ASSOCIATION OF INDEPENDENT PRESS (API)

STRATEGY
for digital development of API members

for the years 2016-2020

Authors:
Ioana Avădani, Cristina Lupu

Adopted during API Board of Directors' meeting on 24th June 2016

Introduction

The Association of Independent Press (API) is one of the most active media organisations, which promotes and defends independent press in Republic of Moldova. In accordance with the Strategy for development 2015-2020[1], API has the power to influence decision-making factors and shape the public opinion on press development in the country. In this sense, API's image is also supported by its member newspapers, which, by serving as examples, confirm the possibility to develop an independent and impartial media product.

API's Strategy for development for years 2015-2020 foresees the following main streams of activity:
• to support independent media institutions, defend civil and professional rights of independent media employees;
• to assist independent media institutions in an effort to consolidate their viability;
• to ensure a continuous process of training and professional growth for independent media employees;
• to develop lobby and advocacy campaigns with a view to improve the conditions for independent media development.

The same document shows that "in the context of providing development assistance for member-newspapers and considering the rapid evolution of mass-media in the country, including on-line press, API members have repeatedly expressed concerns in relation to the slow adjustment of API-member newspapers to media development tendencies. For this reason, it is imperative to mobilize all efforts in order to develop on-line versions of newspapers, as well as to build the media employees' capacities to promote the on-line versions, attract advertising, develop content marketing etc. In this meaning, complex techniques are to be enforced, including training ones, in order to re-format the concept of API-member independent newspapers, as accessible on-line and print mass-media".

Faithful to its objectives and commitment to serve its members' interest, API has developed the project "Increasing the digital capacities of Moldovan print press", which received financial support on behalf of Embassy of the Netherlands to Romania and Republic of Moldova. The project foresees a mission meant to: identify the digital development needs of API-members; prepare a strategy for digital development; deliver a series of courses and media assistance to API members; produce a package of union materials on topic of online developments; as well as organise a digital applications contest for API members.

Developing the digital presence of API members

This strategy is developed within the framework of the above-stated project and targets the development of API members' on-line presence on a short - and medium-

---

[1] http://www.api.md/upload/files/APIs-Development-Strategy-for-the-period-2015-2020.pdf

term, and harmonisation of API members' content and business model to the informational demands of the XXIst century, bearing in mind the social and technological realities of Republic of Moldova.

It starts from the findings detected during a needs analysis, performed by API experts in December 2015. The vast majority of API members declared a decrease in the number of readers, directly linked to population's migration abroad, as well as to Internet development, i.e. new online publications which provide free of charge content. Most of them regard the Internet as a necessary evil, whose instruments they do not command, but which they need to learn to deal with.

API experts concluded the existence of experienced and motivated publishing teams, highly supporting independent journalism values, who are willing to adopt new formulas for their publications, but who sometimes linger in print press routine, both in terms of collecting information and spreading it further, as well as in terms of the relationship with the readers.

In order to guarantee a positive evolution of API-member publications, the main aspects identified by API experts as requiring urgent approach are:

1. Higher concentration (sometimes exclusive) on print products materialised in *print-only* or *print-first* publishing policies.
2. Lack of backed-up concern to investigate and experiment digital products, which would support print operations and enable the multiple capitalisation of information collected by reporters.
3. Unequal development in the online presence of API members, varying from highly-advanced newspapers to minimal online-presence newspapers.
4. Dependence on external IT support, for which press operations are peripheral or void of priority.
5. Lack of very advanced equipment, necessary to perform the technological leap or ensure the editorial diversification.
6. Lack of necessary knowledge to strengthen the online presence, in a professional and potentially income-generating manner.

API has the mission to help its members integrate the digital products in the business model it promotes, and advise them for purpose of rapidly taking-in new technologies and digital tools. To do so, API members need support to ensure the professional growth of the teams, whether these are journalists, publishing managers, sales officers, or marketing and public relations officers.

The simple training of staff is not enough. The management of editorial offices must be prepared to make the escalation from traditional media business (capturing public interest information and delivering them to the public via print press) to integrated products, which combine the still-sustainable print operations with online activity, where journalists make use of various tools to produce innovative publishing products.

The proper endowment of editorial offices with equipment and software is essential for the digital development of newspapers. API may assist its members in writing project proposals for technical endowment of editorial offices whenever financing lines including this component are identified. Additionally, API may negotiate better prices for its members.

The strategy to strengthen the online presence of API publications shall maturate in three complexity stages, which are built one onto the other, and enable updating in time, depending on the evolution of situation. At the same time, such a construction allows for addressing all needs of API members, although their level of technical, editorial and business development differs.

1. Development of a short - and middle-term vision leading to creation of integrated print and online products, and commitment to it on behalf of API (as organisation) and its members (as independent legal entities).
2. Acquisition of theoretical knowledge, which would allow for the enforcement of the development vision, resulting in consolidation of publishing and technical capacities of API and its members.
3. Development of practical competences, which would enable API and its members to prepare and implement successful digital projects.

Such a "Strategy in the loop" enables a continuous assessment of progress, its comparison with pre-set progress indicators and an underway adjustment of the strategy: as soon as new knowledge and competences are acquired – new projects are implemented, which, to their turn, enlarge API and its members' horizon of knowledge and expectations, contributing thus to expanding/refreshing/updating the vision. The new vision may automatically require new knowledge and practical abilities. In such a way, API is in a constant "plugged-in" condition, preserving the development of its digital presence as a control point in the general strategy for development.

The adoption of a digital development strategy for API and its members may seem inapplicable and ill-timed, given today's technological situation in Republic of Moldova. We, on the contrary, believe that Moldova's technological lag may act as an advantage, enabling the editorial offices to "skip stages". API must not repeat the evolution (by that we mean the errors or solutions that failed to meet the expectations) of the last 10 years in print press sector. It may critically evaluate the publishing attempts and exercises of publications in the entire world, but stop only by those which have brought the expected results and seem to be promising as regards profitable adjustments in the context of R. Moldova.

Objective 1: **Committing to a digital development vision**

API's vision in the digital development field relies in performance of some media operations that are **sustainable**, **relevant from editorial viewpoint** for their public and **backed-up by a community.**

To develop the online presence is not by far a goal, but a means by which API members understand to carry out the double mission of any private mass-media: to ensure the correct and prompt information of the public (public mandate) under conditions of economic sustainability (commercial mandate). Actually, by developing online products and operations, API members will aim to boost the efficiency of collecting and spreading information, as well as delivering it in various forms, which would meet the interest and specific consumption modalities of a diversified public.

In essence, the ultimate goal of this strategy is the develop the base of readers/users, who would form a community of interests around API-member publications, and a community whose support will not consist only of buying the newspaper, but also becoming involved in newspaper's life and programs.

The commitment to this vision is the ground stone to any further development of API. The members of the association must see themselves in a minimum 5-year growth horizon, trying to anticipate the relevant social moves in their work zone, and forecast the needs and expectations of the future public. To persist in serving the current public is a doomed strategy. API members must invest in learning about the younger segments of their public, identify the channels used by them for information and provide relevant and quality information via such channels.

To commit to fulfil this strategy is the most complicated and time-consuming task of API, and it also has the potential to stir the most powerful internal resistance.

In order to accomplish this objective, the following activities will be conducted:

A1.1 Developing a virtual library of API, which contains studies, articles and books on world tendencies in the online sector. *This activity is compliant with API's strategy 2015-2020, Priority 2: Creating a resource centre for API members.*	
Risks:	The efficient use of such a library assumes good knowledge of English language, at a rather high level of technical sophistication.
Solution:	Translation of materials or production of summaries in Romanian language. However, the costs for such activities are high. Therefore, either applications for possibility to finance translation/digital culture are submitted, or partnerships with Faculties of Foreign Languages/Journalism are concluded, in exchange for students' access to the library.
Deadline for implementation:	2020

A1.2 Connecting/Ensuring the participation of API members at events (conferences, congresses, exhibitions) related to digital development (e.g.: Global

Editors Network Summit, Global Forum for Media Development, World Association of Newspapers). *This activity is compliant with API's strategy 2015-2020, Extending priority 2: Creating a resource centre for API members.*	
Risks:	Participation at such events implies higher costs (participation and travel costs).
Solution:	Exemption from costs/discount of costs may be requested. Travel grants may be accessed. Online broadcasting/records can be watched.
Deadline for implementation:	2020

Objective 2: **Raising the publishing and technical capacity of API members**

We will pursue the enhancement of publishing and technical capacity of API members in the following fields:
- production/sale of multimedia products;
- attraction of user generated content;
- escalation of audience number, owing to detailed acquaintance with the readers and their media-product consumption habits, as well as due to the cross application of print + Internet + mobile platforms.

The lack of these types of knowledge weakens API members' capacity to act on the market or simply leaves valuable resources unexplored.
Thus, because of the limited space of the paper sheet, only a part of the information and materials (including photos) prepared by journalists from API newspapers appears on the pages of the publications. The rest of the information may be re-packaged and re-formatted, to be presented to the public as value-added publishing products.

Additionally, the establishment of blog platforms or creation of some pages open for public comments might generate two things at the same time: original and exclusive content, and a feeling of belonging to the people who write for a specific community of ideas and interests, created around the newspaper.

In parallel, API will invest efforts to better discover its public – the present and, especially, the future one (potential). Only in such a way will API members be sure of preserving their relevance in the upcoming years and be able to extend their market to other types of public, unknown so far.

In order to accomplish this objective, the following activities will be conducted:

A2.1 **Organising training courses for API members, in fields such as: tendencies in online journalism, writing for the online, online marketing, use of online applications for journalists, legislation (mainly copyright and elements of privacy**

and protection of personal data).
This activity is compliant with API's strategy 2015-2020,
Priority 3: Providing assistance to member newspapers to meet modern tendencies in independent media.

Risks:	The difference in knowledge possessed by API members in the sector is rather big, ranging from publications with basic knowledge to those which successfully develop online operations. Such discrepancies lead to different needs for training/learning.
Solution:	Creation of different training modules, depending on API members' needs: *beginner module* (with basic information, which is absolutely necessary to any editorial office wishing to develop an efficient online presence), *improvement module* (introducing additional information, new concepts, e.g. data visualization, use of free of charge instruments for newspapers, etc.) and *advanced module* (connecting editorial offices with online operations, which are compliant with international tendencies (using Instant articles, photographs and video 360, customizing content etc.)
Deadline for implementation:	2016 - 2018

A2.2 Syndicating some publishing products.
Syndicating publishing products is a way of efficiently using resources, in the context of substantial cut-down of costs. API might negotiate the syndicated production of some materials for its members. In such a way, API members would provide premium publishing products to their readers, produced at much lower costs per each editorial office.

Risks:	Syndicating the online content differs from the process of syndicating for print publications. If done excessively, it might harm the newspapers, resulting in a lower content indexing by search engines, or dilution of the brand of publications, likely not to be associated with their own publishing products.
Solution:	Using the syndicating solution for premium materials. Likewise, training for newspapers on how to use efficiently the syndicating process and SEO courses (search engine optimisation) for those who upload the content on website.
Deadline for implementation::	2016 - 2018

A2.3 Involving readers in supply of content / Contests for users (eventually Moldovans from Moldovan communities abroad).
API will prepare training modules for its members and technical solutions to attract content (information, text, photo, and video) from readers. Online versions of newspapers allow for a better interaction with the readers. The latter stop being only passive receivers, they can be made part of the team by supplying content. Thus, in

interaction with the public will grow, which will generate a feeling of "ownership" towards the publication. At the same time, the publications will benefit from free and diverse content. The contests for readers (the most interesting material, the most viewed photograph, the most active reader – for instance) might boost the degree of involvement and satisfaction of readers who provide content.

Risks:	In a world in which anyone can be a content supplier, there is a huge need for people's training. The users do not possess the journalistic techniques, or the deontology and professional codes of journalists. In such a way, there appears the risk for side-slips or even violations of laws, for which the publications are liable.
Solution:	Preparation of documents for self-regulation and norms for publishing the user generated content on publications' websites. Such documents will be far more than a simple listing of terms and conditions, "mini" training sessions will be organised, having thus an educational role, and not only a normative one. Additionally, the publications will set up procedures for moderating/checking/sorting the content published/supplied by readers, and there will always be a filtering procedure made by a professional journalist, deciding to use the readers' products or not.
Deadline for implementation::	2016 - 2017

A2.4 **Amplifying the use of no-cost tools from digital sector.**
API will organise information and training sessions on editorial instruments which are available online and at no cost. These refer to production of interactive content (software for infographics, interactive maps, etc.), instruments for documentation or audience analysis.

This activity is compliant with API's strategy 2015-2020,
Priority 3: Providing assistance to member newspapers to meet modern tendencies in independent media.

Risks:	API members are not familiar with such instruments and have no knowledge how to use them. The number of free resources available for journalists and media publications grows every day.
Solution:	Delivery of training sessions or production of tutorials for API members. Constant information, updating the "virtual library".
Deadline for implementation::	2016 - 2020

A2.5 **Augmenting and modernising the technical endowment of API members.**
In order to ensure an improvement of the publishing capacities of API members, it is absolutely necessary to upgrade their technical capacity, especially the technical

endowment and software (computers, digital cameras, smartphones connected to Internet, text and image processors, audio-video publishing software, layout etc.).	
Risks:	Such facilities are expensive and often exceed the financial possibilities of API members.
Solution:	API will provide assistance to its members for procurement of such facilities, by means of accessing grants, negotiating wholesale procurement, accessing some programs of second-hand technical equipment, etc.
Deadline for implementation::	2017 - 2020

A2.6 **Syndicating corporate services and actions.** *To facilitate its members' activity, API will set up a joint online platform for corporate services and actions. In such a way, API will be able to sell corporate online advertising and provide other services in a centralised manner, by a minimum effort on behalf of its members.*	
Risks:	1. Too complex technical solution, given the technological disparity among API members. 2. Hesitation on behalf of some members to join the syndicating scheme.
Solution:	1. A cautious approach in development of the platform, based on trial-and-error technique. Performance of tests and pilot-programs to ensure API platform's interoperability with those of its members. 2. Negotiation of agreements with each member for strictly and clearly delimiting the duties and benefits of each partner.
Deadline for implementation::	2017

Objective 3: **Building the capacities of API members to prepare and implement digital projects (including by attracting financial means)**

The financing provided by donor organisations stands for a modality by which API members may have access to resources enabling them to develop organisations, editorial products or editorial offices, by means of investments in staff training or procurement of equipment. Respectively, it is vital for API members to have knowledge about how to write project proposals, as well as project management knowledge, including financial management.

Additionally, API members must be prepared to draft and edit briefs for special editorial projects.

Likewise, API members must possess similar technological resources to ensure a uniform and constant nature of services/products delivered to the public, as well as to guarantee the good functioning of publishing syndication.

In order to accomplish this objective, the following activities will be conducted:

A3.1 Training sessions for API members.	
The members will benefit from having some of their resource persons trained on project preparation and management. *This activity is compliant with API's strategy 2015-2020,* *Priority 3: Providing assistance to member newspapers to meet modern tendencies in independent media.*	
Risks:	There are no such persons within the newspaper office, capable of performing this task.
Solution:	The person in charge of project writing and management is a key-person in the organisational chart of each media institution. It is obviously a cost, but it will be covered from the obtained grant, via Project Manager position. An additional option would be when two or more publications may join hands and hire a competent person to write the programs, they may associate together in program implementation. Another solution would be the partnerships between newspaper offices and local/regional and national non-governmental organisations, in an effort to jointly prepare and implement projects that include a media component.
Deadline for implementation::	2017

A3.2 Modernising online platforms of API members.	
API will collaborate with its members to reduce the technological and operational discrepancies existing among IT platforms of publications. A more or less similar level of development will allow for a simpler and more organic approach of the content, marketing services and sale of advertising, preserving, at the same time, the identity and brand of each publication.	
Risks:	1. Development of online platforms foresees costs unaffordable by API members. 2. API members have different viewpoints on technical specifications for their platform's functionality.
Solution:	API will ensure assistance for modernisation of websites and operational development, identifying alternative resources (human, financial) required for this activity.
Deadline for implementation::	2017-2020

A3.3 Syndicating IT services.
The great majority of API members do not run modern websites, which are harmonised with up-to-date tendencies or have versions for mobile devices

(telephones, tablets). From the discussions conducted during the needs analysis, the IT services represent a huge cost for API members, which many of them do not afford. To syndicate IT services might be a solution capable of ensuring the access to quality IT services, and diminished costs for editorial offices.

Risks:	Different opinions of API members on IT needs.
Solution:	API, together with the experts, may mediate the needs and help the newspapers identify the best variants, as well as the services which they need.
Deadline for implementation::	2018-2019

A3.4 **Contest of digital projects.**
API will initiate a contest of digital/multi-media projects for its members, enabling them to develop innovative functionalities or applications for their websites. The jury to this contest will be made of Moldovan and international experts. The winning project will receive technical and financial assistance for implementation.
The contest will become traditional and will be organised by API each year.

Risks:	Lack of API members' interest.
Solution:	API will repeatedly circulate the information and work individually with its members, in an effort to capitalise this opportunity.
Deadline for implementation::	2016-2020

A3.5 **Contests of media literacy organised for the public.**
API will prepare and organize training formulas intended for the public, to be afterwards delivered either in a centralised manner, or regionally. The media literacy courses - media competences – will prepare the public to act as critical receiver of mass-media content and reject products which are non-compliant with legislation and professional standards. These courses will include an extended component of digital competences, which are extremely necessary in a society where the bulk of Internet is constantly growing and the need for personal responsibility is vital.

Risks:	Such courses imply costs and expertise, and newspapers may not always see instant effects of the investment. The public might not have full confidence in the value of such courses.
Solution:	API can try to identify and access grants for developing media and digital competences of the public. A gradual approach shall be adopted, starting from pilot mini-projects. Concentration will be mainly on youth, who are much more open to training ideas and closer to the online environment.
Deadline for implementation::	2017-2020

A3.6 **Developing partnerships with other organisations.**
In order to increase the capacity of providing its members with diverse and quality services, which meet the latter's demands to a great extent, API will pursue its policy

of alliances and partnerships with similar Moldovan and international organisations. API will consider maintaining a balance between European organisations and those from Community of Independent States, in order to ensure a wide access to financing lines available for mass media.	
Risks:	In case of official long-term partnerships, there might appear the risk of possible conflicts of interest or exclusions by certain international financing lines (lines which do not accept participation in two projects or in two consortia). Additionally, the partners may find themselves as direct competitors for a specific project or financing line.
Solution:	Official partnerships will be preferably concluded for specific projects. In rest, API will develop informal long-term partnerships, by promoting friendly and mutual respect relationships with organisations that share the same interests and values.
Deadline for implementation::	2016-2020