

Project Rio – certainly no carnival just yet

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CRAIG CONSTANTINOU 23 MAR 2017

In August last year, when six major newspaper groups launched a feasibility study to gauge whether the joining of ad sales would combat declining revenues across the market, they envisioned an autumn 2017 start date. Last week, it emerged that the group are still yet to file a report to the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) as issues and disputes continue to arise.

These conversations (when they have been fierce competitors for so long), was a huge step for the brands. 10 years ago, you would never have imagined such an alliance. With the dominance of Google, Amazon and Facebook, has forced their hand to at least try something to shake up the market and attempt a level playing field. With their individually rich histories, varying business models and personal pride, however, you can understand how this hasn't been plain sailing. So much so, that it appears Daily Mail Group and Northern and Shell have taken a back seat in the plans.

There have been lots of disagreements on the direction of the business model; revenue splits, inventory splits and how they would trade to advertisers to name a few. You have to wonder if these issues will ever get resolved considering how diverse the brands involved already are. Not only that, but once the details are submitted to the CMA, that's it! No changes allowed. Every detail has to be spot on. Even then, it's not guaranteed to be accepted, so there is a huge risk for publishers.

But it could, just could, be worth it! Newspaper brands have an abundance of inventory. They deliver quality audiences but yet they still see stagnating digital revenue. This could really turn the tide. Pulling this off gives whoever is left involved at the end, a huge, data rich proposition to take to the market and hopefully rival the other big digital players. Advertisers would be able to buy audiences across a plethora of platforms and with the introduction of Pamco (the industries new audience measurement tool), agencies will also be able to plan in the same way, allowing us to directly compare the delivery to the likes of AOL, Yahoo etc. This is why the flame still flickers for DMG and N&S, who are still keeping a close eye on developments.

Latest news is that it may just prove too difficult to achieve with all parties involved. There have been rumours of smaller collaborations between certain groups who are perhaps more aligned in their visions. News UK and DMG are the strongest of these, which makes sense considering their share of the market. There is a worry though, that if this the case, the once vast potential strength of this wave on the market as a whole would very much be diluted.

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