86% growth in page views and 48% growth in unique browsers to its site. This, together with the innovation and growth in its Apps, has added significantly to the growth of the website, as well as the overall online automotive sector.”



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Reaching new goals

For the company the move to digital is a new beginning, as it now feels it is able to set its sights on the ultimate goal.

“We want to offer our buyers and sellers total efficiency, empowering all of them as much as possible, as we connect them with each other in even more creative ways. The ultimate goal is to be able to conduct an entire vehicle sale online, without administrative or physical barriers. Neither the country nor we are there yet but we are a step closer. We believe that the company is leading this charge and for us, it is just a matter of time,” concludes Mienie.

For more information, click [here](#).

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