

Readers return for premium content in specialist magazines

Bespoke desk research, conducted by marketing guru Martin Neethling into global trends for RamsayMedia, indicates that quality content, curated by knowledgeable professionals, will win the day.



"The public surfs the internet, but swims in magazines," says Ramsay. (Image: [Toby Hudson](#), via Wikimedia Commons)

"It's all very well to have thousands of bloggers writing about cars, but when you are trying to make a buying decision, would you rather believe them or the editor of Car magazine and his team of experts?" commented the company's outgoing chairman, Alan Ramsay.

"After the initial heady appeal of online citizen journalism, readers appear to be returning to trusted sources for premium content that cuts through the overwhelming digital noise - and advertisers will pay to access those quality-engaged audiences."

Insights from a study reveal that the circulation of some special-interest magazines is climbing consistently. Niche publications such as America's The New Yorker and Britain's The Economist have bucked the downward trend for more than a decade, albeit by expanding their circulation model to include both traditional magazines and digital replica editions.

And while media aggregators like Flipboard (and even Facebook) are good containers of content, special-interest publishers are connectors, creating a physical sense of community through events by bringing people together around common interests, and so build and offer quality audiences. "If there is one message we need to take into the marketplace about advertising across all platforms, this is it."

Context the new king

The findings also revealed that content does not always migrate online - and neither do readers. A UK study found that 93% of website visitors are website readers only, while French research found that women magazine readers prefer reading their favourite publications in print; for them, technology platforms (computers, iPads, tablets and even cellphones) are associated with work. Context is the new king, it seems.

When considering the quality of time spent with a print publication versus online, consumption of news on digital platforms captures just 6% of dwell time, compared to newspapers and magazines that capture 35% of their time, an Australian study found.

"This is massively important to advertisers who want people to absorb their message: as we have often said, the public surfs the internet, but swims in magazines," Ramsay added.

The RamsayMedia desk research demonstrates that trends differ for newspapers, magazines and books and between general and specialist magazines, but that whatever the sector, those who experiment tend to do better in growing circulation.

Encouragingly, emerging markets - including South Africa - reflect overall growth in print readership, while this country's media are likely to benefit from the lessons learned overseas because of the lag in world trends reflecting locally.

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