

Online Cover Testing

Your Path to Newsstand Sales Success

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The marriage of online cover testing with audience can help to make the best cover possible, while giving you valuable information on the demographic and sociographic information of your passionate reader.

Your Cover

Your cover is your greatest sales tool on the newsstand and the biggest element influencing sale. Because our industry relies so heavily on impulse purchasing it is imperative to produce covers that appeal to your audience. Without the consumer first becoming aware of your magazine, they cannot transition to a purchase action. A good cover will make your magazine shine on the newsstand. A bad cover can wreck your sales. So, how can you ensure that you are producing the best cover possible for your audience?

Traditional Analysis

Great cover design is the marriage of art and science. While many people have tried to determine what works best for their publication the answer is not always clear. Companies have invested heavily in myriad analyses, in print testing, and in countless hours with executive teams trying to uncover the secret of a great cover. A magazine may analyze issue sales by indexing and identifying what consistently works, as well as new elements that are successful. There are also practical, time-tested methods to enhance your cover design, but remember that what works for one publication may not work for another. Each audience is different: attracted by different designs, typefaces, white space, color schemes, illustrations/photos. To gain greater understanding about what your reader

desires, online cover testing proves to be a formidable tool.

Additional Analysis: Online Cover Testing

Online cover testing is the process of asking your audience their opinions about the best possible cover choices through online surveys. What better way to find out what your audience wants than by asking them? The process is simple. Through a series of cover choices, you can uncover (no pun intended) the cover they like best. Not only does online cover testing provide you answers to a variety of questions on cover design, it also allows you to connect with your reader. Your audience will love to be asked their opinion. In fact, an overlooked benefit is that it builds a greater sense of community and involvement with your brand. Your readers feel empowered leading to a greater sense of loyalty. Amazingly, we also discovered that when we asked people about demographic and sociographic information they happily obliged.

5 Steps to Online Testing Process:

1. Prepare / Brainstorm

We recommend two meetings between circulation, art, and editorial teams to lead the brainstorming through sample selection, design and execution phases. The circulation team can provide the sample selection (email addresses for testing, if possible newsstand readers who subscribed) and brainstorm with the art and editorial team regarding what elements are best to test, for example, discuss what design elements have created good sales results and how

these can be incorporated into tests. Figure out the timing of when the test will be undertaken.

2. Create

Create “recipe sheets” defining the cover variations for the design team. Once that’s done it’s time to develop a test strategy, create the email promotions to send out, and decide upon the universe of potential panelists.

Your audience can be selected from your subscription file (print plus digital), website and newsletter sign-ups. In tests we have conducted, response has varied from 4-20%, with response from online sources like newsletter sign-ups normally slightly higher than print subscribers response. Interestingly, we have found no significant variance in response from any source. For example, people that initially came directly from the newsstand did not respond differently to questions than people who came from direct mail. Respondents have proved very willing to answer a few demographic questions in the course of the survey and this information can prove invaluable to your sales and advertising team.

3. Execute

In the brainstorming section, you will need to make sure your art department is on board and is given sufficient time to develop the tests. Work with the art department to provide them with clear guidelines for what you’d like those tests to be. This is imperative, because you’re asking more of the art department and art director.

Send the survey out, and within 72 hours or less, you’ll be able to move to step 4.

4. Analyze

Look over the data, make sure it's clean, and the fun begins. Slice and dice as you like, and you'll be amazed at the amount of information that can be gleaned from a single online cover test. The information grows as you do more cover tests and can compare responses over time and covers.

5. Findings

Present the findings in the most visually appealing way that you can. The first time you do this, your team will be surprised not only at the clarity of the answers (if done right, you'll almost always come up with a clear winner on the cover), but also at the amount and passion of the comments if you have an open-ended question.

One publisher experienced a 70% increase in sell through or sale across 13 titles during a 12-month test period. Another witnessed a 15% lift in sale in Barnes and Noble and Wal-mart in reported POS over the previous year. Other companies that engage in online cover testing have reported similar results.

Elements to Test:

- Different images with the same cover lines
- Two covers with the same image but different cover lines
- Starburst vs. no starburst etc.
- Skylines
- Color of logo
- Coverline Matrix

Tips We've Learned:

- Watch out for list fatigue. If your subscriber email list is large enough, split it up.
- Keep it simple, and don't offer too many options.
- Keep demographic or socio-graphic questions at the end of the survey.
- Make your tests meaningful—don't test something just because you can.
- Sending the survey on Fridays produce the best response rate.

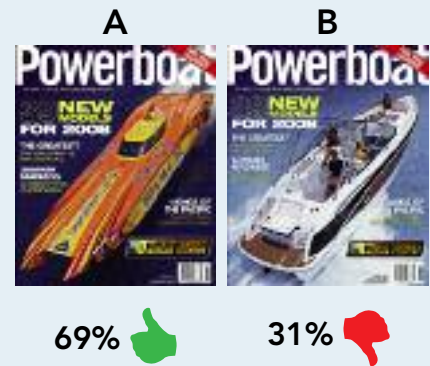
Examples of Feedback from Participants

"I think it's great that you ask your readers' opinions!"

"I thought this new process was better at soliciting my opinions than previous."

"The cover test made me feel more a part of this wonderful magazine."

Survey Says:



What's wanted...

SEEKING
Frustrated retailer seeks consultant that will make RDA collections easy. Only experts in customer service need apply. 30+ years of magazine retail marketing experience a must!

MAGAZINE PUBLISHER SEEKING PROMOTIONAL OPPORTUNITIES IN KEY U.S. MARKETS
Must offer high visibility & accommodate various budgets. Markets should include:
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CHICAGO
ORLANDO
LAS VEGAS
and more...

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