An Interview with Liz White, Vice President & General Manager, PEOPLE and EW Digital at Time Inc. Style & Entertainment Group

Liz White is responsible for the day-to-day business operations of PEOPLE and Entertainment Weekly (EW) Digital across platforms and media channels. Prior to also joining EW Digital, White served as general manager for PEOPLE Digital, leading business operations for the property’s more than 20 million monthly users across platforms. Under her direction, PEOPLE Digital expanded significantly across platforms and devices, most recently with the adoption of responsive design on mobile and tablet as well as the launch of the PEOPLE CelebWatch mobile app. White led the team that created PEOPLE’s first native ad products and has been instrumental in key partnerships and brand extensions at PEOPLE and across Time Inc.

You helm two of the most successful titles in the Time Inc. portfolio. Can you describe your role, responsibilities and mission?

Liz White: As the general manager, I work to drive growth across our digital platforms and collaborate with the site editors to set the goals and strategies for the businesses. I have been in this role at PEOPLE for nearly four years and earlier in 2013, I added EW to my responsibilities.

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What’s great about the role of a digital general manager at Time Inc. is that my chief responsibility is to bring together groups like product development, sales, business development, editorial, technology and marketing to ensure we’re all headed in the same direction. It means I get to work with a wide variety of people and have a unique and holistic view of the digital properties.

You led PEOPLE’s move across digital platforms and devices as well as its transition to responsive web design. What were the biggest challenges in making these shifts?

White: The biggest challenge in these shifts was that most of the time we were the first in our category. When PEOPLE launched its responsive site last summer, there were few large publishers doing responsive. As a result, there were not many best practices or established success stories. We spent a good amount of time refining things like design standards and ad formats, which would have been an easier process had there been a strong precedent.

Another challenge we see is evolving our business models as we move across platforms. Advertising formats need to change, new consumer revenue opportunities may open up, and we need to be aggressive in forging new ground in these areas, rather than assuming old models will work.
**What are your top business priorities?**

**White:** For both PEOPLE and EW, we have seen tremendous growth in consumers accessing us on smartphones and tablets. As adoption of these devices accelerates and technology gets better and faster, we need to ensure we are delivering an experience that exceeds user expectations.

One of the big priorities for our digital businesses is developing new consumer revenue opportunities. Both PEOPLE and EW have such strong subscriber bases in print, and we see a real value to unlock in adding digital pillars to those offerings. On the advertising side of the business, it’s really all about coming up with new and creative ways to work with brands across platforms.

**What are your biggest business challenges as they relate to connecting advertisers with the right audiences across media platforms?**

**White:** Most of the advertisers we work with are very interested in being a part of our move onto new platforms. Most of the challenges arise at the operational level. Creative development is one area that comes to mind. With a myriad of screen sizes and file types supported across devices, there are many more assets required to actually launch a campaign. Every quarter it seems to improve as more advertisers see the benefit of reaching our audiences wherever they are.

**How do you navigate the pace of change in your space? Any best practices?**

**White:** What has worked well in our group is staying constantly connected to what’s going on outside of our own team and even outside our industry. On the consumer side, this translates to getting feedback from users much more often than we were a few years ago. Gone are the days of getting a focus group together to validate your idea, running off and spending six months building something, and then launching.

We are now constantly connected to what our customers want from the moment we have an idea because things are changing that quickly. On the business side, we are very engaged with the VC [venture capital] community and have found this really helps us discover new companies and technologies that we may not have run into otherwise.

**What keeps you enthused about the digital marketing and media business?**

**White:** I’m never bored. One of my favorite things about our industry is that because things are moving so quickly, there is always an opportunity to learn and to find smarter ways of delivering and monetizing content.

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**How do you and your team use eMarketer to solve business challenges and incorporate it into your workflow?**

**White:** Our team uses eMarketer a lot—it’s a great source of information on industry trends that we use in everything from our strategic planning process to internal staff education. Recently, we were working on the roadmap for our newly launched native advertising platform, and I wanted to get a sense of how advertising spending against native was going to change in the coming years. The forecasts on eMarketer helped us put a plan and business justification together for increasing our investment in the platform.

Personally, I’ve started using the eMarketer iPhone app as part of my morning routine of catching up on industry news, so it has definitely become an everyday source for me. It’s easy to use and gives me quick access to the latest reports, articles and charts. ■