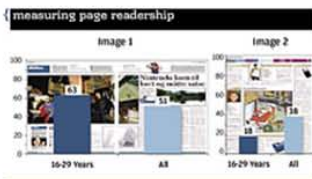


Why Let Young Readers Slip Away?

By Johan Wilberg

Anyone who has attended a newspaper conference in recent years has considered where newspapers stand today on the issue of retaining and recruiting young readers. It is certainly true that the traditional print newspaper has lost some young readers. But were there really that many before?



Be that as it may, the newspaper brand should make sure to convey the right message to young readers as they consume their print and online products because chances are that they will return to the newspaper brand as they mature.

Consider this case from the Norwegian regional daily, Stavanger Aftenblad. Using their online reader panel for an extensive RAM page traffic survey sheds some light on how a newspaper is consumed. Not as an average over time, but on this particular Saturday.

Stavanger Aftenblad has one segment within the newspaper aimed at a younger readership — the last four pages of the third section. This is material specifically created for a young crowd.

Image 1 below is from the first section where young readers scored higher than "all readers" (incidentally an article about gaming). Image 2 is the last page in section 3. Here, young readers seem less than keen and the page is actually read to a much higher degree by "all readers."

Apart from the fact that it is hard to write interesting articles for young readers, what does this tell us? It is essential to get it correct if you want to be read by the young. If not, don't bother. Young readers, albeit a relatively small part of the readership, seem to follow the more mature readers as they work their way through the entire 160 pages of sections 1-3 of the newspaper. Occasionally, they score somewhat lower here and there. These sudden incidents of disinterest are to be reckoned with, but the last pages in section 1 (sports) are well read by the young. But this is nothing compared to the reading of section 3, where the young readers seem to have found something of interest.

A closer look at the survey results from section 3 indicates that the younger readers were more interested in section 3 than any other reader group, with scores up to 30%-40% higher than "all readers." This section basically consists of two things: travel articles and job ads.

As long as we can get young readers to open a newspaper, there are indications that sports, travel, and job ads will contribute to keeping them reading. According to Naveed Ashraf, chief analyst at Stavanger Aftenblad, it is not necessary to keep throwing editorial content written in a "Donald Duck-style" at the young readers. Rather, they will read if you write about things they can relate to in an appealing format consisting of pictures and several "entry points" to the article.

But what about the things that newspapers don't write about? Should they be included or moved to spin-off weekend magazines or be available online? It is perhaps worth keeping in mind that the alienation of mature readers would be much more devastating to a newspaper than lack of interest from the young.

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