

Extending newspaper strengths to the web

PARIS: Newspapers everywhere share some universal characteristics: strong brands, customer loyalty, and high levels of market reach. How to extend these attributes into digital media will be the subject of a major presentation at the 61st World Newspaper Congress, to be held in Göteborg, Sweden, 1 – 4 June 2008.

The congress, the World Editors Forum and Info Services Expo, the annual summit of the world's press, are expected to draw more than 1500 publishers, chief editors, CEOs, MDs and other senior newspaper executives and their guests to Sweden in June.

"On demand, user-generated, mashed-up, recommended, socially networked – media has come a long way since the early days of print," says Tim Bowdler, chief executive of Johnston Press in the UK, who will make the presentation during a session on "Newspapers: A Multimedia, Growth Business."

Rapid digital developments

While rapid digital developments offer well-known challenges, they also allow newspaper executives to transform their businesses into "community media companies with a range of channels which extend well beyond text and pictures to include audio and video content, becoming truly multi-media businesses," according to Bowdler.

"The foundation stone of our businesses remains our strong community links based on the strength of our print brands together with our audience and advertiser relationships," says Bowdler. "Building on this strong foundation, newspaper publishers are entirely capable of surviving and thriving in today's rapidly changing media environment. The opportunities lie in the very threats which confront us. If we grasp them, we will continue to be leading media businesses for many years to come."

Johnston is well-placed to make the presentation: Johnston Press publishes 18 daily newspapers, 291 weekly newspapers, a range of related specialist, locally focused, print publications, and operates 317 local websites to extend the content and reach of its print products.

Other presentations

Other presentations include:

- The transformation of Belgium's De Persgroep, which merged three publishing companies into the multimedia group in 2006. Christian Van Thillo, CEO of De Persgroep, will discuss what worked and what didn't after the merger.

- The growth of >Eenadu, a particularly successful example of the growth and innovation that characterises the Indian newspaper market. I Venkat, director of the group, will show how Eenadu ("Today" in the Telugu language) grew from a fledgling print company into a media conglomerate with print, television, Internet and other media.

Other confirmed speakers for the congress include: Joe Webb, deputy MD of the Irish Independent; Giorgio Valerio, GM of RCS Quotidiani in Italy; Tomas Brunegard, CEO of Sweden's Stampen Group; Nelson Sirotsky, president and CEO of RBS Group in Brazil; Francis Morel, director general, and Pierre Conte, deputy director general in charge of New Media, of Le Figaro in France; Dominic Young, director of editorial services of News International in the UK; and Tony Watson, editor-in-chief of The Press Association in the UK.

Statistical snapshot

The congress will also include the annual World Press Trends update, which provides a statistical snapshot of circulation, readership, advertising and other newspaper trends; a session on the latest research about the media habits of younger readers; a primer on digital developments entitled "Everything You Always Wanted to Know about Web 2.0 but Didn't Dare Ask"; and the 2008 Global Report on Innovations in Newspapers, presented by the Innovation International Media Consulting Group.

Additionally, the conference will also present the best from the 2008 strategy reports of WAN's major Shaping the Future of the Newspaper research project, analysing developments and opportunities in the press industry. Highlights will include the results of a "Scenario Planning" process engaged by WAN to look at the threats, opportunities and possible disruptions lying ahead for the newspaper industry – and identifying a series of "roadmaps" to help publishers anticipate change.

Sponsors for the events now include Volvo, Holmen Paper, SAS, Bonnier, the Stampen Group and Pricewaterhouse Coopers.

Full details of the events, organised by the World Association of Newspapers and hosted by the Swedish Newspaper Association, may be found at www.wansweden2008.com.

• *The Paris-based WAN, a global organisation for the newspaper industry, defends and promotes press freedom and the professional and business interests of newspapers world-wide. Representing 18,000 newspapers, its membership includes 77 national newspaper associations, newspaper companies and individual newspaper executives in 102 countries, 12 news agencies and 11 regional and world-wide press groups.*

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