

Papers Down Under are Not Going Under



Randy Hines

By Randy Hines

PERTH, Australia – I'm writing this from the South, southwestern Australia that is. The doom and gloom forecasts facing most American newspapers have not reached the Aussie shores yet.

Advertising revenue in 2008 was down only 0.6 percent for papers across the island continent. That is tremendous news compared to the record drop of more than 17 percent for U.S. publishers last year. The U.K., on the other hand, saw a 12 percent decline.

Forecasters are predicting a bright future for papers here, according to research by The Newspaper Works, an organization representing the country's largest publishers.

The only area among Australian newspapers seeing a drop was the area of classifieds, which fell by 4.2 percent. But as more and more online opportunities arise across the land down under, that income along with retail and national ad revenue could decrease in the months ahead. Social media are slightly slower in reaching the shores here, unlike the immediate welcome mat received in North America.

Only 2 percent of Aussies reported getting their news online during a December survey. Newspaper Web sites are growing here even though print readers have kept up their daily habits. U.S. papers, of course, have adopted online editions for years now. The new media in the U.S. is now also the traditional media that have adopted the technology to provide online news, video and links. That trend will continue among Aussie papers too.

It will be interesting to see if Australians keep some skepticism about social media or bloggers. According to a 2009 Rosen Group study, almost 60 percent of Americans reported they don't consider information from blogs to be "credible."

Reporters here are identified with bylines, but without an e-mail address in most papers.

Another difference is the size of many papers. Some are tabloids and a few have adopted slightly narrower page sizes. But other broadsheets look like tablecloths compared to most U.S. newspapers. The major paper in Perth is The Australian, a bulky paper that measures 17 inches across (or 34 when opened up).

Some things are the same in both countries. The April 1 edition of that paper carried a one-fourth page ad offering free babysitting services at the offices of members of parliament. It was an April Fool's Day joke poking fun at Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's promise about paid paternal leave. It was just one of a number of printed jokes in the country.

Former Southerner Randy Hines is a professor at Susquehanna University in Pennsylvania. His latest book is "Print Matters: How to Write Great Advertising" (www.racombooks.com) with Bob Lauterborn, James L. Knight Chair of Advertising at UNC-Chapel Hill. He can be reached at randyhinesapr@yahoo.com.

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