

Entertaining and informative customer magazines? A likely story!

Think about the last time you were in an airport. How many people around you were reading product or company brochures? Not many, most likely. What about magazines? Probably more of them. You see, people are still willing to invest their time in reading, and not just with slick fashion publications. In fact, *Financial Times Deutschland* reports that readers spend up to 25 minutes reading customer magazines. So if you're thinking about publishing one – or already have one – it's worth asking what makes a compelling magazine.

Find the story behind the facts. If readers wanted quick facts, they'd be satisfied with bullet points. Want your brand to engage and inspire readers? Then dig for the story behind the facts. In fact, you can work with stories on two levels: i) an overarching theme ii) in-depth reports to explore different avenues of that theme. *Networking Views*, AT&T's customer magazine for enterprises, illustrates this approach nicely. The first edition, for example, spotlights security, network safety, and compliance. Since the cover broadcasts this information, readers decide if they'd like to learn more or skip the issue entirely. At the second level of storytelling, *Networking Views* features articles on real-time business, early warning systems, continuity planning – it even includes a section called "The Vocabulary of Security." What do readers walk away with? Useful information on the challenges they face, in a meaningful and engaging context.

Produce one magazine for each target group. As you'll know from creating brochures, different people have different priorities. So why not apply that thinking to magazines – just like Royal Mail did. The UK delivery company developed a suite of three magazines, *Contact*, *Smart*, and *Sort It*, each designed to speak to distinct groups

"in the way they're ready to hear," says Redwood, the agency in charge. *Contact* addresses senior marketers in blue-chip companies; *Smart* offers words of wisdom to entrepreneurs looking to grow their business; *Sort It* targets personal assistants and mailroom managers. The common denominator? Carefully crafted messages for each group to take advantage of Royal Mail insight and services.

Speak to international audiences. Your company's location might be inextricably linked to your brand's story or assets – an excellent opportunity to say something genuinely original. Take Hewlett-Packard's initiative to restore Bill Hewlett and Dave Packard's house, shed, and garage in Palo Alto – the website claims the structure is "the birthplace of Silicon Valley." As well as giving visitors a sense of the geography, this reference also helps them grasp the bigger HP picture. But what if it isn't Palo Alto but Bad Woistdasdenn? Give your readers a guided tour of the area. Remember: international audiences aren't as familiar with Germany as you are. What makes the place special? Why was it chosen over other locations? How does the site have an impact on the industry? Before playing up the geography, subject your location to the "so what" test. If you can't provide a strong answer, don't put your location center stage.

Overall then, ask yourself: what would you want to read? A product guide rewritten as an editorial or literature that offers you real value – useful information and key insights into your business sector? The right content will transform your magazine from a lengthy update on your company into essential reading. Next time you're at the airport, you just might spot someone reading your customer magazine.