Do or die: The reader economy
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LISA MACLEOD | INTRODUCTION

• Head of Digital at Tiso Blackstar Group
• Running digital strategy and management
• Former General Manager Digital Publishing at 24.com / Media 24
• Head of Operations FT.com, Managing Editor at the Financial Times in London
• Focused on newsroom integration and change management
• Board member of the World Editors Forum
• Vice President WAN-IFRA
• BA Honours in Anthropology
TISO BLACKSTAR | INTRODUCTION

- Publish 8 newspapers, magazines, 14 websites, radio stations throughout Africa (Kenya, Ghana and Nigeria), run a film and music distribution business and an events company
- Big investment in alternative revenue streams: tech, events etc
- Work hard to optimise print business
- Embarking on an overhaul of workflows and processes and new tech to favour a digital-first environment in newsrooms
• Newspaper declining: dailies 16% year on year decline
• High penetration of mobile phones but “smartphone” does not mean internet access is a given
• Android far outweighs IOS
• Data costs are enormously high: 6 x higher than Egypt - spectrum and infrastructure, lack of competition
• South Africans spend more on communication than on health or on education
STRATEGY I 2014 - 2017

Areas of focus:

• Product, audience development and multimedia

Strategy:

• To fix broken and unstable TECH, and build solid, scalable platforms for the digital business (replatformed 12 sites). Changed all processes to Agile methodology
• To entrench strong PRINT brands online with excellent journalism from papers starting life digitally
• To CONSOLIDATE and make digital a sustainable business with growing revenue: focus on paid content
• To DIVERSIFY revenue as much as possible: can’t stand still!
STRATEGY I 2018 - 2019

1. Audience first: bring together the right PEOPLE to gather data and intelligence on all users of our brands and channels and understand their movements, needs and likes. Build richest audience data in South Africa

2. Improve PROCESSES and skills across departments (ads, circ, product and editorial) to manage, service, communicate with and monetise readers wherever we find them - reader revenue team formed, product council pending

3. Build new PRODUCTS based on audience intelligence and market demand, and refine existing products to enhance engagement, revenue

4. Measure our PERFORMANCE: defined as growing audiences, raising revenue, improving retention + engagement.
DATA | FOCUS ON THE FUNNEL

READER REVENUE FUNNEL STRATEGY

TOP: Track
- All about BRAND PRESENCE
  - Cross device tagging and tracking implemented
  - Traffic improvement measures
  - SEO improvements
  - Tech optimisations: Marfeel and AMP
  - Tagging consolidated
  - Lift Team: viral stories
  - Editorial volume and speed
  - Social sharing, pixel tracking and page likes
  - Brand presence and awareness: external marketing

MIDDLE: Profile
- All about ACQUISITION
  - Gather data on consumption and behavior
  - Profile segments / personas
  - Work on demographics, geolocation, transactions etc
  - Internal marketing: banners and offers personalised
  - Personalised content recommendations to increase engagement and time spent on product
  - Targeted on-site banners and email marketing
  - Push notifications
  - Push to sale / call to action marketing

BOTTOM: Engage + Monetise
- All about RETENTION
  - Effort is aimed at engagement, and superior customer service and experience
  - Recency / Frequency / Volume metrics – engagement metrics
  - User journeys, renewals and churn managed meticulously
  - Loyal customer programmes
  - Underpinned by data, active CRM and bespoke marketing
  - Corporate sales and B2B marketing
1. AUDIENCE TRACKING | DATA

- Started building a fully functional audience data team - 3 people
- Editorial analyst (Chartbeat / GA / Narratiive)
- Commercial Analyst - works closely with sales team
- Data Manager: strategy and tools for data, optimising audience intelligence to create monetisation opportunities
- Worked with agency called Jellyfish to improve our data stacks: correct tagging on Ad Manager and Google Analytics, upgrading to G360 across the business
- Project extends from audience behaviour for subscription business to audience segments and verticals for advertising
- Main focus: REVENUE
2. PROCESS | NEW NEWSROOM

- Aim: to change our newsrooms to become digital facing and responsive to audience needs, rather than medium-driven
- Note: already relocated to a new building with a massive open plan newsroom - advantages and disadvantages
- Also running an internal wire to foster collaboration between 8 newsrooms: 200+ stories a day filed for group use
- Involves three pillars:
  1. New newsroom tech including a new custom built CMS called CosMoS and an upgraded print system (Good News 4 / Tera)
  3. Improving print processes and efficiencies to ensure sustainability
Inherited a defunct and unskilled development team
Sites continuously offline or broken - not a business priority
Hired a top-class product manager who brought rigour to the business
Made key development hires, and a partnership with an external team
Process: introduced Github, Jira, email tracking, improved infrastructure
Started on most critical issues: stabilised unstable tech
Started work on a homegrown web publishing CMS, Cosmos
Always thinking of longer term product that can earn revenue

PHILOSOPHY: is Agile compatible with print organisations?
Think Minimum Viable Product… how far can you push a legacy organisation?
Matrix team cuts across corporate structures
5 operational paywalls, 1 coming
All have different business models
One is **defensive** (protect print revenues) - Sunday Times
One is **niche** business content (high end readers) - BusinessLIVE
One is a **digital daily edition** (new concept, print replacement for closed newspaper The Times) - Times Select
2 are **regional / hyperlocal**
1 will be **vernacular**
Supported by new data team
FINISH

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