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23 YEARS REPORTING THE NEWSPAPER BUSINESS FOR ASIA

Ritu Kapur,
CEO & Co-Founder,
The Quint and
Board Member,
World Editors Forum



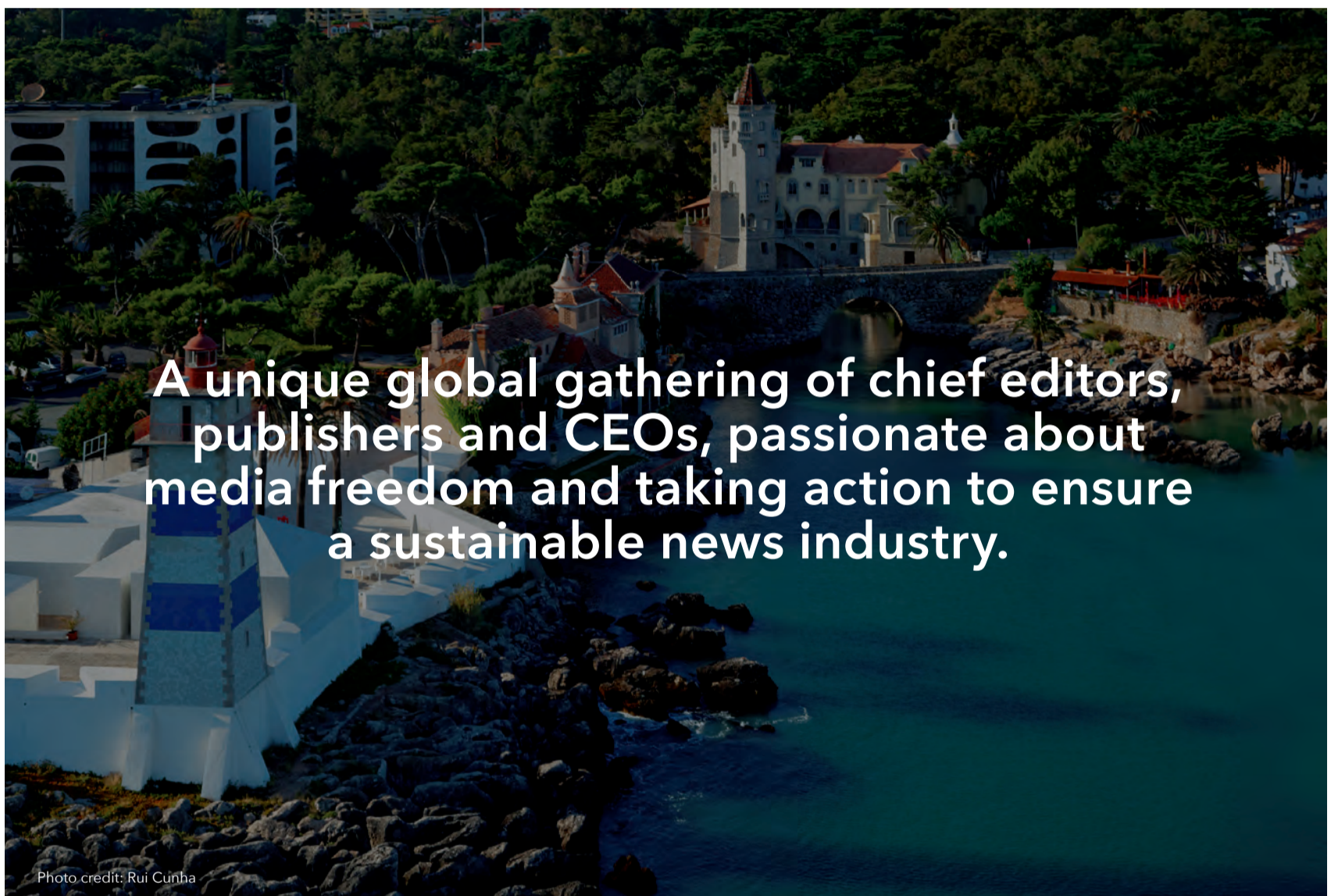
THE QUINT

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DIGITAL JOURNALISM

WORLD NEWS MEDIA CONGRESS

WORLD EDITORS FORUM
ESTORIL, PORTUGAL 2018



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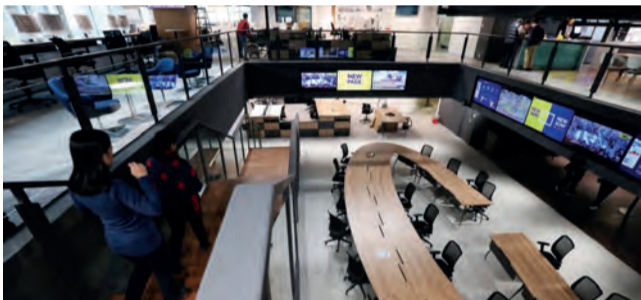


SCMP sports new look, moves to new offices

To reflect its expansion beyond being a broadsheet and into new marketplaces and platforms, Hong Kong's South China Morning Post unveiled its new logo and corporate identity in February, designed to reflect its roots, legacy, and future.

Drawing inspiration from Hong Kong's rich maritime heritage, the yellow-and-blue logo is an iteration of the international signal flag Kilo, which means "I want to communicate with you".

The new look's two-pane design also highlights the importance of understanding the world from both sides of the story, which is key to truth and fairness. In addition, the new identity, which graphically resembles a broadsheet newspaper, pays tribute to SCMP's legacy as Hong Kong's paper of



SCMP's newsroom atrium shows the activity-based workspace based on a cohesive layout.

record for 114 years. Gary Liu, CEO of the South China Morning Post, said, "As we grow into new marketplaces across multiple platforms, we need to have an identity that is simple, recognisable, and iconic – one that tells the story of who we are, where we have come from, and what we hope to achieve."

The rebranding coincided with the media house's move from its old newsroom in Leighton Street to a six-floor hub nearby at Hong Kong's Times Square in Causeway Bay.

The new office features stylish social areas, huddle rooms, varied seating options, and an open atrium set across 100,000-square-feet of gross floor area. The cohesive layout, collaborative spaces, and thematic social hubs are designed to improve internal communication, which will, in turn, foster deeper connections with the company's stakeholders.



Chill out at one of several thematic social hubs at the new SCMP office at Times Square, Hong Kong.

Australian news readership split 50-50 across print and digital

Almost equal numbers of Australians get their news from print or from digital each month.

According to Enhanced Media Metrics Australia (emma) data released last November, 13 million received their news from newspapers while 13.2 million obtained theirs from digital news platforms, based on a survey by Ipsos MediaCT on people 14+ last September.

"News media publishers have recognised for some years the migration to consuming news content on digital devices and pioneered digital news experiences for their readers. We are now seeing balanced readership between print and digital news brands, but the one constant is that their audiences seek and engage with trusted, quality journalism," said Mr Peter Miller, CEO of news media marketing body, NewsMediaWorks.

The Sydney Morning Herald is Australia's highest-reaching title across all platforms with 5.21 million readers. The Herald Sun followed, reaching 4.44 million readers and The Daily Telegraph on 4.39 million.

emma cross-platform readership (for whole Sept 2017)	000s
Sydney Morning Herald / smh.com.au	5213
Herald Sun / heraldsun.com.au	4436
Daily Telegraph / thetelegraph.com.au	4387
The Australian / theaustralian.com.au	3203
The Age / theage.com.au	2969



Reuters News gets US\$10b pipeline over 30 years in Blackstone deal

In a deal most news organisations can only dream about, Reuters News will receive a guaranteed income stream worth US\$10 billion over the next 30 years. This works out to an inflation-adjusted minimum of \$325 million a year for 30 years to keep supplying news to parent company Thomson Reuters Corp's Eikon terminals.

It is all part of a \$20b deal announced in January under which US private equity firm Blackstone Group LP will acquire a 55 per cent stake in Thomson Reuters' newly-hived off Financial and Risk business. Thomson Reuters will retain a 45 per cent holding.

While this may sound like a lot of money, \$325m was what Reuters News received from Thomson Reuters' terminal business last year for its news feed.

Thomson Reuters' share of the financial terminal industry stands at around 23 per cent, lagging behind rival Bloomberg which holds about 33 per cent of the market, according to 2016 figures from Burton-Taylor International Consulting.

It is hoped that with Blackstone behind this deal, more of the banks it deals with as one of the world's biggest investors will take up Thomson Reuters products and services.

Meanwhile, all eyes will be on Reuters News to see what it will spend the money on and how, now that it will only get a fixed annual income from its sister terminal business company and no more.

The global news giant currently employs 2,500 journalists in 200 locations around the world.

World Editors Forum expands to South Asia

WAN-IFRA's global network of editors, the World Editors Forum (WEF), set up its India Chapter in February. This is the first such chapter of WEF in its 25-year history.

Over the last two years, the WEF – South Asia Summit has been held annually at the WAN-IFRA India conference in September. WEF's Editorial Leaders Develop-

ment Programme for South Asia has also been offered for the past four years. With its creation, WEF India Chapter aims to scale up activities and be the representative voice of editors and journalists in the region.

WEF is a premier community of engaged newspaper editors and fosters diversity and trust in media. It acts as the professional voice of editors speaking out for media freedom and promote innovation in journalism.

WEF India Chapter comprises:

- Charter Chairman: Mukund Padmanabhan, Editor, The Hindu
- Anand Pandey, Editor, Dainik Bhaskar
- Anirbhan Chattopadhyay, Editor, Anandabazar Patrika
- Harsha Mathew, Assistant Editor, Malayala Manorama
- Soumya Bhattacharya, Managing Editor, Hindustan Times
- Ritu Kapur, CEO & Co-Founder, The Quint

China's People's Daily moves its presses to new Beijing facility

China's largest newspaper group, People's Daily, with a print circulation of three million, has relocated its presses to a new state-of-the-art facility in Beijing.



The Goss Universal 75 press in its new home in Beijing.

The move, which took 12 weeks to complete in late 2017, involved shifting the six-tower Goss Universal 75 press, comprising of two folders and six reel splicers.

Goss, which project managed the entire job, also upgraded the Universal 75 with a blanket wash system and control system integration.

A smaller Universal 45 press belonging to the People's Daily had already been moved by manroland web systems in November. It involved disassembly, load out, transport, load in, assembly and commissioning.

The project is among several undertaken by German-based manroland web systems since it started to service and upgrade presses made by competitors and third-party manufacturers over a year ago.



manroland breaks into Indian language market with Bartaman deal in Kolkata

Bartaman Patrika, the second-most widely circulated Bengali newspaper in India, has bought a three-tower Cromoman 4-1 press from manroland web systems.

The deal, announced in February, is the second Cromoman 4-1 to be installed in eastern India and signals the entry of the German giant into the flourishing Indian language newspaper market.

manroland now has 28 web offset press systems installed across the country: 27 high-speed newspaper presses and one commercial press.

"The Indian language newspaper market is growing at a CAGR of more than 8 per cent. Today, nine out of 10 top dailies in India are players in the regional space," said Sudeep Bhattacharjee, MD of manroland India.

In the press statement, manroland said its Cromoman 4-1 has been designed for the requirements of the Indian market. Its reliable, high speed, modular dou-

ble-width press can cater to an average run length of between 250,000 and 400,000 copies per night, tolerate power fluctuations, fit into existing buildings and runs smoothly on Indian newsprint with no web severance.

It also does not require air-conditioning and offers web

width versatility with ease of use and operation.

Bartaman's latest acquisition is capable of versatile printing possibilities such as 24-pages or 16-pages plus 8-pages. Its PECOM-X control system is easy to use and offers short make-ready and changeover times.



Bartaman and manroland executives at the Cromoman 4-1 contract signing. From left: Abhijeet Bhattacharjee, MD Bartaman; Amal Roy, Senior Manager for Maintenance; Amit Roy, Finance Director; Subhojit Kr. Datta, AGM & CS; Subir Paul, GM of Sales, manroland India; and Sudeep Bhattacharjee, MD, manroland India.



Fairfax adopts Newscycle to manage print circulation and subscriptions across 4 papers

Fairfax Media's Australian Metro Publishing group has upgraded to the Newscycle Cloud platform to manage all print readership for The Sydney Morning Herald, The Age, The Sun-Herald and The Australian Financial Review. The Sydney Morning Herald is Australia's most widely-read newspaper reaching over five million readers in print and online each month.

With 280 users, the Newscycle Circulation system is managing all home delivery, single copy sales, distribution, billing and customer services functions for these Fairfax titles. One of the key components of the Newscycle Circulation system at Fairfax is Insight, a business intelligence application that lets users analyze and act upon subscriber data to help increase revenue and improve customer service.

Newscycle Circulation also has a built-in subscriber list matching module, and the system manages all credit card tokenization processes for Fairfax via a Hosted Order Page. In addition, the Fairfax AMP team has taken advantage of the openness of the Newscycle Circulation platform, developing their own subscriber portal based on the Newscycle Customer Service, Circulation and Distribution APIs.

Moving the Fairfax titles to a managed service environment hosted in the Amazon Web Services cloud took three months.

QIPC gets 5 new orders from Kolkata customers

Dutch measurement and control specialist Q.I. Press Control's mRC-3D cameras have been popular with customers in eastern India. Kolkata-based print facilities where these cameras will be installed include: CDC Printers, Sristi Graphic (two separate orders), Darpan Conclave and NAP Printers.

A sixth order was placed by Bhiwandi-based Print Plus, which is located near the western city of Mumbai, the company reported in January.

The cameras are used for colour register control on a variety of presses and come with features such as automatic cut-off control and automatic ink mist shield.

Woodwing's Aurora closes gap between digital and print

Content creation software provider Woodwing now offers on its Enterprise platform - Aurora, a multi-channel publishing solution which creates content for print and digital channels.

Using Aurora, a channel-neutral story is created in the Content Station Editor, with document structure automatically applied. This allows for publishing on digital channels such as Facebook Instant Articles, Apple News, mobile app or website.

Variants of the story can be created, adapted and placed automatically onto a print layout, or published on other digital channels with one click of the button.



Rappler, IDN Media partner to deliver news to millennials, Gen-Z

IDN Media and Rappler Indonesia announced in January that they have sealed a partnership to deliver timely, relevant, and credible news to their audiences.

The partnership is in line with IDN Media's goal to grow its news section for millennials and Gen-Z, and Rappler's aim to expand its influence to Indonesia.

The agreement includes the hosting of Rappler Indonesia's content on IDN Times – one of IDN Media's portals –



Rappler CEO Maria Ressa and IDN Times Founders Winston Utomo and William Utomo at the Rappler Headquarters in Manila.
Photo by Rappler

and collaborations in news training, events and business opportunities.

Winston Utomo, CEO and editor-in-chief of IDN Media, lauded Rappler's reputation in the digital news industry and praised the partnership as a step towards strengthening IDN Media's commitment to become the largest digital media company for millennials and Gen-Z in Indonesia.

"We are very excited with this collaboration and we believe that having Rappler's content on IDN Times will bring IDN Media closer to its ultimate vision: to become the voice of millennials and Gen-Z," said Mr Utomo.

Maria Ressa, CEO of Rappler, said the partnership with IDN Media is a natural fit.

"We partnered with IDN Media because we share the same values of independence and focus on the next generation. We are very excited about this partnership because it will allow us to deliver content that matters to the country's youth, together," she said.

Launched in 2012, Rappler set up its first international bureau in 2015, while IDN operates four media brands: IDN Times, Popbela.com, Popmama.com, and Yummy; a creative digital agency, IDN Creative; and an event agency called IDN Event.

– rappler.com

Publishers join forces to set up Malaysia Premium Publishers Marketplace

Five of Malaysia's largest media companies have teamed up to set up their own advertising exchange.

Called the Malaysia Premium Publishers Marketplace (MPPM), the exchange will aggregate the combined advertising inventory across the country's media giants onto a single trading platform.

The 11 participating online premium publishers are New Straits Times, The Star Online, The Edge, Berita Harian, Utusan Malaysia, Harian Metro, Kosmo, Sin Chew Daily, China Press, Nanyang Daily and Guang Ming Daily.

The move, which was announced in November, follows a similar venture across the Causeway between traditional media rivals Singapore Press Holdings and Mediacorp to form the Singapore Media Exchange which kicks off this year.

Similar programmatic advertising exchanges have also sprung up in Thailand and New Zealand, with some, in Indonesia and internationally, like The Pangaea Alliance, faltering due to a fee dispute with its vendor, The Rubicon Project.

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Japanese newspaper uses AI to create article summaries

The Shinano Mainichi Shimbun is working with Fujitsu to speed up its news updates. This is how it works.

In another step forward for robo-journalism, a regional newspaper in Japan is rolling out an artificial intelligence system that automatically generates summaries of news articles for distribution across a range of media platforms.

The Shinano Mainichi Shimbun teamed up with Fujitsu, Japan's largest IT services company, to create the software based on technology developed by Fujitsu Laboratories. Staff at the broadsheet have been producing summaries manually, a task that takes up to five minutes per article. The software creates summaries instantly and with greater accuracy than a different summarizing method that begins with the lead and stops when the word limit is reached, according to Fujitsu.

The system uses a combination of natural language processing and machine

learning to pick out the most salient parts of the article, scoring each sentence in terms of importance.

During a trial, it was trained on a dataset of 2,500 articles from the newspaper as well as their manually compiled summaries.

"By pairing the original articles with the summaries and defining that as reference, or teacher data, we built an 'important sentence extraction model' that evaluates the content importance according to individual sentences, as well as a 'sentence-shortening model' that maintains sentence structure while deleting unnecessary words," says Masato Yokota, a director at Fujitsu's State Infrastructure and Finance Business Group.

The software can work with articles written in Japanese or English. It was built with a web API that can be easily inserted into the existing editorial workflow.

A "summary" button activating the API was implemented into the editing screen for the paper's cable TV news, Yokota said.

Robots vs. Journalists

First published in 1873, the Shinano Mainichi Shimbun is one of Japan's oldest dailies. Headquartered in Nagano, northwest of Tokyo, it claims a morning-edition circulation of 487,000 copies and distribution to 61% of households in Nagano Prefecture.

"The third-wave AI is set to become a trend of great relevance, and now is the time to make concerted efforts in improving the newspaper production workflow as well," says Hiroshi Misawa, the paper's managing director.

The Shinmai, as it's known, plans to roll out the system in April for its cable TV news summary service, with an eye to speeding up news updates.

The summarizing AI joins a host of other automated news applications sometimes described as automated or augmented journalism. Heliograf, the Washington Post's own news bot, produced about 300 briefs on the Rio Olympics of 2016, and has since covered U.S. elections and high school football games; it produced about 850 articles in

its first year, according to Digiday. The Associated Press worked with AI firm Automated Insights to deploy software to cover earnings reports.

"Through automation, AP is providing customers with 12 times the corporate earnings stories as before (to over 3,700), including for a lot of very small companies that never received much attention," AP global business editor Lisa Gibbs was quoted as saying in a 2017 report.

"With the freed-up time, AP journalists are able to engage with more user-generated content, develop multimedia reports, pursue investigative work and focus on more complex stories."

By Tim Hornyak

Tim Hornyak is a freelance journalist based in Tokyo. He is the author of *Loving the Machine: The Art and Science of Japanese Robots*.

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ಕನ್ನಡ ಮತ್ತು ಇತರ ಭಾರತೀಯ ಭಾಷೆಗಳಲ್ಲಿ ಬಳಕೆ ಸಾಧ್ಯ

தமிழ் மற்றும் பிற இந்திய மொழிகளிலும் பயன்பாடு சாத்தியம்

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Innovate to generate revenue in digital




Digital Media India 2018, the seventh edition of the digital conference for news publishers, held for the first time in Mumbai on 7-9 February attracted over 100 participants. While the digital reach is growing in the region, reluctance to innovate and revenue generation in digital remain the main challenges, said Steffen Damborg, WAN-IFRA Associate Consultant, in his opening address of the conference. Gard Steiro, CEO of VG, Norway was the keynote speaker.



A panel discussion on the topic 'Reader revenue' was the highlight of the day two of the conference. Siddharth Varadarajan of The Wire, Himanshu Gautam of Amar Ujala Web Services, Arpan Chatterjee of The Hindu shared how their group is approaching revenue from reader subscription models. While primarily the revenue coming from advertising, everyone is making little steps to make the reader pay. Speakers from BBC, Google, DB Digital, NDTV Group, DW, The New Strait Times Malaysia and others shared their business insights and strategies for digital growth.

For further updates, please see dmi.wan-ifra.org





Ritu Kapur,
CEO & Co-Founder, The Quint and
Board Member, World Editors Forum

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nalism. Thankfully, we’ve had a
very bright team at The Quint that
has been pushing every digital
frontier.”*

Half a billion smartphones will be the tipping point

Ritu Kapur, CEO & Co-Founder, The Quint and Board Member, World Editors Forum

A pure-play digital platform for The Quint is a bold initiative. How would you describe the journey so far?

It has been an incredible journey. The excitement and the challenge has been to stay ahead of the curve, innovating with tech for content and vice versa and breaking new ground with digital journalism. Thankfully, we've had a very bright team at The Quint that has been pushing every digital frontier.

What is the philosophy of the news presentation on The Quint? How do you make it stand out from others?

Our distinct offering is visual storytelling and enterprise journalism. The Quint is reaching out to a very intelligent, young Indian content consumer. So while journalistic rigor is at the core of everything we do, our attempt is to make the content experience rich in terms of multimedia, accessibility while staying balanced, and thorough in our editorial. We try and look for stories where no one is. Video is our strongest storytelling tool and we are clearly leading the industry there. We have a Quint Lab that is experimenting with new formats. The most critical thing, of course, is always the story.

Please share some of the reader engagement initiatives at The Quint.

The Quint was a Facebook page for two months before it launched as a site, which sensitised the team to reader behavior and feedback.

At The Quint we see journalism as a two-way conversation. We opened up the site for readers' blogs on the day we launched, and we have had very strong and sensitive voices from among our readers on the site. We've run several initiatives inviting our readers' views: Letter to India, Bol – Love Your Bhasha (where we invited people to showcase their regional pride in their language). We have just launched our citizen journalism initiative, My Report.

And of course, we engage with our audiences on social media platforms – Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn and now WhatsApp.

Many pure digital initiatives have struggled to be profitable businesses. What is your take on this?

We are seeing revenues going up slowly. The new models of freemium and subscriptions will eventually kick in. Until then publishers have to build credibility in their content and a distinct voice so they give readers a reason to pay for content. The other important thing is to keep costs low. We saw that with TV; media businesses take a while to monetise. Perhaps some synergies with legacy media are inevitable.

What are the revenue streams for Quint?

So far it is primarily ad revenue.

Can you break down, in percentage or figures, how much ad revenue you are receiving from direct display vs. programmatic?

Programmatic is only 10% of the revenue. It is mostly content marketing and display.

Obviously, video and social are strategic content pillars. Can you say how well video advertising is going, and are you working on native advertising for video?

It is early days still for substantial video monetisation. Digital video is just two years old. Models are emerging and we are exploring native advertising on video already. It is a work in progress.

Reader revenue in digital, i.e., readers paying to read the content, is becoming an important part of the revenue mix in many parts of the world. Do you think South Asia will follow this trend? Do you see The Quint charging for content in foreseeable future?

Absolutely – freemium would be the first step.

How do you handle the challenge of technology and talent at The Quint, in terms of finding (and keeping) talent to deal with this constant development? How much churn do you have on staff?

We knew that for digital growth it is 60% content and 40% tech. Which is why we invested in setting up Quintype, a Bangalore-based company that has built out a bespoke CMS and is syndicating the product to other publishers. That gives us the advantage since we have a strong tech team to innovate and experiment.

A warm and challenging work environment, empowering the journalists and the other teams, championing the ideas that come from the youngest within the team and ensuring freedom to experiment and make mistakes. That's what has helped us build a great team.

I think churn is about 10%, and it is mostly those for whom this was a first job. Several young team members have moved on to pursue higher academic goals.

Do you offer content in local languages too? If yes, how are these editions staffed, and how similar is the content for the two editions?

Hindi Quint is our Hindi news offering. It has grown rapidly. While some content is shared, our Hindi team, led by Sanjay Pugalia, comprises senior journalists who are bringing a strong voice to Hindi digital journalism.



The recent IRS shows the print medium is still dominant in India, with the growth coming especially from the hinterlands. Is the reader in print different from that of digital? If so, how?

Literacy levels are going up in the hinterland – and reading is part of the process of getting literate. But their rate of adoption of digital is very high. It's just a question of when they get their first access to a mobile phone or computer. Digital is growing more quickly, just as TV eventually grew to be larger than print in India.

The digitally connected smartphone population is growing at a faster pace in India. What will be the tipping point for the media business, and how do you see the future developing in this regard for media?

Half a billion smartphones will be the tipping point.

Making the switch to lower grammage newsprint

By Prabhu Natarajan, Research Engineer, WAN-IFRA South Asia, and Susan Philip, Freelance journalist

WAN-IFRA Report presents a comprehensive view

Publishers and printers across the globe are striving to upgrade their products and expand their market radius with the help of improved newsprint or even higher quality (coated) paper. On the other hand, there is a concerted attempt to use papers with lower basis weight. Taking cognizance of these apparently contradictory trends, WAN-IFRA's World Printers Forum (WPF) Board has published a report that explores the whole gamut of issues related to the trend towards newsprint of lower basis weight.

The WPF found that the two trends do not in fact contradict each other. On the contrary, they show how the business field of newspaper publishers and printers is expanding and how publishing products are differentiating themselves. This expansion relates both to better quality products and reduced costs for standard publishing products, advertising and free weeklies.

The report titled **Implications of changing to lower grammage newsprint** looks at the properties of lower grammage newsprint samples and how they conform to existing norms. Tests were conducted to determine how newsprint properties correlated to practical experiences of newspaper printers. In addition, the report includes the experiences of and practical advice from a number of international experts at printing and supplier companies.

Why the change?

The change to newsprint of lower grammage is an ongoing process. Newsprint contributes roughly 50% of the cost of producing a newspaper. Hence, this shift to paper of lower grammage makes sound financial sense. It is driven by the fact that it offers better yield. Newsprint of less than 45 g/m² provides additional printable area for the same weight of reel. Besides, fewer newsprint reels are required for an equivalent print run; there is less reel preparation to be done, less tape because of fewer splices, less white paper waste and fewer shipments and deliveries. It also involves less damage, lowered storage and warehousing requirements and potentially fewer web-breaks due to splice failures. Roughly there is a 6% saving when changing from 45 g/m² to 42.5 g/m² and another 6% from 42.5 g/m² to 40 g/m². There are savings in copy distribution, as the weight of copies is reduced. Importantly, there are environmental benefits too.

However, it comes with quite a few operational challenges. There are unresolved issues. For the printer, the use of lower grammage newsprint presents problems vis-à-vis sustaining quality and optimising productivity. Pending quality problems include opacity, folding, curling, and some degree of increased ink consumption. From an economic point of view, printer and publisher expectations may also be dampened by higher production costs and lower paper machine speeds in the production of very low basis weight papers.

The WAN-IFRA study revolves around the economics behind the use of lower grammage newsprint, challenges in production and best practices that can effectively solve problems associated with the use of such paper.

It was compiled from inputs provided by industry experts in newspaper printing houses, newsprint mills and ink manufacturing companies across the world, results of laboratory tests on newsprint and data collected from trial production with lower grammage newsprint. The composite document covers the rationale for the changeover, issues and challenges and best practices from a cross-section of stakeholders – printers and suppliers of both newsprint and inks. The report includes interviews, case studies, trouble-shooting tips, general tips and feedback from readers and advertisers.

Looking ahead

Will the future see a bigger role for 40 g/m² newsprint and a further downgrading of newsprint grammage? Yes, it is possible, says Mario Milošević, Project Manager of Styria Tiskara Zagreb.

Christian Wilms, Managing Director of the Styria Print Group, added "If printing within the parameters of ISO 12647-3 with 40 g/m² is possible (without the hurdles of show-through etc.), printing efficiency (speed, ink consumption etc.) is not touched and the costs are reduced, why not?"

Vallabhaneni Srinivas General Manager, Production & Materials, The Printers (Mysore), feels it may be difficult to standardise on 40 g/m² as there are only a few mills supplying this kind of paper.



Thomas Isaksen, CEO, Den Danske Presses Faellesindkøbs-Forening, Denmark, says that the Procurement Association of Danish Press has decided not to pursue further lowering of grammage below 40 g/m².

Anu Ahola, Senior Vice President, News & Retail, of UPM Paper ENA says that 42.5 g/m² and 40 g/m² will be the main grammages during the next five to ten years, with a tendency towards 40 g/m². This development might depend on various local market trends, meaning there will be countries where this development will be more distinctive than in others. On the other hand, she cautions, paper machine efficiencies might decline because of lower strength properties of the sheet and lower speed of the paper machine. In consequence, this would negatively impact the cost structure and increase the specific production costs.

On the printers' side, Matthias Presotto, Head of Corporate Purchasing Printing at Axel Springer SE, said his company does not, at the moment, have any plans for paper below 40 g/m². "We expect that we have arrived at process limit in particular for recycled paper."

To get your copy of the report, log in to www.wan-ifra.org/microsites/wan-ifra-reports

How Journalists Can Save Journalism

By PN Balji

Veteran editor PN Balji argues that journalists need to do more to convince businesses the cause of journalism is worth supporting. Here's why.

I am stating an obvious and cliché-ridden point – only to reinforce a point. The media is caught in a crisis of identity and confidence and doesn't know how to get out of the dark hole it is digging for itself. Media is in big trouble, deep trouble. Unfortunately, the debate has so far focused on moving glacially away from the old to the new. Most of old media management is caught in a classic dilemma of knowing deep inside what needs to be done but not how quickly to act. At the heart of this dilemma is the management's real fear of losing the big bucks that have fattened the pockets of the companies during the boom years, thanks to print.

Singapore Press Holdings is one such print behemoth. Its cash cow is the grand old dame of Singapore journalism: the 172-year-old The Straits Times. It is still a force to be reckoned with in a country that has invisible barriers against competition. The parent company is still a billion-dollar company, but profits are going down and down every year and only this year has its management taken the bull by its horns and articulated publicly a policy that the company has to move away from print.

"The strategy (to protect print at all cost) has seen its last days. A lot of our investment has gone towards a digital-first strategy and digital subscriptions," newly-minted SPH CEO Ng Yat Chung told shareholders recently.

"Journalism only for journalism's sake cannot work anymore. It has to be for the reader's sake."

Intentions are one thing, implementation another. A report by Slate on Newsweek's spectacular rise and dismal failure sums up the problem of legacy media: a precarious business model, a roller coaster of explosive growth and cruel contraction, mercurial corporate ownership and journalists doing work that is not widening the divide with readers.

There are some success stories, though. The Economist, The Financial Times and New York Times are examples. The first two have withstood the storm to some extent. Only in the last one year did NYT reverse the losses and it has Donald Trump to thank. Its incisive reporting

and analysis of a President who rules by tweets than by real action has reversed its fortunes as seen in its latest bottom line: Revenue from digital subscriptions increased more than 51 per cent in the last quarter compared with that of a year earlier. Overall subscription revenue increased 19.2 per cent, total revenue rose 10 per cent from a year earlier to US\$484.1 million and the share price went up more than 20 per cent. Impressive figures, indeed.

All these three publications reveal one point clearly: Only compelling content can delay the demise of print. What is compelling content? I am an avid reader of all three and there are a few things that make their editorial content superior:

- One, clear, concise and classy writing. Every one of these newspapers has articles that make me say: How I wish I could write like that. Clichés and wieldy sentences are not in their dictionary.
- Two, they provide not just news but knowledge. The March 3-9 edition of The Economist has this as the cover story: How the West got China wrong. Presenting its arguments cogently and authoritatively, it concludes: "A powerful, yet fragile, dictatorship is not where the West's China bet was supposed to lead. But that is where it has ended up."
- Three, there are heavy hitters that provide unique perspectives into a changing world. The Economist's writers write like they can run Britain, FT is a master at stitching together instant commentaries and analyses of financial, business and political events and NYT is a source of insights into the US and the rest of the world.

However, the business model that relies heavily on advertising to succeed is under assault on two fronts with both advertisers and readers shifting to the world of digital. To keep heads above water, the media needs to do things that will give it a few more legs to stand on.

First, it must get practitioners to relook the way they have been operating so far. Journalism needs a bold paradigm shift to one where the practitioners learn to understand the fast-changing market better and turn their age-old practices on their head. Journalism only for journalism's sake cannot work anymore. It has to be for the



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reader's sake. I have always believed that journalism teaches practitioners life skills. It is time to put these skills into practice to survive in this stormy world. What is acceptable today is irrelevant the very next day.

There is a small unit in SPH called Think Inc that is doing some impressive work in this area. Its three staff came from the newsroom. They have transformed themselves into content marketers by providing commercial services like explaining complex issues with a mixture of words, illustrations and infographics to their clients. I understand Think Inc has got off to a good start, is making good money and bagging impressive clients from government ministries to private enterprises like banks, insurance companies, shopping centres.

Second, philanthropy journalism. A report by UK-based Alliance magazine says that US philanthropies support media and journalism in a great way, giving US\$1.3 billion between 2011 and 2015. It said: "...the times are such that foundations with different backgrounds have come to appreciate the public value that lies in independent journalism. A great opportunity – but one which journalism must step up to the plate as well."

This trend has not caught on in Asia for reasons like fear of officialdom, ignorance, and businesses' distrust of media. But with the dark clouds enveloping the media scene, this is an option the media will have to consider soon. Businesses need to believe in the cause of journalism and realise that a shoddy media environment resulting from a lack of resources is not good for the country they make money in. Journalists need to go out there and woo businesses by explaining how their money can make the difference between a good media and a horrible one.

Indeed, the cause of journalism is worth fighting for.

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South Asian

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