

Publishers explain ABCs hits, misses



By Herman Manson: @marklives

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The Audit Bureau of Circulations (ABC) released the local print media's 2011 first quarter circulation figures [earlier this week](#) and, as usual, it makes for interesting reading. A couple of figures really jump out as worth investigating.



Men's magazines

Take the steep decline in the men's magazine market, for example. *FHM* saw its total circulation drop to 59 961 from 66 940. This continues a steep decline from 74 367 in the corresponding 2009 period. In 2005 the magazine was selling 117 365 copies per month (January to June 2005 ABC figure). *Men's Health* fell to 70 439 from 76 373. In the UK, the bottom has dropped out of the 'lads mag' market - one *FHM* helped pioneer in there and here in South Africa as well.

But publisher Jonathan Harris is promising a turnaround strategy for the title. According to Harris, as soon as his division (within Media24 - the so called 'Developing Market' division') took on the title from former publishers UCM, his team began a complete bottom-up review of the brand.

"The July 2011 issue will be the first in its new format - funnier, sexier, awesomer as we say on the cover," says Harris.

"A significant reinvestment into the brand has delivered new bleeding-edge design, carefully restructured editorial and a new flow that delivers a better read. *FHM* is the title to watch over the next year. Editorial is our best marketing, as we say in my division, and *FHM* is primed to deliver a reversal of its circulation trend based on this."

"No doubt the men's market is facing a challenging period on the newsstand," says Jason Brown, editor of *Men's Health*. "While we are slightly down year-on-year, we take a broader view and see *Men's Health's* overall performance as solid, given the downward trend in our competitive set. In fact, in the past year *Men's Health* has increased its share of the men's market."

Brown says sales of the January 2011 issue was quite disappointing - possibly because the magazine did not include its annual workout calendar package - but says Brown, "I think it can viewed within the context of what's happening in men's magazines generally."

Business and news

In the business and news category, *Entrepreneur* saw its circulation fall from 29 620 to 19 572. CEO Andrew Honey explains that a one-year business subscription of 10 000 bought by Telkom ended in August 2010. "Our true circulation [projected before launch] was always around 20 000, although we are working on getting this to 25 000," notes Honey.

Financial Mail held relatively steady at 26 115, while rival *Finweek* declined to 26 729 from 29 675.

In the celeb category, *FHM*'s former stable mate (a [reorganisation](#) at Media24 resulted in *FHM* being moved into the Developing Market division while *heat* moved to the 'weekly magazines' division) declined to 39 935 from 49 959 - continuing its decline from 54 611 in the corresponding 2009 period.

'Family interest' title *You* declined to 182 909 from 195 821 and *Huisgenoot* declined from 313 581 to 323 917. *You* editor Linda Pietersen says that while the magazine's decline is worrying, it is understandable given the current economic climate and that she is sure the tide will turn in the near future. "We are already seeing much higher sales figures for our past few issues," says Pietersen. Royal wedding mania is sure to help.

Golfing

Golf Digest fell to 13 892 from 51 621. When the ABC released its circulation figures for the second quarter of 2010 (April to June), it showed circulation jump from 19 855 to 43 937. At the time, *Golf Digest* editor Stuart McLean explained that following the closure *Golf+* magazine, which went out free to all Playmoregolf and World of Golf members, its readers were moved to *Golf Digest* and offered a subscription deal. The initial deal with former *Golf+* subscribers seems to have expired.

Other noteworthy declines included *Top Billing*, which declined to 19 548 from 30 426, and the *Gardener*, which fell to 24 980 from 29 219. On the upside, *House & Leisure* managed to grow its circulation to 41 646 from 37 636. *Tuis Home* grew to 77 924 from 68 585. *Stuff* grew to 19 728 from 15 670.

The rivalry in the travel category between *Weg/Go* (at 84 348, down from 89 161 in 2010 and 96 517 in 2009) and *Getaway* (at 60 366, up from 59 222 in 2010 and similar to the 60 036 it managed in 2009) continues, with *Weg* dropping in circulation and *Getaway* seemingly regaining its footing after a lengthy period of playing second circulation fiddle to its younger competitor.

Women's market

In the women's market, *Cosmo* continued its decline to 91 213 (from 102 138 in 2010 and 116 714 in 2009) as did *Finesse*, falling to 83 306 from 94 812 in 2010 and 104 549 in 2009. *Rooi Rose* fell to 108 790 from 115 988 while archival *Sarie* jumped to 134 939 from 114 856. *Kuier* grew to 32 287 from 15 681. *Women's Health* maintained interest after launch to grow its circulation to 72 700.

Also interesting were the ones that have fallen out since last year. *Sarie Kos vir Mans* is listed as discontinued, as is *Fit Pregnancy*. [SoccerLife 442](#) has also been discontinued by Avusa Media.

On the daily newspaper front, many dailies experienced circulation decline, including *Beeld* (83 330 from 91 772), *Die Burger* (69 932 from 75 013), the *Cape Argus* (46 904 from 56 455), the *Daily Sun* (400 699 from 484 588) and *The Star* (150 184 from 160 135). Sunday paper *Rapport* fell to 231 215 from 260 897 in 2010 and 282 260 in 2009.

PwC newspaper research

Well, [PricewaterhouseCoopers](#) did just release a research note finding that the local newspaper market fell 15.9% from R11.5 billion in 2008 to R9.7 billion in 2009.

City Press took quite a hit, seeing its circulation decline to 141 395 from 176 025 in 2010 and 181 816 in 2009. Editor Ferial Haffajee says that, during the period in question, *City Press* experienced a double whammy in that it had implemented a new circulation and distribution platform "which suffered teething trouble".

"It's hurt us," says Haffajee. "Then, we are in the middle of a [radical repositioning](#) to capture a larger chunk of the Sunday reading market, which entailed moving into a different readership. We always expected to lose some readers."

Haffajee remains convinced that *City Press* will attract the market and audience it desires to reach with its revitalised product. "My desire is to make [City Press] a Sunday read (and take it onto the social media platforms, online and mobile) that is home to South Africa's best journalism. Give us time," she says.

'Emerging market' newspapers

It was the 'emerging market' papers that bucked the negative newspaper circulation trend to grow - such as *Isolezwe*, which grew its ABC to 112 273 from 104 481. *Ilanga Langesonto* also managed growth (to 87 744 from 82 673), as did *Isolezwe ngeSonto* (to 77 999 from 71 219) and *Ilanga* (to 139 343 from 109 447). The *Mail & Guardian* also jumped to 49 654 from 47 156.

Finally, it was also good to see *Soccer Laduma* regain ground by growing its ABC back to 314 130 - up from 245 704 in 2010 and recovering ground lost that year after a circulation decline from 317 571 in 2009.

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