

PRINT MATTERS

JOHNSON PRESS OF AMERICA • volume 6 • issue 4 • july 2012

Are you engaging your readers?

In the entertainment industry, the triple threat who can act, sing and dance is considered best positioned to captivate casting directors and nail an audition.

In the magazine world, it's the publication that pulls out all of the stops — top-notch editorial content, well-chosen images and effective page design — that stands the best chance of keeping its readers.

Two-way conversation

Producing editorial content that will engage the reader is no simple task, said Sara Stephens, managing editor of *Houston Family Magazine*.



"In terms of pure writing, when you talk about engaging the reader, you're talking about making reading interactive," said Stephens, a writing and editing veteran who also founded an online marketing agency. "If you talk at a person, you're sure to lose them, and they'll walk away. With writing, you can't hear to adjust your communication for mood, interest or the expression on someone's face."

Stephens says she strives to apply what she calls the "three Ts" to writing: touching the reader, teaching and tracking.

Touching the reader calls for evoking a memory or emotion that gets the person to relate to the article. "They leave in an altered

state," Stephens said. "The same thing happens in the movie theater. In your writing, share an anecdote. If you're sharing statistics, humanize them."

The human element is invaluable, agreed writer and editor Donna Gable Hatch. "I'm drawn to human interest stories, insightful stories, stories that raise awareness and are uplifting," said Gable Hatch, who has worked for *USA Today* and the *New York Times Co.*, among other media giants. "No matter the subject, the writer must always tell the reader the impact the material could have on his own life."



Exceeding our customers' expectations for more than 60 years...

continued from page 1

As for teaching, this involves showing the reader how to do something, like fixing a flat tire. “Any kind of how-to gives the impression of engaging the reader,” Stephens said. “It is interactive. You’re writing something, and they’re doing it. That’s something that touches lives.”

When Stephens refers to tracking, she doesn’t mean a “Big Brother” approach. It’s as simple as using technology to find out what readers want so you can deliver editorial material that interests them.

She recommends using online analytics — tools that analyze your Web site traffic and visitor behavior. Have reports sent regularly so you can monitor your site’s activity. What are people looking at? Where do they linger? This data provides insights into the things that interest them.

And by all means, Gable Hatch said, open the door for readers to reach out to you.

“The publication’s Web site should be designed to enable readers to comment on a story, blog or photo,” she said. “Readers are not shy about expressing their concerns and questions, and posts can often spark fresh story ideas. In the print product, have a standing information box that encourages readers to

submit story ideas, or run a small information box with a story that asks readers for their opinion on the content of the story.”

Perspectives magazine Publisher Tracey Guhl, another longtime writer and editor, recommends contacting readers directly.

“One successful strategy for connecting with readers is to make 10 calls to readers each month,” Guhl said. “The results are always impressive, and it’s a great way to get story ideas. Plus, it builds a closer connection to individual readers and increases your reach.”

If you really want to embrace technology in your publication, you can use QR codes that whisk readers to sites that complement the article via their smartphones. The code could link to a video or a static page that you update regularly. “Now you have a living, breathing relationship with your reader that you can maintain indefinitely,” Stephens said.

Consider linking readers to a survey, too. This gives them another method of offering content suggestions. “They are shaping the magazine, and they know it,” Stephens said. “That engages them in a very personal way.”

Chefs devote time to presentation because it enhances the dining experience. The same dynamic applies to the look of a magazine — from the fonts you select to your headlines, images and overall product design.

In some cases, basic journalism tenets are your best guide. When it comes to typefaces, Stephens has found readers most easily follow a serif font with upper and lower case letters. Avoid extensive use of all caps, although the technique is effective in small doses.

When it comes to photos, Stephens believes that people want to see people.



“Even if the topic is a motherboard, put a person in there.” The person isn’t there simply to grin for the camera; he should represent someone who’s knowledgeable on the topic you’re covering. “The reader can better see himself there,” she said.

Your photos are part of your publication’s voice, Gable Hatch said. “I choose photos that can tell the story without words. A photo should interpret events, furnish evidence to show the authenticity of a story, and appeal to readers’ emotions — make them smile, laugh, trigger compassion or outrage. The right photo will pull readers into a story. The wrong photo will make them turn the page.”

Tightening budgets have led some publications to reduce page counts. But even if you’re packing more content into less space, it’s important to incorporate white space into your designs, Stephens said. Increasing type size is one way of doing this.

“People are turned off by too much copy on a page. It looks difficult; it looks too hard. The average readers want some air; they want white space.”

Print publications do face vast competition for readers’ attention, but there is every indication that carefully executed publications will continue to be an important part of the landscape. If your readers believe you have something valuable to offer, they’ll be willing to check it out.

From there, it’s up to you to use every tool at your disposal to keep their attention. 



One on one

JPA profile: John Weaver, pressman, bindery operator and maintenance

Number of years with JPA: 20 years (8 years in his current roles)



John Weaver

Why he loves JPA: “I like working with all of the people I work with,” Weaver said. “I learn from them all every day.” Weaver also appreciates the opportunities JPA has given him to learn and grow in his job over the years.

Family life: Weaver and his wife, Wendy, have been married for 16 years. Wendy works, too, and is a secretary. The couple has one son, 14-year-old JW.

“We love camping,” Weaver said. “We go camping every week when the weather is good.” The family also loves animals and currently has two dogs, a cat and a rabbit. JW, who will be starting

high school this year, enjoys playing basketball.



Wendy, JW and John Weaver

Hobbies: “I like working on and rebuilding old muscle cars and motorcycles,” Weaver said. And camping, as he mentioned, ranks high on the list as well. He and his family belong to a camping club and recently

purchased a camper. Weaver doesn’t necessarily have a favorite camping location. He likes secluded spots, campsites near water, wooded areas — you name it. “Wherever I can get away from the hustle and bustle, that works for me.”

One cool fact: Weaver wouldn’t say he has a cool fact about himself; he has more of a cool discovery about life. “You never stop learning,” he said. “Every day I learn something new.” He said he didn’t really feel that way when he married Wendy and started a family. “I learned a lot by raising my son and being married. There are a lot of things I thought I knew that I didn’t really know.”

Quote of the Month

“Never give up on what you really want to do. The person with big dreams is more powerful than one with all the facts.”

— *Life’s Little Instruction Book* by H. Jackson Brown Jr.



Johnson Press of America
800 N. Court St.
P.O. Box 592
Pontiac, IL 61764

RECIPE

Pasta with sausage

4 cups dry pasta
12 ounces uncooked Italian sausage
2 medium red bell peppers, cut up
½ cup broth (beef, vegetable or chicken)
¼ teaspoon ground pepper

Cook the pasta according to the directions and then drain it. Next, return the pasta to the saucepan and cover it to keep it warm. Cut the sausage into bite-sized pieces, and then brown it over medium-high heat in a large skillet with the red bell peppers. Next, stir in the broth and the ground pepper, and bring the mixture to a boil. Simmer, uncovered, for 5 minutes, and then pour over the pasta.

Johnson Press of America For quotes, please contact:

Duane Carrell

815.844.5161, ext. 235 or 217.341.1305 (cell)
duanecarrell@jpapontiac.com

Jill Rambo

815.844.5161, ext. 234
jrambo@jpapontiac.com

Randy Pennington

815.844.5161, ext. 237
rpennington@jpapontiac.com