

What to expect from 2015

 By [Jaco Pienaar](#)

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Business has now resumed at its normal frenetic pace and thoughts have turned to how the local media landscape will change in 2015. But with print still very much alive, social media being embraced, and technology becoming part and parcel of ordinary life, is there still something to be excited about?

The battle for consumer attention is still very much alive. Given the South African context of high technology costs and limited access to reliable, fast, and affordable connectivity, print will never go away. While the latest figures from the Audit Bureau of Circulations of South Africa (ABC) show a steady decline in circulation, it is not all doom and gloom. Publishers have increasingly been trying to come up with inventive solutions to attract readers and to embrace technology to cater for the connected generation. Granted, some have done it kicking and screaming, no publication can afford not to have an element of social or digital that supplements the printed copy.

New ways to reach customers

Local mobile operators are also finding new ways to push content to its customers. Whether it is by forming over the top content partnerships with international players or coming up with more competitive entry-level smartphone devices and mobile data packages, the expectation is that this year will see a significant increase in the connected population. Print publications need to embrace this and develop unique content value propositions for readers. It is highly debatable whether a pay-wall strategy will work in South Africa so the opportunity to do something new is ripe for the taking. More effectively leveraging the likes of Facebook, Twitter, and even e-zines, could result in a mini-renaissance for some struggling publishers. Going a more niche route might also attract some attention although the number of readers in those segments might not justify it financially for the big publishers.

For its part, social media needs to continue to push the envelope. Citizen journalism could gain even more momentum this year as people are more aware of the power they have with generating content from their mobile devices. While many argue that the lack of a gate-keeper with this mean that the news from such sources could not be trusted, it will become a self-policing environment. People are likely to start filtering out those individual content generators that are untrustworthy and focus their circles of influence around those who are. We are also seeing a rise in the consumer voice using social channels. While this could have an impact across industries, those companies in telecoms and banking are especially the ones that could benefit (or risk reputational damage) from more pro-active consumer activities.

Increase in data

Of course, this also means that from a measurement perspective local expectations need to change. The increase in content sources result in an increase in data. This will result in a larger shift in media focus and a continuous change in the market landscape.

AVE values should no longer be considered the Holy Grail of media valuation. But while a move away from this is important, the traditional nature of many South African companies (and agencies) mean that it will still be considered a key valuation metric for months, if not years, to come. So what is the solution? Initially, much focus needs to be placed on education around how coverage is needed to be valued in the new connected world. Especially the impact of social networking and non-traditional forms of media (think podcasts, e-zines, mobile messenger, and so on) on the quality and quantity of coverage need to be investigated.

This might not be such a relaxed year after all.

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ABOUT JACO PIENAAR

Jaco is an MA Information Science graduate who specialises in research, analytical framework development, and content analysis. His thesis was on Intellectual Capital measurement and he applies this to his framework developments as well as knowledge strategies. Professionally, Jaco has worked in the journalism field, academic environment, multi-national research environment, and media analysis environment. He is currently the Chief Knowledge Officer at Professional Evaluation and Research.

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