



23 Tips for Adapting From a Print-Centric to Cross-Platform World

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For publishers, the transition from print into multichannel publishing can be fraught with questions of timing and strategic approach—should the movement be seen as a linear progression of old into new, a “zero sum game” where resources are shifted from one element to another as needed, or a true broadening of focus to meet the needs of a marketplace attuned to customization and choice? How should resources be allocated, and what elements should be prioritized? Does success depend on careful preparation ahead of implementation or the ability to turn on a dime as circumstances change ... or both?

Answers to these questions may depend on one’s specific market or advertiser base, but the strategic tools needed to make these critical decisions cut across consumer, b-to-b and b-to-c worlds. This paper offers tips from executives in various publishing segments on making the transition from a print to a digital world.

I Launch across platforms. When inaugurating a new publishing venture, jump in with both feet, advises Vicki Wellington, publisher of Food Network Magazine. Launching the magazine across print and digital allowed for maximum initial exposure through multiplatform marketing channels, contributing to a huge—and lasting—rate base explosion.

II People who like a brand in one platform will like it in another. Peggy Northrop, vice president and global editor-and-chief at Reader’s Digest, advises thinking of your brand in terms of a “circle of products with your reader in the middle.” She uses as an example a person who enjoys watching the National Geographic Channel on television and is therefore inclined to be interested in the National Geographic Society’s print products.

III Don’t fear “watering down” a brand. A corollary of the above is the need to understand that broad can still mean deep, notes Eric Hoffman, executive vice president and CEO of consumer lifestyle publisher Hoffman Media. For companies long accustomed to satisfying niche audiences in the print world, there is, he says, “no need to think of the digital world as compromising that.”

IV Think Video. Social media may be compelling as a marketing tool, but in terms of allocating resources for engaging online content, video is still king. Train staff in use and integration of video, and think in terms of multimedia content when setting editorial calendars. As one publisher puts it, “The emphasis is more on the people we’re writing about—capturing the CEOs and business leaders that come by our offices. But any editor with capability on camera—their stock is going up.”

V Take your cue from your audience. As consumers become ever-more familiar with the range of print, online and face-to-face options out there, it’s important to pay attention to what they are interested in, says Frank Anton, CEO of business-to-business

publisher Hanley Wood. This means not privileging any one channel over another, based on preconceived notions, when it comes to providing an entry point. “Start where they want to start and lead them into [other formats],” Anton advises.

VI Organize around brands rather than platforms. This is critical, believes Bob Carrigan, CEO of business-to-business publisher IDG Communications, because it allows innovative ideas to come from any quarter—an event concept from a salesperson, for instance, or fruitful collaboration between editors nurtured by print and online product-development teams. This approach also ensures that all employees feel equally engaged in, and essential to, any transition process.

VII Train staff to think in terms of multiplatform functionality. Editors and salespeople trained in print should understand website design, architecture and navigation, as well as have an intimate understanding of how people use the web. At the same time, as publishing e-media expert Eric Shanfelt puts it, “Don’t expect to create technological wizards.” The goal is to facilitate communication between departments in order to leverage and coordinate specific areas of expertise, not create many-armed multitasking hydras.

VIII Talk to advertisers in terms of client base rather than the traditional ad buy, advises Hoffman. This requires knowing what your audiences want and being able to communicate their passions and preoccupations to advertisers looking to work in the context of multiplatform marketing.

IX “Nichify” a mass brand. Having a longstanding brand rooted in mass appeal—and strongly associated with a particular print product—need not be a hindrance, says Northrop. Reader’s Digest has successfully used its worldwide reach to “tap into local experiences,” she says. Recently, for instance, the company built a volunteer initiative (around an issue chosen by readers) into a series of events to promote literacy. The effort demonstrated the effectiveness of utilizing a mass brand to promote a coordinated effort on the local level, increasing its relevancy among diverse audiences.

X Multiplatform thinking is not a “brave new world.” Larger publishers (and many smaller ones) have always engaged in multiplatform product development and marketing, whether through extensive video production (e.g., National Geographic), audio (Reader’s Digest) or a wide range of media offerings (Time Inc.). Northrop notes Reader’s Digest has found success monetizing both new offerings (an app for the iPhone) and archives (1 million downloads on iTunes of Reader’s Digest-owned content to date). National Geographic plans to make extensive use of its vast video and photography assets to build multimedia functionality into its digital editions, according to Drew Onufer, director of interactive publishing at National Geographic Global Media.

XI The Web is more than just a place for repurposed content. Just as television is not “radio with pictures,” the Web is not simply print online. Audiences engage with content differently on the Internet, and creating content specifically tailored to the search-based, open-ended Web—as contrasted with a more linear, controlled print environment—is a wise way to enrich the products you offer.

XII Do research and listen to your readers. In the midst of the recession last October, the Food Network launched its print magazine. “People thought the timing was crazy,” Wellington says. But the publisher knew it was likely to work: they had done the legwork of asking the right people the right questions about what they wanted in a magazine. Knowing your readers can help you decide what new products to build out, and when.

XIII Leverage your audience’s passions —and knowledge base. Look to existing products and feedback to get a sense of which elements would most likely be successful in a particular format, be it recipes delivered to people’s phones, downloadable sewing patterns, an entertaining app or targeted Twitter feeds. Especially in b-to-b and enthusiast markets, audiences love to talk about challenges and share tips and tricks, notes Shanfelt; this content can be just as valuable as that which you create. The same holds for advertisers, whose aggregate knowledge can be leveraged through whitepapers, webinars and data sheets.

XIV Update old ideas. Loyal audiences and advertisers are often more receptive than you might think to remaking long-standing concepts in new formats. Hanley Wood decided to make its traditional annual show house (showcasing sponsors’ home-building products and services) virtual this year, with clickable sections and pop-up graphics. The company’s Builder Concept Home 2010, an online tour of a 1771 square-foot virtual house, has attracted over 16,000 visitor registrations and \$600,000 in revenue. Up-front savings for the company were huge, Anton says, and “we sold more sponsorships with the online version.”

XV Make information entertaining. Reader’s Digest is creating games for smart phones, an example of how even small products can be monetized if demand is there. Web sites, smart phones and digital editions all provide opportunities for creating fun interactive games and activities within ads and features, as seen in Wired’s recent launch on the iPad. This kind of value-add is especially important if you hope to sell digital subscriptions or put content behind a pay wall.

XVI Take on an agency function. One of the most interesting recent developments enabled by digital workflows is a new level of collaboration with advertisers, whereby publishers essentially take on an ad agency function to customize campaigns. Hearst’s recent acquisition of digital marketing agency iCrossing to create a new business unit,

Hearst Marketing Services, and Meredith's acquisition of several companies to form Meredith Integrated Marketing are two high-profile examples of publishers moving into digital marketing, but such a move can be made without necessitating a pricey acquisition. Both Wellington and Anton have guided their companies into this role, with concepts tailored to specific advertisers leveraged for a particular platform. "We have a market insight into housing that [ad agencies] do not have," Anton says. Publishers can leverage their expertise in a particular market, save advertisers money and create a new revenue-generating service.

XVII Plan ahead. Strategize to harness the power of your brand, and do not skimp on any details. "It's not about throwing money around, it's about crossing every 'T,'" Wellington says. Decide who should take the lead and take a big-picture, brand-centric view of building out a product across print and digital platforms. "Be smart about this," she says, "and the advertising will come."

XVIII Build for scale efficiencies without weakening brands. If you maintain multiple brands, part of the planning for building out digitally should involve setting up content management and staff resources to leverage scale, with common technology platforms and applications, says John Loughlin, executive vice president and general manager of Hearst Magazines. At the same time, he says, take care to maintain the integrity of individual brands. "We've engineered our sites to look and feel very different to the consumer," he says.

XIX Your scarcest resource is time. Prioritize and learn from past experience about where to direct the talents of your staff, media executives advise. If audiences respond better to e-newsletters than blogs, allocate resources accordingly—while keeping lines of communication open to gain clues as to when and where to innovate.

XX Be agile. Digital products require a high level of flexibility. "You have to understand that online is different," Carrigan says. "You know instantly if [a product or marketing initiative] is performing well, and that requires a significant shift in workflow ... We have a lot of common infrastructure, common standards [and] communication between our business units. But our first strategy is to stay close to the customer by having teams close to the customer. It creates a much more agile operating environment."

XXI Pay attention to metrics. In the digital world, marketers expect clear return on investment. "You have to stand by the numbers and be much more results-oriented" with digital media, Carrigan says. "The expectations are much higher now for marketers, because everything is measurable."

XXII Understand and mirror your audiences' needs. Publishers must be able to provide integrated online programs that mirror the decision-making process of the

audiences their advertisers are trying to reach, notes Marilou Barsam, senior vice president of client consulting and corporate marketing at b-to-b publisher TechTarget. For Techtarget, this means offering advertisers a suite of online advertising options, whitepaper sponsorships and invitation-only events; no matter the audience, the key is to understand their decision-making process. Many b-to-b audiences, she notes, “... go through a journey, beginning with research, that helps them solve a problem in their enterprise.” Are the products you offer meeting needs in every stage of that journey?

XXIII Be content centric, and platform agnostic. It’s become an old saw, but no less meaningful now than it was at the dawn of Web 2.0—think in terms of content as an asset to be used, enhanced, repurposed and aggregated, rather than a sort of cargo tied to one delivery platform. Remember the example of the Pennsylvania Railroad: the nation’s first billion-dollar corporation made the fatal mistake of believing it was in the train business, rather than the transportation business. Make sure you are successful in thinking outside the boxcar.

Source: The tips in this whitepaper were compiled from various Publishing Executive magazine articles and interviews, as well as from educational sessions at the Publishing Business Conference and Expo.