

Concern and confusion over the OPA and OMOA's future roles

Taryn Hood, of the Online Media Owners Association (OMOA), responds to the ongoing debate over the formation of a representative organisation for the online media industry and expresses concerns that there may be confusion as to the respective roles that the OMOA and the other newly-formed body, the Online Publishers Association (OPA) will play in the industry's future.

In response to the recent debate with regards to Media 24 and IOL's withdrawal from the ABCe and the development of the new Online Media Owner's Association I would like to clarify a couple of misinterpretations.

The Online Media Owners' Association was developed as a result of negotiations with leading industry members and SAARF at the online media council meeting held on the 26th of September 2002. Attendants included a body of representatives of interactive agencies, online media owners, online research companies, AMF, PMA, SAARF directors and Telmar.

It was concluded that a separate Online Media Owners' Association, independent of the ABCe, needed to be developed in order to govern the relationship between SAARF and other such organisations, as well as deal with broader issues related to industry research, education and promotion. As the PMA, Print Media Association, requires removal from the ABCe, whose sole focus is to ensure the correct measurement and publication of circulation figures. The ABCe's mandate is to ensure the correct publication of site-centric measurement for the advertising industry on behalf of the media owners.

The OMOA has attained support and recognition from the AMF (Advertising Media Forum), who hold strong relations with ASOM, AA, CDF and AMASA. Furthermore, the OMOA has completed the feasibility study into the online inclusion of AMI and commenced a relationship with ESOMAR.

World Online, BDFM, Ananzi, iAfrica, Johnnic Publishing, Telkom's Aardvark and Directory Services, Map Studios, 365 Digital, Replay, Career Junction, UNISA, Student Village, GAL, World Wide Worx and Internet Media have committed to attending the founders meeting on the 21st of November.

As a result of continued industry arguments Arthur Goldstuck will chair the first founders' meeting until such time as a chairperson is voted in by the founding committee at the first meeting.

The fact of the matter is that this industry could be leaps ahead of where it is now, if other industry bodies such as the Online Media Owners' Association had been encouraged years ago. It has been eight years since the internet's commercial uptake in 1994, and there is still not enough media spend online to sustain the industry (1% of total local media spend). The reasons include:

- Not giving media planners' even remotely adequate tools to plan online.
- Not enough private and institutional education.
- No information sharing amongst local and international bodies of authority.

But worst of all has been the industry's arrogance and desperation.

The proposed mission statement and objectives of the Online Media Owner's Association is to assist interactive media owners of online, email, wireless and ITV media space increase their mediums awareness and share of media spend and aims to

1. Represent the interests of the industry on behalf of its members.

2. Provide and support members of the association with information shared across members, the industry and other such organisations, locally and internationally.
3. Ensure continued and reliable research by maintaining a relationship with the South African Advertising Research Foundation, as well as identified and recognised research providers and bodies.
4. Promote the industry by publicising media effectiveness, to advertisers, agencies and the media.
5. Foster the growth and understanding of the online and interactive media industry by creating learning opportunities that add value to the building and broking of online media space.

Concerns and Confusion between the Online Publisher's Association and the OMOA

The Online Publishers Association championed by Media 24 and M-Web has caused confusion and stimulated much debate amongst local media owners.

M-Web and Media 24 both gave written support for the association more than a month ago. So much so that the founders' meeting was pushed out three times to accommodate the two Russells. However, there seems to have been a miscommunication between one of Media 24's internal employees and the two Russells who thought that they had championed the new association. Worried about not being able to attend the first meeting, IOL called Media 24 to attain a better indication of their stance. On realisation that more than 30 other online media owners were invited to join the body and an independent person had been asked to organise the first meeting, Media 24 and M-Web blatantly denied ever pledging their support.

The founders' meeting was to initially be held in the Media 24 boardroom, but after complaints were received raising concerns over impartiality, the meeting was moved to an independent location to avoid further argument.

My concerns with the association Media 24 and M-Web are gathering support for are as follows:

- 1 - Their support for other associations and bodies such as the ABCe and the OMOA will be further compromised and the resources that could be afforded by these organisations will be focused on their own association. A dispersal of resources and duplication of function will prove to be unproductive, especially within a growing and highly competitive industry.
- 2 - An association should not discriminate according to size and market share, but should encourage the participation of all practicing online media owners. Media 24 has stated that they do not want the "rats and mice" of the industry involved.
- 3 - The power of persuasion by these two organisations is extremely powerful and decisions may be enforced in their benefit and not in the benefit of the industry. Media 24, M-Web and IOL do not make up for 80% of the local online audience, as stated by the parties and media. The local audience drawn from other local and international sites such as MSN, Yahoo!, Ananzi, Webmail, Google, World Online, iAfrica and MTNice, would match if not exceed that. Remember - users don't visit one or two sites, but many various sites and the same audience can be reached through multiple channels and not just through Media 24, M-Web and IOL.

At the end of the day all the commotion over the past month has finally stimulated some initiative and it is great to see some of the larger organisations finally getting involved in sorely needed industry initiatives.

Hopefully the organisation that M-Web and Media 24 have initiated will be able to work alongside other organisations such as the OMOA and ABCe, and I'm sure that once the dust eventually settles we will find the industry working productively together to assist its positive development and growth.

At the end of the day each media owner and advertiser needs to make their own business decisions and their choice of industry involvement will depend on company objectives.

In response to the issue of ABCe

It is clear from the public statement made by Craig Farham, ABCe chairperson, that neither of the two media owners have ever made any effort to give positive suggestions, solutions or offered resource assistance. As much as there are still flaws in the ABCe system, active members are aware of this and are working on real solutions to address these issues. If Media 24, IOL, iAfrica and M-Web had been actively involved during discussions, they would have been aware of the developments within the association and assisted with the obstacles incurred with the implementation. Without resources there is very little the ABCe or any other organisation can possibly achieve.

As a result of further discussions between ABCe, Media 24 and IOL, the two media owners have agreed to have their membership temporarily suspended until such time as some of their issues have been addressed. My only concern is that without the assistance from these two media owners, it does become difficult to address some of these issues. Craig Farham, ABCe's Chairperson, wrote a very true and transparent statement to the media in his response to Media 24 and IOL's public statement to withdraw. Please take the time to read this. [\[ABCe's Media Response\]](#)

It will be interesting to see how it all pans out.

I trust this sheds light on the situation.

Kind regards,

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