

Custom Spreads Around the Globe

From the most developed international custom media markets to less developed markets in Latin America and Asia, more and more companies are integrating custom programs into their marketing mix.

Called by various names—including branded content, corporate publishing, customer publishing and content marketing—custom publishing came into its own in the late 20th century as mass media became less effective and marketers began looking for ways to measure the ROI of their marketing money.

Since the first national customer publishing association, the Association of Publishing Agencies in the U.K., was started in 1993, similar organizations have been formed in at least 20 countries.

In some markets, particularly in East Asia, a lot of custom is digital, particularly mobile, says Arjun Basu, editorial director, Spafax. "There is an appetite for custom wherever it's done well," he says.

As a pioneer in in-flight entertainment, Spafax has offices on four continents in order to be close to its airline clients. Those offices have since expanded into other industries such as other travel, lifestyle products, finance and entertainment.

One relatively new client—and new market—for Spafax is Chile's Teatro Municipal, an opera house in Santiago. Teatro Municipal wanted to reach a younger demographic to sustain its audiences in the future. Spafax recommended a culture magazine that highlights the opera's offerings in a younger and fresher manner. The result is Vox, a twice-yearly magazine that is delivered by mail to select readers in the Santiago area and also available online.

As in the U.S., custom media withstood the economic downturn

in most countries better than traditional media, according to the International Customer Publishing Forum, an umbrella organization for national customer publishing associations in Europe and Asia.

In the U.K., circulation for the top 100 customer magazines grew 6 percent since 2008 and now accounts for 54 percent of the total circulation of the top 100 magazines, according to the APA.



Royal Jordanian Airlines, Amman, Jordan, publishes its Royal Wings magazine six times a year and distributes it on all its flights worldwide. The bicultural and bilingual (in English and Arabic) magazine, created by Spafax, acts as a "calling card" for the country in the world at large.

They comprise one-third of the magazines in the top 100 most actively purchased publications and are sold alongside traditional magazines on newsstands.

According to the most recent research from the Audit Bureau of Circulations in the U.K., published in December, the top seven magazines in the U.K. by circulation are custom, and custom publications also dominate a number of magazine categories: the cooking and kitchen sector, with publications from grocery chains Tesco, Asda, Sainsbury's and Morrison's taking the top four spots; women's fashion, with asos.com No. 2 behind Glamour and ahead of Cosmopolitan and Good Housekeeping; holiday and travel, with British Airways' BA High Life; and business and finance, with NatWest's Sense.

In other European countries, custom is also going strong. The first in-depth study of custom publishing in German-speaking countries in Europe, conducted in 2008 by market research company zehnvier for the European Institute for Corporate Publishing, found there were almost 15,000 custom magazines in the German-speaking region. The study also discovered that in its survey target—companies with more than 250 employees—97 percent use corporate publishing to comprise a market that exceeds \$3 billion.

For the study, zehnvier conducted 305 individual interviews with corporate publishing managers and decision-makers, using computer-assisted Web interviewing.

The future also looks particularly bright. Slightly more than half of the respondents said their own publications and media were becoming increasingly important. The survey found that corporate publishing will see particularly high growth in Switzerland and Germany at service companies with 1,000 or more employees.

The expansion of custom into digital is expected to open up even more opportunities in global markets. "Every culture has its own channels that it prefers to reach people or that work better," Mr. Basu says. "Custom publishers will use whatever channel makes things stand out and gets the message across." ■

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