

The DMMA celebrates 10 years in digital

Issued by [IAB South Africa](#)

22 May 2013

On 21 May 2013, exactly 10 years ago, a national body was formed that would integrally change South Africa's digital landscape forever. Yesterday was the tenth birthday of the Digital Media and Marketing Association (DMMA).



On the 21st May 2003 the Online Publishers Association (OPA) was launched when 16 of South Africa's most well-respected publishers came together with the aim of promoting the growth and profitability of the online publishing industry. The OPA aimed to address the needs of marketing and advertising professionals by providing credible information about the South African internet audience; to build standards that made the internet an effective, trusted advertising media; and to educate the market on these standards.

Theresa Vitale, who began working for the OPA in 2003 as an administrator and now serves on the board of the DMMA as a Director, reminisces about the launch of the OPA: "The job interview for the position at the OPA was conducted via video conference - and I knew then that things were going to be different!" she laughs. "I started working for the OPA at the beginning of May 2003, and had less than three weeks to organise the official launch. Despite some hiccups and a few minor disasters, the launch took place on the 21st May 2003 at Primedia in Johannesburg and on the 22nd May 2003 at the Pavilion in Cape Town."

Russel Yeo (MWeb) was the first Chair and Russell Hanly (Media24) the first Head of Monitoring. JP Farinha (iAfrica) was the OPA's Head of Measurement and Howard Platjies (IOL) served as Treasurer. The other members were Adrian Hewlet (365 digital), Mark Buwalda (Ananzi), Geoff Cohen (BDFM), Jovan Regasek (ITWeb), Elan Lohmann (Johnnic), Matthew Buckland (Mail & Guardian), Gert Kruger (Moneymax), Byron Kennedy (Moneyweb), Steve Bassler (MSN), Neal Farrell (Ramsay, Son & Parker), Ray Moore (Supersport) and Vicki Lyon (WOL).

Elan Lohmann, former OPA member and founder of SleekGeek, outlines some of the challenges faced by the industry ten years ago: "Measurement standards were a big issue as there was no 'apples vs. apples' comparison. 'Click and display' advertising was also restrictive due to the limited formats in those days, and in addition, bandwidth and low market penetration made conditions increasingly difficult."

Due to the growing urgency for a trusted online measurement provider, the OPA appointed RedSheriff to deliver a web analytics/metrics infrastructure to OPA members. This was a milestone for the Association, as they were now able to provide members with reliable audience statistics and demographics.

Terry Murphy (Publisher of Marketing Mix), who was instrumental in the formation of the Association, explains: "The inaugural committee made the strategic judgement to first focus on establishing credible and independent data to measure digital. The consultative process took about a year, and then a very personal brief was issued to research companies and the tender was awarded. During this period the OPA secured enough financial support to get the project off the ground. In my view this core decision really did establish digital as a credible, professional medium."

Another milestone was the launch of the Bookmarks Awards in 2008, an initiative by the OPA which aimed to recognise and reward excellence in digital. The first Bookmarks was an irrefutable success. It shifted perspectives on what it took to achieve effective online communication, and, most importantly, it accelerated the growth of the industry. In his retrospective column for 2008, leading media and marketing journalist for FinWeek, Tony Koenderman, named it the award of 2008.

Another milestone was the opening up of membership to agencies and smaller publishers in 2008. In 2010, the OPA changed its name to the DMMA to signify this broadening. The DMMA aimed to promote engagement and facilitate growth

between all major players in the South African digital industry, including online and mobile publishers, advertising and media agencies, and digital development agencies. "These parties are all key to the future of the South African digital industry. Only when all parties are engaged can the industry at large develop and grow to its full potential," explains Adrian Hewlett, who was the DMMA Chair at the time and who led the process.

In April 2011, the DMMA announced the appointment of Effective Measure as its official measurement provider. This meant that the DMMA would be able to provide data to Telmar, the predominant strategic media planning software in South Africa. Andre Rademan, Co-Founder and Director of BizCommunity and a key member instrumental in a number of DMMA initiatives over the years, says: "The DMMA's single online measurement system for all digital publishers gave us a lot more credibility with regard to audience statistics and demographics."

In 2012, the DMMA launched the Knowledge Network, an initiative that aimed to promote the use, understanding and development of digital through transformation and training. The strategy was rolled out through a number of initiatives which included job shadowing programmes, a digital textbook drive led by Quirk Education and the launch of a mobile phone Matric revision series called CellSchool, in partnership with MXit. The DMMA also launched a Transformation Pledge, whereby members were able to commit to training a pre-determined number of candidates by the end of the year. Nikki Cockcroft, the Chair at the time, explains: "We realised that many education establishments still did not recognise digital as a viable career path. Our challenge was to correct this perception, by making learners aware that digital media presents many opportunities for an exciting, lucrative and rewarding career. Although there is still a long way to go, we believe we have laid the groundwork."

Over the years, the DMMA has conducted ongoing research in order to provide its members with important information and insight - the most recent of which was a survey conducted in conjunction with Columinate Online Marketing Research Company in 2012. The DMMA released the findings at the beginning of 2013, providing members with a deeper understanding of South Africa's online consumer and thus assisting advertisers in utilising digital channels optimally.

In 2013, the DMMA formed stronger ties with Loeries, committing to provide input regarding digital categories and the appointment of judges for the digital category. The DMMA also hosted a workshop aimed at its agency members and non-members from the larger advertising and communications industries. The 'How to Take Home a Trophy' workshop, which unpacked exactly what it takes to win an award, was attended by over 90 delegates and included presentations by prominent personalities within the advertising and communications industries, including Tony Koenderman (Ad Review), Andrew Human (Loeries) and Graham Warsop (The Jupiter Drawing Room), amongst others. The workshop provided delegates with invaluable guidance and top tips from SA's leading agency heads as to how to best package and present their awards entries at the upcoming industry awards.

But one of the proudest achievements for the DMMA has been seeing the industry grow with its support. Matthew Buckland, one of the first OPA members and Managing Director of Creative Spark, says: "My personal highlight over the past ten years has been watching the field of digital marketing options expand. Another defining moment was seeing South Africa's digital audience surpass and smash the ten percent penetration barrier, as we originally predicted."

"The DMMA has played an integral role in the digital revolution over the past ten years, and we intend to continue to support, sustain and grow the industry for at least the next ten," concludes Jarred Cinman, Director and Chair of the DMMA.

In celebration of its 10 year milestone, the DMMA has a number of exciting initiatives up its sleeve that will be rolled out over the remainder of 2013. Watch [this space](#) for more information.

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