

MAGNETIC

Magazines – A very human relationship

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In a sea of media buzz words and acronyms (SEO, PPC, VR, AR, AI...WTF FML) it's easy to get lost in the complexity of channels, and the vast amount of data available to us. It sometimes makes you wonder, are we losing sight of what it means to be a marketer – to connect brands to people, to build a relationship. Not a theoretical person that exists in a spreadsheet, or in one of those anonymous, aggregated surveys, but real humans. As Dave Trott said at Magnetic's The Lab, "The punter never changes. Media is just the delivery system. It's fashion".

Humans, despite all being part of the same species, are complex beings with a huge and diverse array of passions. This manifested at the start of The Lab process where we were all requested to submit our interests. These ranged from running to cooking, music to fashion, to name but a few, and not only could you see the animation in which people talked about their interest, but also the energy with which they talked about their favourite magazine associated with it. And this is where magazines have a unique position. Whereas some channels may have to settle for sporadic attention, much like passions, magazines have a long term, deep relationship with their consumers – a phrase that stuck with me from The Lab was "share of heart not share of voice".

I was lucky enough to spend a morning at Grazia and The Debrief. Once I got over the panic of what on earth I was going to wear to these titles at the forefront of fashion (I went for a denim jumpsuit and got a compliment #winning), I was overwhelmed by the warm welcome, generosity and openness of the people I met (including editors of both titles).

Getting to sit in a morning conference at Grazia, and a features brainstorm at The Debrief, I learned that magazines take their relationship with consumers very seriously. Like all good relationships, they work hard at numerous elements to ensure it endures rather than becoming a brief flirtation:

Trust

The bedrock of any successful relationship. Magazine brands work hard to maintain trust through a consistent tone of voice and reliable selection of content. At Grazia I learned that they do this by passing all copy through the lens of their reader and being highly self-critical. The level of responsibility magazine brands have to stay

true to their core proposition was very apparent, with one reader of the Debrief describing the publisher as 'their dependable friend' in an overwhelming new city.

There are two things we can take from this as advertisers. One is the opportunity this trust offers to brands as a halo effect, as well as contextual warmth and affinity, reaching your target audience in both an attentive, open and positive mindset.

The second is a reminder as marketers to remain true to our brands' core proposition. There is the temptation with the plethora of ever increasing channels to jump on the latest media opportunity, but we must always be mindful of brands self-concept, behaving consistently according to its values.

Keeping it real

As a trusted voice, magazine brands are a place you turn to for expert opinion, whether that's the latest fashion trends, or advice on the best trainers for trail running. I always wondered how magazines stay ahead of the curve, and learned that they use multiple sources to inform their content, whether through data from online panels, or PRs and 'sources' on the inside. However, what is clear is that they also use their intuition and immerse themselves in the real world to set, rather than follow the agenda – they are data enabled, not data controlled.

As planners we too gather the many data sources available to us to inform our communications strategy, however the morning within Grazia and The Debrief served as a reminder how important it is to step outside the numbers and get the irreplaceable real world experience of our target audiences.

Adapting and Learning

With any successful long-term relationship you test, learn and adapt to move forwards. Through The Lab experience I learned that magazines work with agility to get their content right, not just adapting to 'latest news stories' but also testing and learning on online platforms to dictate long form content. This presents a great opportunity for advertisers to test advertorial content, see what resonates well with the audience, and adapt to create something even more valuable.

Listening

Perhaps one of the biggest strengths of a successful relationship is the willingness to listen, which is something magazine brands do in spades. From my morning at Grazia and The Debrief I learned they take great pride in reading all audience feedback, whether that is letters in, or comments to online articles, and use it to fuel the direction of the publication. The Debrief's editorial team is even made up of the target audience (which is significantly younger than the average) and they have an online panel, which they regularly ask questions to and gather feedback from. The level of understanding magazine publishers have of their audience is very impressive and presents a brilliant opportunity for brands to not only learn more about their

target audience but also utilise the expertise of the editorial team to craft content that truly resonates.

Overall the experience with The Lab reminded me of the opportunity magazines bring to brands – the ability to utilise the expertise of the editorial team to create content that truly resonates, and the chance to access the unique, very real relationship they have with their readers.

Magazines + Brands 4eva.

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