



Magazine Trends

Magazines are moving towards greater visual impact and more reader-friendly formats.

by Kim Pettit

This issue of *InterLit* presents the tremendous challenges and opportunities for Christian publishers in the years ahead. For the most part, though, its focus is on book publishing. What about the trends for publishing of other types of products, such as magazines?

John Brady and Greg Paul, consultants in the magazine industry in the U.S., recently highlighted the following trends.

1. Distinctions between consumer magazines and trade publications will continue to disappear. Cover design has traditionally been more important for magazines sold on newsstands than for those sold in other ways. With the increasing use of direct mail and other forms of advertising, trade magazines have greater competition for readers.

2. Visual elements will be more important. Designers are using larger type, more leading, more white space, pictures, captions, and call-outs. Magazines will require more art direction. "Publishers must invest more money in design than in editorial content," says Paul. This trend is already reflected in the titles found in magazine mastheads, as publications are increasingly headed by "creative" rather than "editorial" directors. Brady cautions against "art direction for art direction's sake," urging publishers to maintain visual appeal. Magazines must be not only readable, but browseable.

3. Copy will decrease in relation to images. "Instead of 2,000 words of narrative, feature stories are split into short segments with many sidebars," says Paul. Instead of two or three 5,000-word feature stories, magazines are increasingly offering six to ten shorter stories and providing more entry points to readers.

4. Articles will be more service-oriented. Consumers are experiencing information overload, especially in developed countries. With the dizzying array of data available, readers want help. They want to know the take-away value of feature stories and articles right away, relying on headlines on the cover, or taglines in the table of contents.

"Our job as editors is to sell the story," says Brady. "Readers want to be told what is important, what to buy, how a story will affect them," he adds.

5. Personal connections will be more important. One way editors can promote readers' personal identification with the magazine contents is to publish the photographs, biographies, e-mail addresses, and web site addresses for contributors. Another is to offer letter and e-mail departments and to promote reader participation through polls, contests, and surveys. Readers want to know publications are having an impact; they do not want to support ineffective ministries.

6. The Internet will become more crucial in print media. Publications do not grow just by serving a core of loyal subscribers; they must reach new readers. A significant portion of new subscriptions for *Christianity Today* come from contacts made on the Web. Editors oriented toward future readers will provide links and additional content on their magazine's Web site. "Split a five-page story into a three-page print feature and a two-page Web supplement," says Brady. "Welcome Web-savvy readers."

7. Revenue streams are changing. With the proliferation of free content on the Web and other media, consumer publications are changing from circulation-driven to advertising-driven revenue streams. Ten years ago, few of the magazines for general readers were free; now, many are. "We cannot count on people to pay for consumer magazines," says Paul. Brady cautions that magazines for specialized audiences, such as knitting enthusiasts or toy train hobbyists, may charge higher prices. "The bottom line," he says, "is the perceived value that the magazine has to the consumer."

In a society where sex, greed and celebrity are increasingly used to sell magazines, Brady sees signs of hope. "Interest in religion and spirituality is high," he says, "and will continue."

We have work to do!❖