

Newspaper beats trends, increases circulation

Despite launching during the recession, as well as operating in the current competitive online environment, *The Times* has shown an increase in circulation of 2.8% in the October-December 2010 figures, being an increase of 6.2% on the final quarter of 2009.

The Times

"The newspaper has been an exceptional success story for the group and for the print newspaper industry," said Mike Robertson, MD of Avusa Media. "The paper has become profitable within our three-year target, compared to other newspapers that have taken over a decade to make money or completely failed."

The success is built on five pillars: editing, format, pricing, new channels to market and offering value and innovation to advertisers. Finding a gap in this niche market, it has successfully positioned itself as a short, sharp read to its South African market. Robertson explains, "Editor, Phylcia Oppelt, and Ray Hartley (the founding editor) are successful as they create a product that resembles their readers - smart, sassy, connected and colourful."

"The days when readers were prepared to wade through long grey screeds of text on a daily basis are long gone. When we put together an issue, we recognise that we are fighting for our readers' time as Facebook, Twitter, web searches and gaming eat into our readers' busy schedules."

Advertising follows readers' trends

Robertson believes it owes its success to increased support from advertisers and the rapid growth in single copy sales. Clifford Fram, Avusa Media GM circulation and print management, said readers want value for money. "Our pricing model of R2 for single copy sales has resulted in the paper growing to 35 000 (unaudited) copies daily in the six months since we began our aggressive single-copy campaign."

"Advertising has increased due our innovative strategy. Part of the success of reaching profitability in a record three years has to do with a deliberate and dedicated approach to incorporating innovation in our approach to the advertising market" explains Enver Groenewald, Avusa Media GM: advertising revenue and strategic communications.

"Doing so with a little bit of boldness, some cheek and a lot of perseverance I'd like to believe that we have proved that in the right kind of product, newspaper advertising becomes visually stimulating and delivers on its primary purpose - to inform and motivate."

Engaging women, youth

The newspaper has become very popular amongst women and the youth and aims to provide compelling content that start important conversations that set the South African news agenda. "The paper breaks agenda-setting news as it happens and top stories this year have included publishing a picture of the body of a dead newborn baby that was found in a field in Orlando, Soweto, Gauteng that led to a police investigation," says Oppelt.

"That picture lead to a public outcry but created an awareness of a problem that is plaguing some sectors of our society. We took some heat for running that picture but as a mother and as a member of this society, I felt that that was the right thing to do. And I will do it again."

Award winning journos

Journalist Sipho Masondo recently won a national award for his investigation into acid mine drainage and it is thanks to Robin Comley that its use of photographs has become a trend-setting feature nationally. The paper's columnists have also gained a large following and some notoriety, especially Justice Malala, political columnist and Professor Jonathan Jansen, Vice-Chancellor of the University of the Free State. Similarly, the sports columnists have gained a loyal following through award-winning writers such as Simnikiwe Xabanisa, David Isaacson and Carlos Amato.

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