

New trend: brand newsrooms



By Louise Marsland

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An interesting media and communications development in recent years is the establishment of newsrooms within advertising agencies and brands to deliver news, branded content and amplify social media campaigns.

Staffed by trained journalists, editors, communication specialists, strategists and creatives, these new content hubs are beginning to deliver on content targeted at the media's business pages, as well as to feed the viral appetite of consumers on social media platforms.

They are also starting to play an important reputational role for brands in identifying threats to brands online and reacting appropriately in time.

Most importantly for this market, these content hubs are running and executing campaigns that draw on content created and repurposed for specific consumer niches across all channels. From social content with a turnaround of hours that lives for only a day, to long form content on a website or print publication that engages a consumer for months.



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Ogilvy & Mather Cape Town has established the '[Newsroom](#)', housed within Ogilvy Public Relations, but designed to drive benefits right across the agency, according to O&M leadership.

Getting this "journalism mindset" into the agency is essential, said Luca Gallarelli, Ogilvy & Mather Cape Town MD. "It is essential to deliver for clients in a really agile way on two tracks - quick turnaround and slower-burn crafted creative.

"The agency needs to stay fully at speed on anything current which might provide an opportunity or a threat for a brand, we should have the ability to take gaps within an hour and be aware of any news, trends, social memes or even bad jokes which are, however fleetingly, playing out in a big way in the minds of consumers."

The Newsroom at O&M is headed up by creative director and well-known Cape Town blogger, Dan Nash. It combines journalists, researchers and copywriters into a group that monitors news, trends and exchanges ideas - from the office during the day and via chat apps after hours.

Nash says their content studio has embraced the traditional newsroom model of fast paced and tactical with instant delivery, and grown that into a content studio with a strategist, analyst, copywriter, designer and creative director. Some of the team are former journalists or studied journalism.

The core group are in before everyone else in the agency each day, connected via chat apps and social media after hours so they can move quickly when there is breaking news to deliver on ideas for clients or tactical social campaigns within hours of a story breaking or a meme going viral.

"We move very quickly, there is no paperwork, we present ideas to whichever brand is a client of Ogilvy's or go direct to client with the idea. Much of the content is biodegradable. Sometimes it's just a GIF."



Dan Nash

Rapid response

It is becoming more common for brands and their agencies these days to have teams of 30 writers waiting for something to happen to respond and 'war rooms' for awards shows like the Oscars to capitalise on the social capital generated when something happens that goes viral.

Adidas recently shared its global 'digital newsroom' strategy for the group. It is setting up a series of digital newsrooms across the world in a bid to bring more strategic oversight to brands marketed online, according to the ['2015 Media Trends and Corporate Newsrooms'](#) report from Press Feed and the Society for New Communications Research.

As the PR report states: "Some will argue that this is merely PR, and they'll have a point, but brands putting their own slant on the news is no different to a media journalist constructing a narrative to suit his audience... Media outlets report the same stories in very different ways, so why can't brands?"

"Getting to your audiences first is critical if you want to own that story. This means having a team that is agile, fast and can expect the unexpected so that it can respond quickly and creatively to whatever comes its way."

The report states that brand newsrooms are a way to alleviate the problems brands currently have in reacting timeously to content opportunities or reputation threats - often bogged down by legal compliance, slow sign-off processes, over-zealous brand protection, a lack of trust, lack of resources and a lack of understanding of the new 'always-on' social media landscape.

Owning the conversation and driving brand loyalty is as much about how you respond to current memes and debates in social chatter, as it is about gorgeous advertising campaigns. As Nash reiterates: "Just because it is short and disposable, it still has to be brilliant."

Of course clients can't always be reached, although increasingly, good marketers are connecting to their agencies on WhatsApp too, so clients sign off on conversational calendars and trust their agencies to look after their brand(s).

"Unfortunately not all clients understand the urgency with social. Sometimes you can't wait an hour for them to get back to you," Nash says.

He agrees that what they are doing at O&M is ground-breaking stuff. "We are seeing the volume of our audience on a one-to-one communication level. This is not a small little message - the entire audience and brand is aware of what other brands are doing. We need to know what we are doing, we can't make a mistake, or we get picked apart."

In essence, Nash says, they are more of an incubator and idea generator. They have started a conversation that lives anywhere, starts anywhere, more than a new department or a room in a building.

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