

BREAKING: *Daily Maverick* launches weekly print newspaper, exclusive interview with Styli Charalambous

 By [Jessica Tennant](#)

6 Aug 2020

Daily Maverick has just announced that it's launching a weekly newspaper, yes, in 2020, in the middle of a pandemic and the greatest calamity to ever hit the global print media. "Madder than a bag of snakes" was the initial reaction.

“ Editorial: Fellow South Africans, we're launching a weekly newspaper. In the middle of the pandemic

<https://t.co/adxKDcy44a> — *Daily Maverick* (@dailymaverick) [August 6, 2020](#) ”

It certainly is a bold move during a global crisis that is seeing major declines in print advertising and a counter-intuitive one at that given the recent closures and scaling down of local publishing houses and print divisions, but also one that Styli Charalambous, publisher and CEO of the *Daily Maverick* says they've considered and that they feel confident that their model is sound and robust enough to see the crisis through and come out stronger on the other side.

In our exclusive video interview, Charalambous tells us the rationale behind their decision to foray back to the future, as they've dubbed the project.

Why now? He says now is as good a time as any. Of course, they've had to relook at their strategy and re-evaluate, but

Charalambous says that after taking a long hard look at theirs, the reader demand is there and their ability to produce it is there, so the question then becomes 'Why not?'. The thing is, he says, "If you can launch and grow in the middle of chaos and a crisis, the traction that you need after being in the market for a couple of months and to come out the other side hopefully when things are closer to what we used to consider normal, we'll be in a much better position to take advantage of that. And it's a great time to experiment."

“ If you were able to launch something in the most difficult of conditions and get it out there into the world, when those conditions subside, and things become a little bit easier, you've almost futureproofed yourself to a large extent against some of the challenges that might come down the road. ”

He admits that it has not been an easy feat, there have certainly been additional challenges to what would be considered normal pre-Covid, but although print advertising has seen a decline, he says the demand for good, quality content has spiked and, in some markets, even for print products. "The big challenge is obviously, 'What happens to the advertising side of the equation?', and that's the biggest variable here for us. April was the worst-hit month for print advertising in South Africa's history ever. There was a massive decline, but it's going to come back. It might not come back to 100%, but we're comfortable that our model as a lean digital-first approach to publishing will insulate us against any decline in the market for at least the next decade.



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Styli Charalambous 18 Jan 2019



"We're excited to bring something new to a segment of the industry that is taking a huge amount of pain and hopefully, we can show the country and the world that innovation is the way out of the problem for the news industry.

"We can sit here and lament the impact that Google and Facebook have had and there may be ways out of it but to just sit and complain is not going to solve the problem, you've got to try stuff, and we didn't want anyone to call the time of death on print journalism without us having had a chance at a crack at the title."



The idea to launch a newspaper was one that they'd been kicking around for quite a while at the *Daily Maverick*, but they didn't want to come to market with a similar iteration of what had been done before. Charalambous explained that newspapers typically start in print before digital and that digital transformation poses a massive problem and one that few publishers have got right.

“ You were stuck with this golden goose of the newspaper ad revenue model and then digital, and even though the numbers were there, and substantially higher than the newspaper readership, the revenues just weren't there and so you had this imbalance and these contradictory forces fighting against each other and this cannibalistic nature and worry of one side of the business being eaten up by the other and it almost felt like there was this schizophrenic one up against the other that a lot of news publishers across the world were feeling. ”

As a case in point, he referred to the *New York Times* innovation report that was leaked in 2014, where you could really see how the historic print culture and practices were holding back the publication's transformation. “They realised what they

needed to do to transform, and to stop thinking of these things as two competing products, they needed to make sure that the digital transformation was at the forefront of everything that they did... They're one of the few that have got it right and so even as they've had incredible success in digital subscriptions, the print product has still remained important to them, but has become a smaller part of their profitability, but still a massive part of what they offer their readers."

So, as the *Daily Maverick* was born a digital native, instead of focusing on digital transformation they're working on creating a product that better serves their existing readership in this day and age. As such, the paper should rather be seen as an innovation, having been designed from scratch by a traditionally digital publisher in a modern era with a digital approach to its methodology, using data and technology to help establish the quality of the product and to allow for engagement with their readers. Much like the *New York Times*, they're thinking of these elements as part of the same holistic pie. "We're very happy to see that we're able to put all these things together and launch something that's new, exciting, innovative and is also, but more importantly, a quality read and a quality journalistic experience for our readers."



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Charalambous says they're looking to launch with a critical amount of copies, around the 20,000 mark, which they feel will make an impact to advertisers, and are working with distribution partners, PnP to get this out to their readers.

Yesterday, they released a campaign to their readers, extending to the broader market, asking people to vote on which stores they would like them to launch with, to see where the demand is strongest and which areas they need to service with deliveries.

They're also working with PnP to make sure that the growth of the product is sped up. "We're doing that by making the cover price of R20 available for free to all SmartShopper customers, and so removing the cost barrier is a strategy that we wanted to bring to the market that would help us reach new audiences quickly and get to that critical number as quickly as possible." And with PnP's SmartShopper programme to reach new readers who haven't yet experienced *Daily Maverick* journalism, who might want access to quality journalism but may have data costs as a restriction, for example.



Describing the product, Charalambous says they wanted to build a comprehensive editorial product that's going to keep people busy for quite a few hours. It will come out on a Saturday and keep you busy at least for the next week until the next

edition comes out, but “it’s the kind of quality product that if you pick it up in a week, two weeks or a month even, or a couple of months, that there’s still going to be a good read to be had, with the long-form journalism that we’re going to be producing.”



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The name *Daily Maverick 168* is reference to the number of hours in a week, he explains. “It’ll be a combination of some of the best content, the best articles that we’ve produced in the week, that’s been repacked for the weekend print edition, been repacked with better visuals and edited to fit the paper, as well as new and exclusive stories that will be published for the first time in the print paper, and it’ll come with South Africa’s favourite cartoonists Zapiro, Madam & Eve and Carlos, all great, and I think it’s the first time that those three have ever been published in one publication. So a really complete and comprehensive editorial experience that we’re hoping is going to both surprise people and obviously give them that lean-back experience away from screens over the weekend.

“I think we’re all feeling this backlash against what screens are doing to us physiologically and just that fatigue that we all have and even the mental distress that notifications and the never-ending scroll give us and we wanted to create something that will give people an escape from it and some of the most important journalism affecting the country wrapped up with some inspirational stories, some lighter stories, some shorts in a high-quality product, so it’s a tough, exciting challenge we’ve given ourselves.”

The stronger the demand and the more votes they can gather now, the more they can prove to advertisers and sponsors that there is still ink left in the tank. You can do your bit by casting your vote [here](#) and asking friends and neighbours to do so too. And when the launch date arrives, they promise to deliver a world-class newspaper experience for you, every weekend, for free in return for a trip to the supermarket.

For more, read the [Daily Maverick’s release announcement](#), where they further explain why they think this is an idea worth pursuing, that they should go back to the future.

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