

# Magazine Distribution

## What Periodicals Buyers Look For in a Magazine

The following notes are from the presentation by Matt Cooper, Periodicals Buyer for Borders UK, to the Literature Northwest Magazine Distribution Seminar on 15<sup>th</sup> February 2008. While they reflect Borders' perspective, it's hoped that they will be instructive to magazine publishers seeking distribution to all booksellers.

### At The Sharp End

- Borders is a Range Retailer carrying a portfolio of 3000+ titles across 42 stores.
- We stock titles through Wholesale, Central, Comag Specialist direct and WWMD.
- No titles are taken direct from the publisher.
- We have an average browsing time of 45mins, probably the highest for any magazine retailer.
- Most other high street chains only get supply through Wholesale and charge for listings.

### A Quick Decision?

- Initial decision HAS to be a gut reaction, as if the buyer is a customer. Does it have "grab" factor.
- Does it have all of the required elements?
  - Barcode
  - Price
  - Format
- Is it worth the money?
  - Paper quality
- Would I buy this if I wasn't "interested" in the subject matter?

### The Cover

- The embodiment of everything in the magazine.
- Customer has to know it's the title for them, don't over design.
- At the very least it should be obvious what the content deals with.
- Most of the time, straplines should be used to highlight the big features.

# The Content

- Clear, defined and simple.
- Avoid pages full of text.
- Photographs should be bordered not bleed into the edges of the page.
- Pages that are text heavy should be broken with spacing and font changes.
- Photographs should be in colour and professional.
- Advertising will be looked at.
- Editorial must be focussed and lively.

# AI's. Do they work?

- 95% less likely to take a title if only an AI is received.
- Must contain the technical information used to make a buying decision:
  - Price
  - Frequency
  - Pagination
  - Binding
- The “Newspaper Rule” should apply: most important information first.
- Remember – buyers have a broad knowledge of subjects (at best). Try not to “assume” we know anything.
- The AI should be as good as holding the title in our hands. Where possible tailor them to the retailer with forecasts and projected sales talking in monetary terms.

# Pitfalls

- Never say this is the only title of its kind in production. If it hasn't been done there's usually a very good reason!
- The cardinal sin is to talk about having no competitive titles. Every other title out there is vying for the customers money and is a competitor, regardless of their subject matter.
- Make an effort to describe how the title will add to the offer and grow the section. Buyers want to know the differences of your titles and how they will add sales, not cannibalise them.

# Timescales

- Dependant on when you want the first issue to go into our stores.
- Almost instant yes or no.
- Hold ups occur due to lack of product information which we need before titles can go in to the stores.

- Using Central, Comag and WWMD result in a faster turn around with more flexibility.

## “Free” Listings?

- Titles going onto the shelves have little chance of being noticed unless backed by the publisher.
- Promotions are necessary to highlight special issues and to ensure the customer knows the title has arrived.
- Borders can be flexible but other high street retailers may insist on a fee to get into their stores.
- Benefits outweigh the outlay in cost for additional POS.
- Exclusive issues, advertising and cover mounts can be “traded” off for promotions but have to be high quality and attractive to customers.

## Case Study: The Flop (Popworld Pulp)

- Launched into an already declining market.
- Up against an institutional title – NME
- Wrong frequency.
- Lacked something new to encourage additional purchase.
- Title was too lengthy and the presentation dated.

## Case Study: The Success (Aesthetica)

- Began as A5 format circulated in York.
- Well presented, clear and uncomplicated.
- A commitment to copy supply and promotions.
- The perfect mix of reader submissions and high profile articles.
- Remains as tangible today as ever.
- Invested a great deal of “hurt” money into the title meaning it HAD to succeed.

## Natural Selection:

### Why do Titles get Dropped?

- Lack of adaptation and focus results in being left behind.
- Titles must be fluid and open to their readers not stagnant and reactionary.
- The bottom line is the money generated for the retailer.
- What once was an acceptable level of quality quickly becomes poor.
- A lack of support for the title through promotions and communication with the

retailer.

## Surprised?

- Know your limitations and your market.
- Throws all rules about cover design out of the window yet still communicates to the “visually stimulated” customer it is aimed at.
- Superior quality production and design.
- Uncomplicated and relevant to the market.
- High cover price ensures it is of value to the retailer.

## The Benefits of Acceptance.

- Reaching a wider audience not just a specific type of customer.
- Realising pockets of interest possibly not already considered.
- Advertising revenue.
- Increased sales.

## Summary

- Win over the layman win over the buyer.
- Don't over design covers.
- Demonstrate you can grow sales of magazines not steal them.
- Provide sample copies.
- Adapt and evolve.
- Support your title.