

PERSPECTIVE

Important lessons on what makes the top magazines tick

**Russell Davies**

I went to this fantastic conference on the history and future of magazine design last week at the glorious old St Bride Library off Fleet Street. You were probably all there. What could be a better place for an art director or media planner to deepen their expertise?

I didn't notice any agency names on the attendee list, though. Maybe you were all anonymous. Hmm. Anyway, for those of you who missed it, here are a couple of things that popped out at me.

The first thing I hadn't realised was how reliant the UK and bits of Europe are on newsstand sales, compared with the US and emerging markets such as Russia and China. The physical scale of those places means the only viable way to distribute is via subscriptions, and a largely subscription-based relationship with its readers lets a magazine take many more risks, both commercially and creatively.

I guess that might not matter to those in the UK, except that there are clearly commercial and ecological downsides to printing 200,000 copies of something in the hope of selling 100,000. You have to imagine that sensible magazine owners are pursuing subscription sales wherever possible, and that must have implications for their relationships with advertisers.

There was also a good discussion on how to react to the digital challenge, best summed up by Jeremy Leslie, the executive creative director of John Brown and editor of magculture.com, saying that magazines need to get more "magaziney". There are things only magazines can do: the deep blacks of the ink in *Grazia*; the feel of the different paper stocks in *Monocle*; the striking cover images of *Time Out*; the unrivalled readability of ink on paper and all those little giveaways and extras that can make a magazine experience such a delight.

William Owen, the founder of the digital consultancy Made By Many, was equally eloquent about the need for magazines to dive into the web without just importing their pages into a content-management system. He summed that up rather smartly as "magazine as service rather than magazine as product." This means abandoning some of the magazine prejudices (beauty is more important than utility; the editor knows best) and embracing the community of readers and giving them a platform to create their own experience.

But the thing that really intrigued me was realising how little advertising income magazines had during the 40s and 50s, a time when they did a lot that was innovative and important. There have to be some useful lessons in that for the future of magazines. We media folk don't know enough about our own history. If we paid more attention to the past, maybe the future would be less frightening.

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ALL ABOUT...

Branded Premiums

Payal Khandelwal figures out when they are used, and how they help

Increasingly, branded premiums have become an important and almost an indispensable tool of branding for the media companies. Premiums, to the uninitiated, are corporate gifts which feature branding of the company or of a particular product or brand from the company. Most media companies now spend significant time and money on the development of the "perfect" premium, searching for one that breaks through clutter.

1 How are premiums important as a branding tool? "Branded Premiums can be very powerful tools, depending on how you use them. They have the ability to make the brand message come alive and engage with the target audience. Great tactical execution with well thought through strategic intent can actually help build brands. If the target audience is focused, then it can also be a very cost effective way to spread the brand message," says Abhijit Pradhan, director, sales & marketing, Mid-Day.

Says Monica Tata, vice president, advertising sales and networks, India & South Asia, Turner International India, "Premiums are a very good way of building top of mind recall for your brand. Premiums not only give the person a chance to touch and feel the brand beyond television but it also helps spread across the message you would want to convey to the audience. However, what is of critical value is the choice of premium and its utility." She adds, "For instance; to announce the launch of our second kids' channel POGO and depict its off-centre positioning we created dice that opened in a snake fashion and was appreciated by people. As part of our localization strategy, for Diwali we sent out very cute candles with cartoon characters dressed in Indian attire, wishing Happy Diwali. For Holi, we gave Pichkaris and a colorful tin filled with organic colors that had our popular show, M.A.D.'s branding on it. For promoting our pre-school show Galli Galli Sim Sim, we created miniature wooden school desks that are placed on table tops as Post-it holders."

2 What portion of your trade budget do you allocate for the premiums? "This can range from 10 to 30 %. In many industries, this figure can rise dramatically," says Pradhan. "We do take out some fixed amounts for the most important occasions like Diwali and New Year. Otherwise, we decide on a certain portion of the market-



Premiums are useful in building relationships while building brands

What it means for...

COMPANIES

- Premiums are a very good route to building top of mind recall for the brand
- Media companies use branded premiums for specific programs, often to aid in selling sponsorships before launch
- If the target audience is focused, then branded premiums can also be a very cost effective way to spread the brand message
- What is of critical value is the choice of the branded premium and its utility

ing budget for the premiums as and when required," says Prem Kamath, vice president, marketing, Star India.

3 How do you zero in on a premium? "We start from the consumer promise that we would like the brand to deliver. In Mid-day's case we are propagating the cause of "Make Work Fun" to all young urban mobile professionals across India. So, a premium which would help spread the message of "make work fun" to busy professionals in their workspace. The next step would be a physical scan of kinds of premiums available through various suppliers (India / International). The criteria that we would look at in terms of short listing and selection would be: uniqueness of premium / idea, kind of experience that it creates / impact, sustainability/longevity of life of premium for the intended audience and cost. When we launched the new avatar of mid-day.com, the party invite was a boss management kit – which was essentially a voodoo doll representing the boss – and one could have fun with intended boss' reactions with the voodoo doll," says Pradhan.

Kamath says, "We generally have branded premiums for specific programs on STAR as that helps us if we are looking for sponsorships before the program is released. For example, for our show on Star World, Desperate Housewives, we had a packet of detergent as the branded premium which connected well with the positioning line of the show, 'everyone has a little dirty laundry'. So we use any novel and interesting idea based on programs which brings alive the concept." He adds, "In terms of zeroing in on a branded premium, it has to be subtle. We generally have different premiums for different advertisers and distributors. We developed a bean bag with Star Gold's branding and a director's chair for Star Movies."