

## 8 PUBLISHING TRENDS FOR THE B2B TECHNOLOGY SECTOR

*Normally people use the New Year to discuss trends in their industry. However, during the summer holidays I found myself thinking about the changes in the European trade press and the questions clients keep asking. So I thought it would be worthwhile putting down my take on what will happen in the world of trade press publishing in Europe over the next few years.*

### THE LONG, SLOW DEATH OF PRINT

In Europe we remain strangely wedded to print publications, and have proved far more reluctant than Americans to stop reading paper publications. There have been many different suggestions as to why this is, ranging from the convenience of a print publication on public transport to the belief that Americans strive to choose what they read whereas Europeans are more prepared to accept the guidance of an expert editor. Perhaps the easiest thing to do is simply to put the difference down to culture.

Although I see the decline of print as inevitable - mainly due to its very high cost, rather than environmental damage it causes - I think this will take a long time in Europe. Whilst a couple of publications are already delivered entirely in digital format, and many more will follow, some publications will continue print circulation for several years. These publications will almost certainly command the highest advertising rates, as European engineers gravitate to the publications that are available in their favourite print format, and advertisers value print circulation over digital distribution.

### THE DESPERATE SEARCH FOR PAGE VIEWS

Perhaps the biggest challenge faced by publishers is the lack of online advertising inventory. Many of the leading websites have been turning away advertisers as their monthly page views failed to keep up with the number of impressions advertisers would like to buy. Some websites will choose to chase as many eyeballs as possible, publishing stories about consumer tech that will inflate visitor numbers with irrelevant readers. Others will continue to cut editorial cost, but I believe that the winners will invest in unique editorial that engages the audience and causes readers to come back again and again.

### THE QUEST FOR MEASURABILITY

Advertisers will continue to move towards forms of advertising that are measurable. Interestingly there appears little demand for PR to become more accountable, although that may not be a bad thing. Identifying return on investment with numbers in a spreadsheet will increasingly be the easy way out for lazy marketing managers. The most successful campaigns, however, will be built to achieve specific business objectives - many of which may be qualitative. Personally I hope marketing managers will choose the tougher route of committing to challenging goals and measuring themselves against that, rather than presenting endless spreadsheets showing click through rates.

### CORPORATIONS MOVE INTO JOURNALISM

As publications continue to struggle financially, companies will find it increasingly difficult to get their message across without investing in high quality PR. Recently I've seen many companies increase the amount of material they publish on websites and in e-mail newsletters: this will be a trend that gathers momentum. Many companies, however, will fail to take advantage of this trend because they simply use it to throw sales and marketing information at their customer database. The leaders will see the opportunity to provide high-value material that engages not only their existing customers, but also future customers.

## **THE INCREASING IMPORTANCE OF VIDEO**

Probably the most rapidly growing medium for European trade publications is video. The use of video is going to explode over the next few years, on publications' websites, in digital magazines, on video sharing sites (both generic and those aimed at specific industries) and on companies' own websites. Inevitably as the use of the technology grows, companies will need to strike a balance between cost, authenticity and whatever will be considered acceptable production value.

## **THE DECLINE OF THE CUT-AND-PASTE PUBLICATION**

Today some of the most profitable online publications do little to edit the material they receive as press releases. With the relatively low cost of entry, and Google's endless quest to rank original, value-added material more highly on the results page, I'd expect traffic to these sites to decrease relative to those that provide truly original content. In the small silos that define the B2B world in Europe, however, these publications are unlikely to die out.

## **SOCIAL MEDIA STAYS AT 1.0**

The world of electronic design is a great example of what is happening with social media for B2B marketers in Europe. Although some engineers do use Twitter, Facebook and other social media tools, the most common use of social media is forums. Engineers are practical people, finding forums an effective way of resolving problems, despite them changing little since the days of USENET back in the 1990s. Although we are unlikely to see a move to more "modern" forms of social media, customers will have far higher expectations. More companies offer forums on their websites, and almost every major supplier will have to allocate resources to monitoring and responding to posts on 3rd party forums.

## **READERS ACCEPT DIGITAL MAGAZINES**

The first trend I identified was that publishers will continue to deliver magazines in print for several years. However, we are close to the point where digital publications are accepted by the vast majority of European readers. Without doubt there is a demand in Europe for knowledgeable editors to guide readers to the most important topics, products and articles. With the increasing number of effective ways to read digital publications – particularly tablets – we'll see the value readers place on digital magazines increase, readership rise and open rates improve.