

Soccer Laduma proves print's not dead

By Leigh Andrews

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Soccer Laduma newspaper has just celebrated its second decade of printing the continent's most popular sport news. CEO and founder Peter du Toit explains the digital design touchpoints that have extended the publication's longevity.



Du Toit.

Soccer Laduma, the biggest circulating weekly soccer publication in Africa and amongst the top in the world, has just celebrated its 20th birthday – that means there have been over 1,000 issues since its launch in 1997. Du Toit attributes much of this success to listening to their readers – and in keeping with technological changes, the title is no longer merely in print but also includes a massive digital footprint including 1,312,504 unique browsers on web and mobile, over two million Facebook fans and 370,000 Twitter followers.

Clint Roper, head of content marketing and part of the Soccer Laduma brands for 18 years confirms that they've always put the reader first and made sure that their content both reflects their views and has diversified into digital at a time when conventional wisdom said their readers did not access the internet. That's part of their phenomenal success 20 years

on.

Going digital: Turning readers into listeners

Take last October's launch of SL Radio as a further example of digital adding to their print stable and set to rival the biggest digital radio players. That's why Jason Acar, editor at SL Radio, says the brand looks forward to further serving their readers as listeners.



Soccer Laduma, then and now ...

In doing so, they're continuing to build their brand [despite the market](#), while also establishing a massive digital readership. In talking to their customers and giving their readers a voice, their advertisers get to speak directly to the market. Here, Du

Toit talks us through the importance of supplementing your print offering in order to keep things fresh and interesting, thereby enhancing your readers' existing loyalty...

■ **20 years is something to celebrate! Talk us through some of the brand's highlights over the past two decades.**

Du Toit: We've been achieving some incredible milestones lately, like our 1,000th edition and launching *Soccer Laduma* (SL) Radio last year, which has grown monumentally. But I think a personal highlight would be when the readers have told us what *Soccer Laduma* means to them. We've had people who call to tell us they've learnt English from reading the paper. It's always moments like this that stick in your memory.

■ **How has the brand kept up with technological change and its effect on the 21st century consumer?**

Du Toit: The key has been to embrace the changes instead of fearing them. It's crucial to align your new ventures and platforms with your old ones, so that they work together and boost each other. We've made sure to engage with our readers on whichever platform they are using, and create content that is too good not to share and talk about online. We've also launched Soccer Laduma Radio, which has been a huge success from the start. It's numbers skyrocketed immediately – an interview with Quinton Fortune was downloaded over 207,000 times. After running for just over three months, we are rapidly approaching the two million download mark.

■ **Talk us through the importance of listening to your reader and interacting with them.**

Du Toit: It's the most important thing that any business can do. Our motto is 'The reader is boss' and we've always stuck with that philosophy. There's no trick or secret strategy either – we just listen to our readers and engage with them. People really just want to be heard, and your business can only benefit from listening to people. Our content is driven by what our readers tell us they want to know – it's as simple as that. But it takes a huge effort to make it happen, believe me!

■ **Explain how the following decision came about and how you've reaped the rewards since then: "We diversified our media offering into digital at a time when conventional wisdom told us that our readers did not access the internet."**

Du Toit: We conduct a lot of our own research through the Soccer Laduma Supporters Club and our engagement with our readers. We take their calls, respond to their emails, meet them and talk to them online. So we saw that many of them had mobile phones and were willing to access the internet for things they were really invested in. The trust that we had established with the newspaper quickly shifted to include the online space.

■ **Share a few of the publishing trends you're most looking forward to in 2017.**

Du Toit: The next 5 to 10 years are going to dwarf the last 5 to 10. We are going to see a lot more originalities coming into the industry. Nobody imagined social media 10 or 12 years ago, or how powerful it would become. So I think there will be more innovations that will become crucial to the communication methods we have with our readers. The interaction between print and digital leads to growth in both formats, and I see that interaction expanding to whole new levels in the coming years.

The newspaper's current editor, Vuyani Joni, adds that he's looking forward to being part of what comes next for the publication as he achieved a lifelong goal by becoming editor of a newspaper that he's passionate about, a passion that drives the *Soccer Laduma* team.

It seems they can only continue growing. Follow [Soccer Laduma](#) and [Du Toit](#) on Twitter for the latest updates.

ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

Leigh Andrews AKA the #MilkshakeQueen, is former Editor-in-Chief: Marketing & Media at Bizcommunity.com, with a passion for issues of diversity, inclusion and equality, and of course, gourmet food and drinks! She can be reached on Twitter at @Leigh_Andrews.

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