

The relationship between print and online publishing:

where is it going?

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Introduction

Since the early 1990's the internet has become an increasingly major presence in our lives. As an alternative medium beyond the printing press, radio and television, it offers elements of all of those, but also possesses a dynamic presence all its own. In this discussion we shall look at how especially print publications have coped and adapted to the internet revolution.

Most, if not all, print publication titles have embraced the internet to enhance their overall media footprint. They have done this even when they have risked losing some of their audience away from the core activity.

This is primarily because they have been forced to. But whether this online presence can generate any substantial revenue, or even under certain circumstances replace the traditional media format, is still open to question. At the moment, since the dot.com crash of a few years ago, established opinion would deem it unlikely. Certainly very few media outlets that publish exclusively online are sustainable. It doesn't seem as if the internet is particularly well suited to it.

In Case Studies 1-3 the various advantages and disadvantages of web publishing are investigated, whereupon also the operating assumptions of a leading cross-media commercial agency are looked at. Finally, some concluding remarks are offered.

Case study 1: In the bag – Zoo vs. Nuts

Launched in January of 2004, Nuts Magazine and Zoo Magazine both aim to break into a new market: the men's weekly. Backed respectively by IPC Media and Emap Consumer Media, these are noteworthy titles for study because of their relatively new arrival on the scene. Given the saturation of the internet – and, increasingly, digital TV – in the public imagination, one might have expected the extensive implementation of cross-media strategies for both of these new titles.

The men's magazine market in general is one particularly well suited to such an approach. In most scenarios, the printed magazine can be relied upon to provide the core journalistic content. The internet operation supplements that with interactive games, video content, forums, and links to other websites deemed noteworthy to the target audience. The lack of online written material that this implies is unlikely to detract from an already image-intensive market sector (at least amongst 'lower-brow' titles). Downloading images is precisely the kind of activity that will be encouraged anyway[†].

In other words, the fact that the internet is less well suited to reading in depth investigative or otherwise articles/features than the print media is, has little impact on brand identity vis-à-vis the print 'mother' title. The emphasis will be on producing and – importantly – also linking offsite to 'fun', 'wacky' or, increasingly, 'risqué' material.

It should be noted that sites will in these cases not so much *publish* editorially questionable content, as provide *links* to it. Says Alexandra White, Head of the Association of Online Publishers and also Head of PPAinteractive[‡]: "they must still ensure that the content *on the site* is every bit as high quality as in the printed product."

Nuts and Zoo have approached the challenge of marketing themselves rather differently. The latter certainly *has* embraced the new media paradigm: there is an extensive website that genuinely complements the print operation. The former has conversely placed very low emphasis on its internet operation – essentially it's little more than a 'shop window' offering a brief overview of what is in the latest issue of the printed magazine.

[†] Download times aren't generally an issue either, since for the most part it's acceptable to link to images of a fairly low resolution.

[‡] Interactive arm of the Periodical Publisher's Association.

Viz.:

- Right at the opening home page of either title, it is clear that the Zoo website is better developed than the Nuts website. There are 11 menu options in the former vs. 6 in the latter. And in Zoo every page linked to in the menu offers added functionality – i.e. they lead somewhere. The same cannot be said for Nuts.
- In terms of engaging with the target audience both websites provide for the magazine readership to contribute (usually with jokes and images). But Zoo does so much more visually: ‘Tell Us’ gives the reader one of four choices, depending on how you want to contact the editorial team (reader campaigns, jokes, editorial feedback and so on). Zoo also provides the readership with an electronic message board service (‘Banter’) where readers can discuss magazine related subjects.
- In ‘Junk & Jokes’ Nuts does provide for readers to contribute to the website (jokes and images). Some of this may appear in the printed magazine. So the website does provide some added value. But in Zoo you get much more: not so much in the form of additional Zoo editorial material, but in the way of links to third party websites. These are organised and classified into ‘Weird’, ‘Girls’, ‘Sport’, ‘Unprintable’ and ‘Snapshots’. It’s an extremely cost efficient way of complementing the printed magazine. All the web team has to do is identify suitable offsite links (primarily featuring images, video, flash animations/games, etc.) and post them on the website. It’s also a clever means of posting material that for legal reasons might not otherwise be printable (because legally of course, Zoo can’t be liable for third party websites).

In fact, when Zoo launched there was a clearly defined cross-media strategy in place. A fully complementary website was a target from the start. This was not the case for Nuts who chose to concentrate on its print operation. The internet presence would instead be developed on an ad hoc basis after launch. As the magazine develops and finds its niche, so then the website is to become more established. Says Paul Reeves of the Nuts online production team: “In the future, hopefully it will *become* an interactive complement to the print publication.”

In fact, the Nuts website is handled by the same team that also handles the websites for Loaded, NME, Wallpaper and Uncut for IPC Media. All these sites *are* better developed than the Nuts site is, so there may be some merit to that notion. Still, it is debatable whether this

kind of economy is sustainable in the long run. Certainly, the sharing of resources for any other purpose is discouraged between titles, even within the same publishing house.

Differences notwithstanding, both websites do nonetheless have some common traits:

- Neither website places great emphasis on direct advertising in the form of banner or pop-up adverts. Instead, usually the advertising will be in the form of a magazine campaign or competition in association with a sponsor. The product and the brand name are thereby marketed indirectly. Usually such marketing is exclusive to the website, and will not be included in the printed magazine for practical reasons. The internet is ideally suited to this kind of functionality.
- Both titles offer a regular newsletter for which it is necessary to register. Audience profile information gained from registration is a means for the magazine to source revenue from third parties, who will pay to use it for advertising purposes.
- Neither website posts much material that is already printed in the magazine. This means that there is little scope for readers to be 'lost' to the online operation.
- A problem that applies to both websites is that they are relatively difficult to find with search engines. With time, this may be rectified as they become more regularly sought after. Nevertheless, it highlights yet another small detail that, however handled, can make a huge difference to attracting target audiences.

Overall, Zoo's cross-media strategy is much more clearly defined than that for Nuts. It may be that Emap is much more aware of the multi-media trends that undoubtedly are developing in the industry. Zoo's big brother at Emap, FHM, has recently been at the forefront of developments by signing a sponsorship deal worth £1m with milkshake brand Friijj to back its High Street Honeys competition. The cross-media sponsorship involved magazine and online content as well as telephone, licensing and point-of-sale promotions.

For both Nuts and Zoo it is clear that there are no ambitions to raise revenue by providing pay-per-view material. Says Paul Reeves: "Other IPC titles (Loaded and, possibly, NME) are going to put pay-per-view material up in the near future, but not Nuts." What may happen is instead that images may be posted online, but only after they have first been published in magazine format. Articles won't feature on the websites at all.

Promotions, competitions and surveys in conjunction with external marketing efforts are the preferred method of generating income. This plays to the interactive functionality of the internet to a much greater degree than simple banner or pop-up advertisements ever could. Indeed, it is more likely that people can be tempted to fill out a form to win something – anything – online, than if they would have to cut a questionnaire out from a magazine, put postage on it, and then post it in the mail.

That's not to say that there is no place for more traditional web campaigns: advertisers have been known to place campaigns on the internet that would be deemed unsuitable for more general consumption. For instance, Virgin recently placed a video commercial on the Loaded website that was deemed too risqué for broadcast on TV. Yet precisely because of this, it was deemed ideal for the audience of a 'lads mag'.

It is fairly clear then, that it *is* possible to make web operations such as those supported by Nuts and Zoo financially self-sufficient. Importantly however, this would not be the case if they were stand-alone websites. What Zoo demonstrates is that it is possible to use the internet as part of an overall *cross-media* strategy to *enhance* a brand already present in another medium. It does not answer whether or not the internet could support a branding campaign on its own.

Case study 2: Hot off the wires – daily newspapers

As a medium that can easily be updated on a regular basis the internet was identified early on in its inception as a particularly suitable outlet for news organisations.

It was always going to be useful beyond simply providing a ‘shop window’ for other media operations. In the long term, it had the potential to generate significant revenue in and of itself. Most daily newspapers, however, started off by providing all of their print material online for free. When the internet was still a fairly small phenomenon in the public imagination this worked well. It served to build up a user base and encouraged people to explore the internet more generally. It was also useful as a goodwill gesture.

Whilst newspaper sales have declined somewhat in later years, few people in the industry attribute this to websites drawing readers away from print runs. For most people the ‘experience’ of a newspaper in hand is still preferable to reading news off a screen. Nevertheless, in recent years there has been a move towards making web operations more financially self-sufficient. That has meant an increased propensity to make readers register, and also the introduction of pay-per-view material.

Titles such as the Independent, that have started to charge for select material (‘Portfolio’ in the Independent’s case), are still very much in the minority. More common is the strategy to charge, such as the News International titles, the Times and the Sun have, for access to online archives.

Others, like the Telegraph website, generate revenue from the marketing information derived from registration. This latter strategy is one that most titles are planning to implement. But it’s not solely for advertising purposes. Says Sarah Clarke of the telegraph.co.uk production team: “it is extremely valuable to know about the readership for editorial purposes as well.”

In terms of strict reporting of news and events, the internet is a perfectly adequate medium for most news organisations. Most material that is placed in print, will also make it onto the web. However, newspapers do not restrict themselves to just reporting events in writing. Photojournalism is for many titles a very important aspect of their identity as well. This is something that as yet, chiefly due to download times, does not cross over especially well to the internet.

Unlike the men’s magazines looked at above, newspaper websites are less able to fully exploit the cross-media potential of the internet. Whilst flash or video animations do feature

in online advertising campaigns, such material is rarely used to specifically add journalistic value.

There is some movement to address this. Recently, both the Guardian and the Telegraph have introduced pay-per-view ‘digital editions’ of their daily newspapers online. The newspapers are in these instances fully reproduced page-for-page in an enhanced pdf format.

This is not meant to replace the current websites because, at the same time, as before, most of the newspaper content is still freely available in htm format. This new format does address the lack of images in the htm version though: all the photographs that are included in the printed newspaper appear in the ‘digital edition’. “It’s a feature that many readers appreciate,” says Sarah Clarke.

Both these newspaper titles claim to have identified a market willing to pay for the product – chiefly readers abroad, but also online readers who enjoy the ‘traditional’ format (though quite why such readers would be using the internet is unclear). As Alexandra White says: “only time will tell how successful they are.”

For online editions of newspapers, there are some general traits that apply:

- Web operations are chief and foremost meant to complement the print edition. Only on a small scale are there moves afoot to market them to some readers – especially from abroad – as an alternative. Viz. the Guardian’s and Telegraph’s introduction of ‘digital editions’.
- It is not a long-term aim that readers should be tempted away from the printed newspaper. Editorial teams continually review how to avoid this.
- Therefore, in the very long term, continuing to provide all the newspaper’s material online for free will probably cease. This has already happened with the Independent, but at the moment, for most, “isn’t even on the horizon” (Telegraph). Others, like the Sun, are more crassly commercial, stating that they’ll continue to provide free material “until we can get readers to pay for it” (Pete Picton, Sun online editor).
- Indeed, generally the websites are willing to post as much newspaper material online as they can.

- The main source of pay-per-view revenue is that arising from access to archives – e.g. the Times – though the ‘digital editions’ of the Guardian and Telegraph are also pay-per-view. Some titles also charge for access to crosswords and sports games.
- Unlike the ‘lads mags’ there is very little appetite to post any material online that wouldn’t be considered fit to publish in print. Says Steve Purcell, site editor, Mirror website: “We try and make sure that our material on the web holds the same integrity as our print material.” In fact, the only type of material that may appear on websites that won’t necessarily make it into regular newspapers is breaking news. This is often fed directly online from news feeds coming in from agencies such as Reuters.
- This is one of the principal *raison d’être*s for the newspapers to maintain websites: to provide up-to-the-minute news as it happens, the better to fully take advantage of the instantaneous nature of web publication.
- Registration of visitors to sites is important not just for advertising purposes, but also for editorial purposes.
- Beyond the marketing activity associated with selling registration data, most sites include a substantial amount of banner, pop-up and flash animation advertising. Advertising features, produced in conjunction with in-house journalists, also appear frequently.

In general, most newspaper titles have grasped the need to make their web presence a complementary aspect of their print operation. They have also started to adopt strategies to make that presence pay for itself and, ultimately, ensure that it enhances the commercial success of *all* media operations – web or print.

Case Study 3: Catching the next wave – ybw.com

One of the most successful cross-media initiatives to be undertaken in recent years is that of IPC Media's Yachting and Boating World (ybw.com). This is a web-based complement to a range of IPC marine brands (Yachting World, Yachting Monthly, Practical Boat Owner, Motor Boat and Yachting, Sailpower.com and Motor Boats Monthly). As such, significant economies of scale are generated since the website can make use of the resources of multiple editorial teams.

The enterprise aims to move definitively beyond the task of just building 'brand presence'. Providing tangible services to the target audience is an important goal. The visitor is also encouraged to diversify his/her interest beyond any one IPC marine title. This benefits the reader because it provides for access to a broader information base.

Moreover:

- The most tangible benefit of the site is that it brings together extensive and easily-searched databases not only for magazine content, but also for classified advertisements. The site is, for example, an enormously useful tool for those looking to buy marine equipment – new or second-hand – or researching marine-related services.
- Interaction with the target audience is of considerable significance to the website. Electronic forums provide for a real and practical need for people with a marine interest/hobby to network.
- Topical news content and searchable databases are placed online. But feature length and well-illustrated material is reserved for the printed magazines. This is a sound allocation of material to where it is most appropriately consumed – feature articles and photojournalism are better suited to the printed page.
- Accordingly, the material that is posted on the website will continue to remain free indefinitely. The risk of reduced print circulation is trivial since the readers are only getting a part of the package online. Whether ybw.com will ever charge for web content is open to question. "Another option in that case," says Group Editor, ybw.com, Kim Hollamby, "is to opt instead for locked magazine subscriber only areas."

/more

Because of its functionality ybw.com has become a strong and extremely popular brand in its own right. It is even conceivable that it could stand as a model for a stand-alone website looking to provide similar services. However, the security of a print ‘mother’ organisation is definitely preferable – IPC themselves no longer envisage backing any exclusively internet-based enterprises.

Despite its success, there are a number of areas where ybw.com have chosen not to fully exploit the strategies available to it as an online operation:

- The site does not require visitors to register, though it does have data gathering policies in some areas of the site – this is mostly restricted to competitions, however.
- The use of multimedia material such as video or flash animations is at present rather limited. According to Kim Hollamby, “we've used some video and panoramic image material but the things that work best are topical content and searchable databases.”

Indeed, this latter content is particularly well integrated. All the projects are built around a core database. From that, some of the content is posted on the website, and some of it is exported for print use.

On the online advertising front, interest seems to be growing again. “Everything from expensively created rich media campaigns through to sponsored sections and dedicated microsites are being put forward,” says Kim Hollamby, “though banners and buttons still draw interest too.”

Indeed, with its advanced functionality, and steady advertising interest, ybw.com has secured a sound business model for itself that goes far beyond just being a branding exercise. Nevertheless, as with the previous case studies, it is doubtful whether this would be the case without the print operations feeding into it.

Unanimis Consulting – the marketer’s point of view

Unanimis Consulting is a leading UK cross-media commercial agency. Its brief is to help develop advertising and marketing strategies for media owners. This is important not only in terms of delivering more sales and new customers, but also for developing brand identity and presence.

An internet presence – as we have seen in the above case studies – seems to work best when it is part of a broader media package. But it is often difficult to gain a strategic understanding of how best to formulate such an approach. One media presence should ideally feed into another, and vice versa, but how best to achieve this isn’t always immediately obvious.

Unanimis emphasises a number of points:

- Websites are on the whole still operated as ‘shop fronts’ for other mediums, though this is beginning to change: Capital Radio for instance, and most daily newspapers constitute notable exceptions. TV station websites tend to be particularly lacking in content – the one exception being Channel4[†].
- In terms of interactivity, if a website is really good, then it can bring in a new base of users – e.g. the Radio Times online audience is significantly younger than its print audience.
- Websites provide for a much more efficient capturing of audience data than other media formats. This is very significant for facilitating advertising and marketing efforts for both onsite and third parties.
- The ease by which archives can be placed online is potentially very commercially lucrative. However, it is sometimes problematic to get people to pay for access to the online databases. It has been achieved outside of the media notably in the legal sector (archive searches of legal history), and for enterprises such as Friends Reunited. Perhaps though, the real income that can be generated from placing archives online comes from advertising. If the archive search function becomes widely used, then the huge amount of traffic that generates becomes attractive for marketing purposes. Similarly the actual user-base information can provide revenue.

[†] The BBC’s website doesn’t really count since it is about so much more than just TV.

- The instantaneous nature of web publication is *the* Unique Selling Proposition of the internet: instant updates can be posted as soon as things happen and marketing campaigns can be assessed within a few days. But it presupposes that websites are *updated regularly*. When this doesn't happen, the major benefits of the web are lost and strategy falters.
- In a similar vein, e-mail and instant messaging are hugely important in that they facilitate the interactivity of the web.
- The next 'killer application', according to Unanimis, may be communities and community trading – the best example of which is eBay (already hugely successful, of course).
- Web advertising campaigns experience high turnover rates: because a web campaign is easy to track, it is also easy to quickly evaluate. That means that a campaign that isn't working will quickly be shelved. And so an advertiser may be inclined to run a greater variety of campaigns than he/she otherwise would for the printed page or TV (where campaigns take much longer to assess).
- Advertisers have to be careful of overusing other media formats such as online video or flash animations. Often they can annoy the users, especially if they have a slow internet connection.
- Profitability *is* beginning to occur for many online operations. Examples include Guardian Unlimited, FT.com, and Channel4. Some magazines are successful too. Notable examples include Conde Nast (Vogue etc), and a number of Emap titles (especially FHM).

Discussion

The case studies show that it is demonstrably possible to add value to a print publication by way of an online presence.

This is often thanks to the interactivity and instantaneous nature of web publishing. It has allowed media operators to engage with audiences to an unparalleled extent:

Viz.:

- Never before has it been as easy for audiences to contact the sharp end of the publishing process. Beyond e-mail, online surveys, forums and games emphasize this trend.
- This interactivity can also initiate new, fresh editorial content and direction. If the web operation is associated with another media format, then that will benefit too.
- Rolling updates can easily be provided. As long as content is kept regularly up-to-date, the net's inherent dynamic advantage can be powerfully exploited. It is of particular significance to online news providers.
- In terms of generating income, media operators can more easily gather sophisticated audience information. This is tremendously important for marketing and advertising clients.

Other advantages include:

- The ability to post extensive databases online. It means that archives can to an unprecedented extent easily be searched. This is revolutionary – previously archive searches would have involved, for example, tedious examination of library microfilms.
- The internet enables information to be easily linked to related websites with a similar subject matter, both onsite and offsite. This provides added value to the audience.

There are some potential downsides, however:

- It's difficult to provide a media experience as graphics-intense to the web audience as is the case in newspapers or magazines. Download times simply don't allow for it.
- For a cross-media publication, there's a danger that readers will switch exclusively to viewing material on the website, thereby weakening circulation figures. This can have a significantly negative impact on revenue streams.
- Websites cost money to maintain. And it's surprisingly hard to make them even revenue neutral, let alone turn a profit.

In practical terms:

- Added value is rarely achieved by exclusively reproducing print content online. Says Alexandra White: "most successful websites have ensured that they are producing at least some unique content for the web." Making use of web-specific technologies – embracing the interactivity of the internet – makes the end result even more desirable.
- Indeed, with the spread of broadband, the use of more multimedia content will become practical. This encourages audiences to interact and engage more with websites, making it easier to foster brand loyalty and repeat visits.
- Nevertheless, it also seems clear that in those cases where a successful cross-media strategy has been developed the web operation is a *supporting* factor. In very few cases does it operate as a stand-alone enterprise.

As regards advertising trends, it is still the case that web campaigns are cheaper than offline media campaigns. This is starting to change, however. Says Alexandra White: "the rate of online ad spend is outperforming other media." Nevertheless, since TV and print are still better suited to establishing brand presence it will be some time before online advertising spend catches up.

Another source of income arises from the internet's suitability to host archives and databases. The ease with which they can be exploited is unprecedented. A lot of operators are beginning to charge for their use.

In fact, it is becoming increasingly clear that websites that cannot pay for themselves will not be allowed to survive in future. This will mean the introduction of a lot more pay-per-view material, as well as the routine dissemination of marketing information obtained by website registration.

Conclusion

This study has looked exclusively at print publications that have also chosen to launch a web presence. Most print titles have done so today.

It has been established that an internet presence can enhance the overall media experience for the consumer. However, all indications in this study point towards web operations as stand-alone enterprises standing much less chance of success. Indeed, few media outlets that publish exclusively online are sustainable. The internet's real significance may instead lie in its ability to act as an *enhancement* to traditional mediums.

Perhaps this is because whilst the internet incorporates elements of all the traditional media formats, it is still difficult to identify what is exclusive to the net. In other words: if I want to read a book or an article, yes I can do that on the internet. But I'd prefer to read it in the printed format. Similarly, if I want to watch TV, it's still preferable to watch regular TV rather than web-TV. And so on.

Of course the real exclusivity inherent to the internet is its interactivity. That's a quality that simply isn't as tangible or easy to visualise. But this ambiguity is perhaps precisely what makes it such a great *complement* to the traditional media formats. It's a way of linking *all* the mediums, rather than so much being an exceptional medium in itself.