

Why Asian newspapers continue to grow

BALI, INDONESIA: Those simplistic explanations about why Asian newspapers continue to grow went right out the window when Asian newspaper leaders gathered in Bali, Indonesia, last week.



Some say Asian newspapers continue to gain circulation simply because they have large populations, and incomes and education are growing. That is only half of the picture, however. The other half is the work Asian publishers are doing to protect print revenues while pursuing digital expansion, and there are lessons here for publishers in markets where print circulations are declining.

"The print needs to be protected because that's where the money is, while the digital needs to be developed," says Chua Wee Phong, executive vice president of Circulation for Singapore Press Holdings, speaking at Publish Asia, the premier Asian publishing conference organised by WAN-IFRA, the World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers.

"It's a question of slowing down the rate of decline, milk as much money as you can out of it, and give the company sufficient opportunity to venture into the digital world," he said.

More than 700 newspaper executives from across the region participated in Publish Asia, which was four conferences in one, covering all aspects of publishing: a CEO Summit, Newsroom Summit, Advertising Summit and Printing Summit. Summaries of presentations from the CEO Summit are now available from WAN-IFRA.

Exclusively for members of WAN-IFRA, a full executive report on the event can be found at <http://www.wan-ifra.org/summaries>.

Non-members can access an abbreviated version of the summary in return for a tweet or a Facebook entry at <http://blog.wan-ifra.org/blogs/publish-asia-2012-blog>.

One of the chief advantages that newspapers have over other media is they can use the profits generated by print, which continue to dwarf those of digital, to fund online, mobile and tablet growth. And no region does this better than Asia.

"The money is still there. There is print market share and advertising growth," said Agung Adiprasetyo, chief executive officer of Kompas Gramedia, one of Indonesia's largest media houses.

So why invest in digital?

"The demand to fulfil the needs of people for quality information cannot be satisfied by print alone," he said. "We believe that, rather than just one pillar, it is always better to have two or three."

Quotes from the conference

"Three-quarters of the world's top 100 largest newspapers are published in Asia. Print circulations are growing, a fact that is not easily explained away by those who insist on predicting the death of newspapers. Millions of Asians turn to their daily paper as their primary trusted source of news and information." - Jacob Mathew, president of WAN-IFRA and executive editor and publisher, Malayala Manorama Group, India.

Today we push to newsprint - in future it will be tablet or whatever comes." - Dipankar Das Purkayastha, managing director and chief executive officer, APB Pte Ltd, India.

"The core principle we have moving forward is that we're no longer thinking about business in terms of geography and platforms but about audience and content." - Jack Matthew, chief executive officer, Fairfax Metro Media, Australia

"Most important is to learn from others, and adjust to your environment." - Pichai Chuensuksawadi, editor-in-chief, Post Publishing, Thailand

"It doesn't matter what industry, somebody is going to come up with a product to dislodge your business. It's already happened in the newspaper industry. Somebody has already defined what it takes to be successful in our business." - Sanat Hazra, technical director, Bennett, Coleman & Co, India

"Almost every year, we try to do something new with the newspaper - a new page, a new section - and it may be unusual, but we try it. If it doesn't work, you can always stop it, but if works, you have something new." - Azrul Ananda, director, Jawa Pos, Indonesia

"We see lots of companies inject digital Botox into products that have become moribund." - Juan Senior, partner, Innovation International Media Consulting Group.

"If anyone says you have to have the technology development in-house, I'm sorry, but they're taking you back to the past." - Allan Marshall, joint principal, iMedia Advisory, Australia

"The largest consequence of increasing democracy is the increasing role of media, with the responsibility of being the purveyor of news and information. The media industry has a much greater social value, well beyond its economic one. You have a great deal of influence in charting the course of nation states. The role of media is to enlighten, serve truth, promote justice and nurture democracy." - Indonesia Vice President Boediono.

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