



GOOGLE: FRIEND OR FOE?
Recommendations for
Publishers and Editors of
B2B Magazines and Websites



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Objective and Method

Objective

Search engines have democratized the media by empowering people to choose the type of content they want, when they want it and how they want it. The objective of this report is to give recommendations to the publishers and editors of B2B (Business to Business) magazines and websites on how they can compete in this new democratized world.

Google has been used as a synonym for all search engines since it is the top-of-mind search engine for most people.

Method

This study was undertaken as a part of a project at the London School of Economics, UK. It is based on several interviews with publishers, editors and other media practitioners in the UK during a course of three months. These interviews supplemented many discussions that the author has had over the past two years with practitioners in the US and India about publishing companies' response to the online world.

The interviews in the UK were not just with practitioners in the B2B publishing space, but also with those in the B2C (Business to Consumer) publishing space and in broadcasting. This was to broaden the canvas of viewpoints to benefit from the perspectives of different media.

The author has been a media practitioner for 12 years and has the experience of starting a B2B magazine's online offerings. She is currently working to integrate the print, online and events offerings of her media product.

Summary of Findings

Users typically enter the Web on the back of a search engine. When looking for a piece of information, on say the Stern report on the economics of climate change, they are more likely to enter related keywords in a search engine, rather than to visit a specific website on the environment, economics, development or news.

Such a consumption pattern is a tremendous advantage for media websites, especially for the lesser-known brands. Search engines are almost single-handedly responsible for delivering traffic to their websites. As a result, media companies spend a lot of money and time to optimize the search results of their sites on various search engines.

Search engines also help generate advertising revenue for websites, for example through the Google AdSense program.

At the same time, publishers see search engines as culprits that divert traffic to other websites. They also see them as upending the competition scales by opening up 'new' types of competition—blogs, user-generated content, videos, audio, consultants, market-research companies, propaganda sites etc.

Whether media companies regard search engines as friends or foes, they agree that search engines have democratized media—they allow people to choose what type of content they want, when they want it and what format they want it in.

Boardroom meetings in content companies today discuss how their media offerings can compete with this democratization. And since Google is the top of mind search engine, it becomes almost synonymous with all search engines in these discussions. So, very often, instead of asking the question, "how can we compete with search engines" or "how can we compete in the online space", the question that gets asked is "how can we compete with Google".

Given this context, this report sets out recommendations for publishers and editors of B2B magazines and websites on how they should be running their businesses more effectively in order to be successful in the new democratized world of media.

The summary of recommendations is given below.

Recommendations for Publishers: Summary

Medium Agnostic

Publishers should think of servicing their readers by using a combination of media—magazine, newsletter, website, cellphone, conference, exhibition, audio, video, images. They need to regard content independent of the medium. Being medium agnostic will free them up from thinking of medium-specific strategies to reader-specific strategies.

“Whether media companies regard search engines as friends or foes, they agree that search engines have democratized media—they allow people to choose what type of content they want, when they want it and what format they want it in.”

Cross-media Content

An integrated media approach will require the editorial operations also to be integrated. Publishers should consider having a common editorial team for a media brand to think through the content issues and package them differently for print, online, cellphone, TV, radio or events.

Cross Selling and Solutions Selling

Sponsorship sales should be flexible to allow advertisers to spread their campaigns across media. An ad campaign for an enterprise search tool, for example, can invite users to try out demos of the tool through the magazine; download trial versions through the website; vote on the performance of the tool through the cellphone; and interact with the search company at an event.

Online Revenue: Beyond Banner Ads

Companies must consider revenue options other than banner ads on websites. Some options are:

Contextual Ads: Advertisers will benefit from contextual ads because the visitors to a website are often more relevant than the readers of a magazine because they choose to visit the website for specific information.

Lead Generation: The online media can capture user data that can be used as sales leads by advertisers. This method, however, brings into play privacy and data-protection laws, and must hence be used judiciously.

Sponsored Content: Publishers can charge sponsors for carrying their content (product demos, whitepapers, reports, case studies) on their sites. This content can be placed to suit the context of the content on the website.

Charge for Content?: The newspaper model of making revenue through advertising and not circulation has been a success on the Internet as well. Publishers should not charge for content, or charge only for 'unique' content, giving away 'non unique' content for free.

Technology at Par with Circulation and Distribution

Just as circulation and distribution are the channels through which magazines are made available to readers, technology is the channel through which content is made available to readers online. So media companies must spend management time and money on technology.

Vertical Search

B2B publishers are well positioned to offer vertical search facilities. A B2B auto media company, for example, can editorially identify automobile sites that they consider will be relevant to their readers. Advertisers, too, will find the audience that uses such a facility relevant to them.

Recommendations for Editors: Summary

Anti Dumping

Editors must customize content for different media, and not 'dump' magazine content online. They must understand Web content such as search, aggregated content, tools (for example, to calculate bulk product discounts), user-generated content, databases and lists (for example, of service providers), blogs, podcasts, webinars, etc.

Content Aggregation

As editors compete with Google that throws up thousands of pages on any search query, they must aggregate content on their sites. For this aggregated content to be credible, editors must spend a lot of time browsing relevant sites, picking up links to appropriate articles and seeking ideas for stories and blogs.

User Participation in Content

Editors should engage communities in all aspects of content—creating it, verifying it, commenting on it, questioning it, critiquing it, linking it to other sites, etc. Readers should be encouraged to write articles, blogs and experiences; contribute photographs and videos; create communities; invite others to buy from them or sell to them, etc.

Role of Editorial Staff

As publishers begin to offer content through various media, the role of the editorial staff will have to change.

Journalists: Journalists will have to create content to tell stories in text, images, audio and video and not simply write articles.

Editors: The role of the editor will change from being a creator of content to being a facilitator, navigator or curator of content as he aggregates content, engages his audience in generating content, continuously seeks and responds to feedback and is more attuned to the commercial side of the business.

Edit and Commercial Interaction: Editorial integrity must be maintained, for that is the most fundamental value of publishing, but editorial staff now needs to be more attuned to the commercial side of the business. They must now think more like publishers, concerning themselves with competition, marketing and tracking readership data.

Measures for Editorial Staff: Editorial staff must be held responsible for generating page views and driving the popularity of their articles. This will compel them to continuously engage with their audience at a time when the democratic online medium empowers readers to immediately respond with bouquets, brick backs and comments.

The following section describes the findings of this report in detail.



Magazine sites welcome search engines as a means of free, surrogate marketing to build traffic to their websites. Yet, they regard search engines as their foes—search engines have emerged as intermediaries between the publishers and their readers.

Google: Friend or Foe?

Friend: Can't Live Without

The one friend of most websites today is Google. Google—the top-of-mind search engine—is almost single-handedly responsible for bringing readers to websites. When users search for information on the Internet, they typically begin by typing keywords into a search engine. Except in the cases of well-known websites (amazon.com, bbc.co.uk, myspace.com) or personal blogs, users do not directly go to the individual sites. If it weren't for search engines, numerous sites would have gone unvisited by users.

Users' preference for seeking information through search engines has as much to do with search engines' techniques of bringing together information from varied sources, as it has to do with the human brain not being able to remember and recall the domain names of multiple websites.

While this phenomenon is true for all types of websites and is not restricted to media sites, this report will focus on the interplay between this phenomenon and the way B2B media companies should conduct their businesses. Moreover, while most search engines depict similar functionalities, this report will focus on Google because that is the most innovative and the most widely used search engine.

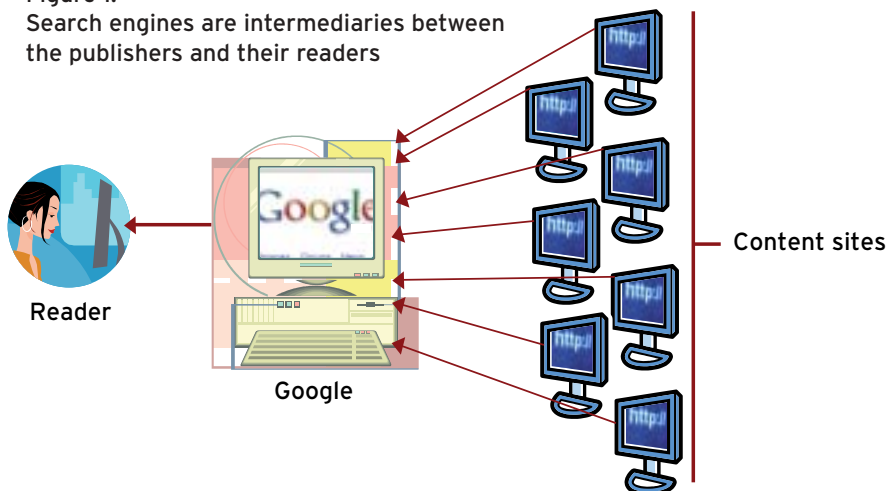
Magazine sites—of both big and small brands—welcome search engines as a means of free, surrogate marketing to build traffic to their websites.

Better-known magazine brands—both the traditional heavy weights and the younger marketing-savvy ones—command reader loyalty, and find that users often bypass search engines and directly go to their websites. Yet, search engines are the biggest online friends of these magazine publishers, for they bring in the fringe audiences—those that otherwise would not have visited their sites.

Lesser-known brands court search engines by spending money and time thinking about search-engine optimization and advertising issues because the search engines are most often their best means of getting readers to visit their sites.

Publishers' dalliance with Google extends beyond brand building and traffic generation to the critical aspect of revenue as well. Google's AdSense, for example, is widely used by publishers, allowing them to harness Google's power of contextual ads and its extensive advertiser base.

Figure 1:
Search engines are intermediaries between the publishers and their readers



Foe: Can't Live With

Search engines are also foe number one for most creators of the written word. They have emerged as intermediaries between the publishers and their readers. Websites are forced to use search-engine optimization as a mechanism to get to the reader via the intermediaries. (See Figure 1)

Search engines are also responsible for taking readers to competitors' websites, causing a fall in readership and revenue for publishers.

They have, in fact, redefined the competition landscape for the media world. While traditionally publishers regarded other magazines that published similar content for a similar audience as competition, today that is not so.

By offering readers a menu of content from different sources, search engines have added non-traditional sources into a publisher's competition basket. Some of these are: reports by consultants, reports by market-research companies, whitepapers by corporates, journals by academic institutes, blogs, propaganda material.... This content is also spread across diverse media: text, audio, images or video.

(Not search engines per se, but online technology as a whole has also made competition asymmetrical. Today, Monster competes with magazines for their recruitment ads, Craig's List competes with them for classified ads, iTunes competes with music publishers, and the MSN home page alone reaches more people in a day than the top six newspapers in the US combined!)

It has come to be commonly agreed that anyone with a networked computer can now publish, and is hence a potential competitor.

Going a step further, search engines themselves are direct competition to media sites. Since they make their dollars by dealing in content, just as media companies do, publishers consider search engines as much media companies as technology companies. Both serve the reader by disseminating content; the only difference is that media companies 'create' content and the search engines 'aggregate' content.

(Google, however, calls itself a technology, and not a media, company. It puts forward a 70:20:10 rule to explain its technology bent: 70 percent of its resources are spent on search-related engineering, 20 percent on other engineering areas (Google Maps, Google Earth, Google News) and 10 percent on personal projects that its engineers undertake.)

Search engines have toppled another bastion of publishing—that of the editor's control over content. Traditionally editors have decided what type of content the reader should read (based on an understanding of the reader's need and domain knowledge) and the publishers have decided the frequency at which the reader should get the content (based on their business models and market dynamics). This can be called the push scenario where content is pushed to the reader.

But, search engines have altered the role of the editor by democratizing the media. They have empowered readers to pull content to themselves when they want it. Readers no longer have to wait for a print publication to reach their homes or even a website to update its content and hope to find the piece of information they had been waiting for. They simply go to a search engine and pull information to themselves when they want it.

By doing so, search engines appeal to a very innate human need: 'To do your own thing'!

In publishing, the money goes where the reader does. So, understandably media companies are losing large parts of the marketing budget of their key advertisers to companies like Google, Yahoo and MSN.

Rather than advertising on a single B2B website, advertising on a search engine—where the traffic is multiple times more—makes better ROI (Return on Investment) sense for the sponsor. Advertising on Google is especially beneficial to the sponsor because of the search engine's contextual ads feature wherein the sponsor is guaranteed, to a far greater extent than he is when he advertises on a media website, of being seen by the 'relevant' reader.

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The Challenge: From Gutenberg to Google

The genre of search engines as a whole has contributed to this dramatic shift in the media landscape. Yet, the one search engine that gets talked about most in the boardrooms of media companies is Google. Google accounts for almost 50% of all searches conducted on the Internet (see Figure 2), and almost 300 million searches every day.

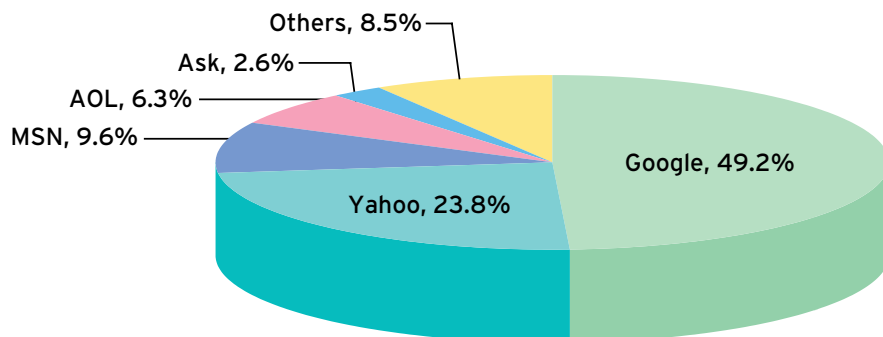
Worried about falling readership, revenue and stock prices, publishers and editors are increasingly beginning to ask a sticky question: How can our magazine and website compete with Google?

Most publishers and editors that the author spoke to regard Google as a very strong ally to collaborate with. They realize that Google gives them an enormous opportunity to extend the reach of their brands. They also realize that since Google is spending billions of dollars and employing very smart technology people to constantly improve its search algorithms and other products, it will be difficult for a media company, whose core strength is content and not technology, to compete with Google. They are, therefore, planning for the future of their businesses with Google as a 'given'.

A lesser proportion of people spoke about competing with Google in specialized markets. They believe that spending time and money in activities like search-engine optimization means accepting Google as an intermediary between them and their audiences.

The shift in the competition scenario from print (Gutenberg) to online (Google) publishing, brings with it the obvious questions of readership, content, revenue and marketing, but also the more controversial ones of the changing roles of editorial staff and the divide between the editorial and commercial sides. The following section discusses how these issues can be tackled.

Figure 2:
Google accounts for almost 50%
of all searches on the Internet



Source: Nielsen NetRatings for SearchEngineWatch.com, 2006

“Publishers should service their readers by using a combination of media. Being medium agnostic will free them up from thinking of medium-specific strategies to reader-specific strategies.”

Recommendations: Publishers

B2B publishers have for almost a decade been trying different online strategies—they have replicated their magazines' content on the Web, they have developed 'Web only' content, they have created portals, they have offered digital newsletters and magazines, they have offered free content, they have offered content for a fee, and they have sought innovative advertising through newsletters, whitepapers and reports.

Yet, somehow, they have not got it right—their websites have not generated sufficient revenue, nor have they attracted voluminous traffic.

Below is a set of recommendations for publishers that will help them thrive in the online world.

Medium Agnostic

Companies such as Google use the Web as a platform. On that platform they converge other media—print, audio, video and events (webinars).

Publishing companies, too, have access to all these other media. But, they use these different media as divergent (and not convergent, as does Google) tools. They almost never have a common team to create content or sell advertising for print, online, cellphones, events and broadcast.

Moreover, while boardrooms are increasingly beginning to discuss the merits of other media, their focus remains on the print products and they hesitate to allocate sufficient budgets to other media.

To be successful in the 'multimedia' world that the Internet has opened up, publishing companies need to think of themselves as integrated media companies, and not publishing companies. They have to regard content independent of the medium.

Publishers should think of innovative ways to service their readers by using a combination of media. Being medium agnostic will free them up from thinking of medium-specific strategies to reader-specific strategies.

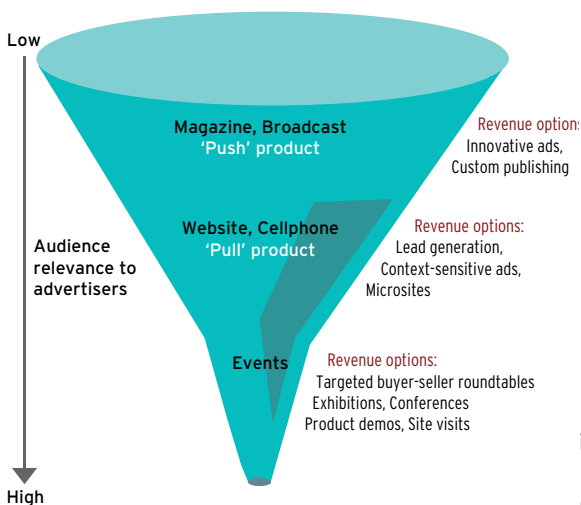
Here is an example of how an integrated B2B auto media offering can meet the readers' and advertisers' needs.

- » **Magazine and online newsletter:** The reader will read the magazine or online newsletter to get general knowledge on the trends in the auto industry. During this time he need not be ready to make his purchase. (Examples of a purchase in the case of an auto B2B case may be mergers and acquisitions, deals with component manufacturers or deals with service providers.)
- » **Online:** As the reader gets closer to purchase readiness, he is more likely to go online to compare product/service reviews, pricing etc.
- » **Event:** Closer still to his purchase readiness, he will want to 'touch and feel' the product or service he wants to buy. This need can be met through an event or exhibition.

The advertising benefit of the integrated approach is explained in Figure 3.

To financially support such an approach, publishers must be ready to divert some of their investment towards this integration.

Figure 3:
Publishers should service readers through a combination of media



Companies may lose money in the short run, as online revenue will not be nearly as large as print in the near future, yet the integrated decision will be a strategic one to build brand and make money in the future.

Cross-media Content

Separate teams for print, online, cellphone, events (and other media) mean that the different edit teams spend time thinking through the same content and the various sales teams go back to the same set of clients or agencies to sell. This is not only inefficient, because processes have to be replicated across the teams and the knowledge generated is not sufficiently harnessed by the company, but it is also expensive.

An integrated media offering will offer readers what content they want, when they want it and in the format they want it in. For the content output to be integrated, the operations of delivery must also be integrated.

Publishers should consider having a common team for a media brand. The common edit team will think through the content issues and package them differently for print, online, cellphone, TV, radio or events. Each medium will require an edit-side 'owner' who will be responsible for quality and timeliness, but the operations team will be common. This is a practice that some publishers are beginning to follow.

Cross Selling and Solutions Selling

Traditionally, the emphasis on sales for non-print media has been very low. Sales teams seldom sell a package of offerings. Training manuals for sales teams don't generally describe integrated selling; they focus (almost entirely) on print with online and conference selling coming in the appendices. Selling for the cellphone is largely invisible. Advertising options for the Web are also largely restricted to the traditional banner ads, with little information on contextual ads or lead generation.

Cross Selling: Publishers should encourage and train their sales teams to cross-sell advertising between various media. For example, a sponsorship package can include the sponsorship of a webinar and a live event, supported by a custom published newsletter to be distributed at the event, contextual ads on the website, promotional ads in the magazine, and a cellphone text-messaging registration for the event.

Solutions Selling: Sales teams should also be trained to do consultative selling much like an agency does—understanding the client's needs and then offering tailored solutions around them.

These recommendations are more applicable to the smaller advertisers, which take advertising decisions on their own, than to the larger companies that depend on media buying houses. The way that media buying houses are currently structured means that the people who take decisions about print advertising are separate from those that deal in online or event advertising, making it difficult for publishers to cross sell to them.

Online Revenue: Beyond Banner Ads

Until recently sales teams gave away ads on the website free in exchange for advertising in the magazine. This changed, websites began charging for ads, but the nature of the ads and the selling process was replicated from publishers' print experience—sales teams sold space for banner ads online just as they sold page

The online medium can meet the need of advertisers to see ROI to their ads. Publishers can use lead generation with clients working towards strengthening their sales pipelines.

Telegraph's Multi-tasking Newsroom

Telegraph will soon be the UK's first media company to produce print, online and broadcast content from a single newsroom. It's new office, which boasts its common multi-platform newsroom, is currently under construction.

The new 'spoke-and-hub' newsroom layout has a round table at the center (hub) with 11 rows (spokes) fanning out from it (see Figure 4). The editor and the 11 section heads will sit at the center, while the teams of the 11 sections will sit along the spines of the spokes.

The teams will include both the reporting and production staff, who will work together to create content for Telegraph's newspaper editions; copy, audio and video for the website; and alerts to be sent out over email and cellphones.

The new integrated approach has an underlying demand: that the journalists work across media.

The layout also allows for an open working environment, where the editorial and production teams will interact seamlessly to meet the rolling deadlines for various media. This is expected to create content when it's required rather than

once a day, as is the case with traditional newspapers.

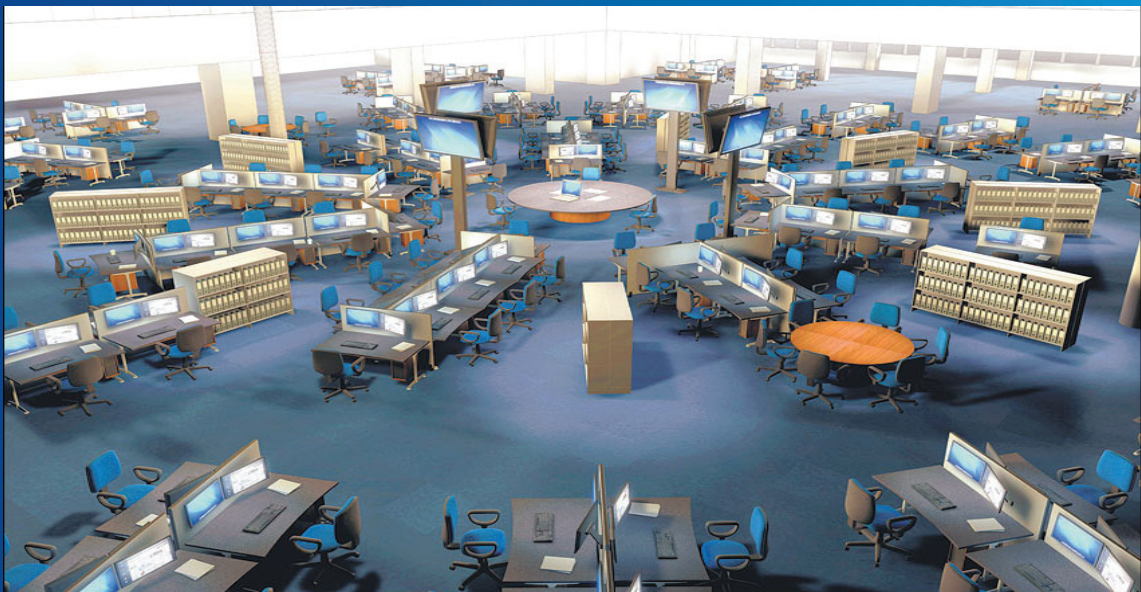
The company has also changed its name to the Telegraph Media Group—the new name will reflect the diverse variety of products (newspapers, Podcasts, Blackberry services, broadcast) that the group has to offer.

This 67,000 sq ft editorial floor has been a multi-million pound investment for the company.

Telegraph's newsroom is not free from controversy, the main argument being that expectations to deliver content across media every day will eat up on the precious time that journalists should be spending researching their stories. They argue that journalists can create the write-up for the newspaper, and then another team can package that for other media.

While this argument may have some merit in the case of newspapers where journalists will have to spend time collecting facts about, say a bomb blast, it will not apply as much to the B2B media space where writers are more preoccupied with news analysis than breaking news.

Figure 4:
Telegraph's to-be-launched Multi-tasking Newsroom



space for a magazine. This continues to be the favored way of getting revenues for websites.

But, there are other effective ways that publishers should consider as well.

Contextual Ads: The big difference between magazines and websites that publishers must harness towards online advertising is the fact that the visitors to a website are extremely relevant because they choose to visit the website for a specific reason. This is not the case with magazine readers, who, even if they pay or opt-in to receive the magazine, are at the receiving end of push content.

Advertisers will benefit from contextual advertising, placing their ads next to relevant content (just as Google does). The nature of these ads can be varied; they can be banners, text-based ads, videos, reports, whitepapers, product demos, etc.

Lead Generation: Advertisers have always pushed for ROI measurement to their ads in magazines. Though publishers have tried innovative means of measurement (for example, giving product codes and helpline numbers to generate sales leads) on print ads, not many have succeeded.

The online medium, on the other hand, requires least manual intervention to generate such information. By capturing data about visitors' usage patterns and registration processes, websites can generate quantitative (number of unique visitors) and qualitative (demographic profiles) sales leads.

Lead generation can be an effective method for advertising companies working towards strengthening their sales pipelines.

Publishers must, however, be cognizant of privacy and data-protection laws when using lead generation. Since websites can be accessed anywhere in the world, publishers must consult legal counsel to understand the international legal framework for such laws.

Sponsored Content: Publishers can carry sponsored content (much like magazine advertorials) such as whitepapers, reports and case studies on their websites. They can also carry product placements, such as demos of software and games or promotional films.

They can charge sponsors separate fee for uploading and downloading content. Sponsors typically pay a one-time fee for uploading, and a smaller downloading fee each time a user downloads their content.

To be effective, sponsored content should also be contextual and placed in the relevant areas of the website.

Charge for Content? Publishers often charge readers for online content—a fee to access the entire site, to access parts of the site or to access a full document where just the summary of the document may be available for free.

Some publishers believe that quality content that is unlikely to be available elsewhere must be charged, their argument being that it is credible content that separates them from the riff-raffs on the net.

This is an argument that online 'believers' don't subscribe to. They favor the newspaper model with their strategy being to make revenue from advertising rather than circulation. They aim at getting more ad revenue by increasing traffic by allowing people to link to and comment on stories, and through search-engine optimization and smart marketing.

When so much content is available easily and for free, restrictions imposed by payment (and even registration, in some cases) will simply drive people to other websites.

Radical publishers may choose to give all their content away for free, while the less radical ones will charge for truly unique content that can't be duplicated. But, charging for 'non unique' content (be it for complete documents or summaries) should not an option.

Radical publishers may choose to give all their content for free, while the less radical ones will charge for truly unique content that can't be duplicated. But, charging for 'non unique' content should not be an option.

FHM's Vauxhall VXR Campaign

FHM, UK publisher EMAP's men's (B2C) magazine, ran an integrated campaign to promote Vauxhall Motor's launch of the VXR brand. The theme of the campaign was a car racing competition to find the 'VXR Sports Driver of the Year'. Ten finalists were to be flown to a race circuit in Spain, and the winner was to win a £20,000 Vauxhall Astra VXR.

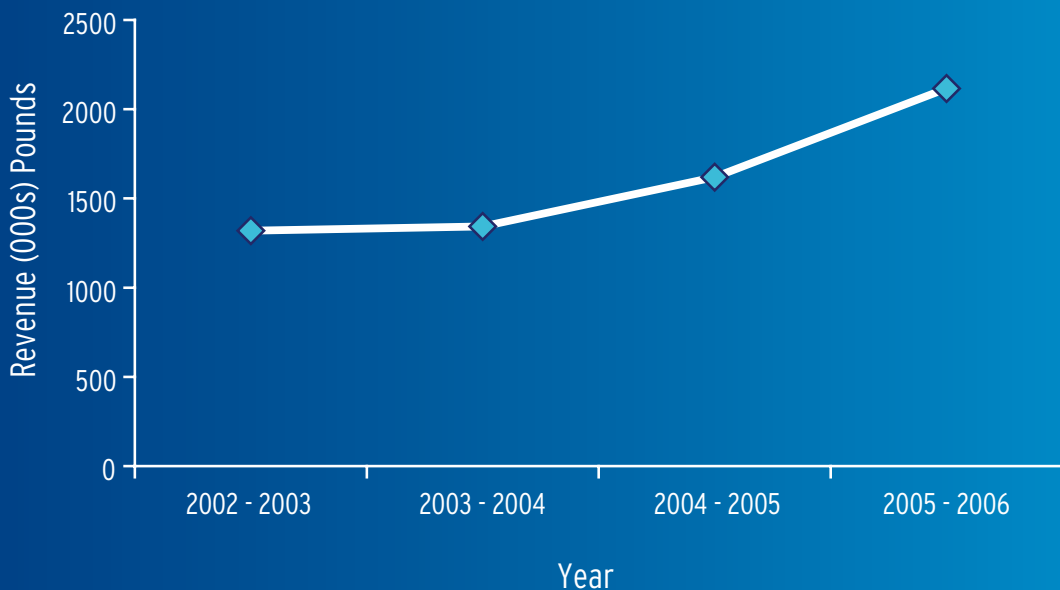
The campaign used the various media that FHM had to offer: magazine, website and event. The magazine carried promotional pages of the car and the upcoming racing event over seven months. A microsite on FHM's website complimented the campaign. Through it, visitors could enter the competition, take

part in simulated races and download images of the VXR. Promotions through events comprised a series of heats where racers were shortlisted to go to Barcelona, Spain for the grand finale.

The campaign also saw a close collaboration between the editorial, marketing and publishing teams to create, package and sell the concept. The editorial team was involved in conceptualizing the concept and in creating advertiser-funded content, while the sales team took the concept to the market.

The success of FHM's multi-platform strategy across various campaigns can be seen from Figure 5.

Figure 5:
FHM's Brand Performance Across Platforms



Technology at Par with Circulation and Distribution

Publishers need to invest as much in managing technology as they do in managing their circulation and distribution processes. After all, it is technology that enables content to reach readers in an online world, just as circulation and distribution do in an offline one.

Successful online companies such as Yahoo, Craig's List and YouTube (all of which compete with media sites) are not in the business of selling software, yet they harness the power of software and sell products or services on its back. They regard technology as the backbone for delivery.

Publishers have traditionally regarded the circulation and distribution processes as their backbone for delivery. In the online world, they have not been able to recognize that good software development is key to their circulation and distribution.

They have continued to frown upon high technology budgets, hire few IT personnel as support staff (for site maintenance, uploading, etc) or outsourced basic development work. Successful print publishing companies who built fairly large IT departments in the 1990s to support their online offerings now find that these departments are not able to navigate through the rapidly growing technology and apply it to their business. This has primarily been because of management's lack of focus on this area.

To thrive in the online space, publishers must take technology seriously. Whether they keep the technology function in-house, outsource it or do both, companies need to give management attention to technology.

And, since it is people who make up a function, publishers should think of their software developers at par with their circulation and distribution managers. Without them, they can't get their content online in an effective way.

Vertical Search

Publishing companies are spending a lot of money on search-engine optimization. This is valid if they regard themselves in competition with each other. This strategy accepts that Google (or other search engines) is the starting point, and all efforts have to be made for websites to appear higher and higher on search results.

The other approach is to redefine the competition scenario. If companies consider search engines as competition, they will think of innovative ways of competing in that space. Providing content through vertical search engines is one approach.

When competing in this space, however, companies must understand that their expertise lies in content, and not in technology (as it does with search engines). So, their competing offerings must harness content.

On the facing page is a case study of a media company that sees itself competing with search engines.

Publishers need to invest as much in managing technology as they do in managing circulation and distribution. After all, it is technology that enables content to reach readers in an online world.

searchmedica.co.uk's Vertical Search

searchmedica.co.uk is a B2B vertical search engine for doctors in the UK, brought out by United Business Media. Searchmedica has positioned itself in competition not with other media sites offering medical information, but with search engines such as Google.

Its value proposition is that doctors can hope to find more relevant information through their search engine as opposed to Google's because: one, it searches through only credible websites chosen by its editors (Google will search the larger Web and may hence throw up non-relevant results as well) and two, it is designed to search medical issues, such as government's guidelines on tests for childhood diabetes, which Google isn't (and may hence throw up irrelevant results).

Doctors in the UK have the Electronic Patients Records (EPR) system on their desktops. Through its relevant search, searchmedica

hopes to be the other essential tool on doctors' desktops.

For the technology, Searchmedica partnered with a search-engine company. And for identifying the relevant websites it turned to its editors. Based on their knowledge of the market and understanding of the reader, its editors drew up a list of 2,000 websites, which they believe a doctor in the UK will benefit from. Of these sites, Searchmedica had to approach 60 'closed' sites, whose content was protected, for aggregation permission.

Advises the CEO of the business: Vertical search is the way for audiences with very specific and well-defined information needs, such as health-care professionals. These characteristics are likely to exist in some other B2B markets, but not necessarily in all.

Searchmedica was launched in October 2006, so its success is yet to be seen.



Since most editors running media websites are traditional print editors, it's natural for them to first create content for the magazine and then 'dump' that content on the website. But, they need to think about content that will fly on the Web instead of duplicating magazine content online.

Recommendations: Editors

Some publishers and editors that the author of this report spoke to considered Google a threat and some an ally. Whatever their stance, they were in agreement that there are only two ways forward to a successful future for a publishing company. Both are basic fundamentals of publishing: credible content and reader affinity.

The recommendations below discuss what these fundamentals mean in the converged world.

Anti Dumping

Most editors running the websites of B2B media offerings are traditional print editors. So it's natural for them to first create content for the magazine and then 'dump' that content on the website.

Some do generate news and Web exclusive content for the website to go alongside the print content. But, while doing so it is natural for them to have their print hats donned. So, typically the content that finds its way on websites is: news, features, interviews, case studies, reports, images, blogs (written like short features), and occasional podcasts and webinars.

Editors need to think about the content that will fly on the Web instead of duplicating magazine content online.

They need to think seriously about Web essentials such as search, aggregated content, tools (for example, to calculate bulk product discounts), user-generated content, databases and lists (for example, of service providers). They need to think about ways of engaging their readers in dialogue, something that is far easier to do online than through a magazine.

Content Aggregation

The publishing business is based on the backbone of producing proprietary content. For centuries editors have guided the creation of content in-house or through external writers. The content has always 'belonged' to the publishing company.

This may have been the right thinking for the magazine age, but not for the 'democratized' age.

Today editors have to compete with other content that is not only of competitive quality but is also high in quantity. They have to compete with Google that throws up thousands of pages on any search.

How do they get the best of both the worlds of quality and quantity? Many editors are finding the answer in the aggregation of credible information.

One way of doing this is by integrating vertical search engines on to websites. Editors identify a set of relevant websites from where they want content aggregated and brought to their sites, and the search engine goes and fetches that information.

Aggregation typically means that your website will carry the links or brief synopses of articles, and direct the reader to the source site to read the full article. Generally most source websites are happy with this arrangement because their content gets more visibility and their websites more traffic.

A common technology used for aggregation is RSS (Really Simple Syndication) feeds, where websites 'expose' content that can be picked up by other websites. Yet,

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unfortunately few B2B websites offer RSS feeds. Only 28 percent of publishers of global B2B websites polled by FIPP (International Federation of the Periodical Press) offer RSS feeds on their websites. Permissions for aggregation will have to be sought in such cases.

While automation for aggregation is a good method, some editors argue in favor of manual aggregation. Automation, they say, brings in indiscriminate results. Their model is for editors to spend a lot of time browsing relevant sites, picking up links to appropriate articles and seeking ideas for stories and blogs. They also recommend moderating the content aggregated through automated means.

User Participation in Content

The power of the Web lies in communities—email being the best example of community-based online success. Editors should engage communities in all aspects of content—creating it, verifying it, commenting on it, questioning it, critiquing it, linking it to other sites, etc.

Readers should be encouraged to write articles, blogs and experiences; contribute photographs and videos; create communities; invite others to buy from them or sell to them, etc.

There are various ways of getting readers to participate. The most effective way is to harness users' self interests. This is what Craig's List does by offering people a platform to 'do their own thing'. People use the platform to advertise houses, jobs, resumes, concerts, services, etc. Its content is almost entirely run by users—Craig's List employs only 23 people!

Another way to get users to participate is to harness their egos. This is the model that Wikipedia is based on. Its tens of thousands writers contribute content to 'satisfy' their needs for creativity and knowledge sharing.

But, editors must remember that the huge amount of user-generated content is actually created by a tiny fraction of the user base. So, they will have to constantly work towards increasing reader interactivity by offering content that invites comment, making feedback mechanisms interactive and easy to use, etc.

Editors will also have to decide what type of content they would want to put up on their websites un-moderated and what type they would like to edit.

Role of Editorial Staff

In the traditional world, writers have written and editors have edited. Print journalists have written for a particular medium; and editors have decided, based on their understanding of the reader and market trends of the domain on which they write on, what the reader should read. Editorial staff, as a whole, has been removed from the commercial side of the publishing business.

In the converged world, this is changing.

Journalists: For journalists to have successful careers, they cannot continue to simply write. They will have to create content to tell stories in text, images, audio and video. They will have to learn to write for the magazine; blog and podcast for the website; write creatively for the cellphone; create content for the conference, etc. Each of these can be done innovatively—journalists can put up photographs or videos on blogs, they can set up polls for their articles, etc. And, at every level, they must continue to interact with their readers—through email, text messages, polls, etc.

Even the role of photographers will change, as they will be expected to also do videography for videos to be put up on websites or created for broadcast.

There are various ways of getting users to participate. The most effective way is to harness their self interests (Craig's List model). The other is to harness their egos (Wikipedia's model).

Editors: Traditionally the editor has been somewhat revered; he has told the journalists to write what he believes the readers want to read. He has interacted with his readers, yet has been largely inaccessible—letters to the editor, for example, have gone to the copy desk directly without being seen by him.

The online world brings in a curious conundrum for the editor. On the one hand, the availability of vast amounts of indiscriminate content on the Internet calls for the strengthening of his role as the gatekeeper of credible, well-investigated content. On the other hand, it calls for him to no longer unilaterally decide what the reader should read, and instead engage his audience in an ongoing dialogue to understand what they want to read, provide them that content, and also invite them to participate in content generation.

Does this mean the role of the editor is changing? Yes, agreed most people that the author of this report spoke to. The editor will no longer just uphold brand values and create content; he will also aggregate content, engage his audience in generating content, continuously seek and respond to feedback and be more attuned to the commercial side of the business.

His role will expand, and not diminish as feared by many, from being a creator of content, to also being a facilitator, navigator or curator of content.

Edit and Commercial Interaction: A Chinese wall has existed between the edit and commercial sides of the publishing business. The reason for this is well known: to maintain editorial integrity.

Editorial integrity must be maintained, for that is the most fundamental value of publishing, but editorial staff now needs to be more attuned to the commercial side of the business. Since they are the closest to the brand, they must extend their pulse of the reader market to the marketing and sales teams; at the same time they must get the knowledge of the advertising market from the marketing and sales teams.

Editors must now think more like publishers, concerning themselves with competition, marketing and tracking readership data.

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Measures for Editorial Staff

Sales staff is always measured by sales targets. Editorial staff, on the other hand, is seldom measured except in some cases by the number of stories written or edited. This practice may be fine for magazines but will not work in the online world where feedback from readers is far easier and quicker to get. The online medium empowers readers to immediately respond with bouquets, brick backs and comments to articles and blogs.

Writers and editors must be held responsible for generating page views and driving the popularity of their articles. This will compel them to continuously engage with their audience at a time when the democratic online medium empowers readers to immediately respond and send feedback.

A publisher of a very successful American B2B website went to the extent of saying that those edit staff who do not succeed in bringing in traffic to their articles are not doing their jobs and should be asked to leave.

Marketing, of course, will continue to be responsible for traffic enhancement. But, the practices they follow will be different from the ones followed by the edit teams.

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