

Tight times for SA magazines

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South African magazines have begun to feel the heat as circulations dip and advertising and growth stagnate, forcing some to start digging their own graves.

The latest Audit Bureau of Circulations (ABC) figures, released last week Friday, 21 February 2008, in Cape Town, is a stark warning to magazine publishers that they must go back to the drawing board and rethink their tactics if they are to stay ahead of the game and stop their respective titles from bleeding to an untimely death.

While Media24 appears to have suffered the most in this dry season – six of its 63 titles have so far been buried – Caxton has finally come out of the closet and revealed that things are not rosy at its stable as they used to be.

Even though Caxton said it will not close any of its 12 magazine titles, the company said it was concerned about its magazines' profitability as advertising revenues were not growing, according to *Business Report*.

"The result is that circulation is not growing, and in fact many circulations are falling. The recent reduction in the value of the SA currency will mean that printing costs will be increased, with a knock on effect on the shelf price of magazines, thereby placing a bigger burden on the consumer," *Business Report* quoted Caxton as saying.

Highest number of titles

According to ABC statistics, there are 474 magazines currently publishing in SA – all affiliated to the audit body, with the consumer section boasting the high number of titles (180), followed by B2B (166), custom (78) and free magazines (50).

While the ABC noted that an increased focus and promotion of digital editions by B2B titles has helped several magazines make significant circulation gains, it also said consumer titles have suffered the most in the last quarter of 2007, mostly due to the tightening economy, increased competition, the Media24 circulation scandal and the industry reaction to the ABC focus on transparency.

In such difficult times, the temptation to use unconventional means to 'fool some people' in order to gain an unfair advantage over its competitors is great, but they do it at their own risk, because credibility is a magic world that is not sold anywhere in this world.

Donald D Kummerfeld, president and CEO of FIPP (Federation Internationale de la Presse Periodique), suggests that magazine publishers start building out what he called the '360 degree media capacity' – the ability to create and deliver

attractive content on any and all media platforms, new or old.

Stay ahead of the curve

This means to prepare to do everything media-wise with the aim of 'staying ahead of the curve'.

Apart from the biggest US magazine publishing companies such as Time Warner, Hearst, Conde Nast and Meredith, it appears that several European magazine publishing companies are also headed in the same direction, Kummerfeld said.

"Of course, this is only possible for the big well-financed companies who can acquire and integrate whatever media capacity they currently lack.

"For the great majority of smaller magazine publishers who cannot afford to buy multimedia editorial and production capacity, the challenge is to partner with other media or to learn how to do other media like video, mobile and search themselves.

"It is not rocket science! As Nike says 'Just do it!' he added.

ABOUT ISSA SIKITI DA SILVA

Issa Sikiti da Silva is a winner of the 2010 SADC Media Awards (print category). He freelances for various media outlets, local and foreign, and has travelled extensively across Africa. His work has been published both in French and English. He used to contribute to Bizcommunity.com as a senior news writer.

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