

Print needs to be 'sold' differently

By [Louise Marsland](#)

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If brands prize reaching consumers across all touch points wherever they are, why do media still have to justify using print to do the same? This was a question debated by an expert panel at the Media24 Lifestyle Magazines Summit in Cape Town on Thursday.



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A panel on the 'State of the Magazine Nation' was facilitated by Dr Samir Husni, dubbed '[Mr Magazine](#)', who is the founder and director of the Magazine Innovation Centre at the University of Mississippi's Meek School of Journalism and New Media. Cheryl Brown, the editor-in-chief of Allrecipes magazine, owned by [Meredith](#) in the US, wondered if the only people who say print is dead are media people.

"Consumers want all of it... digital, print, social. They don't see it as mutually exclusive," Brown said. "It is just a matter of figuring out how to deliver it in ways that don't cost as much. Print always looks to be more expensive, but it plays a different role in their lives.

"If print advertising sales are down, let's find new ways, get creative, to bring brands on board. The print product itself is thriving."

[Allrecipes](#) is a case in point - it started as online offering Allrecipes.com and then went into print last year, launching a magazine because there was a [demand](#) for it. Brown believes that magazines are "alive and well".

Publisher of [Quartz](#), the business channel of The Atlantic, Jay Lauf, believes the media are too sentimental about what print is and represents. "Bigger isn't much better. Some of the print titles that survive will be niche titles. Give it time. We are in a moment where the advertising community is enamoured of digital and when they hear you defending print they classify you as 'old world'.

"You are almost not allowed to have that conversation. But there will be a Darwinian shakeout. Over time we will be able to go back and have the conversation about how print fits into the mix."

Brown made the point that media owners are also selling a brand and the power of a brand is in reaching consumers at all its touch points, as we all know.

"So the problem lies in the way print is sold. We need to change our approach when communicating with advertisers."

Lauf agreed, touching on the question of ad blockers online and in mobile. "We need to focus on the experiences our readers want to have. It is naïve to think readers will compute the fact that ads pay for the free content they receive and 'give us a solid' and read our ads - they will go for ad blockers. But there is a glut of inventory online and we need some of it scraped away to make a living."

The discussion turned to native advertising and how editorial still needed to maintain editorial integrity, but Brown also urged editors to become more savvy about the business. "Commercially, we need to sell ideas. We are not a non-profit, we need to make money and also give advertising sales a reason to sell. The 'line' (between editorial and sales) is still there, but there is a lot more conversation about 'the line'. We are all part of the same business."

Innovative thinking

The two key themes of the debate were innovation and talent. Much of the discussion focussed on retaining and growing talent, as well as creating the environment for innovation within media companies.

When SVP Atlantic Media, the US publishers of news site The Atlantic, launched Quartz as an international business channel, they gave them a "clean whiteboard to paint on", says Lauf. No existing technology or publishing resources were drawn upon.

"If we had, we wouldn't have invented anything new," Lauf explained.

As regards talent, both Brown and Lauf admitted that their teams were young, made up of millennials and that there was no room for 'print-only' people or 'digital-only' staff and that those days were gone of 'singular' experts who only focussed on one subject in their area of expertise.

"You can have grownups, senior people in the room, but you have to infuse your organisation with new thinking: cross-generational, cross-philosophical, people to challenge my assumptions, not just rubber stamp everything I say.

"We have some specialist writers and some high volume, high octane digital writers. But over time we have weeded out the people who are too specialised in print."

The key Lauf added was to create the conditions in which innovation thrives, even if you weren't the one necessarily coming up with the innovation.

Lauf said his job as publisher was made up mostly these days in talent retention and talent acquisition. "The biggest challenge in my job is finding new talent."

The acquisition of that talent is also changing, with Husni raising the fact that in order for some of his journalism students to

land the jobs they wanted, they had to understand data analytics. Brown added that she knew of other food magazines that hired photographers and food stylists on the basis of their high Instagram following.

Brown also emphasised that publishers could no longer support huge editorial teams and that in order to keep high quality journalism, new ways had to be found to keep sustainability.

Said Lauf: "People create what we are doing. It is hard to find people who care, who are passionate and whom we will keep for longer than two or three years."

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