

TV's world cup, but real growth for online too

By Herman Manson: @marklives

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TV owned the 2010 FIFA World Cup. There, I said it. While the Internet increasingly owns breaking news and the various South African news portals came up with numerous strategies for making their world cup content as engaging as possible, it could not even attempt to mimic the vibe of families, friends, even communities, gathering together in the real world in front of TV screens to follow the main matches.



The world cup is an extraordinary event despite the best efforts of FIFA and its armies of lawyers and accountants. It doesn't signify the norm when it comes to major news events but it does offer some insight into the limitations online news organisations face when covering news events of this magnitude. Sometimes computer screens and consumer needs just don't match up.

Fairly similar strategies

The major SA news portals adopted fairly similar strategies for their coverage, but as Arthur Goldstuck, Internet analyst *[and ardent soccer fan - managing ed]* notes, the main strategic flaw of their coverage appears to be lack of close integration between the world cup sections and the main news web sites.

"So, for example, Avusa has one of the best portals, but if you go to Times Live, it is difficult to figure out if you should click on [Our 2010](#), Soccer, or the banner that links through to their [Go2010 portal](#) (correct choice: number three)," says Goldstuck.



FIFA

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"Once you find it, it makes the [FIFA site](#) look distinctly amateurish. The [Mail & Guardian 2010 site](#) looks great in theory - in fact, before the tournament looked like the best on offer - but falls down in practise. It doesn't have live updates or results on its front page, which is a 'sine qua non' of sports sites of this nature.

"News24.com has a [great portal](#), rivalling that of Avusa, and it gets it right by being fully integrated into News24's sports coverage rather than appearing to compete with it."

Doesn't appear to enjoy same backing

IOL, which doesn't always appear to enjoy the same financial or executive backing as some of its rivals, decided to launch a dedicated, standalone brand for its world cup coverage. [Shoot2010](#) was launched in collaboration with its newspaper partners (which include *The Star*, *The Mercury*, *Cape Times*, *The Argus* and others) who launched the same brand as a newspaper supplement.



IOL Shoot2010

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IOL editor Rhys Johnstone explains that coverage focused on team and player profiles, as well as stats- driven features. Independent Newspaper reporters filed content separately for the site and for the various dailies to bump up coverage. Johnstone dismisses criticism on IOL's decision not to integrate more IOL branding elements into Shoot2010, saying the site will stay up long after the world cup is over.

Goldstuck also points out what he perceives to be little integration between the main news site and the Shoot2010 site, noting that some world cup news appears on the main site, some on the 2010 site, and the IOL news links sometimes go through to the 2010 site and sometimes to a normal IOL page. Goldstuck did, however, give IOL the thumbs up for having the best chart for plotting the possible routes through the rounds to the final.

Doubled traffic

According to Johnstone, sport pages have doubled traffic since the tournament started.



Mail & Guardian 2010 coverage

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Chris Roper, editor of the Mail & Guardian Online, says his team launched its site as a standalone with its own product identity simply because it was easier to sell to advertisers as a package and because it would allow for more lifestyle and sport-obsessed coverage without impacting negatively on the news offering, which is the central part of the *M&G* brand.

"Also, soccer is fun - we wanted something a bit more suited to the exuberance of the cup," says Roper. "As we're busy redesigning the *M&G* website to fit the new needs of news coverage (more foregrounding of multimedia, for example), we wanted to test something new anyway."

Asked whether the lack of live updates or results on the front page of the dedicated site isn't a major oversight, Roper says that's really just a splash page.

"All the stories are accessed via the M&G's front page, Twitter feed or newsletter, or search engines," says Roper. "There's a results page on the 2010 site, with results on the nav bar. I decided that actual results were too static to include on the 2010 page, which has limited space."

As of the start of May the standalone site had 120 698 page views in the previous 30 days

"Multi-platform interactive digital destination"

As mentioned, News24, the dominant online news brand, integrated its coverage into its Sport24 pages. "Our aim was to provide a multi-platform interactive digital destination offering the most comprehensive editorial coverage of the soccer world cup in South Africa, and in fact, the world," says 24.com publisher Andrew Lanning in typical Media24 speak.



News24/Sport24 2010 section

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Lanning says the group invested in coverage by bringing in a dedicated project manager to oversee the section and manage the editorial process, and the group "white-labelled a fantastic interactive mobile and website match centre, WAP site and desktop widget".

Lanning disagrees with the strategy of sites that chose to create their own world cup brands. "I thought to be a mistake as not only do you dilute the mother brand, but you also then have to spend energy on building up a new brand," says Lanning.

Traffic grew dramatically in the build-up to the event and Sport24 saw an increase in domestic unique users from 450 000 in January to 590 000 in May and a record 1 016 000 domestic unique users in June. It translates into growth from 3.3 million page impressions in January to 4.6 million in May and finally 8.84 million in June. In May, Sport24 went close on 300% over the budgeted advertising revenue target, and in June it was close on 60% over budget.

User-generated content

Over at Times Live, recently appointed editor Reuben Goldberg says his site covers breaking news and he followed this strategy for the event on the site. At times, Goldberg says, eight of the site's top 10 stories were related to the world cup. Apart from the standalone Go2010 site, an Our2010 page was also created for user-generated content.



Avusa Go2010 site

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"We got some great images and stories from people who were part of the whole event from post kick-off with the flags on cars to fan parks to stadium experiences," says Goldberg.

As in the case of IOL and Shoot2010, Go2010 is an Avusa group initiative with a newspaper supplement (carried in the *Sunday Times*, *The Times*, *Sunday World*, *Sowetan*, *Herald* and the



Times Live Our2010 section

[click to enlarge](#)

Daily Dispatch) alongside the website.

"Go2010 represents the collective world cup content efforts of all our titles, not Times Live alone, so the intention was never to integrate completely. Each brand was able to cover the cup in addition on our own sites," says Goldberg.

Interestingly, Goldberg is the only online media exec to mention the role TV played in this world cup. He saw immediate traffic dips as people flocked to their TVs to watch games "but Times Live traffic in June was consistent and our Go2010 site saw excellent growth according to Nielsen," he says.

Nice site strategies

Niche sites adopted their own strategies for covering the tournament.



The Daily Maverick

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[The Daily Maverick](#) has established itself as a high quality magazine-style read. For its coverage, it decided to offer well written and intelligent analysis post-game, usually with a slightly different and entertaining outlook.

"The Dutch crush Forlan and co, finally condemning them to history. Oh yes, they also qualify for the World Cup 2010 final," was the headline for the story covering the game between the [Dutch](#) and [Uruguay](#). Let's face it, no newspaper would even attempt to fit that headline onto a page.

[Another read](#) "Germany's Young Turks (and their Poles, and Ghanaians, and Brazilians and...) pulp the Argentines, advance to semi-finals." Different? Check. Intelligent? Check.

The eight-month old site boasts around 70 000 monthly users and publisher Branko Brkic says too date the site has run around a 100 world cup-related stories on top of its regular site updates.

Extensive rich media components

SuperSport.com, meanwhile, developed a [dedicated section](#) with extensive rich media components, including live match video streaming as part of its strategy. SuperSport.com GM Ray Moore says DSTv subscribers in Africa are able to register to watch the matches streamed live online, and non-subscribers can access the match highlights for free.



SuperSport 2010 section

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The site also included visual 360 degree views of the stadiums, restaurant guides, city and stadium detailed information and transportation guides, as well as opinion and commentary. The [SuperSport.com mobisite](#) already has 900 000 unique users and its [online coverage](#) was also mobile-friendly.

Overall, 'Net users seem to have received quality world cup coverage online. One aspect I suspect most online publishers missed out on, though, was the popularity of Twitter during the cup.

Fans expressed views on Twitter

Twitter was where fans expressed their views on the games as they progressed (via their mobiles and from in front of their TV sets [*or live from the stadiums - managing ed*]). Journalists live tweeting from each of the games, capturing the atmosphere and giving a live account on progress from the sidelines, could certainly have added to the event coverage.

While some news organisations did tweet on aspects of some of the games, nobody really tweeted a comprehensive account that might have caught the attention and imagination of readers. Although IOL's Johnstone admits some of his sport writers tweeted from their personal accounts, IOL did not even bother to retweet them.

Traffic volumes clearly indicate the value proposition offered by local websites and a certain coming of age for web-and mobile-based media in this country. TV might have owned the live plays but online will certainly remain the go-to resource for fans seeking background information on teams and players, accounts of each game and the stats most sport fans can't face a braai without.

For more:

- FIFA: [news section](#)
- Mail & Guardian: [2010 site](#)
- Avusa: [Go2010 site](#)
- Times Lives: [Our2010 section](#)
- News24/Sport24: [2010 section](#)
- IOL: [Shoot2010 site](#)
- Daily Maverick: www.thedailymaverick.co.za
- SuperSport.com: [2010 section](#)
- SuperSport mobisite: [2010 section](#)

See also:

- Zoopy: [Inside 2010 section](#)
- Bizcommunity: [Zoopy syndicates world cup coverage to US TV](#)

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