

Digital doesn't trump print... yet.

 By Leigh Andrews

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Speakers at the first day of the INMA Global Media Summit Africa were that rare mix of funny, knowledgeable and approachable. Here are some of my favourite moments from the day, all highlighting the fact that we need not panic and become 'jack-of-all-trades' publishers.

The International News Media Association (INMA) World Congress 2017 kicked off on a sunny day in Cape Town's Vineyard Hotel on Monday, 14 November. With Peter Ndoro of SABC News Prime Time as moderator for the day, Mark Challinor, president of INMA and Media Futures Ltd kicked off by explaining INMA's role as an ideas-sharing network for the media industry that brings best practice and inspires change by spotting trends in the industry of where things are moving.



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Most of the day's presentations focused on the fact that while the future of media is undeniably digital, print remains a cornerstone for many and will do so for years to come. So instead of pinpointing digital alone, publishers need to master ways to accelerate digital while preserving the best in print. Keeping things current, Challinor said: "What used to be called the USA is now Trumpland and what used to be part of Europe is now just the UK." This served as a reminder of just two of the major changes affecting the globe in the past few months, and reflected the main theme of the day: the big issues facing news media.

Ndoro provided context by stating SA is unique as we are both the best of the first world and the best of the third world. It's technically two economies, and those with the screens to access great content don't always have the data to access it.

Media's mid-life crisis

In response to this statement, Earl J Wilkinson, executive director and CEO of INMA provided a snapshot of where legacy media are today in their transformation. He said most print media companies have a hard time acting and behaving in a digital way until they realise their audiences matter.

He added that we are truly spoilt for choice at the moment, as we keep turning things on without turning things off. Just think of ad blocking, big data, integrated newsrooms, distributed content – none of this existed seven years ago, but we're expected to know it all. We want to know what the next big thing is, the next big revenue model, but no company can do it all or be the jack-of-all-trades.

Instead, Wilkinson said to match your offering with what fits in to your company's DNA and prioritise only those, as it's impossible to cover all the bases. He added that there was little growth in traditional or legacy media prior to the digital age, but that doesn't mean we need to dump print for digital. Instead, the challenge is for print to serve as the bridge to the digital future; it's media's midlife crisis. Wilkinson predicts publishers need to learn both business models, as they will exist side by side for the next decade. So find the temporary synergies and what works for your advertisers. "If they are ready to do the dance, the publisher needs to be ready to implement, fast," he explained.

Sharing the words of wisdom that have stuck with him over the years, Wilkinson said, "**No matter the business, its value is about scarcity and relevance.**" Programmatic is rising, we're now seeing it not just in digital but [also in broadcast](#), so the tectonic plates are shifting.

Meet your new audience

Digital has teased out the reality: There are still those with civic responsibility who read the hard news, but young readers in particular pick up newspapers for fun things like reviews, cartoons and more. Their mindset is that news should be free and "it will find me, especially on my smart phone." That's the challenge for journalists of today; but they'll do well by realising digital is as much a mindset of "I want it all, now" as it is anything else.

Moving onto a brief top line discussion on paywalls, Wilkinson said general news has no commercial value so people won't rush to subscribe if you simply package your formerly free content with a premium price. This strategy is bound to fail if you don't add new value.

“ Seen at [#inmafrica](#) right now. A real life demo of the relationship between print and digital. 💡💡

pic.twitter.com/WAGESbUjQZ— Adrian Ephraim (@AdrianEphraim) [November 14, 2016](#) ”

Wilkinson added that there was a massive shift in consumers' time spent on mobile between 2010 and 2013. Even existing publishers have to play in that pool as it is where the audience is looking, and the data says to go for apps over a mobile web experience, especially if you've put in the promotional money to get your audience to pay attention to them.

He ended his talk by pointing out it's the ones in the middle – not the pure digital or print – that are the most interesting; those at the high end of legacy media. With the rise of big data we need to transfer that data into knowledge and eventually wisdom about what our audiences really want. It's time to take a step back from the hype and decide if you're in the digital, journalism, media or attention business. Wilkinson says to pick the one that really creates value as that'll drive your strategy going forward. Find what works for you and go with it.

Looking further afield, Ngoro added that we need to think of ourselves as pan-Africans; we tend to be inward-looking but

need to look beyond our borders. Do you know who your audience is, where they are and how to reach them?

Sandy Naude, INMA board member and group executive of direct advertising and community newspapers at Independent Media mentioned an exciting way to do so: Making INMA Africa a stronger group.

All the presentations will be available from 2pm on 15 November on [INMA's website](#), and be sure to follow the [#INMAAfrica hashtag](#) for the latest updates.

ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

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