

ABC, AMPS latest results show print is not dead, but we need to shake research to its core to truly reflect what's going on

An article issued on behalf of Print and Digital Media South Africa (PDMSA)

First of all, let's talk about the research: the Audit Bureau of Circulations (ABC) released its quarter one results (2014) on Wednesday and overall, within the print medium, newspaper circulation increased by 20,000 (up from Q4, 2013), while magazine circulation increased by 97 000 copies (0,5%), compared to Q4, 2013. The public's faith in the robustness of print was never more apparent than when the 'big news' hit the country: Nelson Mandela's death, the Oscar Pistorius trial and, the national elections. The news is ever more digitised, and yet, many, many people still turn to print to provide them with that something extra and deeper. This is also reflected elsewhere in the world, noted the presenter of the ABC results, Gordon Patterson.

In terms of readership figures, as detailed by the April release of the All Media and Products Survey (AMPS) by SAARF, the print medium is the picture of stability – positive news for many.

And yet, we have to accept that things could be a whole lot better, and that the print media industry has the opportunity to be ahead of the curve in responding to the needs of the South African audience in its complexity and diversity.

We have to tackle the issue of research itself. It can be said that while print is no dinosaur, print research is.

Because what we have now in the likes of AMPS and the ABC figures, may not point to the reality of how people are consuming print. On the surface, the latest AMPS and ABC results are positive, but if we really drill down into the data, the nuances show a steady decline. It is thus very easy to get depressed: for example, while overall circulation increased, there were significant decreases in many print products' circulation. There are other reasons to feel gloomy, and this article well assumes you know what those are.

We know that the way people consume media is very different, and that research models will need to reflect this reality. The entire media industry seems to agree on this and hence the concept of an Establishment Survey (ES) was born (to eventually replace AMPS). Together with the ES as the core survey, each media industry sub-sect intends formulating their own surveys (PAMS, DAMS, TAMS, OHMS, RAMS), accounting for the changing digital and media platforms.

Currently, we know that AMPS will still continue into 2015, and the work that the print media industry will do for its portion of the AMPS, will form much of the groundwork needed for the new and swanky print media currency kid on the block – PAMS (Print Audience Measurement Survey) 2016.

The evolution from AMPS to PAMS is going to be interesting and perhaps controversial. We are grateful for the opportunity to use 2015 as a time to refine things and "get our house in order" so that PAMS truly and accurately reflects what is going on with our audiences.

How and why are PAMS and the Establishment Survey going to do this?

- Because the current measurement of paper only versions creates a perception of decline in print figures, evolved research models may in fact point to the 'rechanneling' of

circulation and readership: people are shifting to multiple platforms, and indeed in reality there may well be an increase in reading. (This is evidenced internationally).

- It has become essential for print to find a measurement model for both traditional and digital media or the research currency will be staying behind the curve
- It is true that a fundamental shift may change the currency but the industry is likely to value a more relevant measure.
- In terms of the new Establishment Survey (the evolved AMPS), PDMSA will provide input to reflect print media's needs and expectations for the research.
- PAMS will be innovative and inclusive to ensure that it meets the needs and expectations of the print media industry both now and into the future i.e. it must accommodate the multiple content platforms.
- PDMSA is looking at appointing technical experts and referencing international best practice to assist us in the development and design of the new PAMS research model and currency.

In the meantime, the print media industry will work on tweaking the existing AMPS. As Patterson mentioned at the ABC results presentation, print research must be trusted and must demonstrate its value to advertisers, media agencies and marketers and "not just its quantum". The print media industry is fully aware of this undertaking.

Greater detail about what 'goes into' AMPS 2015 will be communicated in due course, and what the research landscape will look like in future will also be further detailed. Industry: watch this space.

**With thanks to Jos Kuper of Kuper Research for her insight into the future of print media research.*

Ends.