

Association Magazines That Go Beyond

There are different reasons why an association pub might want to grow past its membership roots; and sometimes, it's all part of the plan.

BY CHANDRA JOHNSON-GREENE

Today's association publications are looking beyond their main purpose, which is to serve as flagships for their organizations, and are using a myriad of circulation and advertising strategies in order to attract broader audiences.

Three magazines in particular are thinking outside of the box so they can not only compete with other association publications to become the premiere magazine in their field, but so they can perhaps give commercial publications a run for their money.

IEEE Spectrum

Although *IEEE Spectrum* magazine is an association publication, publisher Jim Vick feels that *Spectrum* stands in the same competitive market as other major tech publications like *Scientific American*, *MIT Tech Review*, *Popular Science* and, on some level, *Wired* magazine. "We also consider *EE Times* to be a competitor, although their advertising is product oriented," says Vick.

IEEE Spectrum, established in 1964, is the flagship publication of the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers, Inc., the world's largest professional technology association. But because a large part of its mission is to provide content to non-members as well as members, *Spectrum* is able to attract a larger audience than most association publications.

"Our main purpose is to provide benefits for all members of IEEE," says Vick. "But we take it a step further. We want to provide a magazine that can reach all different disciplines represented in our field and do it in a way that's informative and entertaining."

Five years ago, *Spectrum* went through a major revitalization that allowed the magazine to further expand its readership. "We edit our content in a way that's very readable to members and non-members

who have a real interest in technology," says Vick, "and it's written in a way that's very easy to understand whether you're an engineer or not."

Spectrum's ability to reach beyond IEEE's 350,000-plus membership is reflected in its circulation, which is managed by Special Interest Media. The magazine boasts more than 2,200 individual non-member subscribers as well as 715 in single copy sales as of Dec. 2005 (most association pubs don't have any single copy sales).

Spectrum, which is distributed by CMG, can be found on newsstands across the country, including Borders and Barnes & Noble. It can also be read on Continental, Northwest and United airline flights through Creative Resources, as well as in waiting rooms via Waiting Room Subscription Services.

What also makes *Spectrum* stand out is its advertising. "We have a very upscale and wealthy demographic with the potential to draw advertisers like BMW, Mercedes



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Benz and high-end watch companies," says Vick. "We engage in advertising for consumers as well as b-to-b."

So what does the future hold for *Spectrum* as far as brand extension? "Right now, our coordinator is putting together a plan to market *Spectrum's* digital distribution, which should be out next year. We'll be using it to go after non-members fairly aggressively."

American Journal of Nursing

How can an association publication survive without its association? The *American Journal of Nursing* will soon be doing just that.

Effective October 2006, *AJN* will no longer be associated with the American Nurses Association, ending a 107-year partnership. "The membership has been dwindling over the years and there are only about 150,000 professional nurses left in the association," says Mason. "They decided that they did not want to invest in a nursing publication anymore."

But Mason says the split will not affect *AJN's* readership because, in the past few years, the magazine has grown to stand as a strong and separate entity.

"I came on at the beginning of 1999 with the idea of transforming the publication," says Mason. "It was losing market share, advertising dollars and circulation, and it was losing its solid reputation. I came on board in order to lead it back to being the premiere nursing journal in the country and in the world, and we hold that position at this time. No other publication is doing what we're doing."

The loyalty that *AJN* subscribers show is reflected in the magazine's circulation. Mason says that the amount of paid subscribers has grown 34 percent since 2002—up to a total of 352,353 in Dec. 2005. "The market is responding to the changes we're making in the journal," says Mason.

As of its latest ABC audit report, *AJN's* individual paid subscribers represent more than half of its circulation—

partly due to the fact that ANA is down to 150,000 members out of 2.9 million nurses in the U.S. (ANA pays for membership subscriptions and will continue to do so through September 2006, when association subscriptions are due to expire.)

"We always do direct mail strategies to build our subscriber base and do have an aggressive strategy for replacing the ANA numbers, including converting many of the ANA members to individual-paid subscribers," says Mason. "Lippincott Williams and Wilkins/Wolters Kluwer Health has an excellent marketing/circulation department, team, and strategy that benefits all of its journals, including *AJN*."

With the separation from ANA, advertising income will become even more important to *AJN*. "Advertising is an important source of revenue to *AJN* as well as to a number of Lippincott Williams & Wilkins nursing journals," says Mason. "But we don't have the same pressures that controlled circulation publications have, since our large paid subscriber base enables us to put the readers' interests first. This issue is a growing concern in nursing publishing as advertising-driven publications compromise editorial to ensure a continued revenue stream from advertisers."

All in all, Mason feels the future is bright for *AJN*. "*AJN* is in a very strong position because of the work we've done to transform it over the past seven years. Readers have responded," says Mason.

HR Magazine



Rubin: We have an additional and very important purpose which is to be the external face of the organization.

Gary Rubin, chief publishing officer of *HR Magazine*, believes that his magazine is able to compete with other commercial and association publications based on the basic tenets of good publishing—"better stories, better writing, better art and more relevancy."

"Readership is a battleground," Rubin says, "and we compete on that field as passionately as we would if we

AARP—Growing the Magazine

Here are some creative ways to get your publication out beyond association walls.

By Scott Oser

AARP's flagship publication, *AARP the Magazine*, is arguably the largest circulation magazine in the world. It's printed six times a year, has a circulation of over 22 million per issue and is on newsstands at Barnes & Noble. Yet the majority of people, members included, do not know much about it.

Although membership is a huge part of the circulation, in order to increase outside awareness, we needed to go beyond those walls. Here are some of the activities we did while I was circulation director at AARP:

- **Public Place:** Getting copies into demographically desirable locations where the right types of people would see them. This not only helped advertising sales, but also exposed the publication to both current and potential members.
- **Newsstand:** The publication was displayed in Barnes & Noble and other smaller bookstore chains. The goal here was not necessarily sales, but increased exposure.
- **Distribution at Industry Meetings:** Getting the magazine in front of industry people.
- **Distribution at Association Events:** AARP is not really a federated model, but if you have state and local chapters or organizations, find out when they're putting on events and ask them to display your magazine.

At AARP, we increased the ways current and potential members were informed about the magazine. I worked with the membership group to increase the presence of the magazine in the promotional materials—to be the hook in bind-ins, blow-ins and advertisements placed in our own publications.

I believe that if a non-member picked up the magazine and liked what they saw, they should be told that they could get the magazine simply by joining AARP.

We also used different versions of a magalog based on the look, feel and content of the magazine to show non-members what a great membership benefit the magazine was. Although the magalog did not beat the current control, it was sent to 100,000 additional people who had now been exposed the *AARP The Magazine*.

I am sure that some of you are finding it very challenging to manage circulation in a world focused on membership. Just remember that if you develop the right relationships, keep track of the right information and think of creative ways to get your publication out there, it can be done.

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were a commercial publication.”

HR Magazine is the official publication of the Society for Human Resource Management. According to Rubin, the magazine's purpose is to drive support for the strategic direction of the organization, which sets *HR* apart from other association publications.

“We have an additional and very important purpose which is to be the external face of the organization,” says Rubin. He adds that the magazine plays an important role in retaining and acquiring new members.

As of its Dec. 2005 BPA audit report, *HR's* readership consists mainly of society members. 99 percent of its qualified circulation is members. Rubin says that it's hard to build individual subscription or single copy sales because everyone who reads the magazine eventually becomes a member.

“We don't have newsstand circulation,” says Rubin. “Our type of publication is too expensive, but we do sell individual subscriptions and look for same basic ROI. It's difficult for us because we represent such a large audience that finding individuals that aren't members already is challenging. We also find that once people receive the magazine, they're more likely to become members, so we have to go back into the well.”

HR is also quite careful with the advertising it will accept.

“All of our ads are business specific,” says Rubin. “We don't spend money on non-endemic advertising, because we don't get a good ROI on advertising sales. If there were an interest, we would certainly take an ad, but the cost of going after [selling] these ads doesn't

warrant the response we might receive.”

HR Magazine does, however, have a circulation strategy that is similar to other publications. “We do the same test and measure [circulation] plan that other professionals engage in, says Rubin. “But we go after different niche markets that may have not been tapped into.”