Michelle Guthrie wants to distribute ABC programs on new digital platforms

Newly appointed ABC managing director Michelle Guthrie says "we need to partner with third parties so our journalism and TV are available everywhere". Peter Braig

by Greg Earl

New ABC managing director Michelle Guthrie has flagged much greater distribution of the broadcaster's programming by third parties to meet growing viewer demand for television where and when they want it.

Ms Guthrie said she thought the publicly funded broadcaster had to be available in many more places. "We need to partner with third parties so our journalism and TV are available everywhere. The idea that the customer has to come and find you has been turned on its
head," she said.

She said her views about the need to distribute ABC content on other platforms had implications for other media companies in the age of digital disruption and they would have to get used to the consumer wanting to access their content, for example, via Facebook.

"This will force a number of organisations to find ways of partnering," she said, "Because distribution will be less important, the content will be more important. That's a good place to be (for the ABC) because that is what we are really good at."

She wouldn't comment on whether an outside platform such as Apple would pay for ABC content saying "Watch this space. The value exchange is still to be determined."

The need for business and government to accept the rising power of the consumer or be pushed aside by new technology and rising demand for greater accountability was a consistent theme through many sessions of the Crawford Australia Leadership Forum in Canberra on Monday.

**Information democratised**

REA Group chief executive Tracey Fellows said the arrival of online real estate information had transformed buyers’ and sellers’ expectations about what they can now expect in the housing market.

"It's democratised information – there's not so much of a dance (with real estate agents) any more. Consumer's don't care about a business model – Uber showed that. They expect you to know about them."

But she said that more information meant consumers wanted more individual treatment although there was a concern among some consumers about online companies using information that they had gathered to recommend actions to their customers.

Uber Australia chief executive David Rohrsheim said the success of the online booking service in creating a greater level of trust between passengers and drivers provided a model which could be extended to governments to quell growing dissatisfaction with government service delivery.

**Consumer sovereignty**
Business Council of Australia chief executive Jennifer Westacott said businesses had to understand that if they didn’t understand the demands of the modern consumer they would be washed away. "We have the most experienced consumer in history," she said.

But striking a note of caution about some of the expectations for change created by rising consumer sovereignty, she said: "We have to be both optimistic and pessimistic about their ability to change things."

But former competition regulator Graeme Samuel attacked the euphoria in one session about how Uber had broken into the passenger transport system in Australia saying it would have been better to work with governments on a change which dealt with driver training and consumer safety.

"What Uber did was to give the single finger. That was a fundamental error," he said in reference complaints from Mr Rohrsheim about how long it had taken him to be able to negotiate with governments about the new way of providing transport.

He said there was growing confusion about the public interest, the consumer interest and vested interest in the new world of digital disruption. "It is an important issue which we have to be able to deal with: vested interests as opposed to consumer interests," he said.