

Newspaper Supplements - Papers take on magazines for advertising share

Specialist glossy supplements, devoted to a single interest, are flavour of the month among weekend newspapers locked in a battle for readers. The Daily Telegraph's biannual food magazine, planned to launch in November, is the latest from its magazines division, which earlier this year published a men's fashion title in addition to occasional guides to travel, style and luxury goods.

With specialist consumer mags struggling to find shelf space on crowded news-stands, the quality press has made a land grab on their territory.

By capitalising on Saturday morning TV cookery shows, The Daily Telegraph hopes to vie with the established Observer Food Monthly for ad revenues. The Observer now comes with a themed supplement with every issue, while the Financial Times' How To Spend It publishes about 20 editions a year. The Independent has experimented with both a music mag on Fridays and a photography supplement.

Yet there are questions over the commercial motive for many of these launches? Are they simply circulation builders, attracting floating readers to purchase the newspaper, or are they profitable in their own right, luring new advertising to the paper?

Newspapers claim they build circulation. The Observer says supplements can boost circulation by up to 20,000 copies, while The Daily Telegraph says its occasional specials generate uplifts of around 7%, with modest retention in subsequent weeks. The downside is they risk advertisers moving their existing campaigns from the paper into the supplements.

Attracting advertisers

Both the FT and The Observer claim to have widened their advertiser bases. Marc Sands, Guardian Newspapers marketing director, says brands such as Becks, Gatorade and Smeg fridges, who barely had The Observer on their radar before, have advertised in Observer Sport Monthly, which has also run a photo special sponsored by Mercedes.

Dominique Moseley, head of magazines at the FT, says luxury brands have come to the paper via How To Spend It, while existing advertisers now run more brand-focused ads in the Saturday supplement after tactical weekday campaigns to generate footfall in stores over the weekend.

Despite a plethora of food mags and coverage within newspaper sections, Rory Bett, magazines sales director at the Telegraph Group, is confident that food is a subject with room to grow ads. "It's a massive growth category, with revenues up 87% in the past two years. There are more products being talked about, which means more potential for ads, and more need for editorial."

But glossy supplements do not come cheap. Advertisers use them to reach a broader audience than consumer magazine readers, although they admit it is unclear what proportion of each newspaper's readers actually read them.

The relatively high cost often limits frequency, yet they need to appear regularly to generate continuity of readership. This is a dilemma for the Telegraph and others. Since the FT launched How To Spend It as a monthly 12 years ago, only The Observer has taken up the monthly mantle.

Timing a supplement to coincide with an expected peak in advertising is one thing. Convincing advertisers it will provide more than a brief circulation boost is another. This at a time when consumer magazine publishers are increasingly looking at weekly launches, rather than monthlies.

As one press director puts it: "Anything less than a monthly is disastrous, because no one's expecting them." Marc Sands agrees: "The problem with producing supplements twice a year, as we've done with technology and travel, is that they don't generate advertiser loyalty." But given the cost involved, he is not surprised that papers are reluctant to commit to a monthly frequency.

Publishers unperturbed

Meanwhile, publishers of consumer specialist titles profess to be unconcerned by the competition from newspapers. "Given the interest in food, I'm amazed more weekend newspapers don't have spin-off magazines, and we will see more of them," says William Sitwell, editor of

Waitrose Food Illustrated. "But this seems like a slightly half-hearted attempt [by the Telegraph] to get a foothold in this area."

Seamus Geoghegan, MD of Seven Publishing, which publishes Delicious, is more circumspect. "I don't see Observer Food Monthly as a threat because, editorially, it's earned its place - it's less practical than other food titles and more challenging and investigative. But the Telegraph's 'Middle England' readers are closer to those of existing consumer titles and, hence, it is a threat on advertising."

He expects the Telegraph will next look at its other Saturday strengths, specifically gardening. "Everyone's having to dig deeply at the moment and any threat from a newspaper is to be taken seriously."

SPECIAL SUPPLEMENTS

THE OBSERVER

Sport, Food, Music, Women - monthly

Property - five times a year

Travel - twice a year

Technology - twice a year

THE TELEGRAPH GROUP

Travel - four times a year

Fashion - twice a year

Food - twice a year from November

Luxury - annual

THE INDEPENDENT

Music - launched earlier this year, two produced so far

Occasional specials including recent three-part photography supplement

FINANCIAL TIMES

How To Spend It - monthly luxury goods, with occasional further specials.

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