

SAARF's way forward

Following the announcement this week of Etienne van den Berg's appointment as the new interim CEO for SAARF, the SAARF Board says it can state that the industry body is now firmly on the road to transformation.

In its statement, the board says that while the precise outline of the future has yet to come into sharp focus, there are a number of things on which the industry can bank.

Keep calm

The first, in the words of Bruce Williamson, MD of UM South Africa and the ACA representative on the SAARF Board, is that there is no need to panic.



"There is a clear route into the future now," he says. "Our vital research currencies will not be disrupted, just improved. After the shock of the NAB's resignation, things are now moving forward in a very positive way. The industry is talking and we are taking the right steps towards ensuring we have credible, sound, and future-proof research going forward. Everybody has agreed to the fundamentals: we need credible research, supported by the right oversight, and underpinned by

broad consensus."

The research currencies as they exist now will therefore continue to be delivered, unaffected by change, throughout 2014.

A plan is being devised

The second assurance is that numerous parties have been cooperating and talking to devise a plan for the industry currencies come 2015. "The various industry constituents have all agreed to work towards creating a joint Establishment Survey," says Virginia Hollis, acting chairperson of SAARF.

In a bid to expedite the process of transition, the NAB and PDMSA have put together a way forward which they are sharing with industry stakeholders.

In broad strokes, the proposed collaborative model will see the launch of an Establishment Survey which will cover information such as geographic and demographic information and top-line media consumption data. The media currencies - both established ones like TAMS and RAMS, and new sector-specific ones like the PDMSA's print currency, PAMS, and the DMMA's digital currency - will hook into this survey, fusing their data with the Establishment Survey to allow for intra-media comparisons.

Peter Langschmidt, MD of Echo and one of the PDMSA's two representatives on the SAARF Board, says there will be a seamless transition from the current research currencies to the new model.

This model will have a number of benefits for individual media. "For print, for example, the creation of a separate 'PAMS' means the medium will be able to control its own destiny by doing its own research," he says. "We will be able to give users new and better insights into how people interact with print and digital by providing data that covers more than just readership."

Maintaining standards

The third assurance is that whatever research model is eventually decided on, the data produced will still adhere to the high standards of quality and credibility to which the South African market is accustomed.

Marketer and SAARF board member, Brenda Koornneef, of Tiger Brands' group marketing and corporate strategy division, says that there remains a clear requirement for a media research body that will manage and administrate the research requirements of stakeholders. "Marketers insist on jointly funded, independent and jointly controlled research surveys and will not accept research which is funded and controlled by one stakeholder body," she says. "MA(SA) is working with all stakeholders in a bid to achieve this goal."



(Image extracted from the SAARF website and texted added.)

At this point, such a central reputable body "seems most likely to be a body such as SAARF, although its mandate, scope of work, structure, processes and funding model will have to be revised according to its new purpose," according to SAARF board member, Gustav Goosen, CEO of The SpaceStation and DMMA Exco member.

Changing for the better

The final assurance is that whatever happens, things are going to change, and for the better. "The NAB has been the catalyst for much-needed change in our industry," says Langschmidt. "The new research landscape will be bigger, better and more representative; this is definitely a good news story for media audience research in South Africa."

Koornneef sums it up: "There is a commitment from all stakeholders to develop a model that will be sustainable and meet all stakeholder requirements in the rapidly changing media environment of the future."

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