Interview with The Readership Works' Mal Dale

Mal Dale is the general manager of The Readership Works, which owns [emma (Enhanced Media Metrics Australia).](#)

What kind of work do you do as the general manager?

I am responsible for strategic direction of the emma product with an emphasis on how it can be adapted to suit the ever-developing needs of the media industry, including working with other currency data, including audience data. There is also a lot of stakeholder and contract management, plus the day-to-day management of the metric and the research suppliers who power it.

How did you find yourself in this role?

I've worked at creative agencies as a planner, I've run large agencies at the managing director level. I've also run digital teams. I've always been interested in media and having a background in strategy, combined being a bit of a nerd, this was an ideal role.

At the time that I was approached to do this job it was an interesting period in publishing because there was a desire to move on from an outdated legacy system provided by an incumbent research company.

Publishers and agencies were looking for a genuinely cross-platform metric that was a combination of currency data- both print and digital- as opposed to all being based on recall (as was the case with the incumbent). This had never been done anywhere else in the world, so it was an opportunity to get to be at the cutting edge, to develop a product that was able to satisfy the rapidly changing needs of the market, and it's an approach now being increasingly adopted in other markets.

What are some of the challenges that come with the territory?

One of the many key challenges has been keeping pace with consumer technology, both in the sense of how we measure it and how it affects respondent behaviour. For example, when the emma survey was under initial development, smartphone penetration was about 28 per cent and the iPad hadn't even been launched. We have had to adapt to measuring this growth (not always easy across multiple platforms and operating systems which can be updated at short or no notice) and also to adapting to the survey respondent behaviour that accompanies this growth. The first iteration of the emma survey was desktop-centric and that was fine when only 5 per cent of people were attempting the survey on a mobile device, but it becomes problematic when you are where we are now with just under 50 per cent doing so. We have had to continually adapt the technology of the emma survey to account for this and make it a satisfactory experience for respondents.

It has been worth the effort because societal changes across the same period have meant that the end-to-end digital completion of the survey is more important in delivering a representative sample of the population and ensuring the accuracy of results. Door-to-door surveys are increasingly unrepresentative and are also prohibitively expensive to conduct, particularly given the poor quality of data accuracy returned by them.

How has emma developed since its inception?

Five years down the track, we've got emma to a point that I want it at: we are focusing on our audience measurement and on finding third parties to enrich that

data.

All the major publishers are using emma, and all but one of them are using it exclusively. We're established in the majority of large media agency groups, and our usage is growing very strongly. Through the integration with the Nielsen CMV product we are now a metric that is part of a comprehensive channel planning and C-suite reporting tool.

The utility of data these days it in its ability to live in a variety of ecosystems, so emma will receive broader usage by virtue of its ubiquity and its ability to work with other data providers. Nielsen is an obvious example of that, and [DBM is a more recent, exciting example of that.](#) We look at how we can work with others to enrich our product for mutual benefit.

What have been the key ingredients in emma's success?

The key to emma's success is the superiority of the product in meeting contemporary market needs and doing so within a framework that is future-oriented. Our collaborative approach to working with other data providers (e.g. DBM Financial data) and audience metrics (e.g. Nielsen digital ratings data) means we are not a standalone product, but a fully integratable data partner – as demonstrated by the integration of emma audience data into Nielsen's CMV channel planning product.

We were pioneers in using a statistical modelling technique called fusion to combine digital and print audiences, and that approach has since been taken up in the UK and other European countries and is being actively considered elsewhere. Australians should be very proud that we were at the leading edge in developing a model that is now considered global best practice.

We're continuing to report audiences in the most accurate and transparent way possible, but we're also becoming more and more successful at integrating that data into other people's data ecosystems.

Can you explain the key differences between implementational and channel planning?

Channel planning takes place upstream in the strategic planning process, where a planner is considering which media channels will most effectively deliver an

insight or proposition. Implementation planning takes place once the channel plan has been agreed and is the process of most efficiently activating the plan within particular media channels.

So implementational planning requires the data and interrogative ability to very accurately and at a granular level plan your schedules within a given channel. An example of this in the case of a print schedule is determining the best titles to use and optimising them for a specific reach and frequency goal. This is the need that the emma cross-platform data serves.

Channel planning is different: a planner is looking at a datasets and using them to inform decisions about which particular channel(s) they will use, such as print, outdoor or radio. By definition that dataset has to include information about all of the channels they will be considering, and they will want to look at it in relation to a series of consumer segments, product verticals attitudes and lifestyles.

CMV provides the hub where different points of data can be integrated, making it the best available channel planning tool. It is the most expansive and includes the most accurate data when it comes to the individual channels, as it utilises currency media data (e.g. emma, OzTAM, the IAB accredited Nielsen digital ratings). This integration creates a tool that is far superior to anything else available.

What is the future of emma?

The future is bright for emma. My vision is for us to be able to work even more closely with audience currency providers to make sure that we are providing the best audience and planning data for our channels, and maximising inter-operability. We want to increase synergies and efficiencies, especially as media organisations become increasingly cross-platform. We will continue to work with Ipsos and Nielsen to do this, and we're always looking for other parties where we can deliver more value.

And that is the future of data: data is no longer going to be silo-ed and self-contained; it has to be agnostic and work across a number of different systems. That's where the value in data is truly unlocked, and the more that we can do that and the more partners we can find to work with in doing that, the better as far as emma goes.

What does this mean for news media publishers?

It means two things in particular.

Firstly, publishers have access to world-class survey data to measure their assets with precision, both print and digital.

Secondly, as publishers' businesses become more and more multi-media disciplinary, it means they are going to be looking at integrating audience data with other media and their own data.

emma's unique ability to provide this to them, and to media agencies, means we are well-placed to continue to evolve and satisfy market needs.