

There's still a place for print

By [Angela Adamson](#), issued by [AdCheck](#)

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It's rare to see the words 'future' and 'print' in the same sentence when considering advertising's prospects. But despite the rise of digital ad channels and the forecasted decline in print ad spend, there's still a vital place for print and it shouldn't be written off just yet.

In our virtual world of new media, smartphones and social networks, consumers still want tangible products. They want to be able to walk into a store and, in the case of print media, buy their favourite magazine and then savour it in their own time...on the couch, in bed, in the bath. Digital channels will never replace that emotional connection so many people enjoy with a printed product.

That said, print is definitely competing with these new channels for ad spend - a challenge made even more difficult by the demise of so many print titles. But while the figures indicate an increase on the digital side, print is still holding its own.

In the year 2009-2010, print advertising in South Africa recorded a 7.3% year-on-year increase. The sectors that increased their print spend included food (27%), beverages (20%) and retail (16%). The only sectors that decreased their print spend year-on-year were government (-4.6%) and small display ads (-1.1%).

Digital advertising as a whole increased 23% over the same period, year-on-year. Within that, health and beauty followed by small display ads showed the largest increases in ad spend.

Yes there's a marked difference between the increases in ad spend in the two mediums, but I think the more important observation should be, how is the increase in digital affecting ad spend in print.

I think we're only now starting to see an impact on print advertising from digital's presence and even then, only in certain sectors. For example, health and beauty increased its digital spend but also increased its print spend, although the latter was a marginal increase. So despite spending more on Internet advertising, the sector didn't decrease its print spend but just recorded lower growth in this area compared to other sectors over the same period. Other sectors like food bucked the trend completely, with a higher growth on print spend in 2010 versus 2009 than on digital advertising.

So digital ad spend is very much sector specific right now. It also doesn't take into account mobi sites and as such, mobile spend, which would be needed to provide a more accurate view of the extent of digital ad spend.

This, combined with a greater understanding by advertisers of how to use digital channels more effectively for maximum impact, will no doubt push digital spend figures up in the future. But that still doesn't make it a replacement media for print.

Consider these figures in terms of reach: magazines - 49.8%; weeklies - 32.4%; dailies - 29.2% and the Internet, just under 10%, where the highest reach is in the home at 7.3%. It's clear print still dominates the market when it comes to reaching the masses.

But that speaks to the heart of the issue when it comes to advertising - who are you trying to reach? South Africa is such a diverse country. Our media landscape is not a one-size-fits-all; advertising will always have to be target market specific in order to be successful, and print effectively facilitates such niche communications.

As an emerging market, more people are now also able to purchase aspirational items they couldn't afford previously, like glossy magazines. So there's a place for print to retain a foothold in the market there. And of course through community newspapers, which still play a vital role in local communities.

Certain sectors rely heavily on print and are unlikely to entirely replace this in future. These include retail, which makes extensive use of broadsheet advertising for promotional activities. The recession brought with it a marked increase in retail promotions and as such, greater support for print. This trend will most likely continue in future with sustained support from this sector.

No matter how many new communication channels are added to the media mix, the fundamental principle of advertising - of using multiple channels to effectively reach your target market - will always remain. And there's certainly a place for print in that mix in the future.

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