

Wertheim Aymés snapping up *Stuff*

By Gill Moodie: @grubstreetSA

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What a coup for [Gisèle Wertheim Aymés](#) to have snapped up *Stuff* magazine's licence - and it's also heartening news for independent publishers and media owners.

It was [announced](#) this week that [Haymarket](#) UK was moving the South African contract for the tech magazine from Times Media (previously Avusa) to a new business venture headed by [Wertheim Aymés](#), the owner-editor of [Longevity](#) magazine, and business director Sally Hudson.

Going with Wertheim Aymés is *Stuff* editor [Toby Shapshak](#), who has overseen the growth of this little star of a magazine since its launch in SA in 2007.



Gisèle Wertheim Aymés

Shapshak will be the publishing editor in the new organisation.

Stuff has consistently bucked the general trend of print circulation decline since its launch - total sales were at 25,811 in the second quarter of this year compared with 23,215 a year ago - and now Wertheim Aymés and Shapshak will take it from publishing alternative months to monthly (in May next year).

Innovation in order to survive

"It's very exciting for magazines in general as I think independent publishers bring more innovation because they have to in order to survive," Wertheim Aymés told Bizcommunity this week. "The model that I've adopted is to share ownership so *Stuff* is a real collaboration. I'm not actually even the majority shareholder. I've got a fair amount of shares but I've got other partners and they are all magazine fundis. I personally believe that's the way forward. We have to have people who take ownership of magazines because it's such a rigorous business that, without that, you can't hold people who are talented for long.

"When I think of the amount of passion I've put into building magazines over the years and never owned them, you just know that that is the way to go because that's how you keep the people you need to keep."

The highly regarded Wertheim Aymés worked for Times Media for many years - including as GM and publisher of magazines - and left the company in 2010 to join her family's medical business. Later that year, she [bought Longevity](#) from Times Media.

The magazine was at 21,353 total circulation (in the last available ABC figures, from the second quarter of this year) compared with 20,469 in the same period a year earlier.

"*Stuff* is in a much better position than *Longevity* was when I took it over," Wertheim Aymés says. "*Longevity* was really in a free fall whereas *Stuff* is the other way around. It's getting good growth in a market where very few magazines are growing."

A hard slog

Bringing *Longevity* back to health and on to a growth trajectory has been a hard slog for Wertheim Aymés.

"We work at it all the time," she says. "Everyone is 100% committed and we move fast. If we see things aren't working, we

change them very quickly.

"The traditional structures just can't work anymore because the costs are too high - that's what's killing a lot of magazines... With *Longevity*, we do events. We are going to launch a shop soon. We've got a whole lot of activities around this brand we've developed to make it viable in the long run because it won't survive on ad pages alone. No magazine will in the long run, the way the world is going.

"We have to change and we have to multi-skill people. Being able to write copy is not enough. You must be able to upload that copy and go on to Twitter and have a conversation and be able to go on to Facebook. You've got to be able to interview someone for a podcast - that, to me, is the journalist of today, whether it's for a magazine or a newspaper."

Distribution will be the easiest part of taking over *Stuff*, says Wertheim Aymés, while selling advertising for the tech magazine will be a different ball game to that of *Longevity*.

"Where we find synergy is in management and marketing and strategy," she says. "But what makes or breaks a brand is focus.

Dominating the niche

"When we wake it up in the morning all we have been thinking about is *Longevity*. When Toby Shapshak wakes up in the morning all he's going to worry about in his life is *Stuff*. These are the brand champions. They're not worried about five other things that are going on that are not that relevant in their lives. Again, that's the model of what we're trying to do - to dominate the niche and bring what we can to that vertical in the market."

Haymarket's vote of confidence in Wertheim Aymés shows that small independent outfits can be players - even in today's increasingly consolidated media landscape.

She may run a small business but the South African magazine industry has a history of family businesses that grew into sizable publishers - think of [Associated Magazines](#) and [Ramsay Media](#). ([Click here](#) to read last week's in-depth Q&A with Ramsay MD Stuart Lowe.)

As for Times Media, it is [promising that it will be launching](#) a new luxury magazine next year. The publishers of newspaper such as the *Sunday Times*, *Sowetan*, *Sunday World* and the *Daily Dispatch* also publishes *SA Homeowner* and *Elle* but its magazine division is quite diminished compared with a few years ago.

Besides selling off *Longevity* and now losing *Stuff*, it [closed SoccerLife](#) in January 2011 and [Avocado later that year](#).

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