

## THE CONVERSATION

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# Scotland just bucked the print-is-dying trend with two new Sunday newspapers

September 19, 2018 1.36pm BST



What's inside? GingerInc

My first job as a trainee reporter was on a Sunday title. Sundays are a breed apart. We had contempt for our daily sister, were drunk until Thursday and staffed by some of some of the oddest journalists in town. Unsurprisingly, the paper doesn't exist any more.

There is a different rhythm to newsgathering. Much of the Sunday paper has to be away early, with stories that won't date. Front page leads have to be exclusives, it's just too risky relying on events to bail you out – even in Northern Ireland in the 1980s where I was working. This is one reason why the sting and the “kiss-and-tell” are among Sunday staples.

If you are a Sunday paper news editor, you live in fear that the splash (the front page story) you have been nursing all week will leak to another title. The news business is a kleptocracy, and colleagues on your sister title are the enemy. All's fair in love, war and newsgathering.

### Promiscuous Sunday readers

Sunday newspaper readers are different, too. They still have a little time on their hands, and a desire to be entertained. They will frequently buy titles at odds with their daily habits: Guardian readers

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flirting with the Sunday Times; Sun readers, bereft of the News of the World, picking up the Sunday Mirror or heading “upmarket” to the Mail on Sunday.



Richard Walker, now editor of the Sunday National. Newsquest

Sunday is also the day readers are tempted to take a second title; and in those parts of the UK the BBC euphemistically calls “the nations and the regions”, indigenous papers rub shoulders with the big London players from what is still called Fleet Street.

But as the economics of publishing a newspaper become increasingly challenging, stand-alone titles published once a week look like a luxury to the accountants who now run media organisations. So seven-day operations make sense. In 2012, Rupert Murdoch replaced the discredited News of the World with a Sunday edition of the Sun.

### **Heritage, politics and independent views**

Newsquest executives in Scotland came to the same conclusion when they announced in August that the Herald – its daily broadsheet – was to run seven days a week. The victim was the Sunday Herald, then without an editor.

In normal circumstances, that would have been that. But this is Scotland, and Scotland is not normal. Newsquest’s problem was the Sunday Herald’s editorial support for Scottish independence. Taken down that road by its urbane editor, Richard Walker, the Sunday Herald was the lone media voice supporting independence in the 2014 referendum. Walker went on to become founding editor of the National – designed to tap into nationalist sentiment after the independence referendum.



The first front pages. Newsquest

Although the Herald claims to be neutral on independence – even the dogs in the street know where it sits on the issue. It may not wear a sash and a bowler hat, but it is temperamentally unionist.

With the SNP now established as the natural party of government in Scotland, and with a second independence referendum on the political agenda, killing off the only Sunday in favour of Scotland as a sovereign nation would have displayed a distinct lack of pragmatism.

So, against the tide of consolidation, Newsquest's single title was replaced by two. Say hello to the "neutral" Herald on Sunday in a racy tabloid livery, and the Sunday National – with Richard Walker again as launch editor.

## What the papers say

It's a brave move for both titles. It is notoriously difficult to persuade readers to change their habits. Can a Herald reader who is wedded to the Observer or Mail on Sunday be seduced back? And what about the fledgling National? It's tough out there.

The journalism is solid, but – in the first two weeks at least – neither generated the front pages they needed to compete effectively. Rule 101 of a launch edition is to have an exclusive. The Herald's "Lifeline to Scotland's islands in jeopardy" did not cut it. The Sunday National led on "Boris 'set to go for PM' ... and trigger Indyref2". Billed as an "exclusive", it was one of those exclusives nobody else would want.

Inside, the National was pacier than the Herald. Even Sundays need news, and it delivered. The internet sensation "giggling granny" was a classic Sunday read, and Jennifer Johnston's big spread on Scotland's postcode lottery for primary one parents deserved its prominence.

Foreign correspondent **David Pratt** brings insight, gravitas and an international perspective to the Sunday National's broadsheet Seven Days section; its news and features agenda is not quite as unremittingly politically driven as the daily, though Nicola Sturgeon got star billing.

The Herald suffers most from the transition. In tabloid form, it's like an ageing uncle wearing a baseball cap. The daily broadsheet can sell a story; on the tabloid, the squeezed-in lead barely makes a splash. Inside, the flow of news and features is clunky. "The Week" section, opening the paper, is a mess. A spread on Strictly Come Dancing up front jarred, and the big read on pages six and seven kills the pace up front.

That may change as the paper settles down. But it should be taken as a warning not to mess with the format of the daily, especially if trying to align the titles.

Oddly, both share the same sports coverage and an unbranded Sunday Life supplement. The National needs it to bulk up. It's a catch-all lifestyle supplement that doesn't have a clear sense of purpose. The papers also share David Pratt – a great journalist, but sharing writers and sections muddies the waters. Sundays need to be individualistic.

At their best, Sundays are distinctive, tribal and totally attuned to their readers. If they are to carve out a place for themselves, these two new Sundays are going to have to do more to break exclusives that set the agenda for the week ahead – and give Scottish readers the excuse they need to change their buying habits.

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The lifestyle magazine shared between the two titles.  
Newsquest