

Six Reasons Why In-House Print Publications Appeal to Customers

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August 2007



Excerpt

Despite the hype over the Internet as a marketing medium, research has shown that print still prevails in terms of credibility. And when it comes to reaching top business decision makers, it is print publications that are proving most effective in cutting through the clutter to influence BDMs – and this applies even more so in today's noisy media environment.

More often than not, a major difficulty marketers have to tackle is how to reach their desired audience – and this is particularly challenging when the people they need to reach are top business decision makers at the CXO level.

With the Internet becoming a pervasive and highly popular medium, many marketers have reprioritized their budgets and tactics in favour of the Web. But is the Internet truly the way to reach the right business people with the authority to make purchase decisions?

Despite the hype, research shows that print remains the medium of preference for business decision makers. A study recently conducted by USA Strategies and the Graduate School of DePaul University in Chicago (known for its graduate business programs as well as for being one of the leading IT graduate schools in the United States) revealed that the majority of the 600+ respondents still prefer print over the Web as the source to find out about new products and services.

Even when both print and web versions of trade magazines are available, print remains the preference.

The print medium, as opposed to having met its death – as many marketers thought when the Internet's popularity boomed – has not only survived, but has retained its unique strengths in comparison to the Web.

Why A Print Publication?

While businesspeople continue to be bombarded on all sides by electronic newsletters, direct mailers, and phone calls from telemarketers, in-house print publications are proving to be an exceptionally effective tool

in cutting through the clutter and gaining the attention of high-level BDMs. There are several reasons for this.

Credibility

The first, and biggest advantage of producing a print publication is its credibility. Information online has long faced the challenge of proving its credibility and reliability. Information, when it flows so fast and freely on the Web, can be debunked and thrown out of the window with as much speed as when it first arrived.

On the other hand, when information is presented in a print publication, it speaks to the reader with credibility, authority and expertise.

Think about an electronic mailer you received recently. Do you recall what it was about? Or did you file it away or hit "delete" before it could make an impression? As much as marketers hate to admit it, the impermanence of the online medium makes it hard to take seriously. Anyone can send an e-mailer and blast it to thousands of email addresses with just a click.

Print publications, on the other hand, are in a league of their own altogether. Think of a 40-page full-colour magazine with a glossy cover. Its weight feels good in your hand when you pick it up. The pictures and headlines grab your attention, and its pages hold the promise of new information relevant to your field of work. Would you discard it easily? I doubt it.

Position Yourself as an Expert

The second benefit of producing a regular, in-house print publication is that doing so positions your company as an expert in the field. This, in turn, creates top-of-mind awareness for your business in the minds of BDMs. When they have a business need for your category of

solution, your company will end up in the short list.

When Microsoft Asia Pacific started marketing towards the public sector three years ago, it needed a way to reach high-level key decision makers (KDMs) in government. These were policymakers and influential thinkers who would advise government on how to deploy technology strategically in their country, for the empowerment of their citizenry.

Faced with the objective of reaching these government elites, a professional and attractive magazine design was put together, an editorial calendar drawn up, and writers and designers deployed for the purpose.

Today, Microsoft publishes a quarterly magazine called Insights: Public Sector for government KDMs. Every issue of the magazine revolves around the three main areas of concern for policymakers – education, healthcare, and defense. And the reception has been overwhelming. I've been told that at a recent government event, a thousand copies of the magazine were placed on a nearby table for those interested – not given out, mind you – and by the end of the event not a single copy remained.

And not just well known companies that are firmly entrenched in their market space (such as Microsoft) can benefit from producing their own print publications. In fact, companies carving a name for themselves in new fields stand to gain even more. Let's talk about Business Intelligence (BI) – still a young and relatively alien concept to many businesses in Asia Pacific. When the opportunity to deploy a BI solution for their business presents itself, BDMs need a reliable, accurate and non-biased source of information to answer numerous questions such as: What is BI? What can it do for my business? Is it relevant to my needs? Is my business big enough to take advantage of what BI has to offer?

By producing a BI print publication on a regular basis, introducing its benefits and the latest news and developments, a company captures the mindshare of potential customers. By positioning itself as a thought leader and expert in the field, it gains a foothold in the mind of BDMs that might one day want a BI solution for their businesses.

News and Views

The third benefit of a print publication is that it is an excellent platform to go beyond the mere

dissemination of facts. Print publications are ideal for more complex information to be communicated – hence it is possible to address and talk about the deeper issues and debates surrounding your industry.

And when it comes to CXOs and other BDMs – who not only want to know for themselves what the latest technology is, but also want to know what others are saying about it – this is a particularly alluring attribute of print publications. By spending some quality time with what they deem as a knowledgeable publication, they can easily update themselves on the latest news and views in the industry.

The concept behind this is quite simple – BDMs don't want to be told what to think. Instead, they want to know what everybody else thinks, so that they can weigh the arguments on both sides and make their own informed decisions.

Strong Reader Engagement

The fourth reason why a print publication is a great tool to reach BDMs with is the strong reader engagement during the reading experience itself. In contrast to today's noisy media environment that bombards consumers with too much unwanted information, a good magazine provides just the opposite – a focused oasis of calm.

In fact, a study by the Magazine Publishers of America identified the top three reasons that drove magazine use. Those surveyed said: "It's my personal time-out", "It's part of my routine", and "I trust it".

This plays a big part in the influence print publications have over readers. Unlike the psychological stress of opening a work-related e-mail or e-newsletter, reading a magazine is a treat. A magazine does not judge you nor jostle for your attention (it does not need to stoop so low). It is what it should be – a time-out, like a relaxed conversation with a friend or confidante. For a BDM, it's an escape from the hectic workday, from the hustle and bustle of endless appointments and e-mails.

"The magazine... is complete in itself. Its size and weight give us immediate information about how manageable it is within the context of our busy lives... While they may contain references to other works, or create in our own minds links which we might like to follow, the opportunity of pursuing those as we read are limited. While this means that it may be necessary to make mental or written notes to pursue a link later, it can also be comforting – particularly if we are

reading 'off-duty,'" says one academic, John MacColl (1997).

In other words, a print publication is the perfect way to cut through the clutter and reach BDMs when they are at their most relaxed. Think about that BDM you want to reach – would you rather he react with apathy, or even annoyance, towards seeing your e-newsletter in his inbox, or reach out toward your magazine when he feels ready for a break?

Mobility

The fifth reason why print publications are great for reaching BDMs is that they are extremely mobile. Being tangible, they can be brought along to meetings and referred to at any time. Information can be easily and immediately called out by flipping to a page that is bookmarked or labeled with a note.

And then there is the value of the secondary "pass-on" effect. You know how that magazine, instead of being discarded with just one read, gets passed around the office? This is a crucial part of the readership numbers of any publication – secondary circulation.

The same goes for your print publication. A BDM will pass it on to his colleagues or peers when he is done. He may want to make notes in the margins as he reads, and call out specific information for his boss or colleague to take note of – "Is this something we can implement for our company?", "Will this be useful to us? Perhaps we can try something similar?"

Print publications are also well-suited for the business traveler – they can be read while on the plane, coach or train. The medium is sturdy enough such that even if it is dropped, it doesn't affect the integrity of the publication very much – you can just pick it up again. But imagine the consequences if it was a laptop computer that fell out of your grasp! The robustness of the print publication makes it ideal reading material for BDMs when they are on the go.

A Show of Commitment

This sixth reason is probably pretty obvious to you already. The act of producing a regular print publication speaks volumes about your company's commitment to your industry and the business community at large. Providing and sharing information in a printed format shows the seriousness with which your business approaches readers – your potential customers. While others may spout rhetoric, you really care about your business and your customers.

Unlike setting up a website or company blog, which can be done relatively quickly and easily, a significant additional amount of work goes into creating a print publication. The effort made by your company to produce a regular, tangible publication will not be lost on your readers and potential customers.

Effectiveness and Accountability

On the other side of the coin, producing a print publication is not always easy. It requires commitment in terms of budget, time and effort. Every copy printed has a unit cost.

Many people quickly point out that setting up an e-newsletter is much easier because of very low unit costs – it costs almost nothing to send it out to a thousand people instead of a hundred. But will an e-newsletter reach BDMs effectively? Will it influence their beliefs and position your company in their minds as an expert in the business? Will it showcase your company's serious commitment to its business and customers?

Skeptics also say that it is difficult to measure the returns on a print publication. On the contrary – there are many methods to assess accountability.

One way would be to measure its Return On Objective (ROO). Established organizations such as the Magazine Publishers of America state as a guideline that ROO can be measured based on changes in consumer attitudes. This can in turn be measured by tracking attributes such as awareness, message association, brand favourability and purchase intent. How aware are BDMs about your company and solutions, or even about the market you are doing business in? To what extent is your brand favoured over others? This is important data that can be measured.

Also measurable are other metrics such as sales, coupon redemption rates, business reply card response rates, website visits, Web advertising click-throughs, phone responses, amount of store traffic, recommendations to others, and the saving of advertisements for future reference, that are linked to reading your print publication. These give good indication of shifts in consumer behavior or marketplace response.

Cut Through The Clutter

For all the reasons I have shared above – the fact that a print publication is seen by BDMs as a credible, trustworthy source of information; it positions your company as an expert in the

field; it provides BDMs with not just news, but also informed opinion; it cultivates strong reader relationships with BDMs; the format is mobile; and the act of publishing is a strong show of commitment from your company to your readership and potential customers – it is quite clear that despite what the hype may say about the Web, traditional media is here to stay.

So let the Internet media jostle in the crowd, pushing and shoving for attention from BDMs. Amid the noise, print publications retain their sophisticated and unique strengths – and their great appeal to BDMs at the very top.



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