

Branching out: what brand extensions do for magazines

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Brand extensions are important seedlings for grown in the magazine industry. Photo credit: Adobe stock images

The magazine industry is a revolution. Titles are being leveraged for their brand value to secure a stake in the newstand of the future. This blog examines how brand extensions provide a framework and revenue their publications.

Cast your eyes down a report produced by the industry auditor [ABC](#) for numbers of printed magazines sold in the UK and you'll see a column of minus signs against the runners and riders of the magazine industry.

What is not represented in this dataset is the evolutionary arms race the magazine industry is engaged in. Brand extension is a marketing tool adopted by the publishing industry to retain and diversify audiences to sustain their market share.

So what is brand extension?

Brand extension uses the reputation and quality of an established brand to create a product for a new audience. According to Mary [Hogarth](#), an expert on the magazine industry, brand extensions work best when a magazine, perceived to be a trusted authority, aligns itself with a product, goods or services that further reinforce its identity.

Taking the National Geographic as an example of a trusted and reliable voice of geography and nature. This publication has through journalism, integrity and relationships extended its brand into the travel industry. National Geographic

Expeditions was born in 1999 distinguishing itself as offering expertly guided tours for which it has become recipient of travel industry awards.



Diversification reaches other revenue streams at a price

Vogue sells itself as a lifestyle and the authority in fashion culture. Photo credit: Adobe Stock images

A conglomerate of magazine branding extension is Vogue. It tells potential advertisers that it is the “definer of the culture of fashion”. This a brand that is stating it is imperious in its area of expertise which goes beyond fashion, it is a vogue way of life.

From its website you can shop with Vogue, watch celebrity interviews from the infamous Met Gala, have a make-up tutorial, submit photos to an online gallery or join Vogue club and this is even before you dip into social media, YouTube or touch a print magazine.

It would be hard for any competitor to keep up with the sheer volume of content. It is through these extensions Vogue is able to reach new audiences and reinforce its overall image. It offers so much authoritative content why would you bother looking anywhere else?

This diversification and authoritarianism comes at a cost. The publisher of British Vogue, Condé Nast, announced a reduction of £15m in pre-tax UK profits between 2022 and 2023. Condé Nast attributed its reduction in profits to continued investment in “strategic growth areas” and acknowledges its operating costs have increased. These include low percentage rises in commercial and editorial headcounts.

Using brand extension for future proofing



*From a hat makers publication to making money in the digital space The Economist Newspaper is flying.
Photo credit: Adobe Stock images*

There was a time in history when the reader had to pay for news, especially in the print media. So how does a news brand encourage young consumers to pay for news when they are used to obtaining it for free via a smartphone? This was a problem the Economist was trying to tackle with the launch of the Economist Espresso in 2014.

The Economist has extended its brand as a consistent and trusted source of news to create a compact daily news product designed to be read quickly. The Espresso contains five short news stories, quizzes and a few long form articles.

This brand extension is an the exception to the Economist's content as it became free in July 2024. The Economist has gambled that the adoption of reading the Espresso as a student will translate into paid subscriptions to the Economist in later life.

Along with other magazine brands the Economist has recognised podcasts as the ideal accompaniment to alleviating the tedium of every day chores as well as another revenue stream. Through its podcast only subscription The Economist has come to understand the podcast is listened to by a younger and more female audience when compared to its existing customers.

Making digital pay

The Economist which began life in 1843 as a newspaper produced by a Scottish hat manufacturer promoting free trade is now a serious publication that has been steadfast in monetising its brand to make digital content pay for the last 25 years.

Using ABC data from 2024 the average circulation of paid subscriptions for the digital Economist was 970k, over a 100% of its print version of 450k in the same period. In 2024 on average there were nearly 8.8m potential contacts per issue with the brand as either traffic to a website or via social media.



The brand is proud of its high quality digital journalism and sees itself as a digital first business. This is not a brand that is trying to hold onto its print publication but is proud to showcase that 86% of subscribers acquired in 2024 signed up to the digital Economist. It is brand that has successfully migrated into the digital economy.

Diversity of consumer contact with the Economist Newspaper brand in 2024. Source: ABC data

Organic brand extensions

Sometimes brand extensions originate organically from a publication. What began as a lonely hearts column in the Guardian newspaper's noticeboard evolved into the Guardian's Soulmates website in 2004. The Guardian's brand served as a signpost to a reader where they might meet a like-minded reader with a similar political leaning. The site closed in 2020 due the presence of online dating apps but continues to offer the Guardian editorial content from the couples who met on the site.

Organic brand extension is a benefit to smaller publications. Women's Running magazine estimates it has a readership of around 20k. The editor, Ester Newman, describes the printed copy as the "heartbeat" of the publication and more formal when compared to its podcast.

The podcast has evolved from podcast about running to a women's podcast as the audience likes the development of the female friendship between Newman and her

colleague. The success of the podcast draws revenue from three streams – sponsored content, Acast advertising and Patreon membership.



So how does Newman know this? Feedback about the podcast has been given from the audience through live Zoom events through the digital forum platform, Discord.

Newman says Discord is vital in providing a safe place for women to find camaraderie. It builds a sense of community with conversation rather than through spats that social media commenting can result in.

It also conveniently serves as focus group. It is through Discord and in-person events that Newman and her team are able to gauge and acknowledge the diversity of people in contact with the brand.

Brand extension can be a distraction from a publication's identity

In January 2022 Josh Wardle, a Welsh software engineer became a rich man having sold an online word puzzle game, a pun of his own name, to the New York Times games division for an undisclosed seven figure sum. The NYT is famous for its crosswords consequently the acquisition of Wordle would be seen as a good fit for the brand.

This purchase was not without criticism. Seth [Godin](#), author and marketer, argued in his blog that the acquisition of Wordle by the NYT changed the brand into a casual gaming company with a small news division.

The gray lady newspaper however is grateful for the millions of pairs of eyes who were drawn to it games site due to Wordle. It resulted in the best quarter for the games site and overall digital subscriptions to the newspaper continued grow during 2022. It seems that for the NYT Wordle does not appeared to have surpassed its brand.

Conclusion

The playing field of brand extensions is diverse but there is approaching a time when the market is saturated with podcasts and social media feeds become more curated. Technology offers more options for brand but will continue to diversify consumers into different groups by age and platforms they find appealing. No matter how many extensions a brand creates it all hangs on a publication's identity and its clarity of editorial voice. This is not new.

