

The Value of Brand Magazines

WHITE PAPER



Why you need to read this white paper

"We live, communicate and work in a digital era that overwhelms us with all kinds of information. For consumers, it becomes increasingly difficult to decide what to pay attention to. For marketers, the biggest challenge lies in capturing this attention. Some of them make the mistake of trying to reach the largest audience possible, at the expense of the quality of their message.

In this white paper, we want to place an old marketing tool in the spotlight, a tool that hasn't lost any of its effectiveness. Quite the contrary actually. You guessed it, we're talking about brand magazines. Let's dive in and discover why brand magazines are making their comeback and might be an answer to the information overload challenge of today."



Hélène Renaud
Founder
of Absolute Agency

**"In 30 years, humanity
has delivered more
information than in the
5000 years before."**

*Caroline Sauvajol-Rialland, conference host
at Sciences-Po Paris*

**We have entered the
Content Shock Era.**
**This term coined by Mark
Schaefer in 2014, points
to the fact that the
content offer has clearly
outgrown the content
demand.**

**A human's average
attention span in 2019 is
8 seconds.**
**Which is 1 second less than
that of a goldfish! In 2000,
this was still 12 seconds.**

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Introduction

It's a war out there. A war for the undivided attention of your customers. The battlefields are the chaotic wilderness of social media, the realm of e-mail inboxes, the vast ocean of Google searches, ... Tactics range from aggressive pop-ups to cunning SEO tactics or bombastic video ads. Many have fought, many have failed. But one truth remains: attention only goes where it wants to go. It's a beast not to be tamed by hollow words or fake promises. It only bows for one thing, and that is true value. True value can turn a rebellious sceptic into a loyal follower. It can turn an ignorant pagan into a devoted pilgrim.

The basic concept of content marketing has always been about trading true value for the attention of the target group. The hope is that this attention will finally blossom into brand loyalty and push them further on their customer journey. But what is "true value" exactly? It's a concept that's been thrown around so much that it's losing its essence, yet it should have so much meaning.



LONG-TERM SUCCESS

Of course, a prospect will be briefly grateful if you offer them, at the right time, the right piece of content that entertains them for a moment or teaches them something to overcome a challenge they were struggling with. While this might be an interesting approach in the short term, we all want to achieve long-term success, aka customer engagement.

We want to create content that adds personality to brands. Content that not only informs or entertains the target audience, but actually levels up their persona and makes them feel like they are part of something bigger. This is the fertile ground on which true customer engagement starts to grow. This is where the true value of content lies.

65%

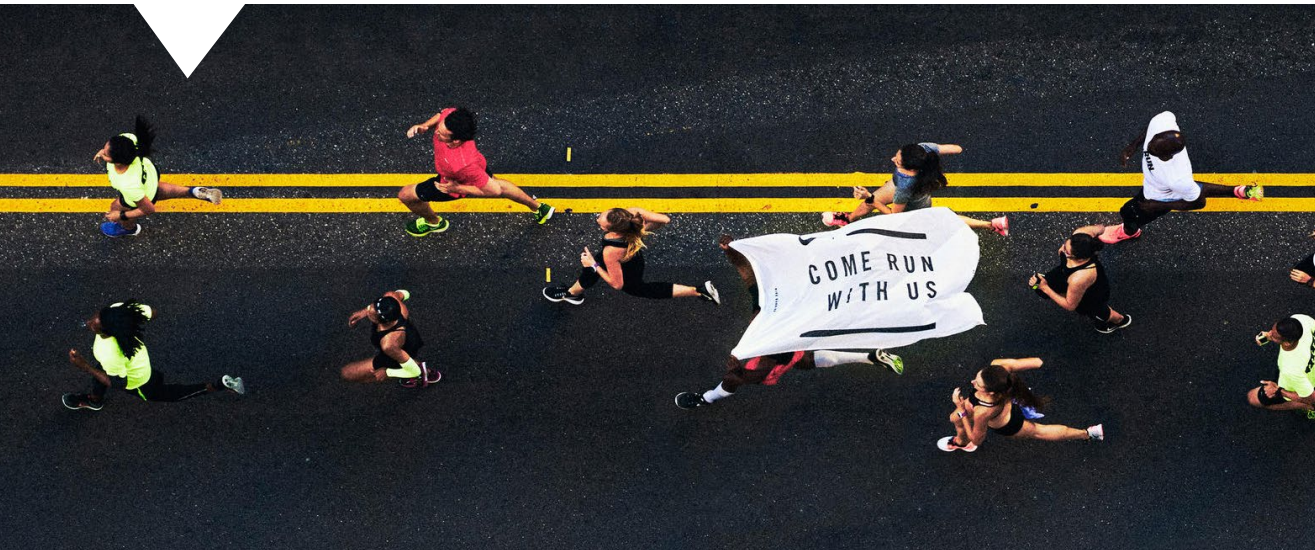
of companies find it challenging to produce engaging content

47%

of internet users globally use an ad-blocker today

Top reasons for ad-blocking

- ***"Too many ads"***
- ***"Annoying or irrelevant ads"***
- ***"Intrusive ads"***



Of course, this all sounds like a smooth marketing pitch – which it is – but how do brands achieve this? There are the obvious big players such as Nike that build loyal communities with their high-profile running & fitness apps. Or Lego creating a whole universe with video games and feature-length films. And of course Red Bull, the energy drink manufacturer slash extreme sports titan sponsoring the world's biggest sport events and even owning their own F1 racing team.

BACK TO BASICS

But we're not here to talk about multi-million euro budget, state-of-the-art marketing campaigns. We're going back to basics with an old school medium that has steadily been gaining in popularity. Yes you guessed it, magazines. And in particular, brand magazines.

For almost 300 years – yes you read that right, more about that later – brands have recognized brand magazines and publications as an important tool in creating customer engagement. Over the last two decades, that popularity might have been declining a bit due to the emergence of the digital era. However, people seem to be yearning again for a single-focus reading experience, without the distraction of a million voices begging for attention. A reading experience that offers a distinct voice and top-quality content.

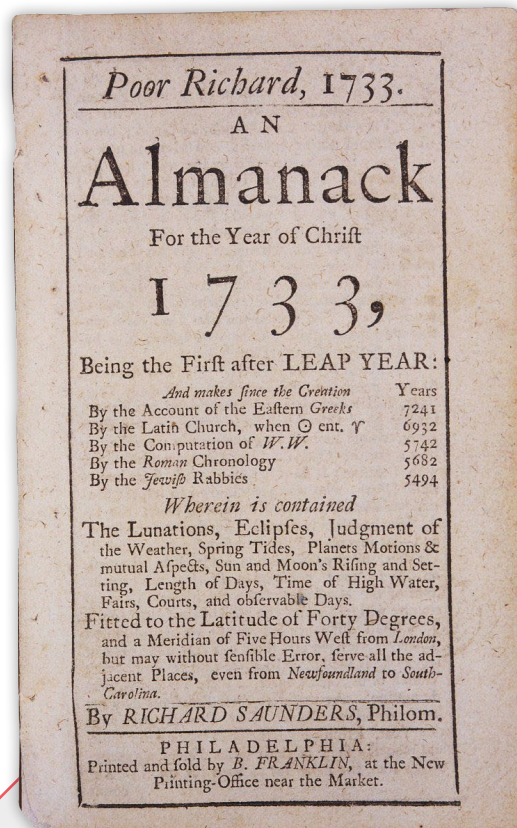
In the pages to come we'll explore a brief history of the brand magazine, we'll delve deeper into how and why they work and we'll compare print with digital magazines. And of course, we'll discuss some of the most inspiring and engaging brand magazines around.



There are the obvious big players such as Nike that build loyal communities with their high-profile running & fitness apps.

Short history of brand magazines

Think content marketing is something new? Think again. While it might not have been called that, the concept of content marketing goes back a couple hundred years. Even though 'The Furrow' is widely regarded as the earliest and most important brand magazine – and example of content marketing – we can date its origins back even further. Let's have a look at the most important examples of brand magazines through history.



1732

Poor Richard's Almanack

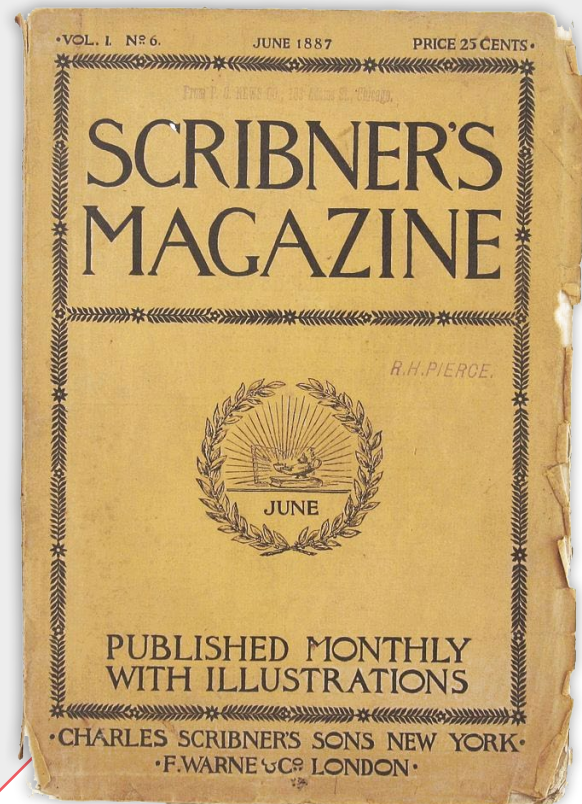
- A yearly almanac published between 1732 and 1758 by Benjamin Franklin to promote his printing business.
- It contained seasonal weather forecasts, practical household hints, puzzles, etc.
- Although technically speaking not a magazine, it's the oldest example of a branded publication with the purpose of promoting a business.



1867

The Locomotive

- Published by Hartford Steam Boiler Inspection & Insurance Company.
- It's the oldest brand magazine continuously published under the same name in the US.



1887

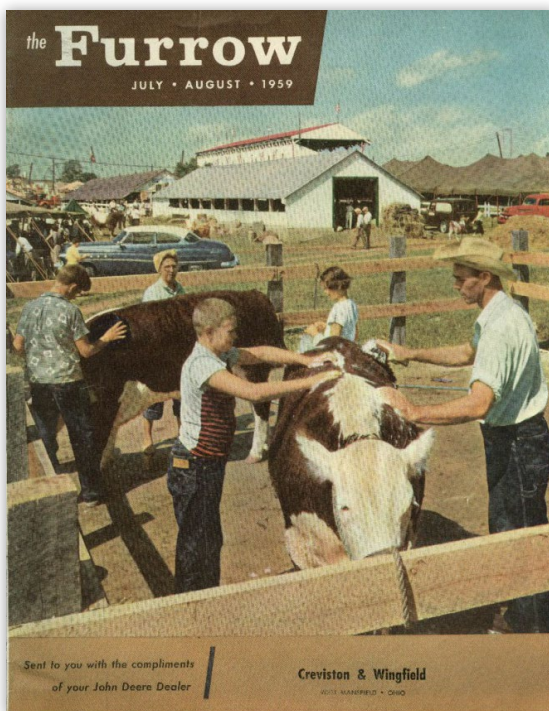
Scribner's Magazine

- American periodical published from 1887 - 1930 by the publishing company Charles Scribner's Sons.
- The publication aimed to boost sales by providing a look inside the lives of the company's most famous authors.
- It was well-read, achieving over 200,000 copies at its peak.

1968

Weight Watchers Magazine

- The first brand magazine to be distributed at supermarkets and newsstands.



1895

The Furrow

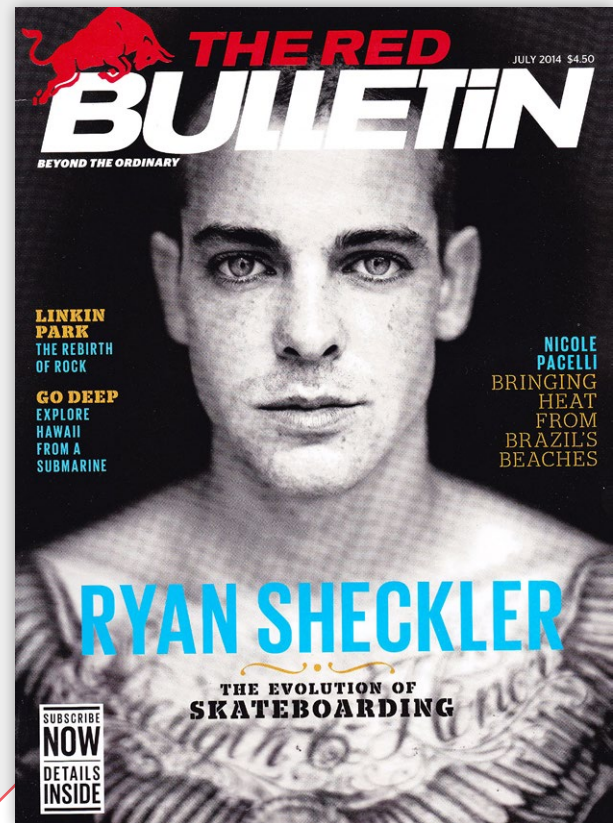
- First published by John Deere in 1895. It peaked in 1912 with 4 million readers. The Furrow is still published today with a circulation of 1.5 million copies, distributed in 40 countries and 12 languages.
- One of the earliest and most famous examples of content marketing and brand magazines.



1987

Brick Kicks magazine

- Published by Lego, now called Lego Club Magazine.
- It contains special offers, comics, games, contests, modelling tips, etc.
- Magazine for the Lego Club members and a great example of community building.



2005

The Red Bulletin

- Published by Red Bull with a monthly print run of more than 2 million copies, available in 4 languages with local country editions in 8 markets.
- One of the most widely circulated international monthly magazines.



Of course, this is an ongoing list. More and more companies – young and old – are rediscovering the value of brand magazines in what could be called a magazine renaissance. And this is clearly not restricted to the more obvious examples such as in-flight or car magazines. Even much less-evident examples such as start-up dating apps or the biggest social media titan – yes Facebook, we're watching you – want their piece of the proverbial printed pie.



Why brand magazines?

But what exactly makes brand magazines so interesting for marketers? Why should they bother pouring all these resources into a medium that basically dates back 200 years? Hasn't it become an outdated concept in this era which is by definition digital? We passionately believe this is not the case and we have identified the four most important reasons why.

1 DEEP CONNECTION WITH TARGET GROUP

A successful brand magazine knows its target group to its core. It becomes part of their identity by catering to the dreams and aspirations of their professional or private personality. 'The Furrow' for example – see Short History of Brand Magazines – produces all their content with the ideal of the self-sufficient farmer in mind. Farmers all over the world

recognize themselves in this ideal and start connecting with the magazine – and thus the brand – in a powerful and meaningful way. Well-thought-out and recurrent brand magazines are therefore one of the most powerful and unique marketing tools for establishing this deep connection with customers.



"Telling stories that folks enjoy reading - and that they can use in their own operations - has been the recipe since the beginning."

*David Jones,
The Furrow's
14th publications
manager*



2 ESCAPE FROM THE DIGITAL OVERLORDS

Yes, it might seem counterintuitive that brands push their content offline in this truly digital era. But when you think about it, it's actually very logical. From the moment we wake up to the moment we go back to sleep, we are bombarded constantly by technology begging for our attention. Dominant notifications, sneaky pop-ups, or screen-filling ads; it's become very rare to be able to enjoy a piece of content without some digital finger snapping in the corner of your

eye. Do you remember the last time you stayed focused for more than an hour reading something interesting without checking your phone? It must've been a blissful moment. Magazines promise exactly that. Zone in, enjoy the content, zone out. You'll feel enriched and relaxed at the same time.

We spend an average of
73.8
hours a month on our phone

3 THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

Many brands claim to be the best, the smartest, the brightest. But very few manage to prove they are the absolute leaders in their domain. A brand magazine is therefore an interesting platform for brands to actually showcase their expertise and establish thought leadership. It becomes less about who shouts the loudest, but all about the brands that take their time to inspire and inform. If



a magazine delivers on its promise to inspire or teach the reader something new, it will convincingly push the brand up the industry's leadership ranks.

4 WELCOMED FORM OF MARKETING

Of course, we're not going to lie, even though we offer a magazine, it's still a marketing tool. The readers are not naive, they are well aware of this and they fully understand the value it offers to brands. But they also understand the value it adds for themselves. As long as they enjoy reading the content that inspires, informs or entertains them, they don't care whether it's branded or not. On the other side, the digital era has given birth to a generation of self-conscious, critical thinkers who don't buy just everyone's bullshit. So make sure the content you are going to produce has enough quality to convince them.



"Brand magazines rely on the merits and value of the content itself to engage the reader. They use this avenue to tell a story surrounding their products. They aren't out to compete with traditional

publications. But the best of them are raising the bar, offering quality editorial content and artful design that can inspire and improve the industry."

***Susan Parente,
Publications Marketing
Manager at Sheridan***

What makes a brand magazine successful?

As with many things, not all magazines are created equal. Even though the idea of a brand magazine might be great, a lot of magazines aren't. Of course, there is no clear-cut wonder formula that works for all, but there are some general key rules that apply to all brands. We defined them in our **Five Commandments of Brand Magazine Success**.



Our Five Commandments of Brand Magazine Success:

I

FIND YOUR
BRAND'S CONTENT
NICHE

II

FOCUS ON THE
READER, INSTEAD
OF THE PRODUCT

III

AIM FOR A
TOP-NOTCH
PRODUCTION

IV

CREATE A SENSE
OF BELONGING

V

BE IN LINE WITH
YOUR BRAND'S
OBJECTIVES

I

FIND YOUR BRAND'S
CONTENT NICHE

Everything starts – and ends – with understanding your target audience. Once you understand who they are, what they want and how they think, you will find that valuable content niche that caters to their personal needs and expectations. A general magazine is boring, it's about everything and nothing at the same time. You want the magazine to have a strong personality. You want it to stand out from the crowd by being a powerhouse in the niche you defined. Once you find your niche, you can create audience- and brand-relevant content for years to come.

II

FOCUS ON THE
READER, INSTEAD
OF THE PRODUCT

Many brands make the mistake of creating a magazine that's all about themselves. Me, myself & I might sound good on a hip hop track, it's the absolute party pooper of your magazine. Don't push the products, instead focus on the human aspect of your content. If you create stories that your readers connect with and enjoy reading, brand loyalty will follow automatically. And

don't worry, loyal customers will find their way to your products, they don't need to read about it in the magazine they love. They will have a look at the catalogue if they feel like it.



1

Members of niche audiences tend to be passionate about their specific interests.

2

They will be more likely to talk about those interests with their peers, resulting in word of mouth advertising.

3

The combination of audience passion and general lack of competition will make brand fans keep coming back.



It's important to create a magazine that has the potential to become part of the reader's identity.



AIM FOR A TOP-NOTCH PRODUCTION

Never – ever – compromise on the quality of the magazine. Being a brand magazine, doesn't mean it needs to feel cheap or rushed. It should be well-designed and alive with inspiring content. Are you on a low budget? No problem, then just reduce the number of pages. Of course, it doesn't need to become a marketing vanity project either. As long as the necessary resources go into it to be in line with the marketing's objectives, the proposed value will follow naturally.



CREATE A SENSE OF BELONGING

'Playboy', 'Vogue', 'The New Yorker', 'Rolling Stone', ... They all bring to mind a very specific prototype of readers. This is more important than you might think, because every time a reader buys a magazine, they don't only want the content, they also want a part of the identity of this prototype reader. A 'Playboy' reader will have undoubtedly fantasized about the extravagant, testosterone-blazed, macho lifestyle its founder was known for. On the other hand, 'The New Yorker' readers will see themselves as intellectual and witty members of a classy society. Keep this in mind and create a magazine that has the potential to become part of the reader's identity.

The Business of Belonging:

IBM's iX study showed that brands creating a sense of belonging with their customers grew revenue

3X
the rate of brands that didn't.



BE IN LINE WITH YOUR BRAND'S OBJECTIVES

Even in companies with big marketing budgets, brand magazines are not the easiest marketing tools to sell. It can sometimes be hard to get everyone onboard – even though you're convinced your magazine idea is genius. It's therefore crucial that you align your ideas with the brand's objectives and find the right way to make it fit the marketing mix. The magazine's success will rely on your colleagues' willingness to cooperate. So make sure your idea is strong enough and is in line with your brand's objectives in order to get everyone wholeheartedly behind the project.

How to pitch your magazine idea:

- ***Start with some stats***
- ***Show some strong examples (incl. of the competition) to create a sense of FOMO***
- ***Present your strategy in a concise manner and keep it personal***
- ***Tie it back to ROI and address the business objectives***
- ***Anticipate any objections***

Featured examples

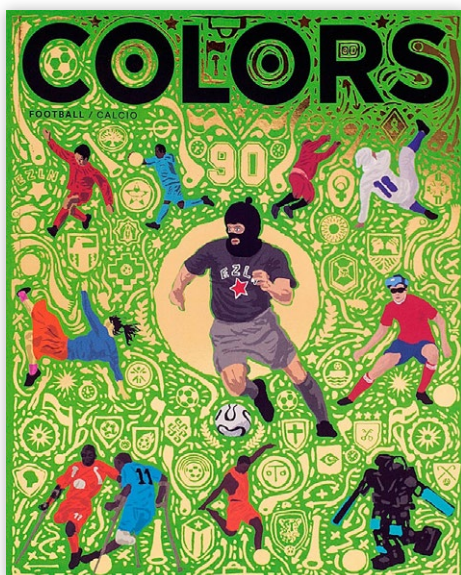
Enough with the talk now, it's time to show some of the world's most successful brand magazines. For some of the brands mentioned, it might seem

like the obvious choice to create a magazine. For others, it might seem much less evident. Let's have a look.

SOME OBVIOUS EXAMPLES:

THE RED BULLETIN (RED BULL)

Red Bull not only helps its consumers fly, it also gave wings to the whole concept of brand publishing. They were far from being the first, but The Red Bulletin sure catapulted brand magazines into the 21st century. With its focus on extreme (sports) stories, it knows exactly what its readers want to read and who they aspire to be.



COLORS (BENETTON)

After a quick look at some of the magazine's issues, you'll quickly understand why it's been called "the magazine for the MTV generation". Its earlier issues contained images of slavery, HIV patients, war and violence, dominated by bright colors and bold captions. Of course, shocking to some, but very effective in establishing a powerful brand identity.

UNITED COLORS
OF BENETTON.

ASOS MAGAZINE

ASOS Magazine succeeds because it understands that its readers don't want a glorified catalogue. They want to read a fashion magazine. And if ASOS doesn't deliver on this promise, they'll go to the next best thing. The result is an elegant magazine with insightful content, including fashion trends, beauty dos and don'ts alongside interviews with celebrities such as Lady Gaga, Jennifer Lawrence, Blake Lively and Lena Dunham.



asos

HEMISPHERES (UNITED AIRLINES)

Of course, an in-flight magazine ranks among the more obvious examples and nobody does it better than United Airlines with 'Hemispheres'. It has won multiple awards and describes its readers as "affluent, curious, sophisticated and intrepid world travelers". With beautiful editorial pieces about travel, luxury fashion, food, business, etc., they know how to create a sense of belonging among their readership.



UNITED 

SOME LESS OBVIOUS EXAMPLES:

BUMBLE MAG (BUMBLE)

An online dating app creating a magazine? Sounds crazy? Bumble did exactly that with the Bumble Mag. The magazine offers stories and advice about dating, careers, friendship and much more, featuring prominent celebrities such as Serena Williams. Top-notch production with a full focus on human stories.



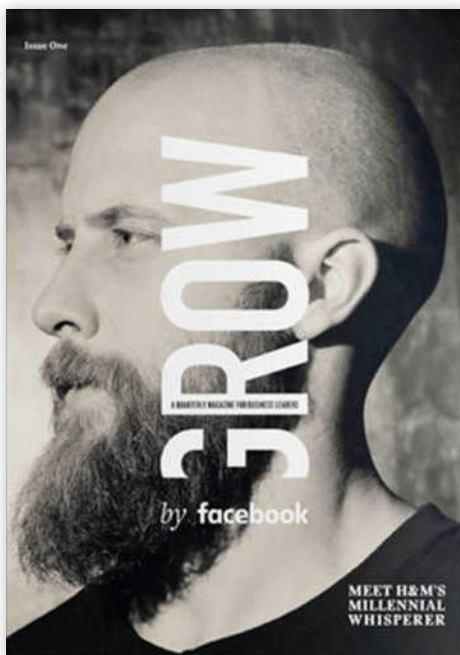
 bumble

HERE MAGAZINE (AWAY)

The luggage company Away noticed that people kept calling its customer service looking for travel tips. Instead of getting annoyed, they saw an opportunity and created 'Here Magazine', a beautiful travel magazine full of inspiring stories and images, exactly what their target audience was looking for.

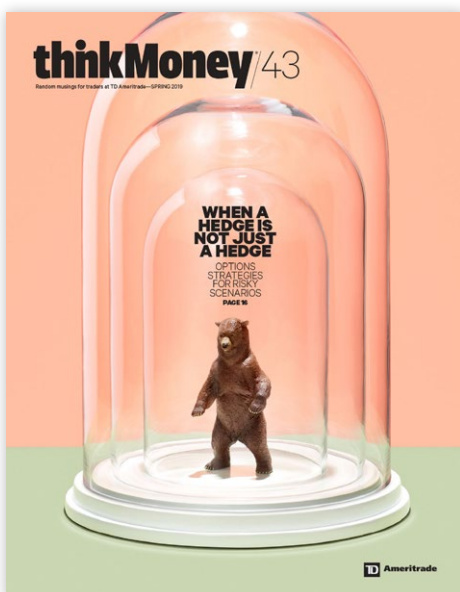


 AWAY



GROW (FACEBOOK)

Many digital companies have been publishing print magazines lately, with the most notable examples being Airbnb and Uber. But the high-end magazine 'Grow' that Facebook created, might be the most remarkable. It was released completely under the radar and is targeted exclusively at business leaders.



THINKMONEY (TD AMERITRADE)

Do you think your business is not sexy enough for a magazine? Think again. The brokerage firm TD Ameritrade created the magazine 'ThinkMoney' and won several media awards over many years with its bright modern design and its witty humor and fresh pieces on equities, options and futures.

SOME BELGIAN EXAMPLES:

DELHAIZE MAGAZINE

With over 100 pages of mouthwatering recipes, colorful photos and an impeccable layout, Delhaize magazine is Belgium's undisputed king of brand magazines. The quality of their products is reflected in the magazine's top-notch production.



DELHAIZE  GROUP

ONE MAGAZINE

One, Proximus' B2B magazine for digital business owners, knows exactly what its readers want. Hands-on content with a strong focus on the future of business and technology packed in a slick layout that underlines the tech-savvy identity of the magazine.



proximus 

To print or not to print

To print or not to print, that is the question. We believe that print and digital can form a perfect hybrid tandem for the distribution of content magazines. We assume we don't have to make the case for digital publications anymore, so we listed three reasons why print is still the favorable platform for magazines.



1 AN OFFLINE EXPERIENCE

In a world dominated by screens and social media, reading offline content has almost become an act of rebellion. It's become the ultimate luxury, an offline experience without a pop-up ad or a screen notification. We argue that print is far from dead and is only becoming more valuable, the more digital is taking over our lives. It offers an escape from all distractions, the only time left for ourselves.

2 A VALUABLE EXPERIENCE

With a more focussed experience, comes a more valuable experience. When people take their time to read, they can delve deep into stories with rich background and context. Valuable and critical journalism is privileged here and will offer a very welcome counterweight against the snack-sized, fastfood-like content that dominates online.

3 A TANGIBLE EXPERIENCE

This fleetingness of online content is especially unfortunate for brands that want their content to be memorable and not forgotten with the swipe of a finger. An elegant print magazine often ends up on a desk or coffee table where it will become an eyecatcher and gets occasionally picked up over a longer period of time. And nothing beats the combination of quality paper with quality content in the hands of a hungry reader.



Neuroscientific studies show that...

- Print is 21% easier to understand than digital.
- People have 70% more chance of recalling a brand's name after seeing a print ad than a digital ad.
- Print is more "real" to the brain which involves more emotional processing.

What about the return on investment?



The question to end all questions: what about the return on investment of brand magazines? It's a question that will undoubtedly be asked during board meetings and it's frankly not the easiest to answer. The simple answer goes as follows: if a brand magazine is well executed and follows our Five Commandments, it can be extremely valuable in terms of branding and brand loyalty. If executed poorly, it will just be a waste of resources.

It's also a marketing effort, which requires a long-term vision. No brand will see a sudden surge in brand loyalty after just one edition of their brand magazine. But at the same time, the value that you're creating is also a long-term one. As the age-old saying goes: the more you put in, the more you get out.

Absolute Agency helps you get your voice heard by those who matter. Do your competitors shout louder? Well, we communicate smarter. Using a content strategy neatly tailored to your needs, we reach your target audience exactly where they are with the content they're waiting for.

Need something more specific? Our design, digital and video creatives are here for you!

Welcome to
our agency



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