

Digital Evolution

In trade circ, the Internet rules—and that's a good thing

BY MARCO URSI



Over the last decade, the Internet has dramatically changed b2b circulation, just like it's changed pretty much every other sector of the publishing world. But for the most part, changes to b2b circ brought on by the web have been overwhelmingly positive—especially when it comes to efficiency. There are still plenty of questions, though: Will digital editions replace print magazines? What kind of e-mail renewal forms will readers best respond to? How do we create databases that encompass reader information from all sources and what can we do with that information?

To find out the latest trends in trade circulation, we spoke to three industry veterans: James Zammit at CLB Media, Vesna Moore at Business Information Group, and Keith Fulford at Rogers Publishing, people who have been in the business since the prehistoric days when “web” was a term exclusive to the printing and spider communities.

Digital Editions

Because the majority of b2b titles are controlled, digital editions can be an incredible money-saver.

Prices for companies such as Zinio, Texterity, Zegapi, Nxtbook and IDEA to digitize your magazine can vary radically. Whatever the cost, if it's less than production and mailing, the economic benefit (and environmental benefit) of going digital is obvious. “In January 2008, publication mail prices are going up two cents a piece,” Zammit reminds us. “For a larger, multi-title publisher such as CLB Media, that equates to \$60,000 in additional postage costs.”

Zammit and CLB are eager to go digital and they're pushing readers to follow them to the web. “We're really positioning the digital editions with the key benefit of timely delivery,” Zammit says. “We publish *Law Times*, for example, and lawyers calling us all the time saying, ‘Is there any way you could courier those copies?’ But when you're mailing via Canada Post, delivering any faster than three days within the GTA is very difficult.” CLB recently partnered with Zegapi. Four of its magazines are now available in digital form, with plans to do the same for every title in the stable.

Zammit is aware that not every reader has quick and ready access to the Internet. “In the

large industrial manufacturing sector, you're targeting people who spend their days operating heavy machinery,” he says. “The biggest factor to that end is that these people are not working at a desk all day.”

Fulford isn't sure readers in general want digital magazines—at least not yet. “We haven't come across huge demand,” he says. “Every market may be different. And certainly the quality of the product makes a difference—there are digital editions and then there are digital editions. People today still prefer a hard copy.”

Renewals

Renewals have always been easier for trade circulators than for their counterparts on the consumer side—in b2b, all you need is a

we originally did our e-mail campaigns, we were kind of fancy,” Fulford says. “And we found, especially this year, response rates were down a little compared to last year. That got us worrying a little. That's why in our fall stuff, we said ‘let's go to something more simple’ and see if we get a better response.” Moore thinks they will: “Simplicity, I think, is a key. Especially with e-mail.”

Just getting someone's e-mail address can also be tough. Anyone doing telemarketing needs to ask for the reader's online co-ordinates, Fulford says.

Telemarketing is the next best stop for renewals. Faxing is on its way out in the next five to ten years (maybe even less), though all three experts note that because of its relative cheapness, it's still worth it.

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name, an address and a “yes.” The web has made things even easier. The Business Information Group gets about a 35% response rate to e-mail campaigns, according to Moore, thanks in large part to an application that allows readers to manage their own information. “It's almost hands off,” Moore says. “We set up the entire campaign at the beginning of the year, then it just runs. Circulators just watch the numbers and make sure everything is going OK. Only 25% of the e-mails that come back have to be looked at by a data entry person—the other 75% get directly applied to the database, without a circulator having to do anything. We've drastically reduced our data entry requirements. It's also helped to lend a lot of structure and a lot of integrity to the data.”

One of the major challenges for e-campaigns is the creative: What's going to make a reader who's probably getting hundreds of e-mails a day bother with your form? The answers suggest that ornate is out and simple is in. “When

Direct-mail, on the other hand, makes less and less sense for trade circulators, Fulford says. “If for some reason we don't have an e-mail, fax or phone number for someone, then we'll send them a piece of mail. But we're in the hundreds.”

“The New Circulation”

As more and more data becomes available, the role of the trade circulator is changing.

“It's not about magazine circulation anymore,” Fulford says. “Now, your magazine is still there, but there's also your e-newsletter, your website registrant, your shows, your conferences. We've evolved into audience development managers.”

Moore has the same idea but a different buzz-phrase. “I think we're going to be looking at all these ancillary things that are going on around the company outside of core circulation and bringing them all together. There needs to be a shift from circulation management to readership universe management.” **M**