

Catalano's ACM leads media innovation with merger deal

SEPTEMBER 20, 2019 - Australian Community Media co-owner Antony Catalano has declared "the new ACM is open for business" after sealing a deal that will strengthen one of the key mastheads in the regional publisher's stable of 14 daily newspapers.

Under an agreement announced in Bendigo today, the owners of the *Bendigo Weekly* will merge their free weekly newspaper into ACM's paid daily, the *Bendigo Advertiser*.

It's the first strategic move by Mr Catalano since the former Domain CEO and Alex Waislitz's Thorney Investment Group took control of ACM, the former Fairfax Media regional publishing division, from Nine Entertainment on July 1.

"We've acted quickly and decisively because we know that Bendigo's two most trusted sources of local news and advertising will be much stronger together," Mr Catalano said.

"We're proud to be taking a positive approach to the challenges in regional media, and we'll continue to lead the way with innovative solutions like this."

Mr Catalano described the merger as a "compelling opportunity to secure a sustainable future" for quality local news in Bendigo and to build on the *Bendigo Advertiser's* rich 166-year history.

"The result will be a stronger offering for readers, advertisers will have access to the very best platform to promote their goods and services and we build a more sustainable business to be able to continue serving the community," he said.

"It's an example of the spirit of collaboration that regional media needs so that we are better positioned to invest and grow even stronger."

As part of the merger, *Bendigo Weekly* is expected to be retained as a dedicated liftout within the *Bendigo Advertiser's* Saturday edition.

In a boost for property buyers and sellers across central Victoria, *Bendigo Weekly's* popular real estate liftout will be combined with the *Advertiser's* Domain weekend homes guide and inserted in the *Advertiser* on Fridays and Saturdays.

The combined Domain property liftout will also be available for free online at bendigoadvertiser.com.au, and print copies of the gloss guide are expected to be available at selected pick-up points around Bendigo.

The new-look print products will be launched next month.

Bendigo Weekly chairman Robert Ketterer paid tribute to the newspaper's staff and loyal advertisers.

"We're proud of the efforts of the *Weekly* team and everything we have been able to achieve for our customers, readers, shareholders and the broader community over the past 22 years, and we're confident that success will continue," Mr Ketterer said.

Australian Community Media CEO Allen Williams said consultation with staff and customers and planning for the integration of teams and products was now under way.

“At the completion of the merger, the *Bendigo Advertiser*, *Bendigo Weekly* and the combined Domain real estate guide will be well-placed to serve the needs of Bendigo into the future,” he said.

The *Bendigo Advertiser’s* loyal print readers and online audience, including a growing number of digital subscribers, would benefit from the expanded local content. The *Advertiser* introduced digital subscriptions in September 2018.

“Print and digital audiences can expect more great reading at the weekend with the *Bendigo Weekly’s* emphasis on essential community news, plus enhanced coverage of the region’s real estate market in Domain,” Mr Williams said.

The free print edition of *Bendigo Weekly* will no longer be distributed direct to homes. It will be available to read for free online at bendigoadvertiser.com.au.

The ACM stable of daily mastheads includes *The Canberra Times*, *Newcastle Herald*, *The Border Mail*, *The Examiner* in Launceston, *The Courier* in Ballarat and *The Standard* in Warrnambool.

With more than 160 news brands publishing online and in print, the ACM network stretches into every state and territory and includes such agricultural titles as *The Land* in NSW, *Stock & Land* in Victoria and *Queensland Country Life*.

The *Bendigo Advertiser* was founded in 1853. Some 500 copies of the first edition of the single-sheet “Bendigo Advertiser and Sandhurst Commercial Courier” were printed and distributed on the goldfields on December 9, 1853.

For more information, email communications@austcommunitymedia.com.au or phone: 0415 724 491

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