

Marieke van der Donk (PricewaterhouseCoopers)

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Production of premium content, channel management and Customer Relationship Management: these are the core competences which will enable magazine publishers to survive the attention of consumers being sidetracked and the declining advertising market, says PricewaterhouseCoopers media expert Marieke van der Donk.

“I’m convinced that there will always be a market for print magazines. It is a ‘lean back’ medium: leisurely browsing through them on the beach is just so much more pleasant with paper. Even though consumers told us in the research we undertook (‘The medium is the message’, the Outlook for Magazine Publishing in the digital age in the Netherlands) that they would expect to spend less time on printed magazines if a good e-reader or e-paper that’s pleasant to read came on the market. It is vital for magazine publishers to embrace these developments, and pay extra attention to subjects and target groups that create the greatest online activity.

What we know for sure is that consumers’ attention has been fragmenting for years. As well as magazines, people have been increasingly amusing themselves with online content – on their computer at work, with their laptop on the sofa, or with their smart phone while travelling. In order to survive, magazine publishers will have to find ways to serve premium content to their consumers in all these channels.”

“One of the characteristics of a good magazine is that it gives its readers the impression that they are members of a club. Brands such as Playboy, Margriet and Donald Duck evoke associations with a well-defined type of consumer. It’s important for publishers to maintain their close connection with their target group, without forgetting that the rules for operating effectively in the online world are totally different from those that apply to print. Posting content on the web directly as it was in print for example, such as we saw in the early years of the Internet, simply doesn’t work.”

“The trick is to achieve a top position in every channel. Vertical portals with a dedicated focus on the target group can be a good medium in this respect. Look for instance at how publishers Sanoma serve their female target group: vrouwonline.nl as a web portal with recipes, horoscopes, a web shop, a forum, and links to the websites of their print titles, such as Libelle, Flair and Cosmopolitan. And they also

reinforce the visibility of their brands through events such as the Libelle Summer Week and the Margriet Winter Fair.”

“In addition to the attention of the consumer being sidetracked, declining advertising income is another threat the sector faces. We don’t expect a recovery in the advertising market until 2011, and even then it will slight, and still under the 2008 level. And at the same time, advertisers are making greater demands than ever. If a publisher can’t demonstrate to advertisers exactly which audience they are reaching and what their return on investment is likely to be, they will find another that can. Vrouwonline.nl is highly valued by advertisers as they can be told details such as which people have downloaded the most recent fish recipe. So CRM databases are as vital as the content. Moreover, advertisers want to ensure their messages are put into the limelight across all the media, to maximise their impact. Publishers who can manage all channels effectively and who know who they are reaching will get the biggest slice of the advertising pie.”