

# Kate Wilson on why *Women's Health* sells

By Herman Manson: @marklives

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*Women's Health* has by far been South Africa's biggest and most successful magazine launch over the past 12 months. At the helm stands editor Kate Wilson, whose previous editorships includes *Student Life* (later *SL* magazine), *House and Leisure* and, most recently, *Marie Claire*.



Wilson moved from Associated Magazines to Touchline earlier this year to help launch what has been described as a "multi-platform brand", rather than just a magazine title. So far, she's helped beat Touchline's internal circulation projections by 35% in a tough economy.

According to Wilson, her new title is taking on *Cosmo*, *Glamour* and *Fairlady* with a series of innovative and multi-channel initiatives, including 'Women's Health Pop Up Studios', social media integration and an online yoga-school finder.

Wilson feels the SA women's magazine marketplace remains conservative, saying mainstream women's magazines "can't really afford to be too challenging or sophisticated," and that titles offers scope for improvement in nearly every aspect, ranging from the quality of journalism to the quality of art direction. *Women's Health* hopes to exceed reader expectations on all counts.

**Bizcommunity.com:** Are you where you thought your circulation figures would be when you were planning the launch of *Women's Health*?



Kate Wilson, editor of *Women's Health*.

**Kate Wilson:** We are well above our projected figures - which were conservative because of the recession and circulation trends at the time. Our second ABC figure showed 3.5% growth (where the majority of other women's title are showing decline) and is 33% higher than what was projected at the time of launch. Personally, I didn't expect to see such incremental growth so quickly as I know how tough the women's market is, but it does go to show what a strong formula and publishing strategy can do regardless of the climate.

**Biz:** How are you positioned within the larger women's magazine category and who do you view as your closest competitors?

**Wilson:** The two most critical aspects of the magazine's DNA are its foundation in service journalism and that it offers advice across all areas of a woman's life, using health and wellness as a filter, and never straying into overly-sophisticated or trend-oriented content. So while we cover many of the same of subjects as our competitors - sex, beauty, food, careers - we have certain advantages in terms of the resources, experts and research we are able to access.

We are targeting the kind of women who want a credible, authentic voice that cuts through the clutter and offers accessible advice on everything that matters to them, not just health and fitness: so we are positioned against *Cosmo*, *Glamour*, *Fairlady* - and to a lesser extent *Sarie*, *Marie Claire*, *Elle*, *Longevity* and *Shape*.

I don't see *Shape* as a primary competitor - despite the perception at the time of launch - in the same way as *Elle* and *Marie Claire* are not competitors, even though they are targeting some of the same consumers - they are special interest titles (*Marie Claire* even more so since I left) and we have been very deliberate in positioning *Women's Health* as a magazine that transcends its name and has broader content and relevance.

**Biz:** It's been described as a "multi-platform brand" that will ultimately include a website, magazine, mobile

**applications, 'bookazines', DVDs, events etc. Where do you currently stand in implementing all these projects?**

**Wilson:** The website ([www.womenshealthsa.co.za](http://www.womenshealthsa.co.za)) was launched five weeks prior to the magazine's launch, which was a strategic move on Touchline's part to do precisely this - position *Women's Health* as a brand, not simply a magazine. For this audience, it was critical to have this brand be accessible across platforms - this is a target group driven by a desire for information.

We've done several workout DVDs as covermounts, several nutrition and weight-loss booklets and have downloadable workouts available on the site too. We've developed tools for the site, like the Denim Doctor, a recipe finder, snack calculator and yoga-school finder, all driven by *WH*'s pillars and the audience's desire for information that will satisfy their individual needs.

We obviously use both Twitter ([@WomensHealthSA](https://twitter.com/WomensHealthSA)) and [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/WomensHealthSA) to leverage the brand and have just launched an online dating portal called Date Night ([www.datenight.co.za](http://www.datenight.co.za) with *Women's Health* and *Men's Health*. We are also negotiating the rights to several books with our US partners on weight-loss and fitness and plan to produce some of our own stand-alone 'annuals' in future.

Our brand extension '*Women's Health* Pop Up Studios' are nationwide events that feature yoga classes and workout sessions with specific goals - eg firming and toning (in conjunction with Nivea) that can leverage both the *WH* brand and those of our partners.

We also have plans to collaborate with *Men's Health* on fitness and fashion events that tie into our joint themes.

**Biz: Do you think the days of standalone consumer magazines titles (as opposed to a brand with a multi-platform strategy) are coming to an end?**

**Wilson:** Yes. I think magazines that don't have consolidated digital and brand-activation strategies, and the budget to support these, will become harder to sustain. There are just too many things competing for this audience's attention. Obviously something 'new' is always exciting, but if you can encourage them to engage with the brand at a number of levels, you'll have a better chance of building loyalty. The beauty of *WH* is that so much of the content lends itself to digital and other applications because it is service-based and highly participative.

**Biz: What role did Men's Health play in the launch success of Women's Health, if any?**

**Wilson:** It played a huge role. I say the brand's DNA is service and one-stop editorial authority, but in fact *Men's Health* is as key to *WH*'s success. Not only does *Men's Health* have brand equity and respect in its own right, so we benefit from the association, but it literally doubles the amount of presence *WH* has in the market. The brand recognition comes from both sides, and on newsstands as cluttered as ours that give us an incredible advantage. The two titles are constantly reinforcing each other - on newsstand, at events, online and through editorial and PR.

**Biz: How much input do you get from the team at Rodale?**

**Wilson:** They are very involved with covers, providing some of the marketing added-value such as DVDs and booklet content and some of the web tools and applications - but they don't have any day-to-day involvement with the content. I went through an induction process with them and beyond that they trust that the editors in their territories understand their markets. It's important to me that the *WH* voice be authentic and the pages demographically representative, so at the moment the split is at about 60% local and 40% syndicated Rodale content. We tend to use the Rodale content and resources for the Your Best Body section, which is core to the brand and incorporates much of the more research-based health, nutrition, fitness and weight-loss content (giving us an authoritative, international edge). The more inspirational lifestyle-related content is all produced locally.

**Biz: Does the local positioning differ from your international counterparts in any way?**

**Wilson:** *Women's Health US* underwent a repositioning process two years ago, whereby they shifted the brand away from its special interest health and fitness roots, to become a much more general interest woman's title. We launched *WH SA* literally months after they unveiled this new positioning and adopted it straight off, but in some of the other territories the previous special-interest positioning has been retained to a greater extent.

In Brazil and Australia, for instance, the covers still feature black and white images of models in fitness gear and swimwear (similar to *Shape*) rather than full-colour and celebrities. I am not sure that *WH* would have done as well locally had we gone with this positioning, but I certainly would not have been the editor to do it!

**Biz:** *Tell me more about your readership.*

**Wilson:** The *WH* reader is typically between 25 and 35 and is someone who sees being healthy as a key part of having a happy, balanced life. Looking good is important to her - which means that content that informs her about fashion and beauty, for instance, is as important as nutrition and fitness advice. She is looking for a voice that is authoritative and credible and a magazine that will help her make the best possible choices, as well as affirming her beliefs. The *WH* reader is neither highly sophisticated nor slavishly trendy, she's not interested in gossip or self-help - she is motivated by tangible results and responds to a magazine that can deliver on this.

We are not measured by AMPS, but we have extrapolated some readership statistics based on an online survey conducted soon after we launched.

The percentages were:

- 61% are between 25 -35
- 72% have a tertiary education
- 80% work full-time
- 49% hold a managerial/owner position

Our projected black readership is at 52%, based on various online and Facebook surveys.

**Biz:** *Content wise, what can readers expect from any given issue of Women's Health? Sex and health seems to dominate your cover lines.*

**Wilson:** Our pillars are health; fitness; weight-loss and nutrition; sex and relationships; fashion and beauty; career and finance. A story in every one of these areas will appear on the cover, with key lines focused on health, fitness and weight-loss as the core of the brand (the Your Best Body section mentioned above).

Having said that, some months we may focus more on some pillars than on others (while always retaining the core focus) - we just did a Denim Special for instance, with an extra 34 pages of fashion and beauty than usual, while our Nutrition Issue in October 2010 focused more on food and weight-loss.

What readers can expect every month are practical solutions, serious advice, some inspirational stories and a creative package that is fresh, contemporary and reflects their optimism and energy.

**Biz:** *How do you view the current state of women's magazines in this country? Are they interesting/innovative enough for modern readers?*

**Wilson:** I think the SA market is very conservative, so women's magazines can't really afford to be too challenging or sophisticated - unfortunately - unless you are happy to settle for a very small niche. At the same time I do think that standards could be higher in terms of journalism and art direction - even the editing could handle a bit of attention.

I think there is probably enough innovation for the women's market in SA to handle, but I'm not sure there is the attention to

detail that readers deserve. As a passionate reader of magazines I find that frustrating. The industry will deliver what readers will settle for and sometimes I wish they wouldn't settle for so little.

***Biz: Has the market environment been tougher than you expected?***

**Wilson:** Not on *Women's Health*. Health and wellness reflect the zeitgeist and the magazine has tapped neatly into a need that existed, but which was not being satisfied either by traditional women's titles or by the special interest health magazines.

I'm a believer in not compartmentalising female readers (why shouldn't they get a little bit of *everything* they love in one magazine if it's really well done?), but it is important to deliver content in a way that is unique and original and to have a publishing strategy that supports the brand's USP.

The fact that the US had achieved such enormous success through their repositioning was an indication that this brand's identity was very "of the moment" and could be translated.

***Biz: How does the company culture differ between Touchline and Associated?***

**Wilson:** Associated is a family business that has built itself on editorial excellence and some powerful women - it was a great privilege to work there for seven years. Working for an independent is rewarding, but tricky - you have to compete without some of the advantages other stables have, learn to shout louder and work smarter - but acquiring those skills was invaluable to me, especially going on to work at male-dominated Touchline! It is a totally different culture - it's essentially men's magazines, which is where I worked in London, so it reminds me of that.

***Biz: Have online reading habits influenced how you present content in print at all?***

**Wilson:** *Women's Health* uses a lot of the principles of online publishing, in the sense that it's a mix of easily digestible snippets and longer reads, but also that the content is focused on promoting tangible results and making the audience's lives better and easier. Much like technology and in the Internet is able to do.

The brand's creative identity - which is discernibly modern and information-driven - is also informed by digital trends and lends itself to that platform in return.

We consider the online offering in whatever we are producing for the magazine and vice versa. So, readers are actually able to influence the content to a certain degree and we are able to hone the product to better service their needs.

**For more:**

- Women's Health: [www.womenshealthsa.co.za](http://www.womenshealthsa.co.za)
- Bizcommunity press office: <https://www.bizcommunity.com/Pressoffice/WomensHealth>
- Twitter: [@WomensHealthSA](https://twitter.com/WomensHealthSA)
- Twitter: [@KateWilsonWH](https://twitter.com/KateWilsonWH)
- Facebook: [www.facebook.com/pages/Womens-Health-South-Africa/97164783333](https://www.facebook.com/pages/Womens-Health-South-Africa/97164783333)
- Men's Health: [www.mh.co.za](http://www.mh.co.za)
- Date Night: [www.datenight.co.za](http://www.datenight.co.za)

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The inaugural Vodacom Social Media Journalist of the Year in 2011, Herman Manson (@marklives) is a business journalist and media commentator who edits industry news site [www.marklives.com](http://www.marklives.com). His writing has appeared in newspapers and magazines locally and abroad, including Bizcommunity.com. He also co-founded *Brand* magazine.

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