



NOTES FROM THE WORKGROUPS AT THE PUBLISHERS' MEETING

SATURDAY 28 MAY 2005, BARCELONA

The attendees were asked to discuss and develop strategies to address the threat of the free-access, free-ads model as exemplified by Craigslist.

Here are their reports:

The Green Group – reported by Sally Winfield

The Green Group felt that Bob Cauthorn's presentation had been a 'rocket up our backsides' and said that what was important was to stop talking and actually start doing. They agreed they needed to start thinking like customers (advertisers and readers) and improve/start their interacting with them to finally understand what business they're in. It was clear that there would be pain and seriously tough choices to be made in the next 6-12 months, and one aspect would be a forced internal emphasis on automation. The Group believed that there is a future for print products coupled with online but there is a clear need to consider whether charging a coverprice is a viable business model. "Stop tweaking, be bold, dive in"

The Red Group – reported by Mark Schiffmacher

The Red Group observed that it was not just Craigslist that posed the threat, it was Gumtree, Loquo etc. Maybe the answer is to "do a Friday-Ad plus coupons and online". The Group noted that maybe Eastern and Central Europeans will be able to take advantage of their relative lack of technical legacy, e.g. mobile technology leapfrogging traditional landlines. There's a future in collaboration efforts, e.g. advertising Greek holiday homes in LOOT. Two of the Group already had Craigslist products in place and there was a sincere belief that we can do this better than the online pure-plays through superior organisation/proofing/cleaning of content plus better customer service.

The Yellow Group – reported by David Waghorne

The Yellow Group concluded that "information wants to be free" and that this is now the market's and customers' expectations. They cited George Brooks' example of small

businesses clustering together in a large group to leverage economies of scale and share best practice. The Group was also critical of our tendency to "imagine" that we are attacking ourselves and trying to cannibalise our products when maybe we are deceiving ourselves with products that do not actually impact our portfolio. There's a need for an outward facing stance and the Group questioned over-investment in colour printing and design, observing that many "basic" publications performed extremely well, and noting that the low-cost provider will always command market-share. The Group considered layering the market electronically, giving the example of one content-owner who delivered the same content on 5 sites each tailored for a slightly different audience. "If the barriers are low, how can we differentiate ourselves?"

The Blue Group – reported by Jack Humphreville

A snappy report from this Group recommending a defensive strategy of capitalising on current content and "owning the client", or an offensive strategy of developing partnerships and working through associations, or developing specialist publications via channels such as PDF's. "If all else fails, sell!"

Bob Cauthorn's final comments

Going forward, it's not going to be business as usual. Bob felt that we are too confident in the strength of our own publications and emphasised that "good enough" is fine for most customers. Our commitment to focusing on our advertisers and understanding them is great but don't forget the reader. He saw more interest from working co-operatively and sharing ideas, and a common recognition starting to filter through that eventually all classifieds will be free, it's just a matter of time. You can still generate revenue from upselling and adding value if you know your customers e.g. delivering locally targeted auto supplies advertising alongside ads for used cars. He cited an excellent service from Trader Classified Media's publications which alerted customers by SMS that their ad had slipped in the rankings and offering a single-click upsell opportunity.

One single piece of advice: LEARN ABOUT YOUR CUSTOMERS.

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