

Traditional publishing and digital advertising: A crossroads and a new frontier

 By [Josephine Buys](#), issued by [IAB South Africa](#)

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At a time when traditional methods of publishing are undergoing rapid change, digital allows new opportunities to connect with readers and consumers. However, our audiences are no longer a given. Publishers and advertisers need to meticulously tailor their content to survive in a cutthroat media landscape.

Disruption in our industry is the norm

The Internet is maturing and evolving at an unprecedented speed. Disruption is the norm and advertisers need to react with agility and intuition. While traditional online display advertising still makes a profit, rising challenges such as banner blindness among readers are limiting its effectiveness. Native advertising, content marketing and/or remarketing are climbing the ranks as real options to make money from a publishers's digital audience.

The emergence of ad blocking

A key issue on the global digital advertising agenda is ad blocking. While ad blocking is still in its infancy and relatively low in South Africa, it does hold the potential to impact the ability for advertisers to achieve the laser point 'holy grail' of 'right message, right person, right time' and of course, more recently, 'right device.' This has a bearing on actual acquisition costs and efficiency. As marketing is driven by cost per acquisition, ad blocking limits audience reach, regardless of what platform they are using.

A united front to counter ad blocking

As a global organisation, the IAB is spearheading the digital advertising industry's reaction to this phenomenon. On September 15 2016, the Coalition for Better Ads was announced in Cologne, Germany, at the Dmexco conference. In addition to the IAB, founding members include heavyweights such as Google, Facebook, Procter & Gamble, Unilever, the 4As, the Association of National Advertisers, the World Federation of Advertisers, The Washington Post and GroupM.

Using technology currently being developed at the IAB's Tech Lab, the consortium aims to monitor digital ad campaigns, scoring them on everything from creative to load time. Standards will be set using data gleaned from the system as well as from consumer feedback and input from marketers. As IAB CEO Randall Rothenberg says, it is critical that, as an industry, we create standards that ensure that consumers get safe, fast, secure delivery of the sites and services they love.

So far, ad blocking has been less of a challenge in our 'mobile-first' context. That does not mean that SA publishers do not need to prepare for ad blocking as they grow their digital presence and audiences. Rather, the idea that global audiences feel led to block out irrelevant advertising should shape what we choose to publish, and how we engage with readers that are becoming increasingly discerning.

Ultimately, it's about great content

The Internet cannot survive without content. In South Africa, we have reached a crossroads rich in opportunity. While our oldest print and press partners are experiencing challenges, our digital industry is hungry for excellent content. We cannot afford to lose good journalists with years of experience because one segment of the media is struggling. As the IAB SA, we are committed to finding ways to supporting our various member sectors to integrate journalists that can no longer work in the print environment, finding them a place within the digital ecosystem. We aim to turn the disruption within print into dialogue.

This speaks to the digital publishing industry's need to deliver relevant content to their audiences in a seamless manner. This content is created by skilled teams that need to be paid competitive salaries. Therefore, digital advertising needs to evolve in such a way that online teams are able to monetise their business and keep creating great content.

It's also about getting to know your users

We recommend publishers and brands engage more intimately with their users to establish what they will and won't accept to remain loyal readers and customers. Open up a dialogue with users so they can contribute to the boundaries of their experience of the platform and what will serve them best. Enhance their experience by making it seamless and laser pointed in its relevance to the individual. Humans are more than a set of data points, possessing their own idiosyncrasies and preferences. They are consumers of content, but also consumers of relevant products and services. The right advert addresses an individual need. In this sense, digital advertising should be a welcome diversion and not a rude interruption. If we strike this balance, publishers and ultimately their advertisers will retain, or in some cases win back, the trust of their audiences.

About the IAB South Africa

The Interactive Advertising Bureau (IAB) South Africa, formerly the DMMA, is an independent, voluntary, non-profit association focused on growing and sustaining a vibrant and profitable digital industry in South Africa. The IAB South Africa represents the digital industry across all sectors including the media, the marketing community, government, and the public, and also acts as the channel through which international bodies can enter the South African digital market. The IAB South Africa currently represents over 200 members including online publishers, creative, media and digital agencies, brands, and educators, between them accounting for more than 43 million local unique browsers, and 1 267 802 page views. The IAB South Africa strives to provide members with a platform through which they can engage, interact, and address digital issues of common interest, thereby stimulating learning and commerce within the South African digital space. To find out more about the IAB South Africa, visit its website, like its Facebook page and follow @iab_sa on Twitter.

ABOUT JOSEPHINE BUYS

Josephine Buys is CEO of The Publisher Research Council (PRC).

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