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Digital-first strategy – the way ahead for news organisations?

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Gone are the days when one had to wait for the newspaper every morning to get one's daily dose of news and views. In today's wired world, we get info and insight into events around the world as they happen through the Internet and mobile.

As the world moves towards more channels to provide instant news, the habits of the consumers in consumption of content is also changing. People prefer to know the news as soon as possible, be it a recent political or social events, or sports. With increased digitization and better technology, the days of enjoying reading your paper with a strong cup of coffee, might just be limited.

In one of the firsts, but definitely not the last, The Guardian, one of UK's leading dailies, announced a shift in its strategy regarding the news production and consumption. The paper announced that it would adopt a digital-first strategy, from a print-first strategy, it earlier had. This would make the news available first on the Internet than in print, and the print version of the paper would change its focus to a more analysis based version.

Why should long-established publications look towards a digital-first future? Vineet Gupta, Managing Partner, 22feet, explained, "Users now access the internet on the move, which gives them access to instant, real-time news. Since the consumption of the content is changing, it is significant for content creators to also change their policies. With access to real-time news and social networks, 'who gets news first' has become a highly important differentiator amongst people now. Recognising this practice of content consumption is important for the media organizations now."

This brings up the question, with evolving technology, is digital the way forward then? Many agency people definitely think so. Yashraj Vakil, COO, Red Digital, said, "It is the right path by the paper and definitely the way to go. It is now being understood that the print medium would slowly go away."

Manosh Sengupta, owner consultant, brand-@itude, said, "I believe that digital is the way forward, but I believe that the time needs to correct for all publications, which would depend on their readership profile. It is a major decision to change to a digital-first and I am excited to see how the Guardian will adopt this strategy."

The question then arises – will a digital-first strategy suit the Indian market? Max Hegerman, President, Tribal DDB, said, “A digital-first strategy will not be the way forward for India, as this is one of the few countries, where print is still growing. The digital first strategy would also need to bring about a change in the attitudes and habits of newspaper reading. Newspaper reading also depends on the lifestyle of the people. People who commute a lot on a daily basis, read a newspaper while commuting and would still prefer to do so.”

A digital-first strategy will involve a change in not just reading habits of people, but also many other aspects for a news organization. Sengupta explains, “But what is important to note while making such a decision is to remember, that to make the strategy successful, the entire process of consuming news needs to be re-formatted. Unlike print’s one-dimensional approach, digital does offer a more interactive approach to news consumption, by offering multimedia and also the opportunity to interact with the news organisation.”

“It is also important to remember that the success of any media organization depends on its commercial and advertising opportunities. Thus this kind of strategy needs a business model, where the advertising revenues would be completely driven by digital as well. It will be interesting to see how Guardian’s decision fares in this sense,” he added.