Meredith Extends Its Brand with Multichannel Publishing

By Penny Sullivan

Meredith is extending its brands in new ways. The tablet versions of Better Homes and Gardens, Parents, and Fitness provide fresh, rich digital content that deepens and expands the readers’ experience with the brands they love and trust. From delicious recipes and innovative decorating applications to workouts, videos and opportunities for parents to play with their kids, every feature delivers helpful, valuable and entertaining content.

This article summarizes some of the ways Meredith is extending its brands, provides a focus on what’s working well, and discusses current challenges and steps that are being taken to drive continued success.

Over the past year, Meredith has aggressively expanded its digital editions on both the iPad and Android tablets. Print subscribers for Better Homes and Gardens, Parents, and Fitness now have free access to the iPad editions of those magazines through their current subscription. Consumers also can purchase digital subscriptions through Apple, and individual issues are available through the App store.

In addition to the iPad format for these three brands, Meredith offers:

- Subscription and single issues of Better Homes and Gardens, Parents, and Fitness on Android tablets via Next Issue Media.
- Subscriptions and single issues of Family Circle, Ladies’ Home Journal, MORE, Siempre Mujer, Traditional Home and Midwest Living on the Barnes and Noble NOOKColor and Nook App, iPad and Android. In addition, interactive editions are available on the NOOKColor for Parents, and Fitness.
- Subscriptions and single issues of Better Homes and Gardens Special Interest Media, Creative Collection and Hispanic Brands — including Siempre Mujer and Ser Padres — and WOOD, Successful Farming and Living the Country Life through the Zinio platform.
- A dozen branded mobile Apps, including American Baby’s popular Baby Names and Parents Flash Cards.
- A wide array of branded consumer websites that comprise the Meredith Women’s Network, which reaches more than 25 million unique users every month.

“Meredith’s goal is to provide content that matters to our consumers across all passion points and to deliver it in an immersive and interactive digital experience,” said Liz Schimel, Meredith’s chief digital officer. “Our consumer insights are incredibly valuable during every step of planning and creation.”

Within Better Homes and Gardens, behind-the-scenes videos take consumers beyond photo shoots to capture designer insights, offering tip-filled shopping excursions and close-up cooking instruction. In addition, a color-swap application activates the popular color-of-the-month feature, letting the consumer tap to see the featured room in different hues. Animated before-and-after floor plans walk users through the clever space solutions and room arrangements. A scrolling recipe format makes it easy to cook directly from the device. For selected reci-
pes, consumers can change the flavor profile with a tap. There is also a recipe index in every issue with photos. Live links allow users to buy featured products, including a link to the Better Homes and Gardens store.

The digital issue of Parents contains the Parents Playroom, where parents and children can explore a virtual playroom together and browse new toys, DVDs, calendar listings and more. The Playroom is also home to child-focused craft and cooking videos. Parents also features an age-by-age guide. Some of the Parents covers have been interactive as well. A showcase of additional products not featured in the print editions can also be found, with direct links to purchase the item.

In Fitness, workout videos bring to life step-by-step instructions for exercises so consumers can prop up the iPad and follow along. Toning routines can be viewed in their entirety or as individual moves, letting users replay them as often as needed to perfect their form. Recipes are easily accessible and hands-free when cooking, there’s no need for scrolling or touching the tablet to follow along. Behind-the-scenes videos of fashion and beauty shoots give the reader additional insights and tips from stylists and experts. Additional product recommendations and information through hot spots and slideshows direct users to websites where they can purchase the products.

Brands like Better Homes and Gardens, Parents, and Fitness, which are optimized for the various device sizes, are thinking about design differently today. Early in the process, they consider how content will be presented in print, in the digital editions and on the websites, and design accordingly.

“Design for multiple-size tablets has become a complex puzzle, and as a creative director you have to think of how stories will translate as you create content and layout templates,” said Michael Belknap, creative director for Better Homes and Gardens. “Design for the 7-inch (tablets) affects the design of the 10-inch and vice versa, because all content must flow and not be re-edited if possible. We are now designing the 10-inch differently to make it ready for the downsizing and added screen views of the 7-inch. Content creation is consistent for both formats, as long as you think out the translation before you shoot/produce to assure you have what you need for both.”

One strategy that has worked well for Meredith is to create and deliver content to the various distribution channels with its existing teams. The highly respected editorial and creative teams...
behind the Meredith's print issues also create the brand's digital editions. The strength of the Meredith brands and the beautiful creative content are tremendous assets. In addition, Meredith's production and technical teams have assumed responsibility for the production aspect of the digital issues. Employees who were once dedicated to print or website production have come together to produce Meredith's digital issues. There have been learning curves with each step forward, but the teams continue to focus on technologies and workflow enhancements that facilitate effective and efficient multichannel publishing. This approach has allowed for aggressive expansion of Meredith's digital presence over the past year.

Meredith and other publishers still face challenges with respect to multichannel publishing, however. At times a publisher's goal of moving forward into new digital channels precedes the ideal state of technology, standards and workflows. In these cases, workflows and processes are implemented that aren't yet ideal or exactly the way the company envisions them for the long term.

In addition, there are issues to address with respect to new types of digital advertising. Ads running in a digital issue can be either static or interactive. Important questions surround standards for these new types of interactive ads, and it will be critical that the right parties come together from the industry to focus on standards and specifications.

Meredith has placed a strong focus on the advancement of technology in the organization, as well as on workflows to facilitate new digital opportunities and the rapid pace of change.

"It's important to work closely with technology providers to drive changes that will result in even greater efficiency and effectiveness of workflows while preserving the creativity of the editorial teams," said Jack Goldenberg, senior vice president and chief technology officer at Meredith. "What we've implemented is a great start, but additional opportunities will present themselves as the technologies evolve."

As an active member of IDEAlliance, Meredith is also participating in working groups to help address some of these new challenges. The NextPub working group is focused on defining best practices and developing specifications that publishers can use to efficiently deliver magazine and other rich content across multiple platforms and devices. Its work in the areas of standards will likely mean changes in how publishers create and deliver content in the future.

The eMedia 21 Committee provides a forum for business leaders to come together to discuss critical issues and work to develop strategies and best practices as appropriate. Topics such as integrated workflows, research, metrics and digital advertising standards are addressed in meetings and by working groups.

The focus at Meredith today is to pave the way for opportunities to reach consumers in new and exciting ways. Technologies and workflows will be enhanced and aligned over time. As the leading media and marketing company serving American women, Meredith will continue to explore ways of extending its brands to reach the consumer wherever she may be."