

LAUNCHING A SUCCESSFUL CUSTOM MEDIA PROGRAM

Custom Media, parts of which are known as custom publishing, is now considered an integral part of any marketer's overall marketing program. This paper contains information a marketer can use as a reference to launching a successful custom media program.

A white paper from



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WHAT IS CUSTOM MEDIA?

Custom media, also known as custom publishing or custom communications, refers to the delivery of editorial content from a sponsoring company to a target audience, whether internal or external. Whether delivered in print, electronically or as a live event, a custom media program provides intrinsically valuable information and interactions that moves the perceptions and behavior of the audience in a desired direction.

definition supported by the ABM's Custom Media Committee and derived from the Custom Publishing Council's definition of custom publishing

HOW ARE CUSTOM MEDIA AND CUSTOM PUBLISHING DIFFERENT?

There is not much difference between the two. Basically, custom publishing focuses on targeted print and electronic initiatives, while custom media's definition is more expansive, and includes in-person vehicles such as targeted roadshows and online vehicles such as web seminars and webcasts.

In the past, custom media was associated almost exclusively with print magazines. Now, thanks to advances in technology and database marketing, custom programs are being offered in many formats, including the following:

- Corporate magazines and brand magazines
- Print and email newsletters
- Directories
- Magalogs
- Show Dailies and other event-related coverage

- Advertorials and supplements
- Case studies
- Annual Reports
- Tip sheets, informational pamphlets and other reference material
- White papers and monographs
- Print books and e-books
- Webcasts and webinars
- Web portals
- Custom events and road shows
- Wall media
- Audio and video media (i.e., CD-roms, DVDs, Kiosks, etc.)

CUSTOM MEDIA TRENDS

The Custom Publishing Council and Publications Management recently released their custom publishing spending survey. They found:

- The average company now produces 2.2 independent custom publications.
- Average frequency is up to 8.7x per year, up from 6.3x in 2002.
- Average distribution is approximately 36,000.
- The total number of custom publications in North America is 108,000.
- 51% of custom titles target customers and prospects. 49% target employees.
- Custom magazines are now 32% of all custom formats, up from 23% in 1999.
- The industry is now valued at \$35.5 billion, up 5.6 billion over 2003, making it the Eighth-largest media sector, ahead of consumer magazines, radio and outdoor.

CUSTOM PUBLISHING FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. WHY SHOULD I CONSIDER DOING A CUSTOM PUBLICATION?

Some of today's most successful marketers have embraced custom media as a part of their highly targeted efforts to reach and influence their customer base. Custom media cuts through the clutter and delivers a message your customers want to hear.

Custom publications, *whether print or digital*, not only deliver messages about your company, products, and brand, but open and maintain a consistent dialogue with your customers. Custom publications give valuable information to your customers—information that makes their jobs and lives easier. You are doing more than selling to them—you *are building a relationship with them*.

Custom publications will:

- Separate your brand from your competitors
- Communicate what you are selling
- Retain and reward your best customers
- Create customers out of prospects
- Reach your target market
- Fully utilize your customer information
- Educate and share your industry knowledge
- Integrate your marketing efforts

- Explain a complex technology or product
- Provide customer/member value
- Position your company as an industry leader

2. WHERE DO I START?

Once you understand why you should consider a custom publication (see # 1) and you decide this is an avenue you must explore, your first step is to define your company goals. Why do you feel *your* company should have one? What do you want the custom publication to accomplish *specifically*? How do you feel a custom publication can best accomplish your goals—do you want a print and web presence? Who will be your team leader to research the concept and interview publishers? When do you want your launch to occur? Once you define your goals, objectives and basic logistics, you can proceed with an intelligent search for a publishing/media partner.

Some of the best resources available to help you familiarize yourself with the concept of custom publishing/media include the ABM Custom Media web site <http://www.abmcustommedia.com> and the Custom Publishing Council <http://www.custompublishingcouncil.com>. Information available in these two resources will put you well on your way to developing the right questions to ask and issues to cover when selecting your publishing/media partner.

3. WHAT SHOULD I LOOK FOR IN SELECTING A PUBLISHER?

Finding a publisher to suit your needs and goals takes some legwork. With your needs and goals defined, you are ready to interview potential publishing/media partners from an informed, focused perspective.

Shop publishers: You'll want to check publisher web sites to get a feel for what services they provide. Some companies want to deal with publishers whose expertise is in specific market(s) so their partnership allows for a more collaborative approach to developing editorial content. Others are looking primarily for an expert in publishing because the client will be a more active participant in the development of their editorial content.

Use the ABM Member Directory of custom publishers to get a solid start: (<http://www.abmcustommedia.com>) You can access information on a large pool of BtoB publishers all in one spot and the searchable directory makes it easy to find a publisher based on the products and capabilities you are looking for.

Check on a publisher's reputation: Contact companies already doing custom publications and tap them for their experience with specific publishers. Publisher web sites list the publications they produce so contacting their customers will not be difficult. You can make blind reference calls before you speak with specific publishers or wait until you speak with a few publishers and then talk with some of their customers. It's really a matter of your own personal choice which approach you take.

Publisher's expertise: Isolate publishers based on their particular expertise as they relate to your needs. For example, some may provide more robust web services than others. If the web looms large in your needs and goals, you can narrow your search based on that.

Logistical issues: Does location make a difference to you? Are you comfortable with conference call meetings and occasional face-to-face meetings or do you feel you want your publishing partner to be readily available for more one-on-one meetings? Is there a person(s) on your staff who can take on the role of liaison with the publisher without adversely affecting your existing operations? Don't forget to make sure your house is in order to handle the coordination efforts between you and your publishing partner.

4. HOW DO I DECIDE WHAT SHOULD GO INTO MY PUBLICATION?

First, decide the purpose of your publication. Some ways companies have used custom media include:

- Building and/or creating brand awareness
- Building customer loyalty
- Acquiring new customers
- Boosting sales from existing customers
- Changing perceptions

Once you have your objective, you need to identify your customers:

- Are they local, regional or national?
- What are their demographics?
- What do they have in common?

After you've identified your customers, you need to create editorial that serves both your objective and target audience. Whether you want to produce print or electronic products, your custom publisher can help you identify the type of editorial and graphics that would best accomplish your goals.

5. HOW MUCH IS IT GOING TO COST ME TO DO MY OWN PUBLICATION?

The cost of a custom media project can vary greatly. Custom communication vehicles can take the form of a variety of media—print publications, web sites, e-newsletters, web casts, etc.

These variables mean that the cost of a custom program can vary greatly—from as little as \$5,000 to \$1,000,000 or more. However, because every program is tailored to the buyer's specifications, the buyer has the advantage of being able to control the spending with great precision. Remember, this is your custom product.

There are some costs that are common to most all custom media projects. Let's take a look at the key areas that determine cost. Keep in mind, costs for print products vs. web products will differ. For example, if you are producing a print publication, you have a printing cost but for e-publications you'll have hosting costs. They can differ significantly. Key cost areas include:

- **Circulation.** This is the actual number of copies you print. The more you print, the more it will cost but the per unit cost should be less.

- **Editorial.** Will you be providing the content or will that need to be provided by your custom publisher? Be sure to develop content that may be used in other formats, such as on the Web or as article reprints.
- **Frequency.** This is number of different issues you produce in a year. Depending upon the page count, a magazine that comes out twelve times a year will cost more than a magazine that comes out quarterly, or four times a year.
- **Page Count.** This is actual number of pages included in the magazine. A hundred page magazine costs more than a twenty four-page magazine.
- **Distribution.** How will you deliver the magazine? Mailed to individuals will cost more than if you were to bulk ship your publication to a single location where they might be displayed.

In addition, you will have costs for circulation management, design, art and photos. Your Custom Publisher can help you work through these details and give you cost estimates for different scenarios—whether it is for a print or electronic product. Keep in mind that there are specific costs of developing and maintaining online vehicles (websites, e-zines, e-newsletters, etc.) that do not come into play with print publications.

6. WHAT INFORMATION DO I NEED TO HAVE PREPARED IN ORDER TO SPEAK WITH PROSPECTIVE PUBLISHERS?

Here are some things to consider when preparing a request for proposal (RFP)

Sample RFP

1. GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT YOUR ORGANIZATION

2. INFORMATION ABOUT THE CURRENT AND/OR DESIRED PUBLICATION

History, mission of current publication /Vision for potential publication.

Demographic profile of readership (current and potential).

Publication information

Founded: _____

Frequency: _____

Print Qty: _____

Distribution: _____

List: _____

Paper Stock: _____

Trim: _____

Binding: _____

Color: _____

Printer: _____

Reply Card: _____

Edit/Ad Ratio and Requirements: _____

Ad sales: Expectations? _____

Images: _____ How attained? _____

Content: _____ How attained? _____

Current editorial departments: _____

Advertising Arrangement: _____

Competitors: _____

Staffing: _____

3. SERVICES REQUIRED

Specify what the publisher should price. For example:

1. (Re)design of the logo and publication
2. Editorial Services
3. Photography/art (commissioned or stock? Ratio of each?)
4. Design and layout
5. Production (prepress, paper, printing and quality control)
6. Printing
7. Circulation maintenance and customer service
8. Distribution management
9. Advertising management (sales, billing, collections, traffic of materials)

4. INFORMATION REQUESTED FROM PUBLISHER

- A. Cover letter.
- B. Description of the prospective project manager’s background and similar information about the publishing team.
- C. Structure of relationship between publisher and your company. How will it work?
- D. Referrals from current/previous clients.
- E. Sample contract.

5. TIMELINE

These dates will serve as a general guideline for the selection process.

| | |
|------------------------|--|
| Month, Day, Year _____ | Request for Proposal issued by Company |
| Month, Day, Year _____ | Proposals due |
| Month, Day, Year _____ | Selection of finalists |
| Month, Day, Year _____ | Presentations made to Company |
| Month, Day, Year _____ | Contract awarded |
| Month, Day, Year _____ | Start date for contract |

6. SUBMISSIONS

Submit one (1) original and two (2) copies of the RFP document by deadline.

Send proposal to:

Company Address _____

7. EVALUATION OF PROPOSALS

Detail the evaluation process and criteria for choosing a publisher.

7. HOW DO I MEASURE THE VALUE/SUCCESS OF A CUSTOM PUBLICATION?

Just as you measure the ROI on a number of marketing projects, you'll want to be able to measure the impact of a custom media effort. Whether it is a print magazine or a custom e-newsletter, you'll want to first establish goals that you want to achieve and that you can gauge your performance against. Try to use the S.M.A.R.T acronym when putting goals together to keep them Specific, Measurable, Actionable, Realistic and Time-bound.

Now that you have your goals, look for ways, both quantitative and qualitative, to measure the impact of a custom publishing effort. Here are some examples:

- Initiate a benchmark survey prior to the launch of the custom media effort to gauge corporate and product perceptions. At pre-selected intervals, say 12 and 24 months, re-issue the survey to see if the custom publication has changed awareness, attitudes and perceptions.
- Schedule ongoing research as part of the content to continually gauge audience reception and to collect information. You may include a qualification card with demographic questions or ask your audience an opinion question that can be answered on a Web site.
- Include a response device in every custom media effort. Not only will you get information back, but you will be able to measure the audience receptivity through the response rates.
- Create as much interactivity as possible with the custom media effort. Add in contact information for authors, create a dedicated Web site to measure traffic, a Web chat room or other ways for the audience to react and respond to the custom publishing effort.
- Use unique promotions offered only through the custom publishing project. Most marketers have a difficult time tracking specific sales, so create offers that are exclusive to your custom publishing effort like coupons, contests, rebates, etc.

**For more information go to <http://www.abmcustommedia.com>
or contact Peter Loibl at 212.661.6360 ext.3317.**