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Pioneer in Media Convergence: Interview with Ye Zhenzhen, General Manager of People's Daily Media Technology Co., Ltd. (Postprint)

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Abstract

In an exclusive interview with *Media Technology Professionals*, this journal's reporter Diao Yigang spoke with Ye Zhenzhen, General Manager of People's Daily Media Technology Co., Ltd. The conversation revealed how the People's Daily "Central Kitchen" platform has become a pioneering force in media convergence. During the interview, Ye noted that a 5 billion yuan media investment fund had been established, anchored by the Central Kitchen platform. Simultaneously, the "China Media Convergence Clou...

Full Text

Preamble: Interview with a Media Technology Pioneer

In an exclusive interview with *Media Technology Professionals*, this journal's reporter Diao Yigang spoke with Ye Zhenzhen, General Manager of People's Daily Media Technology Co., Ltd. The conversation revealed how the People's Daily "Central Kitchen" platform has become a pioneering force in media convergence. During the interview, Ye noted that a 5 billion yuan media investment fund had been established, anchored by the Central Kitchen platform. Simultaneously, the "China Media Convergence Cloud" was officially launched, marking the completion of initial groundwork for both capital and technology platforms serving the entire industry's media convergence efforts.

The Central Kitchen's Three-Year Journey

People's Daily, the official newspaper of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, has walked alongside the Party from its origins in Xibaipo, Pingshan County. Over 70 years of trials and tribulations, it has witnessed the glory and

dreams of a great political party, dedicating seven decades to publicizing revolutionary achievements, construction accomplishments, and reform successes. As the battle songs of the past 70 years echo into an era of surging mobile internet and new media, this veteran party media outlet has demonstrated the courage to be a trailblazer and the agility to adapt, pioneering new frontiers in media convergence and strategic transformation that reveal the bold vision of an established central media institution.

In October 2016, the launch of the Central Kitchen studio plan, anchored by the People's Daily newsroom, dramatically stimulated innovation enthusiasm among editorial staff and propelled media convergence into deeper waters. Guided by General Secretary Xi Jinping's spirit of his "2.19" speech, People's Daily completed construction of its Central Kitchen on December 26, becoming a flagship for deep media convergence development.

On January 5, 2017, the "Symposium on Advancing Deep Media Convergence" convened at People's Daily headquarters. Minister Liu Qibao of the Publicity Department called for adaptation to profound changes in communication patterns, advancement of deep media convergence, consolidation and strengthening of mainstream public opinion positions, and firm mastery of discourse leadership. The People's Daily Central Kitchen construction model received high-level recognition and was mandated for nationwide promotion and replication. Following the meeting, heads of hundreds of central, local, and industry mainstream media visited the People's Daily Central Kitchen. In their eyes, behind this novel "kitchen" surged not only dazzling innovative spirit but also the future of traditional media.

One Cloud and Three Platforms

During the conversation with Ye Zhenzhen, the reporter was most struck by this media convergence pioneer's ideals and passion. In March 2014, to break down internal business barriers and enable advanced technology to support operations, People's Daily established People's Daily Media Technology Co., Ltd., responsible for planning, designing, constructing, and operating the People's Daily Central Kitchen, while driving media convergence forward in depth. By the end of 2016, less than three years after its founding, the company had achieved annual profitability and overall net profitability for the three-year period.

Reflecting on the decision made three years earlier, Ye Zhenzhen explained: "Establishing a technology company was a far-sighted major decision by People's Daily's editorial committee. First, the leadership permitted the use of market-oriented methods to build such a media technology company, and specifically a joint-stock company. This indicates that People's Daily leadership had relatively long-term vision for the company's future development." Ye added: "We implemented the leadership's plan, starting from scratch. After three years of accumulation, the company now employs over 200 people. These outstanding talents come from large, medium, and small internet companies, technical

teams, or major traditional media outlets, and possess exceptional capabilities.”

Ye continued: “From the beginning, President Yang Zhenwu of People’s Daily set the requirement that the Central Kitchen should not only belong to *People’s Daily* but should serve the entire industry and the entire nation. With this top-level design, the company’s foothold is to export this technical system, gradually shifting from technology model export to content resource integration. In this process, the operation platform, technology platform, and capital platform must operate in parallel and interactively.”

In March 2015, People’s Daily Media Technology Co., Ltd. designed a completely new converged reporting process based on the actual conditions of People’s Daily’s all-media operations. The editorial committee decided to conduct a test of this business process during the National Two Sessions to verify its effectiveness. The newly unveiled People’s Daily Central Kitchen, leveraging its speed in delivering news, comprehensiveness in background information, and depth in exclusive interpretation, produced a large volume of all-media content products with both correct orientation and creative excellence, creating a news feast for Two Sessions coverage. From that point forward, “Central Kitchen” became a new phenomenon and concept attracting industry-wide attention. Subsequently, during coverage of major events and historic moments, the People’s Daily Central Kitchen consistently delivered brilliant, “viral” products across networks, with constantly refreshing content creativity that redefined understanding of new media.

In February 2016, General Secretary Xi Jinping visited People’s Daily and highly affirmed the achievements of Central Kitchen construction. In August, People’s Daily Media Technology Co., Ltd. established the “Yidun Media Investment Fund.” This fund, anchored by the Central Kitchen platform, reached a scale of 5 billion yuan. Meanwhile, the “China Media Convergence Cloud” was officially released, completing the initial layout of capital and technology platforms serving the entire industry’s media convergence.

The Central Kitchen serves as People’s Daily’s all-media business operation platform. People’s Daily Media Technology Co., Ltd. positions its main business as providing backend support services for the production, dissemination, operation, and future business of various all-media content. The application of capital mechanisms according to internet principles has already begun.

The Central Kitchen’s technology platform uses “China Media Convergence Cloud” as its foundation layer and a series of Central Kitchen technical tools as its application layer. The Convergence Cloud plus Central Kitchen 打通了 PaaS, IaaS, and SaaS layers, providing one-stop technical solutions for media convergence.

By the end of 2016, during a National Journalists Association event about the “Central Kitchen,” Ye Zhenzhen expressed hope that through construction of the Media Convergence Cloud, the industry could be provided with one-stop technical solutions for media convergence, breaking down barriers between busi-

ness and technology so that technical challenges in media convergence would no longer exist. The company aims to simplify and tool-ize various media-related technologies, “demystifying technology.” As the reporter learned, People’s Daily Central Kitchen initially relied on manual production of H5 new media products. After one Two Sessions reporting cycle, the team immediately developed two H5 production tools, enabling editors and designers to create H5 products as easily as making PowerPoint presentations. Similar thinking has been applied to technologies like “video live streaming” and “VR.”

Regarding capital markets, Ye Zhenzhen considers them crucial for ensuring sustainable momentum in media convergence development. Without sufficient capital support, media convergence may face issues like lack of kinetic energy and insufficient sustainable development capacity. The relationship among operation platforms, technology platforms, and capital platforms is one of mutual support and mutual reinforcement, forming an integrated solution.

Future Convergence Trends

From the high-level platform of People’s Daily Central Kitchen, what magnificent vision emerges when looking toward the future of media convergence development?

On January 5, 2017, the central authorities convened the “Central Deep Convergence Symposium” at People’s Daily. From the meeting’s name, it is clear that central leadership has made a clear judgment: the media convergence process has begun transitioning from its initial stage to a deep convergence phase. On the blueprint of media convergence development, deep media convergence has just begun. Media outlets have completed construction of new media channels such as websites, apps, and micro-platforms, and have begun initiating experiments in converged planning, converged collection, converged processing, and converged distribution. Some traditional media have established corresponding mechanisms.

To achieve the goal proposed by the central authorities of “you are me, I am you,” many thresholds and obstacles must still be crossed. Looking further ahead, whether the linkage of “newspaper, television, website, app, and micro-platform” within media organizations meets the central requirement of “you are me, I am you” remains a question worth exploring.

Regarding the current nationwide rush to build Central Kitchens, Ye Zhenzhen points out that content dissemination effect is the sole criterion for evaluating Central Kitchens. He explains that the success of People’s Daily Central Kitchen first lies in the editorial committee’s determination to reform and innovate business processes and mechanisms, fully activating the capabilities of editorial teams to produce large quantities of content masterpieces. Producing masterpieces is the hard truth of the “Central Kitchen.” As the standard configuration for media convergence, “Central Kitchen” refers to the two core mechanisms of “editor-in-chief dispatch center” and “editorial collaboration platform.”

Only on the basis of process innovation and mechanism reform did People's Daily Central Kitchen develop conceptually advanced technology platforms and build functionally complete spatial platforms, further pushing convergence development to become deeper, more comprehensive, and more integrated. The three steps of "Central Kitchen" construction—"business, technology, space"—cannot have their sequence reversed.

Currently, some media organizations exhibit four major misconceptions in Central Kitchen construction: "emphasizing projects over reform, emphasizing hardware over mechanisms, emphasizing technology over effects, and emphasizing construction over operation." Ye Zhenzhen expressed concern that blind Central Kitchen construction may lead to investment waste without content results.

Ye Zhenzhen stated that People's Daily Central Kitchen's planning sets two goals: first, whether it can achieve deep integration with users; second, whether it can realize deep integration with other industries, rather than stopping at simple integration of internal organizational structures and business processes within media units. In this plan, People's Daily Media Technology Co., Ltd. uses keywords such as "connect, integrate, upgrade" to describe the implementation path for media convergence.

"Connect" refers to connecting underlying layers, eliminating internal segmentation structures within news organizations, then connecting the media industry, and finally connecting users. In People's Daily Central Kitchen's practice, the operational steps for "connecting" constitute an important tactical issue. In the rapidly evolving mobile internet era, this relates to grasping industrial and market opportunities. For traditional media organizations, the most...

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