

DELIVERING THE MESSAGE

How Consumer Involvement Flows from Magazine Content to Advertising

For several years now, magazines have promoted measures of “engagement” as evidence of real value to their readers. And it’s no surprise magazines involve readers. After all, they select titles by content and pay money to read them.



However demonstrating the value of reader involvement to the advertiser has been another matter.

Magazines claim their involved readers are more responsive to advertising. But involvement with a magazine’s editorial content is not the same as involvement with its advertising and readers are quite able to distinguish between the two.

The Research Has Been Divisive

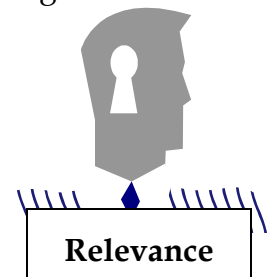
And there is another difficulty with involvement measures. The research has been divisive. Used to pit one magazine against another for a budget, not to show how magazines perform compared to other media. As a result “involvement” as a tool for encouraging advertisers to use magazines has had mixed results.

To give involvement measures real value to advertisers, magazines have to convince them that the involvement and connection readers have with titles carries over to the ads magazines carry. And explain why consumer involvement with magazine advertising is greater than it is with other media, like television.

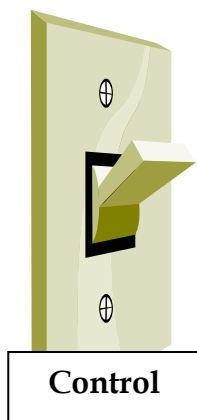
Relevance and Control

The argument for this can be built on two ideas: “Relevance” and “Control.” Because readers are in control, Print advertising intrudes more softly. When confronted by ads that are of interest, readers read them. When confronted by ads that are not of interest, readers simply turn the page.

They don’t switch the dial to a different magazine.



Psychologists call this “pacing” and it refers to the user’s perceived control of the moment and speed-of-use. It distinguishes “search” media like Print, from “delivery” media like TV. The Internet with display and search falls into both camps.



Print’s second advantage is the greater relevance of the advertising it carries. This also has two sources. How well magazine content targets specific consumers. And how well advertisers use this targeting ability to select the titles to carry their messages.

The net effect is people who choose to read a magazine are more often involved by the ads in that magazine because of

who they are, what they are reading and what is being advertised.

This is different from the TV model, where many ads are not relevant to most viewers. Few need Cialis or the patch, drink Grey Goose, plan to refinance a mortgage, eat at Subway or use Serenity Fresh Pads.

Do your own survey.

How Do You Measure Relevance?

Relevance and Control are the connection between reader involvement with magazines and with the advertising magazines carry.

Control as described, is easy to observe, but how do you measure relevance?

I think relevance can be measured as the closeness of fit between the characteristics of the reader (or viewer) of the medium carrying the advertising and those of the ideal prospect the advertising is trying to reach. It is the targeting variable.

It can be expressed as a single number, the medium's product user index for a brand or category as shown by MRI. The table below shows what relevance data looks like for selective brands using selective magazines.

MRI TARGETING INDEX
Selective Brands

BRAND	MAGAZINE	USER INDEX
WINE	Gourmet	278
DIAPERS	American baby	546
HOTELS	Travel & Leisure	302
GOLF SHOES	Golf	875
FINANCIAL	Kiplinger's	325
BRIDAL GOWN	Bride's	722

The first index number, 278, says a wine ad in Gourmet magazine is close to 3 times as relevant to its readers as it is to the general population. And so on.

These high levels of relevance in selective magazines, the examples show indices ranging from 278 to 875, are expected. But what about broader-appeal products, the kind that use Television heavily?

Even for TV brands, magazines make advertising more relevant to their readers than TV does to its viewers.

To illustrate this I've selected six heavily advertised TV brands spanning six different product categories. Each brand also uses Print. The comparison is the weighted user index for a month of TV and Print activity for each brand. (Again MRI, since Nielsen TV doesn't track products.)

**MRI TARGETING INDEX
TV Brands**

<i>BRAND</i>	<i>TV</i>	<i>MAGS</i>	<i>% DIFF</i>
SUV	118	138	+17
COFFEE	101	123	+23
TAMPONS	134	186	+39
FINANCIAL	140	165	+18
MEN'S RAZOR	114	142	+24
MP3 PLAYER	133	198	+49

There are over 5,000 data points in the analysis. Ten Pages of Print schedules. Eighteen pages of Network, 174 Pages of Cable.

Even for these predominantly TV brands, their Print schedules are more relevant to readers than their TV schedules are to viewers. The magazine advantage ranges from +17% for a major SUV brand to +49% for a heavily advertised MP3 player.

Relevance and Control

It is a magazine's combination of advertising relevance and reader control that produces greater reader involvement with advertising. Just as it is TV's combination of less relevance and less control that can trigger the viewer's "nuclear option" . . . Which is dial switching. The opposite of involvement.

The Nature of Magazines

“Involvement” is about the bond between the magazine and the reader. And because of the nature of magazines that bond often carries over to the advertising.

Magazines give the reader control which makes the advertising more welcome. And magazines target readers, which makes the advertising more relevant.



That is why consumers are engaged more by advertising in magazines than in other media.

NOTE: A version of this essay was originally presented at the Association of National Advertisers Print Forum, June 16, 2005, in New York City.

Erwin Ephron