

The ABC murders

A rose by any other name would smell as sweet, as Shakespeare used to say in the days before he became famous and didn't have to work so hard to pick up girls in taverns. But a magazine by any other name smells bad, mainly because it's difficult to sell advertising if you haven't got an independently audited circulation figure from the Audit Bureau of Circulations, or ABC.

 By [Chris Roper](#) 3 Jun 2009



So if you're not allowed to call yourself a magazine, you don't get audited. And if you don't get audited and have an official circulation, it's tricky to sell ads in a magazine. You don't sell ads, you go bust.

And this is what's got me riled. The ABC won't allow the producers of international award-winning [MK Bruce Lee](#), a newish publication that's put out under the MK television brand, and one that you can purchase at Musica stores, to have its circulation audited.

According to ABC, *MK Bruce Lee* isn't a magazine. I quote from the ABC's email to the business director The President, the dementedly creative agency that produces *MK Bruce Lee*.

"At today's Board meeting, the Board rejected your application for membership of the ABC on the basis that it was not considered to be a magazine."

A Catch22

Naturally, the *MK Bruce Lee* producers (or editors, as they're called in old media) responded, asking why their product didn't qualify. Herewith the reasons:

"The definition of magazines in the Rules (available on our website www.abc.org.za) (Rule 3.49) is as follows: 'A publication that must be published at regular intervals, and must be distributed or sold independently of other publications, and registered as a magazine'. A publication is defined as (Rule 3.61) 'Either a magazine or newspaper in printed format'."

Fans of Catch22 will laugh at the paradox implicit in this definition. According to the rule, you qualify to be a magazine if you're registered as a magazine. Since you have to be a magazine to register, it's a circular craziness.

Looking at the rules, it seems that *MK Bruce Lee* fits all these requirements. The problem appears to be that it also exceeds these requirements. The format changes each issue, but basically the cover is a box, and

the text is on various paper media - in the case of the current issue, on sweet wrappers enclosing actual candy.

And sure, *MK Bruce Lee* also includes things like stickers, Internet gaming presence, condoms, small badges, and tiny plastic parabats with parachutes that look really cool when you toss them over the balcony at 24.com.

Convenient backings

But have you noticed that magazines nowadays are basically convenient backings for shrinkwrapped free gunk anyway? I think they call them cover mounts, and they range from handbags to deodorant to flip-flops: look forward to the day - and it can't be far off - when every issue of *Car Today* comes wrapped around a free Chrysler.

Now ordinarily, I wouldn't really care about this. Hey, if you people want to make clubs out of pulped wood and beat each other around the head, go for it. But I happen to believe in a future for print products, although possibly in the same way that fans of Terminator believe in a future.

But in a world where magazines are dying out, and terrible monsters like Googlezilla, The Creature from Silicon Valley, and those horrible deadly vegetables from Day of the Twitters roam free, shouldn't we be trying something new?

And especially if you're competing with the Internet for the eyeballs of young people. So to cripple a magazine that's spot on for getting new young readers into the print market, seems at best counterintuitive. And at worst, blindingly stupid.

Utopian dream

There has to come a time when venerable (yes, from the same Latin root as venal and venereal) institutions like the ABC, the various magazine and newspaper awards, and the magazines themselves, recognise the convergence isn't just something that happens to bad people.

Websites and mobile should count as part of a brand's overall circulation, even if that brand is Cosmopolitan. Cleverly crafted media like *MK Bruce Lee* must be allowed to call themselves magazines, or at the very least be allowed to let the market, their readers, decide if they're magazines or not.

Oh, I know. It's an utopian dream. As one [@elanlohm](#) tweeted on my Twitter stream ([@ChrisRoperZA](#)) this morning, "print and journalism are 2 different religions bro. Some convert but like judaism it's few." Leaving aside the interesting and inadvertent conflation of Internet with journalism, it's a strange statement.

Do we really want to apply a Middle East theory of media to the issue of print vs web? Let the stronger religion win? We all know where that ends up. I hate to sound like the bastard Bill-child of Clinton and Gate but we need to reconcile web with print, welcome new forms of media like *MK Bruce Lee*, and evolve into something greater.

- Watch a [video of what MK Bruce Lee looks like](#).

- Originally published on www.news24.com on Tuesday, 3 June 2009. Republished courtesy of New24.com and ChrisRoper.co.za.

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