


Trends to watch in online publishing

 By [Marcus Stephens](#)

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Publishers face the challenges of becoming a true partner with their key clients; learning to segment and package audiences for marketers; and quantifying the impact their offerings have on advertisers' brands.

There is no doubt that digital has proven its value as a marketing and advertising channel. Now, we can expect to see South African publishers shift their emphasis from building audiences and advertising market share towards becoming serious about monetisation of their online properties.

As they do so, one of the biggest questions they must ask themselves is how they can sell their aggregated audiences into marketing organisations in a manner that delivers the best returns for their advertisers and the best revenue for their businesses.

This is the single biggest trend behind all the other trends we're expecting to drive the South African online publishing market in the months ahead.

Here are a few things to watch out for:

Defining premium digital inventory

Quantifying media impact, pricing and access is far more complicated than it was just two or three years ago. We have seen the rise of new forms of Internet advertising that deliver richer engagements - for example, rich media - creating a wealth of new opportunities for advertisers and publishers.

We have also seen the introduction of ad networks, agency desks and demand-side platform (DSPs) change the ways that we calculate the cost and value of advertising. As a result, premium publishers have more flexibility to vary the yield on inventory previously earmarked for either premium or remnant inventory.

For digital publishers striving to drive profitability, the next year or so will all be about the challenges of defining price, protecting data and audiences, and demonstrating their value proposition to advertisers. It's all about quality of audience and engagement rather than pure reach.

Content matters more than ever

Truly successful digital marketers are those that maximise their use of all digital marketing channels, with content marketing

leading the way. Content marketing is all about using the content one generates to the fullest to provide the customer with an experience and to tell a compelling story.

Customers are more discerning and savvy than ever before, and they have often made their buying decisions long before purchase. Content marketing is about influencing that decision, either by reinforcing their choice of brand or swaying them to an alternative.

Brands must invest in providing followers and fans with information that extends their stories - content that is practical and that adds value in the context of the user's life. Those that get this right become a part of their customers' daily lives and benefit from positive brand association and exposure.

Natural user experiences

Publishers are under pressure to show that they are useful and relevant in a market where apps and social networks make it easier than for users and brands to share information with each other. Audiences will gravitate to connections that are simple, easy and natural.

Mobility, especially, matters. Higher mobile broadband speeds, lower rates and ease of access are changing, the demographic of the user base is shifting significantly, once again creating space for new content and business models.

Not only are smartphones enjoying massive growth, but we expect two million or more tablets to be active in South Africa by the end of 2013. Audience owners must spend more time on their audiences' experiences on these devices - so mobile apps and services at should be at the top of the industry's priority list.

ABOUT MARCUS STEPHENS

Marcus Stephens is general manager at Howzit MSN As general manager of Howzit MSN - a division of Kagiso Media - he oversees the strategic growth and day-to-day running of one of South Africa's largest Web portals. Stephens has more than 18 years of experience in advertising and publishing across new and traditional media.
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