

Case study: Refreshing company magazines





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The aim:

Our client has a quarterly publication that goes to 13,000 employees and pensioners. The readership is diverse – office and field based, UK and overseas, corporate and operative. This newsmagazine's overriding objective is literally 'to be all things to all readers'. Although a popular and important communication channel readership research conducted towards the end of 2007 revealed readers were perhaps becoming overly-familiar with the format. Skimming, rather than reading was prevalent, distinct reader groups were only looking at the page or item most relevant to them. Although writing style/content was consistently high, design and overall impact scored less well compared to previous research in 2004. The challenge set was to re-ignite reader interest and ensure the publication was being read for longer by all audience segments.

The solution:

Our starting point has been to preserve all that was good about the old publication – especially its clear writing style and creative content – and maximise other key aspects such as design impact & surprise, imagery and structure & flow. We therefore aimed to establish a higher quality look & feel throughout with a clearer structure. Equal consideration is given to different reader requirements – those who want to skim for short, digestible chunks of information (fact panels, side bars, vox pops) and those who want a more in-depth read.

Look & feel – The new design aims to be fresh, clean and lively – neither overly corporate or too tabloid. A mix of supplied imagery along with professionally taken material is still utilised. Working within the brand guidelines, there is stronger use of typography and graphics throughout.

Cover – The new design looks for more sophisticated covers – in addition to stronger people-led images – we have used graphical options (like the one enclosed in this entry). The cover is slightly unique in that it is now chosen by the readership via an online vote – this helps to promote awareness of a forthcoming issue. This is a challenge to the design/imagery team as at least three high-quality covers are required each issue!

Page 2/3 - The opening page spread has been revamped to be more informative and forward-looking. It sets out detailed navigation and contact information at the same time offering readers some immediate exclusives.

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Business pages - The first half of the newsmagazine is still strongly business-focused. There is a new treatment of the chief exec's business update. Given the difficult economic climate, these updates are more essential than ever. Other senior leaders are also included. News of contract wins, project achievements, product innovations and operational improvements follow including external perspectives from customers and media. This flow is interspersed with regular people-led features such as 'Site Life' looking at life aboard our client's specialist sea-dredging operation, and 'Country Profile' introducing the rapidly-emerging business in Poland.

New features – More space is given to weighty subjects. The centre pages address a particularly hot topic – the new operators' workwear range. The approach taken here is to feature employees' testing and commenting on the new range as well as answer FAQs and outline the overall decision-making process with a timeline. Pages 18-20 set out the recently unveiled Sustainability Strategy – the article has to cover a lot of ground and opportunities to feature specific people here are limited as the strategy is new. However, the same tactics are applied to break down what is a rather dry subject into more digestible chunks. 'My little big idea' profiles the ingenuity of one individual and how this has led to a new recycling scheme. This feature supports a key business objective to unlock workforce ideas and knowledge.

People pages/back cover - As readers move to the back, content becomes increasingly lighter with a greater mix of people, community and fun items – targeting other reader groups. We know through research that 'Coffee break' is particularly popular with business administrators and clerical staff – so we have beefed up the competition prize and included a puzzle. The back cover is home to the 'Great Marmite Debate' concept (dev with Unilever's permission) – enabling a fuller exchange of views on a work-related subject.

The results:

Research to this point is anecdotal – further investigation is planned next year. However, it would appear the new magazine has been warmly received by readers and has re-ignited interest. For example, the most recent 'cover vote-off' received **2,424** unique votes from employees – this is more than **30%** of the workforce! A reader letter received on 30th Sept 2008 (following publication of this issue) stated: *"To the editor, I enjoy reading your magazine. The September 2008 edition was excellent. The style and presentation is on a par with the best national magazines/periodicals. I appreciate the hard work that goes into drafting such a document and to keep on improving it is a great achievement."*

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