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Viewpoint

Magazines: the next new thing

Marketers must accept print as the last word in consumer control

By RENETTA MCCANN

FORUM

WHY ARE magazines still compelling? That question intrigued Starcom as it explored innovative media strategies to

accommodate our rapidly changing media world. Today's conventional wisdom says that digital is dynamic; paper, passé. Yet wherever we look—in parks and offices, at beaches and lunch counters, on planes and trains—we see people reading magazines. Whatever else competes for readers' attention, it seems their passion for print remains.

Magazines: the next "new" thing?

Yes. Here's why:

All readers know that their magazines provide a journey, one they choose and control by deciding where and when they will go, how long they'll stay and when they'll return. And when readers take this "journey" they are fully engaged. They are active and involved in a thought-out process. In a media environment increasingly characterized by interruption, magazines remain an oasis of engagement.

That's a powerful claim at a time when it's harder than ever to capture peoples' attention, thanks to the almost overwhelming number of choices for media consumption and communication. Twenty-five years ago it was as simple as ABC. Fifteen years ago, it was "I want my MTV." Today it's "I want my MP3."

The scope of choice and change is reflected in TV screens, computer monitors, DVRs, PDAs and assorted wireless devices. So how do magazines fit into this brave new world, and why do we at Starcom feel that the magazine industry is only now starting to hit its stride?

The way we see it, magazines offer benefits that are distinct among competing forms of media. There is, first, the richness of engagement noted by a 2003-2004 study conducted by Northwestern University's Media Management Center. And, in a world in which consumers increasingly seek control, magazines give it to them in a way that speaks volumes. Magazines allow consumers to customize their reading experiences to suit their own tastes. Where they read magazines. How they read magazines. When they read magazines.

NO INTERRUPTIONS

In every other medium, advertising interrupts rather than flows with content. No wonder DVRs and blocking Web software are so popular. Only magazines can make the



claim that advertising is valued content.

For instance, Starcom researchers interviewed women in suburban and urban areas in the typical place they read magazines: their homes. We asked them to pull 10 pages that best exhibited the essence of the magazine they were reading. One-third of the pages the respondents pulled were advertisements.

When advertisers understand the significance of consumer choice and control with magazines, they can weigh media choices using personal investment in the medium as a motivational criterion. And control and choice will become even more of a consumer imperative as our population changes. The 5-year-old daughter of one of my colleagues recently experienced TV without a DVR for the first time at a friend's house. Her dad said she was angry and confused because her viewing was interrupted by commercials. The wave of the future will carry millions of media consumers like her who are likely to reject content interruptions.

In addition to being the original permission-based vehicle, magazines have other important strengths, especially when you match the advertiser's DNA with the magazine's DNA. Take, for instance, that intangible quality of a magazine's connectivity—literally, the powerful way the best magazine brands connect with their

readers. Advertisers can leverage that relationship and build on the unique bond of trust that readers have for their favorite publications.

UNDERVALUED MEDIUM

We are already doing that. For instance, last year we worked with a major pharmaceutical client to create advertorials that appeared in several magazines. Although the message was exactly the same, each advertorial reflected the distinct editorial voice of the specific publication in which it appeared. The advertising content aligned perfectly with the magazine's tone.

Accountability research demonstrates that magazines are undervalued in the media mix relative to advertisers' investment in magazines. More research is needed.

Measures to date have focused on size. We need better measures of magazine reading, including engagement, as well as research that links marketing and advertising goals to performance.

We think accountability should be looked at differently than just ROI. We should also be focusing on return on objective (ROO). In other words, how has a magazine performed against our media/print objective? What are magazines doing for our clients' plans and how are we measuring the effectiveness of magazines within the overall media plan? Previously, there was no focus on output-

based accountability. It had all been about the input such as circulation. We need to devise metrics that truly link marketing and advertising goals to media performance.

Magazines are already doing much that is right; how else in the face of incredible competitive pressures have they only gotten closer to their customers? They enter our homes, sit in our living rooms and bathrooms. Magazines await us in our beauty parlors and doctor's offices. When you see a great ad in a magazine, you tear it out. When another pop-up ambushes your Web experience, you tear your hair out.

Advertisers and magazines have a mutual goal: to better serve both the people who trust us with their brand messages and the people who trust us with their time. Just as the quality of magazines to compel readers is timeless, so, too, must advertisers see their opportunities in magazines as timeless. Only then can we truly realize the benefits of media's next "new" thing. ■



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