

Can magazines survive?

 By [Marion Scher](#)

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I started out as a freelance journalist 26 years ago working for South African magazine royalty such as *Fair Lady*, *True Love* and later *Cosmopolitan*, *Marie Claire*, *Men's Health* and others.

I was proud to have my name associated with these magazines, in particular *Men's Health*, whose circulation rose month on month, exceeding all those early expectations.

This magazine broke away from what was the norm in those days in terms of article size.

Whereas once I was briefed to write 1,800 - 2,000 word articles, I was suddenly writing 800 - 1,200 word pieces and less. *Men's Health* was slowly giving South African audiences a taste of bite-sized news and information.

Over the years, many publications successfully followed the same route and had great success - that is until the era of online reading.

Depressing

Looking at hard-copy magazine sales today is depressing and even more so when we see magazines such as *O*, *The Oprah Magazine* South Africa edition and many others over the last few years falling away. Yes, the top-selling scandal mags, *Huisgenoot*, *You* and *Drum* are still doing relatively well but I wonder for how long? That is, how long before their readers all start reading online?

Research shows that today people's reading habits tend towards clicking on links posted on social networks, reading a few sentences, looking for exciting titbits, growing restless and rushing off to the next page...

Does this type of reading habit materialise into actually stopping you reading whole articles in magazines? Or even worse a whole book? According to the experts - yes!

Apparently, people's eyes pass over words without actually taking in what they're reading. By the time they realise this they literally have to go back and read again and again.

Neuroscientists warn that we're developing digital brains with new circuits for skimming enormous amounts of information online. This way of reading is competing with traditional deep-reading circuitry developed over centuries.

Readers for life

Again (and hear I fear I sound like my granny) I remember when people would look forward with great anticipation to the 26th of the month when their favourite titles would appear on the magazine stands. There was even a thing called brand loyalty in those days, which made it really simple for the advertising industry to choose where their ad spend would go. A *Fair Lady* reader for instance was a *Fair Lady* reader for life - and these readers still exist but as they grow older and fall away will they be replaced by the next generation?

There was definitely a certain warm feeling to buying your favourite mags and looking forward to putting aside that special time, accompanied by a cup of coffee, when you'd devour the latest news, features and often gossip. The same of course for a book. So what's replaced this? Who actually clicks on article after article on one website? And I understand it if you say why would I do that, when I can go to an aggregator site and find so much variety.

So my question is: Is it just a matter of time before hard copy mags go? And as for me, well I have to admit to reading a certain amount online but I do still love buying my favourite few mags and taking time over a week or so to devour the articles. Will I still be doing this by 2020? Maybe not...

And as I've said in numerous articles over the last few years it's definitely time for those who earn their living writing solely for magazines to look at new avenues of income.

As they say 'adapt or die'...

ABOUT MARION SCHER

Marion Scher (www.mediamentors.co.za) is an award-winning journalist, lecturer, media trainer and consultant with 25 years' experience in the industry. For more of her writing, go to her Bizcommunity profile or to Twitter @marionscher.

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