

Newspapers: New digital business models needed

STUTT GART, GERMANY: The search for viable digital business models for newspapers is nothing less than an effort to strengthen the foundation of democratic society.



That was the message in an opening speech on Tuesday (12 June) at Zeitung Digital, the annual digital media conference for German newspaper executives organised by the German Newspaper Publishers' Association BDZV and WAN-IFRA, the World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers.

"Despite all the new competitors, it remains the central role of newspapers to supply the news and information necessary for citizens to make informed choices in democratic society," said Larry Kilman, deputy CEO of WAN-IFRA, in his opening remarks to nearly 300 participants at the conference in Stuttgart.

"We sometimes take that for granted, but it is an expensive proposition and responsibility. Our new competitors - the aggregators and search engines, social media and more - just aren't doing this. They don't have the tradition of fulfilling this role, they don't have the reporting teams, and, in the hunt for greater and greater traffic, they have proven they largely don't care. This role has always fallen to us, and falls to us again in the digital news sphere."

Kilman praised the work being done in newspaper companies around the world, which have largely made the transition from print-only to multimedia news companies. But while newspapers dominate the market for online news in many countries, that success has not been matched with sufficient revenues.

Discovering, developing new business models

"That's why what you're doing is so important, so essential," said Kilman. "You're discovering and developing the new business models. You might not think about the mission on a daily basis, but you're doing the essential work that will ensure that newspaper companies continue to fulfil their societal role as purveyors of credible news and information. Your work should be celebrated equally with the superb editorial work for which your newspapers are known."

"I know the business people in our industry don't usually think this way," he said. "It's the editorial people who feel like they're on a mission. But there won't be a mission if we don't step up and make the money that will allow the editorial teams to do their jobs. Nobody else is going to do this."

The full speech can be read at <http://www.wan-ifra.org/node/59448>

Kilman's remarks were preceded by a review of the last 17 years of Internet presence in daily business life, from a German point of view, by Richard Rebmann, vice president of the German Newspaper Publishers' Association BDZV (and chair of its Digital Committee) and chief executive of Südwestdeutsche Medien Holding (one of the leading media holdings in Germany, owning the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* amongst others) in Stuttgart.

Dr Rebmann tracked the milestones during a period from 1995 to 2012, a period in which the number of Internet users went from 52 million worldwide to 52 million in Germany alone.

More on Zeitung Digital (in German) can be found at <http://www.wan-ifra.org/de/node/52453>.

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