

MEDIA/PUBLISHING

Community, trust crucial for safeguarding media

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Chinese actress and model Angelababy on the cover of System Magazine. Image credit: System Magazine

By SARAH RAMIREZ

MADRID Opportunities exist in publishing, even with the occasional damaging impacts of digital, if brands and publishers can rethink traditional media.

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During a panel at FT Business of Luxury Summit on May 21 moderated by *Financial Times* fashion editor Jo Ellison, industry insiders discussed the evolving media landscape. The shape and purpose of publishers has continued to change as consumers' demand for content and information continues to grow.

"What has changed in the last 20 years in publishing is the fact that magazines are only one component in which you can express your ideas and values," said Alexia Niedzielski, founding member of *System Magazine*. "It's not about a print magazine, or an app or a Web site everything can be a magazine.

"The medium, more than ever, is the message."

Online and offline communities

Despite working within media in different capacities, the panelists all agreed that the function of media has changed with the advent of digital.

For instance, the bulk of today's Internet search inquiries can be categorized as product recommendations, explained **Narrativ** founder and CEO Shirley Chen.

"People are asking the Internet for product recommendations instead of store associates," Ms. Chen said. "This is where media comes in, by playing the role of a trusted expert or curator."



Narrativ works with media brands including Hearts, New York and others. Image credit: Narrativ

Narrativ primarily works with commerce media, providing technology solutions to empower consumers to find the right products. One of the company's products is a machine learning platform that updates broken product links, thereby helping the consumer make their purchase and helping the publication in question remain up-to-date and earn revenue through affiliate commissions.

Fellow panelist Frederic Court also approaches media and publishing from a business standpoint, as the founder and managing director of **Felix Capital**. The firm counts *Business of Fashion*, Goop and Highsnobiety among its current media and lifestyle brand investments.

"We're always interested to see what people are actually queuing to get, because it means there is passion involved and a community," Mr. Court said. "We are looking for points-of-view as well as platforms."

During her time at *System*, Ms. Niedzielski has also seen how the print product has reached different communities through other digital platforms.



Fashion publication Highsnobiety has partnered with several luxury brands, including Mercedes-Benz. Image credit: Highsnobiety

Ms. Niedzielski shared an anecdote from years earlier, when online fashion publication Highsnobiety shared an event *System* was hosting: an autograph signing with Virgil Abloh. She recalled seeing fans holding copies of *System* for the celebrated fashion designer to sign.

"Think of the value of your business as the audience, the community and the trust you've built, as opposed to the physicality of the magazine," Mr. Court said. "The key is to continue to feed that audience."

Shifting strategies

Publishers are turning to new strategies to find those audiences that make up their communities.

Media groups Cond Nast and Meredith are pushing forward with more investments into original video programming, as traditional publishers continue to pivot their strategies in a bid to reach and retain audiences.

Sales, mergers, paywalls and new digital products and video verticals have been dominating the magazine world as publishers look to reverse their business fortunes. The younger consumers that advertisers covet, particularly members of Generation Z, gravitate to video and other visual content ([see story](#)).

Branded content is also becoming more valuable, as consumers pay less attention to traditional ads.

Even with its smaller staff and audience, *System* pitches brands directly with content ideas that protect the publication's authenticity according to Ms. Niedzielski.

In 2017, Hearst Magazines upped its total branded content campaigns to 300, compared to just 200 the previous year. More recently, the publisher changed up its business leadership with a series of promotions aimed at better connecting its sales and marketing activities, including naming Nicolas Neubeck as the first the creative director of its HearstMade branded content studio ([see story](#)).

"We need each other to make us work," *Financial Times*' Ms. Ellison said.

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