

# The prophets of print profit

 By [Terry Levin](#)

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Although the World Print Congress concluded Wednesday to allow for visits to print and pack plants in the Cape, the issues and ideas raised will continue to be relevant, not only to printers and their suppliers, but also to business players, marketers and publishers, till WPC9 takes place, in Santiago Chile, four years from now in 2007: 21-26 October 2007

[www.wpc9.com](http://www.wpc9.com).

What makes the issues raised so critical, is that the written word, whether communicated via printed or electronic media is so powerful. This is why, during Renaissance times (only 500 years ago), a book was worth more than a farm in value! Knowledge (i.e. what was contained in the book) was power and one would hope that the keyboard could still be mightier than the sword.

From the above we can see, that the value of print is not about making an impression on paper, it is in the content. In purely business terms, therefore, the more interesting, engaging and captivating your content, the higher the value. In a humdrum world of fierce cost cutting and competition the only thing that people will pay for is added value.

The Hon. Jeremy Deedes, Vice Chairman of the UK Telegraph Group Ltd, alluded to this yesterday, when he commented that the value of receiving one's information via a newspaper, as opposed to any other medium, is obviously in the calibre of writing, together with the design and layout of the paper. Of course the Renaissance nobility knew this as well - the added value of a book was how its exquisite illustrations and layout enhanced it's messages. As the Hon. Mr Deedes put it - in newspaper terms today, "choosing a good art director is as important as choosing a good editor". Viva Art Directors!

So it would be fair to say, that to make an impact in any medium, in our current climate of info overload and barely discernible differentiation amongst most product and service categories, attention to both visual and verbal content is vital. If we, and our clients are to succeed in business, if our country is to thrive, then from the point of view of printed matter, OK is just not OK any more.

In the future, if our content is not of a sufficiently high standard, says Thomaz Souto Correa, also a bit of a newspaper magnate from Brazil, then people will be doing it for themselves. Correa calls the phenomenon 'Mygazines'! whereby people can print out only the articles relevant to them from the electronic media. He predicts a convergence of the printed and net-based magazine titles whereby consumers may order the articles relevant to them on-line or in variations of this concept.

"We are going to need clear minds," says Correa, "to think out all the possible business models if print is to stay interesting and indispensable to future generations ...it is a very attractive challenge to remain intelligent, delightful and interesting, no matter what the medium."

Print wonderful print - over the years it has built some of our brands into global empires by being lasting, timeless, intrusive, transportable, demonstrative and tactile. As a line from the Sappi corporate brochure puts it so eloquently: "how can something that does not move be so moving?"

I mentioned on the first day of WPC8, how impressed I was that, exhibitors aside, the Chinese government had sent 100 delegates to attend this conference. Let me repeat that, the fastest growing economy on the world, have legislated to prioritise print, recognising it as a fast flowing revenue stream and to this end, sent their 100 delegates to learn about the latest in global print trends and ideas.

One has to ask, why, apart from the Western Cape Premier Ebrahim Rassool, who opened the conference so sincerely, and left, are none of our government departments represented? Where were the Departments of Communication, Trade and Industry, local publishers? Maybe they were there, but were keeping a low profile or maybe they did not deem a visit to an event like this worthwhile? Maybe they weren't invited. Maybe they don't know that a book can be worth more than a farm...

On a positive note, in summing up, global strategist and consultant, Dennis E. Mason thanked all the sponsors and organisers as is customary and, with tears in his eyes, described how Sappi, in organising the black tie do last Monday evening, had arranged for there to be a full moon over Table Bay. "I fail," he said in his broad American accent, "to see how one could not be honoured by the beauty of this place."

See you next in Santiago?!

## ABOUT TERRY LEVIN

Brand and Culture Strategy consulting | Bizcommunity.com COO at large. Email [terry@offtheshelf.co.za](mailto:terry@offtheshelf.co.za), Twitter [@terrylevin](https://twitter.com/terrylevin), Instagram, LinkedIn.

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