

AutoTrader says #ByeByePrint #HelloDigital in industry defining move

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For 25 years waiting rooms and living rooms have been anchored by the thick wedge that was AutoTrader's flagship - a magazine with pages densely packed with cars for sale from all throughout the country. This month the magazine says goodbye to the South African public; a milestone that is both an end and a bold new beginning, and goes fully digital for the first time.

THE FIRST CHAPTER



AutoTrader CEO [George Mienie](#) said, “The magazine was the start of our business and was the heart of the business for 15 years before the transition to digital started in 2008. At one stage it was so popular that our printers told us we had to hold off as the magazine size was going to break the binder! In fact, there were several instances when AutoTrader was late to retail shelves as a result of it having broken the binders. But today we live in a far more exciting reality. There’s no doubt that it’s time to fully embrace the digital age.”

The move to online only is the result of visionary thinking and extensive research, a process that has been in operation for nearly ten years.

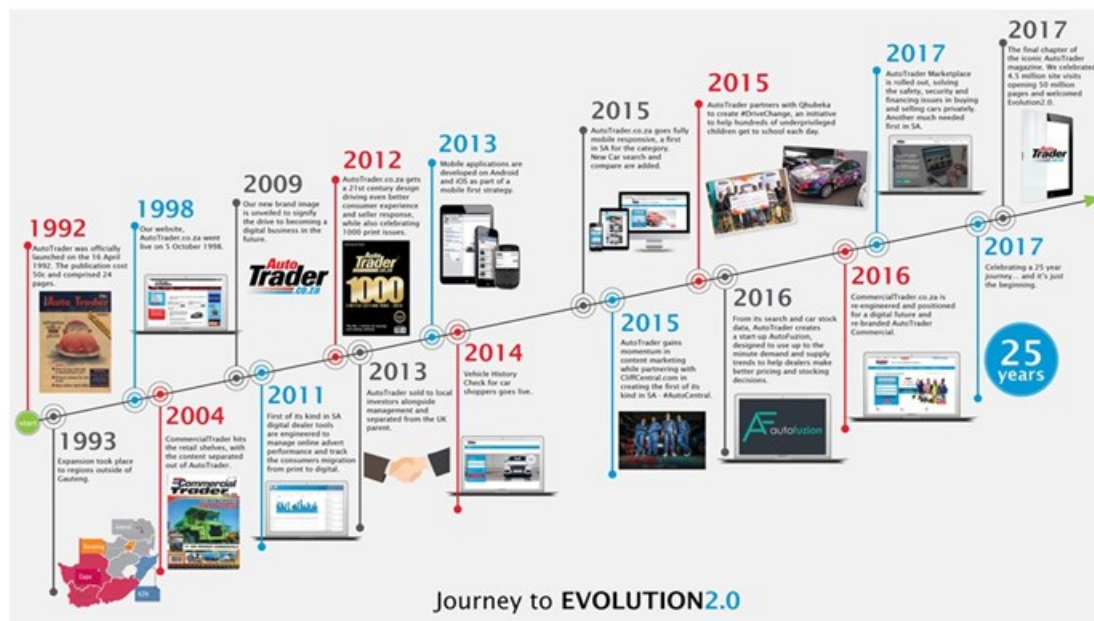
“We launched our magazine in 1992 and our website in 1998,” said Mienie. “It was in 2008 that we realised our magazine had a shelf-life. The internet was developing so fast, and the possibilities of what could be done online were so vast.”

Mienie and his team hit on a novel way to track the change. As with all AutoTrader policy making, they put the process in the consumers’ hands, monitoring changing consumer preference as a guide to when it would be time to make the full digital jump.

“We had to let our customers decide, after all, it’s their platform,” said Mienie. “We created two unique sets of telephone response numbers, one printed in the magazine and the other on our website. We then knew whether our users were responding via the magazine or the website, and through tracking it month-by-month we could see how quickly their preference was changing.”

Having a finger on the digital versus print pulse allowed the company to transform itself in- step with consumers’ changing habits. As user loyalty slowly shifted to digital, AutoTrader were able to train their staff for the eventual jump.

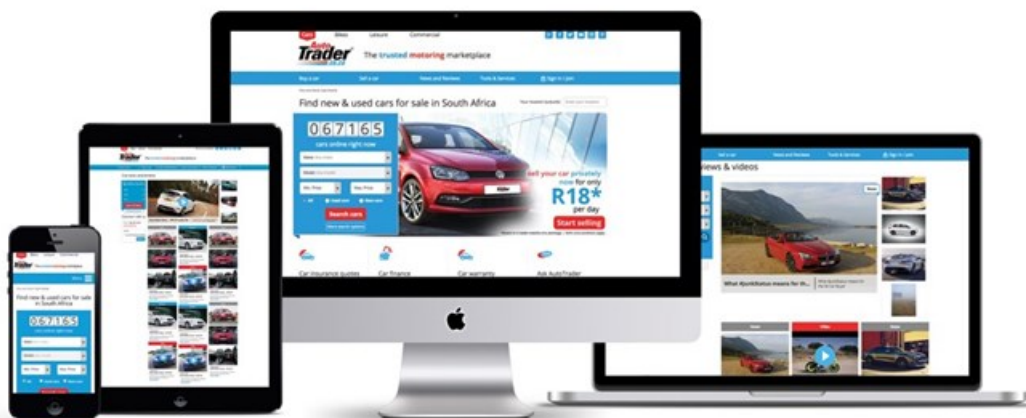
“In 2008 it was 95% magazine,” said Mienie. “By 2013 we hit the midway point. At the beginning of 2016 we thought we had another six months. It was only in January 2017 that the low consumer demand for the magazine no longer made it viable, and we were able to make the call.”



To put the power of the internet into perspective, compared to the 1,4 million magazines AutoTrader sold in 2006, in 2016 the website had over 50 million visits, and the company sent over 3 million leads connecting serious car buyers and sellers. One magazine could host 8 – 10,000 cars in total. Today 68,000 cars are listed at any one time on the website.

The total online package has empowered buyers and sellers to a remarkable degree, and in a way the magazine never could. AutoTrader.co.za today offers financing, insurance, history checks, buyer and seller validation, geographic location services, and a dedicated content hub that houses motoring news, reviews & videos from our in-house experts to help car buyers make the best purchase decision. Strategic digital partnerships have further propelled the business into digital stardom, such as the company's own motoring show #AutoCentral, hosted on CliffCentral.com.

AutoTrader's contribution to the total growth of the online automotive industry has been observed by Effective Measure.



"Online searches for automobiles in South Africa have experienced tremendous growth in the last few years and AutoTrader has been at the forefront of this growth and innovation," said Greg Mason, Effective Measure's Sub Saharan regional lead. "From January 2015 to March 2017 AutoTrader alone experienced an 86% growth in page views and 48% growth in unique browsers to their site. This, together with the innovation and growth in their Apps, has added significantly

to the growth of their website as well as the overall online automotive sector.”

For the company the move to digital is truly a new beginning, as they now feel they are able to set their sights on the ultimate goal.

“We want to offer our buyers and sellers total efficiency, empowering all of them as much as possible, as we connect them with each other in even more creative ways,” said a smiling Mienie. “That has to mean an ultimate goal of being able to conduct an entire vehicle sale, online, perfectly, and without administrative or physical barriers. We, nor the country, are there yet, but we are a big step closer. We believe that AutoTrader is leading this charge. For us, it’s just a matter of time.”

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