

BY SCOTT BULLOCK, *Consultant, CoversSell.com*

11 TIPS TO HELP YOU SELL MORE SINGLE COPIES (SIMPLY BY PAYING ATTENTION TO THE COVER)

NEWSSTANDS CAN BE cluttered, messy places where magazines compete for visibility with a herd of other titles. Even publishing giants have to use all of the tools at their disposal to stand out from the crowd. These 11 tips can help your magazine turn eyes at the racks into money in the bank.

UNDERSTAND THE COVER REAL ESTATE

When looking at potential cover images, don't get emotionally carried away with how great it looks on a large Mac desktop screen. That's not how your magazine is going to end up being merchandised in the real world of cluttered mainline newsstand racks. Design the cover with the realities in mind. Make sure key visible real estate is used to push the best features and benefits.

DON'T BE CUTE WITH COVER LINES

For some reason, puns, bizarre insider jokes and clever plays on words too often substitute for clarity, brevity and straight-forward messaging when it comes to cover lines. Avoid this curse and addiction, which, like most bad habits and illness is not good for your magazine's health. The three-second rule holds that if your cover does not connect quickly, the casual, impulse buyer has probably moved on.

ALWAYS ASK YOURSELF, "WHAT ARE WE SELLING?"

What you may discover is that the answer often lies in the subhead. Main sell lines rarely get to the nub of it, thus requiring an explanatory subhead. If this is the case, try distilling down the subhead and make it your main sell line.

ALWAYS ASK YOURSELF, "DOES THIS COVER EXPAND OR CONTRACT MY POTENTIAL CONSUMER MARKET?"

For example, if you are a magazine focused on cottages, a cover that says "Dream Homes" and shows a warm and inviting fireplace might expand your market, while a cover that says "Craft Cottages" and shows a bizarre-looking hut might shrink your market appeal. While newsstand browsers may be interested in a cottage lifestyle, living like a hermit may not be most people's dream.

COMMIT TO THE COVER

If you believe your main selling feature is worthy of a cover, don't be afraid to play it up loudly. Don't be shy with type, be assertive. If you don't think it is important, why would a casual newsstand browser?

RADICAL CLARITY

Too often, in an attempt to cram as many hooks and sell lines onto a cover in the desperate hope that something will snag a buyer, a cover can become too crowded and confusing. Try to keep it simple and powerful.

AVOID THE PRETTY PICTURE TRAP

It's easy to get captivated and emotionally carried away by a pretty picture. Some magazines love the artwork so much that they produce "award-winning" covers that don't even have sell lines. Paul Jones calls these covers "Art with Logo." They are also known as newsstand duds.

DISCOVER YOUR MAGAZINE'S ICONS AND SUPER STARS

For *Vanity Fair* it is simple. Angelina Jolie, Marilyn Monroe and Jackie O sell. For *Scientific American* it's Albert Einstein. For *Native Peoples* (a niche arts and culture magazine) it is heroic chiefs. For *Canada's History*, think Terry Fox. Every magazine has iconic touchstones, events, people, or even objects. Discover yours and play them up big.

TAKE AN EDGE

Don't be afraid to be controversial. If magazines are to remain vital in an information-rich age, we can't pull our punches.

INVEST IN QUALITY PACKAGING

More than ever what differentiates magazines from newspapers, or from a web-based read, is the way it feels to the touch, the way it looks on our coffee table, and how much we want to keep it on our bookshelf as a reference for information we aim to act on in the future. Perfect binding may cost a bit more, but it makes your magazine look like it matters, not just to readers, but to advertisers too. Trim size, UV coating, 100 lb. cover stock...don't be cheap. If you want other brands to be attracted to yours, you'd better be dressed to kill.

CREATE A SPECIAL INTEREST PUBLICATION

Vertical content almost always sells at considerably higher cover prices, and moves more units, than a normal issue of your magazine. Readers will pay for quality. European imports figured this out a long time ago. You can too.

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