

Nikki Cockcroft leaves Primedia Online for Woolies



By Herman Manson: @marklives

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Nikki Cockcroft, long-serving CEO of Primedia Online, where she oversaw leading South African portal iafrica.com, digital agency Prezence and trafficking solutions provider 365 Digital, has announced her resignation, effective 30 June 2011. She joins retail giant Woolworths as head of online and will take up her new position at the beginning of July.



Nikki Cockcroft

Cockcroft ([@nikkicockcraft](https://twitter.com/nikkicockcraft)) is currently chair of the [Digital Media and Marketing Association \(DMMA\)](http://Digital Media and Marketing Association (DMMA)) and chairperson of the annual digital industry award show, The Bookmarks Awards, and will continue to fulfil her duties in both capacities.

Cockcroft says her new role will see her focus on establishing the Woolworths brand in the digital retail space.

Research by World Wide Worx recently revealed that online retail spend passed the R2 billion revenue mark for the first time in 2010 and has been experiencing rapid growth of between 30-35% per year over the past five years. This year, growth is expected to tick up to 40% reaching revenues of between R2.6 and R2.8 billion.

SA online retail reached a tipping point

Online retail in South Africa has reached a tipping point, Cockcroft says, and her challenge will be ensuring the online retail experience matches the in-store retail experience. The current Woolworths web site will be upgraded soon and the first phase will see a shift in focus to products available online, rather than the corporate information the site currently pushes.

Significant changes and updates will follow as Cockcroft and her new team's ideas and strategies take a firmer shape.

Cockcroft believes online retail technology and systems are as good in SA as they are elsewhere but that infrastructure limitations, logistics and the ineffective use of mobile platforms have limited online retail's potential.

She is particularly excited about the digital retail possibilities of Woolworth's Country Road clothing range. She predicts mobile shopping on the go by busy executives will be an important growth factor for Woolies' digital retail efforts and that Woolies consumers will be prepared to pay for delivery services on premium products.

Free delivery isn't viable

Free delivery isn't viable, says Cockcroft, who will form strategic partnerships with delivery firms, and, while there aren't margins in delivery, consumers will be prepared to pay for deliveries at cost, she believes.

While there is real talent in the digital commerce and in the digital marketing fields, Cockcroft believes her experience spans both, having been involved in building major transactional sites and in online marketing, which helps position her perfectly for the new challenge of heading the digital retail efforts of Woolworths. She intends travelling to several countries and visiting a number of major international retail brands to bring back best-of-digital-retail-practice to SA.

Cockcroft decided to leave Primedia Online and the digital media world after 10 years to push out of her comfort zone and in the hope for renewed personal and professional growth. She also wanted to let "fresh blood and ideas" into the businesses she had been running these past 10 years (at 365 and five years at Primedia). This doesn't mean she will be any less active in the broader SA digital community, as borne out by her continued involvement in the DMMA and the Bookmarks, she promises.

Storied career

Cockcroft has had a storied career in SA's digital media industry, starting at Acceleration Media and then sports publisher 365 Digital. In 2003, she brought ad serving platform Adtech to SA and, after 365 Digital was bought out by media company Primedia, she quickly ascended to position of CEO of its digital businesses. She has since turned around iafrica.com, overseen rapid growth at 365 Digital and recently commenced on a turnaround strategy for Prezence.

According to Cockcroft, the Primedia Online businesses will again be split so that each is led by its own CEO. She is currently interviewing candidates to lead each of the three businesses.

ABOUT HERMAN MANSON: @MARKLIVES

The inaugural Vodacom Social Media Journalist of the Year in 2011, Herman Manson (@marklives) is a business journalist and media commentator who edits industry news site www.marklives.com. His writing has appeared in newspapers and magazines locally and abroad, including Bizcommunity.com. He also co-founded *Brand* magazine.

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