

How Traditional Media Can Focus on News Content and Socialized Services in the Mobile Internet Era: Post-Print on the Development and Exploration of the “Southern +” Technical Platform

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Abstract

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By Journalist Chen Xuguan

Editor's Note: A review of recent transformations in the media industry reveals that technological advancement has become an indispensable driving force, from the print era through the internet age to the current mobile internet epoch. These changes encompass not only shifts in user reading habits but also broader media transformation. In the process of media convergence, how can regional media leverage the strengths of traditional newspaper media to build an internet-thinking technology team? How can they achieve deep integration among technology, content, and users in this era of multi-media fusion? This journal interviewed Mai Miao, Deputy Director of the Information Technology Department of Southern Media Group and Chief Technology Officer of the

“Southern Plus” division. Having worked across newspapers, websites, and apps at Southern Media Group for many years, Mai emphasized technology’s critical role in media convergence throughout our interview: “If media convergence is a multi-legged stool, technology is one of those legs. In advancing new media transformation, we must walk on multiple legs—editorial, business, technology, and product.”

Mobile Internet Landscape and the Rise of Southern Plus

As mobile internet has become the dominant platform, traditional media have accelerated their convergence reporting efforts while leveraging mainstream media’s editorial advantages; portal websites have migrated from desktop to mobile; and information aggregation products that grew rapidly in the mobile environment—capitalizing on their technological edge—have intensified their transformation and user base expansion. With mobile internet emerging as a crucial arena for public discourse in China, the traditional pyramid-shaped communication pattern dominated by conventional media has evolved toward fragmentation and flattening.

In this new communication environment, the “Southern Plus” news client has adopted a “Mobile First” strategy, integrating Southern Media Group’s premium content resources to build Guangdong’s premier authoritative mobile information platform. Together with the provincial party newspaper *Southern Daily*, the provincial party journal *Southern Magazine*, and the provincial party website *Southern News Network*, it has established a new mainstream media communication framework of “one newspaper, one journal, one website, and one app.”

Since its launch in October 2015, the Southern Plus client has surpassed 20 million cumulative downloads with 1.8 million daily active users. Behind this achievement in less than two years lies a remarkable development process: the Southern Plus team delivered their first version within just three months of formation, and now completes a version iteration approximately every 25 days. What specific development strategies underlie this “Mobile First” approach for a local party media group? How does one build a technology team that thrives in the mobile space? And what technical development path has emerged from this process?

“Mobile First” Strategy: Publisher Accounts and Service Accounts Focusing on Content and Services

The Southern Plus news client operates from a mobile internet mindset, placing users at the center to create a linked mechanism of “news + services + social interaction + industry + N.” This approach transforms content production by merging the newspaper’s quality resources with users’ personalized needs to build Guangdong’s foremost authoritative mobile information platform.

To achieve deep integration of content and services, Southern Plus comprises two components: “Publisher Accounts” and “Service Accounts.” The Publisher

Accounts platform aggregates authoritative information sources across Guangdong, including disciplinary inspection and supervision commissions, public security bureaus, education departments, labor unions, women's federations, youth leagues, volunteer associations, major universities such as Sun Yat-sen University, Jinan University, and South China University of Technology, as well as Southern Media Group's own outlets including *Southern Daily*, *Southern Magazine*, *Southern News Network*, *Southern Metropolis Daily*, and *Southern Weekend*. By establishing this authoritative source platform, Southern Plus aims to become the media outlet that “understands Guangdong best.”

The Service Accounts component initially introduced 29 government and lifestyle service windows covering essential daily needs—government affairs, transportation, public data queries, and cultural education—spanning all Guangdong municipalities to create a “government affairs hall in your palm” and build a comprehensive user service platform.

According to Mai Miao, the Group attaches great importance to deep integration across its newspaper, website, and app platforms. The technology team actively empowers this integration through LBS positioning technology and big data analytics to enhance localized service capabilities and improve communication effectiveness measurement. With 21 journalist stations for *Southern Daily*, 21 local channels for Southern News Network, and city channels for Southern Plus, the platform achieves integrated development through online-offline linkages and deep cultivation of local resources. Currently, Southern Plus hosts 1,800 Southern Accounts. For user services, the technology team precisely distributes content to users' mobile devices based on their interest preferences and geographic characteristics. During major or breaking news events, Southern Plus combines senior editors' recommendations with big data-driven intelligent recommendations to deliver authoritative information to users first, rapidly disseminating correct information and amplifying communication impact.

Building a Core Team Through Technical Thinking + Business Logic, and Expanding Capacity Through Innovation + Open Collaboration

The core Southern Plus team comprises only 30 people—a significant challenge for meeting extensive business demands, user needs, and product iterations. Building an R&D team with internet thinking and business logic represents a common pain point for traditional media undergoing new media transformation.

Addressing this industry challenge with limited resources, Mai Miao explained that Southern Plus's team development consistently aligns technical innovation with business logic, developing its own distinctive “Southern Plus” characteristics through multi-pronged approaches under constrained conditions.

First, facing the industry's fundamental challenges, Southern Plus's technology team serves as both the downstream implementation department and the upstream technology innovation and leadership unit, possessing strong internet DNA. As the downstream unit implementing products and services, the team bears final responsibility for product quality, requiring it to follow the entire pro-

duction chain and understand upstream business operations. Simultaneously, as the frontline technology team, it must track new technology trends and integrate them into business scenarios for mobile internet implementation, driving business development through technological innovation.

Second, to address the challenge of a small core team facing numerous business demands, Southern Plus has effectively balanced innovation with leveraging external resources. The team pursues independent R&D for flexibility, control, and innovation while fully utilizing mature external products, services, and talent—“standing on the shoulders of giants” in the mobile internet environment to save substantial human and time costs. According to Mai Miao, Southern Plus follows four principles in technical implementation: for mature, transparent underlying technologies, it typically partners externally or purchases services; for technologies affecting business logic, it pursues independent R&D or must obtain source code in partnerships; for human resource development, it collaborates with universities to establish graduate internship programs, leveraging top talent and identifying future recruitment targets; and it actively applies for technology projects, establishing win-win relationships through industry-academia-research collaborations, adding technological attributes to its media foundation and strengthening technical capabilities.

Mai Miao emphasized that beyond strong technical capabilities, the team’s expansion from its challenging startup phase to its current scale owes much to the Group’s emphasis on the team’s cultural development. Through a belief in “using our best for the first battle and daring to fight tough battles,” the team has cultivated a group of young people who love research, take responsibility, and work with passion—individuals who will become the backbone of the Group’s future convergence transformation.

User-Oriented Mobile Technology Application and Integrated Media Construction of Content + Services

Recent media convergence practices—from traditional media’s “central kitchen” construction to internet companies’ new media labs—have explored various technological applications including VR, H5, and short videos. The essence of these formats lies in adapting to mobile internet-era contextual applications and meeting user needs. Regarding media convergence and news business transformation, Mai Miao noted that traditional media’s editorial process reengineering is an evolutionary process. As a technology leadership and support department, the core technology team must expand while enhancing user stickiness.

On content, Southern Plus creates mobile content products that enhance user interaction and retention. Simultaneously, through co-building Southern Accounts with partner organizations, it aggregates and directs user resources across multiple platforms, achieving integrated development through online-offline activities.

Intelligent Recommendation and Avoiding Information Silos

Before the mobile internet era, traditional media's technology departments focused primarily on operations and maintenance, with relatively weak capabilities in new technology R&D and user demand guidance. During mobile transformation, Mai Miao acknowledged that traditional media severely lacks comprehensive technical talent—a challenge Southern Plus also faces. Therefore, future team building will focus on enhancing new technology introduction capabilities to empower the client with innovative technologies. Additionally, given the lack of mature management mechanisms for new media R&D personnel in traditional media, Southern Plus will further innovate incentive mechanisms to attract and retain high-end technical talent while implementing more refined management to fully unlock R&D personnel's potential.

Toutiao, a rapidly rising intelligent search engine in the mobile internet space, has made its intelligent recommendation algorithms and precise user profiling a widely emulated content distribution model across media outlets. However, machine algorithms and intelligent recommendations have also created “information silos,” a major industry concern in recent years. Mai Miao stated that Southern Plus employs a “technology + editorial” approach for intelligent recommendations, currently in trial operation. For algorithmic recommendations, Southern Plus uses multiple algorithm-driven methods, matching and correlating recommendations based on user profiles, user behavior, and news content across multiple dimensions. The big data team validates and optimizes through A/B testing, selecting optimal algorithms by comparing their value in increasing user visit duration and reading volume.

As Southern Plus's big data technology matures comprehensively, its management and evaluation will adopt a fully data-driven approach to guide content gathering, product design, technical optimization, and operational promotion—replacing subjective human judgment with objective quantitative metrics.

Future Development

Promoting media convergence development and enhancing mainstream media's influence in the new media discourse arena represents a crucial issue in current media convergence. Mai Miao stated that Southern Plus will leverage big data and AI technologies to comprehensively upgrade its intelligence level. Simultaneously, it will evolve from a product to a platform, better aggregating and integrating information release resources and government service resources from party and government organizations at all levels across Guangdong. This will enable deeper participation in Guangdong's “Internet + Government Affairs” and “Smart City” initiatives, improving government information release and service levels, advancing government governance modernization, and accelerating the expansion of Southern Plus's influence in the new media discourse arena.

Note: Figure translations are in progress. See original paper for figures.

Source: ChinaXiv — Machine translation. Verify with original.