

Publisher of the Year EWN's emoji-strong strategy

 By Leigh Andrews

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Here's how EWN tapped into the current 'emoji trend' with its Whatsapp news briefs, and shone as publisher of the year (again) at the IAB's Bookmark Awards.

EWN went home with a 'special feature gold' for its [Homo Naledi interactive feature](#), as well as a 'news or feature writing bronze' for '[Aletta Harrison - Prison Yoga](#)' at the recent IAB Bookmark Awards 2016. In addition, it won the title 'publisher of the year'. It also came out as the top [mass appeal publisher site](#) in 2015, so is clearly onto a winning strategy. It's a feat that's all the more impressive when you realise no entries are submitted for this category. It's a case of the judges singling out EWN from every other digital publisher in the country as the best of the best.



The EWN team on stage at the Bookmarks 2016

As further proof of EWN's digital prowess, one of its biggest digital projects initiated last year, the EWN Whatsapp News Briefs offering, also took home silver in the mobile publication category at the Bookmarks. While other news organisations have tried to launch their own Whatsapp services following EWN's success in this regard, they simply weren't able to maintain them. EWN's offering, on the other hand, is still going strong, with a large and growing audience that's perfectly suited to engage with the Whatsapp news briefs in a language appropriate to the platform.

Sheldon Morais, EWN digital editor and Camilla Bath, EWN's digital development editor, let us in on the publisher's recent digital accolades and plans for future success...

1. Was the EWN team expecting the 'publisher of the year' win?



Morais: We honestly didn't expect to win as we won last year and thought that in such a competitive environment, with so much great work being done, that the mantle would pass to someone else. It was so unexpected that some of the team didn't even stand up immediately, when we were announced. However, we do feel that it is fair recognition of the hard work and excellent output from EWN over the year. The fact that no entries were submitted for the publisher of the year category really adds to the sweetness of the victory as the recognition is not based on a slick entry but rather on the day-to-day output from the EWN team. It rewards consistent excellence, which we are very proud of.

2. Talk us through your EWN Whatsapp Briefs project: How it taps into today's trend of sending short, emoji-based messages and the positive impact on the EWN brand as a whole.

Bath: The experts tell us that the majority of the next billion people who come online will be doing so via a mobile device, so that's exactly where we want to be in the future.

In the mobile messaging realm, people expect a certain type of communication: It's an informal, intimate space. From the very beginning we took a conscious decision to differentiate the EWN WhatsApp news service by using direct, chatty language as well as humour and emoji, because we believe that it's important to tailor our message to suit the platform. We can get away with a lot more of the fun stuff on WhatsApp than we could in a more formal radio news bulletin, but we also have to be careful to offer a service that gives people the news they need to know as well as keeping them entertained.

Watch the video embedded below for an idea of how the service works:

The overwhelmingly positive feedback that we get from our subscribers tells us that the strategy is paying off. What it's doing for us, over and above offering a new entry point for users to the EWN website, is creating a new, interactive and enthusiastic community with whom we can form a personal relationship – and they reciprocate by giving us feedback, asking news-related questions and sending tipoffs of stories happening in their areas. We love it and so do they!

3. Give us a few points on the state of digital in SA.

Morais: It would be inaccurate to view digital in SA as a homogenous group of publishers. There is a lot of great work being done by news publishers, digital agencies, bloggers and brands – often on very little money and with small teams, which might make us competitive, compared to a more developed market with more resources for digital. I think there's still a lot we can learn from the rest of the globe, and specifically from other parts of the continent, not just from the traditional American and European markets.

4. Looking into your crystal ball, what's next for the EWN brand?

Morais: We'll continue to push to find innovative ways to tell stories. South Africa is full of stories and there's a tremendous amount of news every day. It's our duty as journalists to help people to understand these stories in whatever way tells them best, be it an article, video, audio, infographic or any other medium.

Useful advice for anyone in the digital realm. For more on EWN, visit [their website](#) and follow one of their [Twitter feeds](#).

ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

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