

THE DAMNED PUBLISHERS

Since the beginning of this Century media watchers have been predicting the demise of magazines and newspapers. However, it took a global financial crisis and an acceptance that the social web has changed everything to finally give the soothsayers of doom a reason to say 'told you so'. JOE MARTIN reports.

Ten years ago I worked with someone who told me almost daily that I was working in a dead medium i.e. print. He was the 'web guy'. As far as he was concerned the web was going to wipe out all printed media. All of it. By 2005 at the latest.

He was wrong and I was right. I said printed magazines would always be around. My argument was that print still offered the best in portability, design, utility and feel. The two dimensional world of the news site or the ugliness of digital page-turn magazines would never replace the capacity of print. Besides, people have a romantic attachment to print – the touch, the smell, the ability to doodle in the margins.

Now, however, I am questioning my previous defense of the 'dead tree' publishing method. I have, of late, started asking if print magazines can be justified for much longer.

OH THE ENERGY

Not only is print expensive to produce content *for*, and to design, print, package and post ... it takes forever and a day from the time the magazine is sent to print to the time it hits desks.

Then there's the environmental issue. If you're a tree hugger you'd balk at the average magazine's carbon footprint. Yes, magazines consume countless trees that would be better left creating oxygen for our lungs, but they also consume gallons of toxic ink, enormous amounts of energy – required to

pulp the wood and turn the print machines – and then they are wrapped in plastic, loaded onto a truck and driven halfway across the country to a depot, where they are further wrapped in plastic and then carted off to a postal centre where each one is probably driven by a different vehicle to their destination. That's thousands of little magazines all getting an individual lift to their final resting place, where many are simply scanned and dumped rather than recycled. Printing is extremely wasteful.

PISH POSH

Some publishers, successful publishers, reading this may say: "If you're making a lot of money out of your print title, none of that matters."

The truth is there are very few Irish publishers making a lot of money from printing magazines. Back in the 80s and 90s it was quite the business to be in, especially if you had the right political and business connections. Contract printing was for many small publishers simply a license to print awful

COST CUTTING MANIA

Offering cost cutting solutions to magazine publishers has become big business. You know an industry is in trouble when a separate industry offering advice and 'solutions' to said industry emerges. Think about the success enjoyed by career coaches and life enrichment gurus during recessions.

Editorial, print and design are the most expensive realities of magazine publishing. A new service called 'Ready-Media' offers pre-fab magazine and newspaper templates from "a cabal of highly skilled designers" and "at a fraction of the cost". With fewer [sensible] people training themselves for a job in magazine design, it's the type of service that will become increasingly valued by publishers over the next few years.



magazines but plenty of money. Advertisers felt magazine display ads, TV, radio and outdoor were the only gigs in town. Now the web offers nearly infinite ad space and display ads have become a commodity. Ad networks that specialise in more efficient, targeted advertising can sell across multiple platforms. The instant, real-time information revolution means pushing a sales message at a consumer via print is increasingly irrelevant. If they want something they can search for it and receive thousands of real-time recommendations from their peers via social networks. Brands and advertisers have, as Unilever's marketing chief recently admitted, found themselves behind the curve, no longer influencers of consumer behaviour. The consumer is now influencing them.

LITTLE IS EXCLUSIVE ANYMORE

Defenders of the traditional publishing status quo are in a panic and have a right to be. They have 'done the math' and know quite simply that the revenues from print advertising could never be matched by online advertising revenues. Digital euros for online publishers are small fry. Hence we've seen Rupert Murdoch put up his pay walls in the hopeful expectation that everyone else will follow suit, and quickly lose 65% of their online readership.

To say Murdoch is misguided is facetious. He's correct in thinking that it's too expensive to give his content away for free but he's wrong in thinking that people who bought his newspapers will subscribe to his online content. Social media has transformed the way information is disseminated. Publishers like Murdoch previously relied on being the exclusive owners of news and other content. Social media has altered this power hold forever.

THE FIRST 'SOCIAL MAGAZINE'

The iPad app 'Flipboard' has been trending in social media circles recently simply because it's one of the coolest applications to emerge for the iPad and it's the world's first 'social magazine' (guaranteed to have many imitators).

The Flipboard app pulls content from a user's Facebook and Twitter accounts, turning updates into magazine-style digital pages.

Flipboard also delivers your choice of 20 or so aggregated content sections (news, finance, music, tech, food, media, etc.) selected by Flipboard's creators. Naturally the app has a few glitches but it is a very good example of future publishing – a format that has social media embedded in its DNA.

Others like it? Sobees and Blogshelf, Early Edition and PressReader.

WHO NEEDS PAPER?

Richard Branson's Virgin media is planning to launch a new magazine that will only be available on iPads, iPhones and Android phones and tablets. The magazine, *Maverick*, will focus on entrepreneurial projects and highlight new creative, business, travel and technology ideas, targeting an ABC1 international audience. It sounds like *Wired* magazine meets *Entrepreneur Magazine* and Branson's 28-year-old daughter Holly will work as the magazine's ambassador trying to sign up a select group of premium advertisers to work as 'brand partners' on the project.

Virgin hopes that *Maverick* will be its first step into building a successful stable of digital magazines. By launching an app-only title, the company believes it is free to exploit the creative potential of the medium without having the added costs associated with running a print title. *Maverick* is a 50-50 joint venture with publisher Seven Squared. More than eight million people will own iPads by the end of this year and Virgin is banking on tablet computers leading the revolution in digital magazine sales and advertising.

There is no longer such a thing as exclusive content. If you want to find out about anything a quick search, especially across social networks like Twitter, will unveil rich nuggets far superior than anything Murdoch's services can provide.

The pay wall approach prevents further growth for an online publisher because it puts a wall between the content and those who might help to spread it. Murdoch's real hope is that the pay wall will encourage people to continue buying his printed newspapers. This is wishful thinking in the era of the mobile web, smart phones and content applications.

LAST BITE IS THE DEEPEST

Irish magazines don't just compete with British and American titles but increasingly with free titles and very sophisticated, rich media web sites, apps and mobile web products. Magazines Ireland represents 43 Irish publishers and says the 2009 ad spend figure fell by €24 million to €215 million. The 2010 and 2011 figures will be far worse.

Internationally we know subscriptions are falling for once giant magazines. Between 2002 and 2009, Newsweek lost 25% and Time lost 18% of its subscribers

The recession has bitten deep and cut to the bone in many cases. The publishers that survive the recession will still be left with an unrelenting reality – the continual juggernaut of social media and Web 3.0.

Ask any 16–25 year-old what magazines they buy. Ask any executive how many Irish magazines they subscribe to. Ask any publisher how many copies they distribute to doctors' waiting rooms. Then go back to the 16-25 year olds and ask them what social networks they use and what websites they like. The writing isn't just on the wall, it's off the wall.

IT'S NOW ABOUT IDEAS NOT PAPER

Today there is more news and more writing and more information available to more people than at any time in history. People who defend the status quo are, in essence, just defending the medium. They are defending paper. They are not defending ideas or content, just the dead trees the ideas are written on.

There are faster, better and cheaper ways of disseminating information. Print will always have its place, but for many publishers it's increasingly becoming a burden they can't afford and are unable to sell.