

All the news that's fit for advertising:

Highlights of the Canadian Media Manifesto Leadership Summit

When David Walmsley kicked off the Canadian Media Manifesto Leadership Summit last week, he didn't just offer the kind of insight that only the Editor-in-Chief of *The Globe and Mail* can provide. He also conducted a valuable thought experiment.

"Imagine there's no news for 24 hours," Walmsley suggested near the end of his keynote session at the event, which was hosted by the Canadian Media Directors Council (CMDC). "What does the world look like? And then come back the next day and realize what you missed."

While the sheer volume of news in a single day has grown exponentially thanks to a proliferation of sources, Walmsley suggested we might realize some stories aren't worth our attention anyway. These are the rumours or sensationalism which are the journalistic equivalent of "empty calories," he said.

Instead, the value of news organizations at places like the *Globe* and Canadian broadcasting companies is that they make careful choice about what to cover — and then cover it in depth. A *Globe* investigation for a single story might take 20 months, he said. Raising the public awareness of what it takes to report the news well has therefore become critical.

"We have an opportunity to explain to people that we interviewed 65 people, and we granted three of them some form of confidentiality because perhaps their employment would be at risk if their identities were made public," he said. "And perhaps 12 of the people we approached didn't speak at all — they refused — but (being turned down by interview subjects) is also journalism."

The need to keep Canadians informed — and to fight misinformation

The media landscape is more fragmented than ever, and that's pulling money out of local (Canadian) media. At the same time, as people increasingly move to digital as a news source, misinformation has become more prevalent, making the role of local media even more important.



Recognizing the quality of what we read online and see on TV helps explain the urgency of the Canadian Media Manifesto. Led by the CMDC, the manifesto is a call for leaders across the media and marketing community to pledge their awareness of the importance of local media, and commit to championing its importance. More specifically, the goal for this year is to make sure that 25% of all digital media investment, or \$370 million, goes back into Canadian media.

Failure to support Canadian media has obvious — and dire — consequences. As the CMDC shared during the event, 53 media outlets have closed and more than 3,000 media jobs have been lost since the pandemic began in 2020.

The challenges facing local news are also coming at a time when the threat of misinformation is arguably greater than ever before. According to data from NewsGuard, which calculates “trust ratings” for more than 7,500 sources, more than 35% of news sites fall into the red or “untrustworthy” status. This ranges from stories about COVID-19 hoaxes to falsehoods about the war in Ukraine.

NewsGuard’s Gordon Crovitz warned US\$2.6 billion a year in programmatic advertising winds up on misinformation sites, further fuelling the problem. This means greater attention is needed to invest in credible journalistic sources, he added.

The power and credibility of television as a news medium

Fortunately, there’s no question that Canadians have a hunger for quality local news coverage. Corus EVP & CRO Greg McLelland shared that TV broadcast news reaches 71% of Canadians weekly, is highly trusted, and provides a great place for brands to grow – yet broadcast news notoriously under-indexes on advertising support relative to time spent.

“Coming back stronger than ever from the pandemic means making meaningful commitments in fostering responsible media, which is so important,” he said. “It gives our client agencies and marketers the opportunity to connect with diverse Canadian audiences in a way that delivers true value.”

Marketing executives from leading brands agreed.

Susan Irving, CMO at Kruger Products, agreed it’s hugely important to invest in the Canadian industry to help drive the Canadian economy – inadvertently



proving the point, she joined the webinar from on set where Kruger was making a new TV commercial (in Canada, for Canada!).

Irving added: “I believe in ‘full’ marketing; if you know How Brands Grow (Byron Sharp’s marketing tome), you know that linear TV is how you get the most household penetration and the most eyeballs. So you always start there and then build on it with digital and out of home to make sure that you’re continuing to broaden that reach.”

She did admit that they had at one point moved dollars out of news because of declining audiences and fear of association with negative stories – but the pandemic showed the importance of news and they’re moving back towards investment.

Laura Baker, CMO of Home Hardware, agreed that there’s been a resurgence in the importance of local news. She also added that as marketers “we’re investing in our customers and driving sales, but we’re investing in our company also, and need an ethical place to invest our dollars.” When it comes to supporting local journalism and supporting Canadian media, Baker said “there’s tons we can do as marketers.”

Proof that news is brand-safe and drives marketing ROI

As several speakers during the event pointed out, there has historically been a fear among some marketers that news content isn’t “brand safe.” Yet a study conducted by MAGNA in partnership with Disney debunked that notion.

After extensive testing across many different ad formats, news genres and brand verticals, the research found ads work just as well as in non-news content. In fact, ads in news were seen as having more value and were more trustworthy than when they appeared in non-news content.

Those on the CMDC’s Canadian Media Manifesto working group, such as Theo chief strategy officer Sarah Thompson, admit there is a long road ahead to fulfilling their mission. However they, like thinktv, believe sitting on the sidelines is not an option.

“Without local news we do not connect on the most meaningful place possible for businesses: communities,” Thompson said. “We need news, and news needs



advertising. And advertising needs these outlets to return to the Canadian media landscape."

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