

Time to produce proof for print

 By [Sumien Brink](#)

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Here's a challenge to the print industry and its award bodies: if the medium is to grow again, print needs to take a leaf out of digital's book and prove its ROI. And industry awards need to reward this.

I adore print. There's nothing like a beautifully printed magazine cover or the crack of a freshly-bound spine. The smell of fresh ink. The weight of a publication in your hands as you leaf through its crisp, clean pages. I love that back issues of favourite titles form libraries of food, décor and life inspiration in homes everywhere.

Although it might be ailing a little, print is not dead. Not by a long way. The 400+ high quality entries that have been submitted for tonight's [PICA awards](#) are a sure sign that print is very much alive. But shrinking budgets, expectations of immediacy and the ability to measure ROI simply cannot be ignored.

It's time to toughen up

Those of us who know and believe in the power of print need to prove it. Faith is not enough; clients need facts. We need to show how effective - not just how pretty - great magazine work can be. And the focus of our industry awards needs to shift to reward performance, not just beauty and creativity.

Ultimately, whether yours is a glossy consumer title or an under-the-radar internal communication, it has business objectives to meet. And with smart strategy, audience insight, considered content and beautiful execution, this is possible.

The power of print IS measureable

For example, in the first week following the launch of *Ackermans' Club* magazine, the retail chain sold over 10,000 pairs of the shorts that were featured on the cover. Woolworths stores were cleaned out of broad beans when a dish including them was featured on the cover of *Woolworths TASTE* magazine. (*Woolworths TASTE* always features seasonal ingredients, showing customers what they can do with them - and encouraging sales of what's in store.) [Note: *New Media publishes Ackermans' Club, Woolworths TASTE and FNB's custom magazines.*]

When Ackermans wanted to be seen as more fashionable, without losing its family values, we shifted the look and content of its *Club* magazine. Qualitative feedback from readers showed that it worked and that perceptions had changed. And when *FNB* sought to increase employee participation and engagement, we carefully crafted their internal print and digital magazine with this objective in mind. FNB has seen significant and measurable behavioural changes that it can directly attribute to this.

Great magazine work *can* achieve great results. We just need to be clever about how to measure and prove it - quantitatively or qualitatively.

Making awards even sweeter

If industry awards such as the PICAs start allocating greater importance to effectiveness, how much more valuable will a category win become?

Already, industry awards help boost credibility and reassure clients that they've made the right choice. But with performance-based judging in the mix, too, your list of print awards will be an even more important factor when clients award pitches - or when they choose between print or online budget allocation.

So here's a challenge

My challenge to South Africa's publishing industry is this: let's fly the flag for print by showing how effective it can be. Let us be as driven by strategic focus on achieving results as we are by creativity. And let's see industry awards recognising and rewarding the qualitative feedback and hard data that prove that print works.

It's not going to be easy, but if we can prove ROI, our clients can motivate for bigger print budgets, advertising revenues will increase - and this medium will grow again.

ABOUT SUMIEN BRINK

Sumien Brink (@sumienbrink) is the content director at New Media (www.newmediapub.co.za; @NewMediaZA) and editor of *Woolworths TASTE* and *VISI* magazines. Previously, she was the fashion editor for *Cosmopolitan* when it launched, the editor of the *Cosmo* fashion directory and the launch editor of *House and Leisure*. When she's not reading or producing award-winning magazines, you'll find her cooking, baking or working in her garden.

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