

Magazines Canada

425 Adelaide St. W. Ste. 700

Toronto ON CAN M5V 3C1

Telephone: 416.504.0274

Facsimile: 416.504.0437

www.magazinescanada.ca

Matching Magazines to the Mood

It will come as no surprise that a reader's repertoire of magazines can change with evolving life-stage needs but it can also change with the mood of the moment. In time, a repertoire of magazines builds up.

While reader loyalty to specific titles can literally span a lifetime, one's repertoire is not fixed permanently. A person's repertoire moves in step with personal needs and development, modified as one moves through the life stages of childhood, adolescence, early working years, early years of living together or marriage, the years of young children, older children, the empty-nest years after the children have left home, and senior years. Within a much narrower time-span there are other changes that affect one's repertoire of magazines, even if only temporarily, such as moving house, redecorating, or thinking of changing the car.

The repertoire takes on a very personal perspective, unique to each reader. A study from G + J called "Perspectives of a Woman's Monthly Magazine" concluded that:

"A magazine is immensely versatile. The way it speaks to readers and the way readers interpret the magazine is unique in every case. Each woman has a repertoire of magazines and she has a different relationship with each title... to meet her different needs and moods."

Herein lays the benefit to advertisers: selecting a magazine to suit the mood ensures that the issue is read in an appropriate frame of mind. Both the editorial and the advertisements can be absorbed while the reader is in a relevant receptive mood, and thus they have the maximum opportunity to make an impact. Receptivity is a marriage of need and timing driven by one's mood; it's about having the right message in the right place at the right time.

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A number of qualitative research studies have indicated that one basic divide in mood is between serious or heavy reading matter, representing study or learning, and easy or light reading, representing relaxation or escapism.

One instance is a study by Plastow Research for International Thomson Publishing, among readers of general interest magazines. Readers distinguished between magazines according to the amount of concentration required to read them: some were seen to call for a fair degree of concentration and were read in a decidedly practical mood than other

publications. A different group of magazines was seen as a means of escape or relaxation.

Another project by Behavioural Studies Ltd. identified two main types of reading mood:

- 'Feet up': Reading on a couch, in the bath or in bed, sometimes literally with one's feet up. The reader is relaxed, and not conscious of time. What is prized is the experience of being taken out of oneself.
- 'Practical': Reading with the intention of learning something from the publication. This is not necessarily deliberate information seeking; it also embraces a general feeling that one may pick up some useful ideas.

A qualitative study by Communication Research Ltd. (CRL) also drew this distinction between escapist and practical reading. CRL reported:

"Once the magazine has been purchased there is additional pleasure to be gained from choosing the right time and place to read it".

Another dimension affecting the way people choose their reading is the time available and a person's current attitude towards that time. The Henley Centre reported that media and their messages are consumed in different ways according to the person's 'time mode':

- 'Saving Time' Mode - Consumers 'streamline'. They want simple, fast and convenient information
- 'Investing Time' Mode - When consumers need something more complex. They seek relevance, involvement, and added-value information, looking for messages that hold their attention, engage them, and reward them for their investment of time.

SouthBank Publishing's study "The Quality Medium, The Quality Message" by Mulholland Research Associates, showed that readers will sometimes try to save reading their favourite magazines until they have no other pressures on them. "This may be in the bath or in bed or at some other time of relaxation, but the important thing is that they absorb themselves with their magazine giving it their undivided attention." The magazines gain from being part of a private treat.

"I've got two hours that I absolutely cherish - and that's my treat, a nice cup of coffee, quietly taking my time, going through it."

Regardless of whether readers 'invest time' or 'save time', they control their own exposure, on their own time when the mood is right and they are most receptive. Advertisers benefit either way.

An understanding of your target's magazine repertoire will help you to surround your audience and leverage reader need when they are most receptive, using the reader's mood as leverage.

"Depending on mood, need and context, we take from a magazine what we want, when we want it – whether it is ideas, information, advice, inspiration, escapism or relaxation. Our relationship with our favourite magazines will be one in which we feel emotionally engaged and intellectually challenged, but always on our own terms."

Make the connection with magazines.

Source: Taken in part from "How Magazine Advertising Works", 4th Edition, Guy Consterdine; November 2002