

Memoirs of a media veteran

 By [Sam Swaine](#)

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My PR journey began bang-on 20-years ago, I'm unsure if the scales tip at 'experienced' or 'plain old'. Either which way, I've trudged through flooded pea fields in stilettos, crisis managed exploding fridges, met Damien Hirst, won a Gibson Flying V guitar, worked 15 -hour days and weekends; all for the love of PR. And yes, I do love it.



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Back to the old school

I cut my teeth on the precipice of the internet boom (that would make me old, not experienced) and watched the landscape shape-shift from traditional communications of yesteryear into the mercurial age of digital. I was catapulted from my comfort blanket of analogue PR practice into a world of domain authority, keywords, PPC, SEO, influencers, E-PR, Google ranking and link building; it was terrifying. Although I often fall back on the original tenets of the press release, pitching and networking, I've had to learn to surf the tsunami of digital with willing agility.

If you were unsure of integrating digital into your PR offering, familiarise yourself with these numbers. Last week The Audit Bureau of Circulations of South Africa released the consumer-magazine circulation stats for the period April–June 2018 (ABC Q2 2018), the results are alarming but not a surprise:

- Total magazine circulation declined by 3.9% on the previous quarter, and by 15.1% on the prior year
- Consumer magazines decreased by 6.2% on the previous quarter, and by 11.5% on the prior year
- B2B Magazines declined by 2.8% on the previous quarter, and by 5.1% on the prior year
- Custom Magazines declined by 1.7% on the prior quarter, and by 20.5% on the prior year
- Free magazines declined by 4.2% on the prior quarter, and by 10% on the prior year



Newspapers ABC Q2 2018: Static, with some highlights

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Magazines ABC Q2 2018: Decline continues

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Come together right now

With the above in mind and the rise and rise of e-publications, social media and traditional newsrooms trimming the fat, PR practitioners have had to transfer their skills to become online snipers. Organisations have had to restructure digital, social and PR silos by removing marketing discipline boundaries to prevent people from retreating into their old bunkers.

We've entered an age of collaboration and multifunctional job roles and whilst everyone can't do everything; for best campaign success, your teams need to integrate communication practices. Brut force procedure is how you don't go about this; coercing teams into an environment of learning is how you'll get their attention.

Lunch and learn

Circa 2003, my boss implemented mandatory "read and pitch" coffees. Every Friday morning, we were presented with a pile of newspapers (the UK had 5 daily newspapers on shelf on any given day), cappuccinos and muffins. Not only did I learn about the vastly different conducts of newspaper nuance; left wing, middle-road and hard right but it nurtured a hunger in me that still exists – an insatiable desire for media, content and news; this keeps me relevant, creative and proactive. Monthly "lunch-and-learn" meetings in an informal environment will kick-start a culture of collaboration, exploration and upskilling.

Most of my industry-critical skills were learned from colleagues who painstakingly navigated me through the minefield of Google Display Networks, social media ad models, search text and the rest. Digital marketing is a multivariate exercise of trial and error, so who better to share war wounds and success stories than the people in the trenches?

ABOUT SAM SWAINE

Sam Swaine is a freelance consultant with over 20-year's experience in marketing and PR. She also specialises in social media and digital marketing trends. Sam is a journalist for business, marketing and consumer publications.

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