

World Digital Publishing Conference kicks off in Amsterdam

AMSTERDAM: Despite impressive gains in audience and advertisers, newspaper websites do not produce revenue comparable to that of print newspapers. Transferring the core values of newspapers to the new ways of the web is the way to change that, said Caroline Little, who advises both *The Washington Post* and *The Guardian* on their Internet strategies, at the World Digital Publishing Conference in Amsterdam today, Wednesday, 15 October 2008.

“With these tremendous audiences and reach, the revenues digital newspapers have enjoyed remain a small fraction of their print counterparts,” said Little. “For example, the *New York Times* and *The Washington Post* are at the top of the heap in terms of their percentage of online revenue as part of overall revenue. In both cases it’s below 20%. It’s not nearly enough.”

Little, the former CEO and publisher of *Washington Post/Newsweek Interactive* and a special advisor for *Guardian News & Media’s* expansion in the US, said there was no ready-made solution for revenue growth. But she believes “a relatively simple core philosophy” will succeed.

“Keep one foot rooted in the core journalism values of the core product, and one that happens to be delivering the most revenue, and with the other, stretch as far as possible to try new things in this new medium,” she said in her keynote address to the conference, organised by the World Association of Newspapers (WAN).

“The news websites share the same journalistic values as the newspapers, but the web folks also are working in a medium that’s indisputably different, one that requires trying new things and sometimes going down in flames,” she said. “Fear of failure can be debilitating. All we have to lose by being too conservative is everything.”

Little cited four areas for successful digital growth:

1. Multimedia storytelling. “For a newspaper, storytelling options have long been limited to text, photography and graphics. The rise of the web has added a number of new tools to this equation: video, audio, photo galleries, panoramic photos, blogs, etc,” Little said. “Now, we can approach a story with a different mindset, one that says, ‘What’s the best way to tell this story?’”
2. Database journalism. “One often hears about the web’s ‘endless news hole’. The endless news hole, of course, is largely a myth. You can only publish as much good journalism as you can produce, and that takes skilled reporters and editors. And most papers have fewer reporters and editors than it did a few years ago. But what that endless storage space is perfect for is databases that can be useful to your readers. *Washingtonpost.com* has been very active

in this area. For example, congressional voting database going back to 1991 and a searchable list of US war dead in Iraq and Afghanistan.”

3. Reader engagement. “Here are a few things you need to know about your readers: some of them act like jerks, many of them won't like the journalism you produce, and the angrier ones tend to be more active. But the upside is huge. When given a chance to participate in the conversation, readers come back. A lot.”
4. Distribution. “In this new world of media fragmentation, media companies cannot control the format in which readers consume our journalism. That's scary, but also a huge opportunity. We now have the chance to get our journalism in front of readers while they're driving via audio podcast or radio, while they're watching their televisions via set-top boxes or video podcasts, or while they're standing on a street corner looking for a restaurant via cell phone or iPod. And we can push our journalism to them via RSS, email newsletters and widgets. We can no longer apply the ‘Field of Dreams’ mantra build and it they will come to our web sites. We need to be putting our content where the people are, on sites like Facebook, YouTube, Flickr, etc.”

The annual World Digital Publishing Conference, which continues through Thursday 16 October, has brought hundreds of publishers, editors, business development and other senior newspaper executives to Amsterdam to examine revenue-making strategies, winning editorial solutions and resource management.

Summaries of conference presentations and other information can be found at www.wan-press.org/digital2008/home.php.

The Paris-based WAN (www.wan-press.org, the global organisation for the newspaper industry, defends and promotes press freedom and the professional and business interests of newspapers world-wide. Representing 18 000 newspapers, its membership includes 77 national newspaper associations, newspaper companies and individual newspaper executives in 102 countries, 12 news agencies and 11 regional and world-wide press groups.

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>