

Transforming the news experience

 By [Jim Egan](#)

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In a country as dynamic as South Africa we are surrounded by constant reminders that life never stands still. Innovation is in our nature as human beings and nothing epitomises this more than the rapid ascent of all things digital. The speed of developments is eye-watering.

In the news industry the digital revolution presents a challenge; how to provide up to the minute news for an audience that uses a number of devices to access an ever-expanding array of information sources. But it is a challenge we must rise to. In truth, it's exciting.

Every week we hear about another technical innovation. A year ago phrases like WhatsApp and WeChat were anything but common parlance - now we are actively working on creating content that appeals to audiences on these platforms. Not a month goes by without another new entrant joining the news market, challenging the big, established players and disrupting incumbents. The audience is curating their own news and in some instances actually reporting it.

In working to remain the most retweeted news provider on Twitter, supplying bite sized bulletins for Spotify, or infographics of news stories for Instagram - all these innovations have a common denominator - mobile. The device in your pocket now allows access to news from anywhere in the world with a simple swipe of the screen.



Image via Fotolia

A recent BBC World News survey of audiences' [interest in international news](#) showed South Africans came top in feeling particularly strongly that global news plays an important role in making people feel informed about what's going on in the world (79%) and understanding it (70%). The study also showed that almost three quarters of South Africans now feel more concerned about news from other parts of the world than they had in the past.

Last month the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism published its Digital News Report 2015 - the findings of a YouGov survey of over 20,000 online news consumers (<http://digitalnewsreport.org>). It suggests younger audiences are turning towards mobile and increasingly, online video and new visual formats. And there appears to be a quickening towards mobile news-use overall, with the smartphone emerging as the central platform for digital news.

As the broadband and cellular infrastructure develops in South Africa and the cost of mobile data comes down, we're seeing huge growth in mobile viewers of news. In turn mobile consumption is fuelling rapid growth of video news on the move.

What is not in doubt however is that the smartphone is currently re-defining our industry. It has shaken up how people consume news (bite-size chunks; less text; more video); the way that news is reported and is challenging business models. And this has happened incredibly quickly. Although barriers to entry are falling, cut-through can be tough. The number of news sources is growing, but audiences generally rely on a few trusted news providers. It could be a future dominated by a few successful brands which worked out early on how to make their app the consumer choice. This is something which advertisers are increasingly conscious of.

The notion that the audience is permanently online and personalising their news, provides big opportunities. If smartphones are the only tool you need to live your life in the modern world then what they represent and what they enable needs to be at the centre of what we do - from journalists using their iPhones to film, edit and file from the field, to personalisation tabs on a viewer's news app being part of our business models. Digital innovation needs to be woven through all aspects of our industry, including the commercial side of the house.

If we can be at the forefront of digital development there is much to be optimistic about. Personal, portable and on-demand aren't new frontiers for news, they are becoming its very essence. In many ways we are entering a new golden age for news - what we do as journalists has never been in greater demand. Advertisers too are recognising the increasingly profound role that news is playing in the audiences' daily lives.

ABOUT JIM EGAN

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