

- How the magazine is promoted.
- Its personality in terms of content and packaging.
- Values of editorial quality, advertisers and strategic partners.

Alignment of those four dimensions is crucial when building a sustainable brand. As well as having an identity, a brand must create a need in the consumer. This enables the publisher to set a clear path for the magazine's financial future.

Building your brand

When developing a magazine, it is necessary to think of it as a brand, building content around a central ethos, with the title's identity at the core. Branding is reflected in:

- **A magazine's core values** – reflects its ethical boundaries, moral obligations to readers, and value of the content.
- **Cover price** – is your product high- or low-end, where does it fall in terms of audience classification, ABC1 or DE?
- **Design** – achieving a consistent house-style in print, digital and online.
- **USP** – needs to align your product's perceived ideals with its core values.
- **Promotion** – must reflect your title's identity in style and tone.
- **Advertising/sponsorship** – all advertisements and strategic partners need to match the product's core values.

Katy Dunn, editor of *Hinge* magazine, has worked on numerous publications including *Grand Designs Magazine*. For her, branding is about consistency, 'people need to know where your magazine stands' and the trust, which comes from consistency and knowing your audience. 'Be everywhere, do social media, online, and blogging. Be recognized for doing one thing well, rather than lots of things averagely.'

A publisher must define core pillars before developing the concept. Aligning these values and ensuring they set the standard for content and design is the first step towards building trust and a good reputation. This needs to be reflected in the title's name to form the basis of your brand's identity both for readers and advertisers. Remember brands are all about trust and reputation.

Examples of iconic, trusted British magazines include *Radio Times*, *Reader's Digest* and *Good Housekeeping*, whereas global-brand counterparts – recognized around the world – are *National Geographic*, *Time* and *Vogue*. All have values, which translates as trusted content.

CASE STUDY – RADIO TIMES

Despite currently facing competition from numerous rivals on the news-stands, the *Radio Times*, launched in 1923, has built a reputation for providing trusted content on TV, radio and film. It is a brand readers rely on. According to the latest figures from BRAD, it is read by more than two million people, with an average print circulation of 865,562 per issue and a ratio of 52:48 female/male ABC1 readers. While the *Radio Times* has a strong circulation today this figure is far below its peak – before the advent of the *TVTimes* and other similar publications – when the circulation was around eight million copies a week.

Its BRAD profile describes the publication as 'A premium guide for multi-channel listings with in-depth coverage of the best on TV, radio and film' (2013). Households across the UK regard the magazine as being the definitive guide to weekly TV and radio programmes. Trust is central to its identity.

To reinforce the brand's values, the title publishes The *Radio Times* Promise in every issue: '*Radio Times* provides trusted, independent journalism that has been gathered without fear or favour from television, radio and entertainment companies. We cherish our editorial integrity and independence as we strive to give you accurate and discerning guidance to the very best of broadcasting and film.' This further demonstrates the value of setting out clear brand values and ensuring these align with content. It is this strategy that has made the *Radio Times* both popular and sustainable, despite fierce competition in a tough economic market.

Visual aspects of branding

Magazines must stand out from competitors by having a unique identity. This starts with the masthead (your magazine's title). It needs to be distinctive and instantly recognizable from 10 feet – the distance a shopper might be from the shelves in a shop or supermarket. Below (Figure 6.1) are three iconic covers, where the masthead is instantly recognizable even if the rest of the cover is concealed.

Each cover has a clear identity – in terms of the masthead and cover layout. However, it is essential to recognize the differences between issues of a magazine, so the cover looks fresh and vibrant every time. For example if you



Figure 6.1 a) Writer's Digest June cover, b) Reader's Digest cover, c) Oldie cover



Figure 6.2 a) *Writer's Digest Feb cover*, b) *Writer's Digest June cover*

were to compare the February and June 2012 covers of *Writer's Digest* magazine (Figure 6.2), they would be the same, but different.

Both covers have the same masthead in a banner across the top, then a central image that takes up three quarters of the page and is right aligned. The cover lines also follow a consistent style on every issue. The differences are subtle, but sufficiently distinctive for each issue to be unique.

Visual branding is about ensuring that a magazine cover stands out. Consumer and specialist publications need covers that make a sales impact, where numerous titles within a subject are competing for readers. Today it is as much about selling a brand as it is about content. To achieve a clear identity a cover needs:

- **A strong masthead** – title of the magazine that is recognizable away from the cover.
- **To be busy** – which gives a perceived content value.
- **Have distinctive haptics** – how the magazine looks and feels in terms of paper, layout and house-style.
- **Buy-me cover lines** – such as 'how to . . .' which create a need within the reader.

- **A strong sell** – an overall feeling that the title is designed specifically for individuals.

For B2B publications or subscription-only titles there is less emphasis on covers. Because there are no sales within a retail environment it does not need to be part of the business model. However, it is crucial that branding – in terms of consistency in cover design – is apparent, even if it does not have to define the product.

This needs to be consistent across all products – print, digital, online and social media outputs. For example, do headings in the title's digital pages reflect the style of those in the print format? What about panels – are they boxed out or shaded? How are pull – or drop-in – quotes defined? Will feature layouts keep to the same grids – across two or three columns and will this differ with each section? Also little stylized symbols such as putting an icon at the end of each article/story to signify the end can make a big impact and should be unique to your title.

Visual branding applies to everything connected to the publication – this includes:

- **Masthead** – when used anywhere such as apps, subscription adverts, newsletters, press releases, correspondence, email signatures and social media content must be the same as it appears on your magazine cover reinforcing the title's identity.
- **Online identities** – this must be publicized as much as possible. Make sure that your Facebook, Twitter, other social media accounts and website addresses appear on staff email signatures, inside the magazine, on all correspondence and online.
- **House-style** – this must be consistent in the layout and contents applying to print and digital products, apps, website and e-newsletters. Don't forget to include small icons such as symbols unique to your title's content.

Remember consistency is paramount. Staff must be directed to observe visual brand concepts as well as the values. Style guides need to be set up to reflect this, everyone in the company must have a copy and adhere to it.

Editorial consistency

Once a visual identity has been established, the format for content takes shape. One of the first jobs is to define key editorial pillars, or themes on