

Many benefits to custom publishing

By [Vivian Warby](#)

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The average reader of a magazine spends 25 minutes on its content. If you could get into this reader's house, what would you tell them? This question could be posed to every single company as each company has this opportunity daily in the form of customer magazines, the first International Customer Publishing Seminar, which was held in Cape Town, heard last week.

The seminar, held on Thursday, 15 February 2007, was organised by local New Media (NMP). In South Africa there are 115 customer magazines (of which NMP publishes over 30 customer titles) by 16 companies, and the market is still growing.

Lack of understanding

There is, however, still a lack of understanding of the benefits of customer magazines. While they should be used as an effective part of the marketing mix, this is not the case yet, said Richard Eskinazi, head of marketing for Woolworths Food, Home, Beauty, Digital and Special Occasions.

The benefits of customer magazines are so many, said Andrew Hirsch, chief executive of John Brown, one of the UK's leading customer magazine and catalogue agencies, that he strongly urges companies to use part of their adspend on them.

In qualitative and quantitative research done on *Woolworths' Taste*, a customer/consumer food magazine, it has been found that the magazine has created a strong affinity among customers for the brand.

The *Edgars Club* magazine has seen a 12% hike in customer's affinity for the brand. "Twelve percent may not sound like a lot but when you see that it is 120 000 people each spending a few extra thousand rand, you're looking at hundreds of millions of rands a year," said Enzo Scarcello, marketing executive, Department Store Chains, Edcon Group.

Outperforms

He added that in research it has been found that customers rate the magazine as outperforming television, radio and cinema as a place to hear, see or read about the brand.

Publishers need to remember that they have to give readers of customer magazines a "substance read". They are producing magazines not brochures, said Bridget McCarney, MD of NMP, adding that there has to be a fine balance

between the needs of the reader, the client and the advertisers.

Hirsch said customers will be less likely to throw the magazines away if they view them as having substance and not junk mail. Customer magazines can also take notes from consumer magazines. "Look at what selling in newsstands and adopt some examples - take successful things from them," he said.

"How the magazine should look is dependent on what brand you are... But ultimately you want to interact with the reader and offer real emotional involvement."

Julia Hutchison (COR), director of the Association of Publishing Agencies (APA) in the UK, said the quality of customer magazines has, however, improved greatly over the years and more and more consumer journalists are coming over into this media.

Importance of research

She said that research is one of the most important tools to the publisher in ascertaining the effectiveness of customer publications.

Research undertaken in the UK has shown that 78% of consumers prefer to be communicated with via a customer magazine than any other marketing media.

"It delivers above all other direct marketing the holy grail of permission marketing and participation media," she said.

In the APA Advantage Study used, among others, to establish a means of quantifying the effect of customer magazines as a marketing tool, it has been found that 47% of readers are more likely to purchase products featured in a customer magazine than in other types of advertising or marketing.

"Research found that this engagement with the magazines has a positive impact on customers' relationships with the brands... and those exposed to the magazines are likely to spend a greater proportion of their category expenditure on that brand," she said.

ABOUT VIVIAN WARBY

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