

Don't confuse aggregation and plagiarism

 By [Chris Moerdyk](#)

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There has been a lot written in the past few weeks about the challenges posed to the online publishing community by the litigation between Moneyweb and Fin24, and a not unsubstantial amount of this opinion has been a mix of journalistic petulance and hysteria.

All of which has been caused by using the words "aggregation" and "plagiarism" in the same sentence as though they are one and the same thing.

They are not.

The great irony of this debate is that some of those online publishers who were most vocal actually have the habit of getting on the aggregation bandwagon themselves whenever they can.

The way that I see it, plagiarism is when a journalist or medium copies something from another medium and uses it as their own without any reference to the originator.

That is theft. Stealing.

Aggregation is something entirely different. This is when an online publisher gathers together news and information from a multitude of sources then publishes only a paragraph or two, making the source or origin abundantly clear and then providing a link to the originator's website or online publication.

A perfect example of this is an app called ZITE.

What happens here is that ZITE subscribers list their interests by topic and relevant articles, news stories and opinion pieces are aggregated into a package and updated every few hours.

See them on ZITE

Every item on ZITE is presented as only a headline and paragraph or two with the originator, author or publication well marked. When you click anywhere on an item you are taken directly to the originator's website.

Ironically, all of those who have complained the loudest about aggregation can be found featured on ZITE on an almost daily basis.

Hopefully, the assumption could be that they wanted to actually complain about plagiarism - and quite rightly so - but just used the word aggregation in the heat of the moment.

The most important consideration in this debate is that aggregation is market driven. It is not about online publications simply being lazy and not wanting to have their own editorial staff.

The popularity of aggregation apps such as ZITE, FlipBoard and Stumble, to name but a few, is testimony to the fact that consumers today - both B2B and B2C - simply do not have the time or the inclination to spend hours wading through dozens of different websites and online publications to keep themselves informed.

By posting their preferences on aggregation sites, they can be continually updated and informed within minutes.

It's a win-win situation

Here in South Africa, the fact that Africa's biggest B2B online operator, Bizcommunity.com has nearly 400,000 subscribers to its weekly or daily newsletters is testament to the fact that aggregation is consumer driven.

In fact, aggregation is a win-win situation for all concerned. The consumer gets information quickly and neatly and the individual online publications get the opportunity to generate a lot more traffic to their sites completely free of charge.

In fact, most of South Africa's online publications actually request apps such as ZITE to make use of their content.

And the reason why aggregators very rarely find an online publication objecting is simply because any online publisher with half a brain very quickly realises that the process of aggregation is just plain and simple free publicity.

However, most serious aggregators have the courtesy to request permission from online publications. In my experience I have never heard of any of them saying no.

Plagiarism on the other hand, is something entirely different. It is stealing and needs to be eradicated.

ABOUT CHRIS MOERDYK

Apart from being a corporate marketing analyst, advisor and media commentator, Chris Moerdyk is a former chairman of Bizcommunity. He was head of strategic planning and public affairs for BMW South Africa and spent 16 years in the creative and client service departments of ad agencies, ending up as resident director of Lindsay Smithers-FCB in KwaZulu-Natal. Email Chris on moerdyk@gmail.com and follow him on Twitter at @chrismoerdyk.

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