

Cross-media

PUBLISHING



Having the right tools is just a small part of the process.



Publishers must understand the needs of the information consumer and utilize the most effective media combination.



By Scott Bury



The design professional's workload has increased. The job doesn't end when you drop a final layout file onto the RIP hot folder; now you have to turn your attention to adapting that layout for web publishing, for preparation of a PDF for burning onto CD-ROMs, or for some other form of screen-based publishing.

Producing a single message that will be published over several different media has become standard for most electronic publishing professionals. In North America and Europe, it's the rare newspaper or magazine that doesn't have all its content republished on its website. Music CDs regularly include multimedia selections. And is there a movie that *doesn't* have a full website to hype its trailers and hawk its merchandise?

The concept of multimedia keeps widening. Cell phones and PDAs with color screens are recognized targets for specialized advertising, and while the application hasn't moved far beyond the novelty and annoyance level yet, this medium has caught the attention of major corporations. For example, Infiniti, Nissan's luxury-car division,



sponsors the College Hoops channel, which sends basketball news to subscribers' WAP (wireless application protocol)-enabled cell phones and handheld computers. "Not only can NCAA basketball fans throughout the country follow their favorite teams all the way to the Final Four, but they also can learn more about the features and functionality of the Infiniti M, including vehicle specifications, high-resolution photos, and the ability to request more information," according to Internet Ad Sales.

But how does the electronic publisher ensure that each medium carries the same message? "The challenge is that the brand can become fragmented," says Richard Romano, a writer and analyst for TrendWatch Graphic Arts, as well as a designer, consultant, and author of several books, including *The Scanning Workshop* and *Digital Photography Pocket Primer*.

It's a challenge that can be met with some new tools, the latest versions of designers' favorites, and most of all, a new approach to creating communications in more than one medium to start with.

A new mindset

Ten years ago, most communications professionals felt that audiences wanted to interact with new media in ways similar to the way they dealt with print: they wanted interaction to be immediate, easy to understand, and easy to navigate. Web publishers concentrated on delivering images with quality at least as high as in print, without causing delays in downloading.

But new technology has created new expectations among audiences. The spread of high-speed or broadband Internet connections has removed the problem of slow downloads for most urban dwellers. And ironically, it turns out that long downloads aren't that much of a problem, as long as the result is worth the wait. "People are willing to wait five minutes for a movie trailer to download," says Bob Connolly, head of BC Pictures, Toronto.

Once a movie and video producer, Connolly now creates interactive websites for automobile and furniture manufacturers and music companies, among other firms. He also creates multimedia documents in PDF format for clients from NASA to Nissan to the tourism administration of the Caribbean nation of Aruba. These e-brochures and e-books use the full capabilities of the latest version of Adobe's Acrobat 7 software and PDF format, incorporating video and interactivity within the pages. Clients post two versions on their websites for download: a full version that includes all the video content, and a smaller, PDF-only version. "Tracking shows that up to 75 percent of downloads are of the full version," says Connolly.

Downloading music enables audiences to select only the content they want, thereby creating their own "albums." This expectation is starting to spill over into other markets, as well. Audiences are willing to buy over the Internet—Plunkett Research Inc. estimates that Americans spent \$71 billion on retail e-commerce in 2004—but they want to buy only what interests them: particular issues or articles in magazines, exactly the statistics they need, and so on.

From print to web marketing

For Pelland Advertising of Haydenville, Mass., web work has superseded print-based design work. Peter Pelland started the company 25 years ago, offering design and print services across the Northeast. Ten years ago, Pelland diversified to the Web, offering to design pages and sites for his existing clients. Gradually, more of his print customers requested websites. Today, most of Pelland's business comes from designing and hosting websites, and most customers are primarily web services clients, who sometimes request print materials.

Magazines are a natural fit for a web presence, because magazines share many characteristics of web-based communications: well-defined content that appeals to a relatively narrow audience sector, and timeliness of information. *Today's Machining World* magazine began as *Screw Machine World* in 2000.

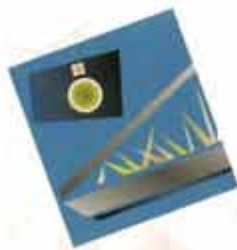
Originally envisioned as an exclusively web-delivered publication, it's published in three versions today: print, web, and "e-book," using EBook Systems' Digital Flip Technology.

After each edition is prepared, publisher Dan Pels sends the PDF file of the completed magazine not only to the printer, but also to EBooks in California. The company that developed the Digital Flip Technology also offers a conversion service; the result is an on-screen visual equivalent of a paper magazine. Viewers can click the "corners" of the "page" to flip to the next page. The technology requires downloading of a free viewer program, à la Acrobat, and enables publishers to add hot links from advertisements to the advertisers' websites. "Our readers are not intense web surfers or computer users, but are more hands-on," Pels says. "They won't be as interested in a lot of flashy interactive features. You have to have something of value to offer."

Pushing technology to the limit

Bob Connolly began his career as a television and video producer and even produced training videos for Linotype. Now, he uses Adobe InDesign to create layouts and publish them as PDFs. "That's





the secret—the files have to be small, and InDesign makes nice, small PDFs.

One of the first things that Connolly had to learn was to design in landscape, rather than portrait mode, to conform to most computer screens. He also had to learn to bring his video skills to a multimedia space. "I found that people don't want to just read text; they also want to look at pictures and they want to watch videos."

The latest version of Acrobat, 7.0, and of the portable document format, PDF, supports videos playing within a PDF document as well as other interactive features. "PDF is becoming the convergence platform for multimedia," Connolly says, delivering a range of customized information.

New tools and skills

"New media are taking eyeballs away from magazines, TV, and other traditional media," agrees Romano. "Marketers will follow the eyeballs." For designers and publishers to stay competitive, they'll need to learn new skills to work with new media tools—all while keeping the original audience for print front and center.

"The whole idea of cross-media publishing is to maintain the same look in all media," says Peter Pelland. "The last thing you want to do is cause confusion in the minds of the client's customers. If you do that, you can literally drive people to the competition, because they can't understand the message."

New media requires new skills and new ways of working with communications. Communicators have to learn to plan for cross-media publishing from the beginning, instead of just converting print layouts into HTML or even XML formats.

"You can waste a lot of time simply by having people on the web side not understand what the print side is doing," for instance, by close-cutting photos for the Web, says Colin Smith of Adobe Canada.

Adobe's new Creative Suite, which includes InDesign, Photoshop, Illustrator,

and, in the "Pro" version, Acrobat 7 and the web publishing application, GoLive, has a number of cross-media publishing tools. The suite supports PostScript files with multiple layers for producing different versions, not just for zones but also for different media. "We never sent layered files in the past—those were extra-money files," says Smith. Today, customers demand files that they can easily drop into production workflows for any medium.

"Conversion is a waste of time and money," agrees Dan Logan, product architect for QuarkXPress. Version 6.5 "is format-agnostic," he says. The Projects & Layouts tool separates content, including text and graphics, from the layout. It can output to a number of media, including PDF and XML, which can then be used to publish in print, web, CD-ROM, or other media.

"There's more compatibility between the tools now," says Pelland. For instance, the latest versions of QuarkXPress and PhotoShop have a much smoother interplay, he finds. Even a tool as simple as Microsoft's web-page design tool, FrontPage, is much better today than ever before. "It's very fast for creating basic web pages."

E-book tools have also advanced significantly, adding features that give readers what they've been asking for. For instance, while EBook Systems' Digital Flip software mimics the look of a book "because our eyes have been trained to read in book form for centuries," as EBooks president, Kyu Kim, says, it now adds a number of useful features particular to electronic distribution, such as hot links to websites, searching, scrolling, and interactive video, audio, and animation. "Anything HTML can do, so can Flip," he says.

Any designer or publisher who wants to move into cross-media publishing (for that's where the money is going today) also needs to be at least aware of XML, the extensible markup language for the Web. XML allows publishers to create a database of content—text and images—that can be formatted dynamically, in response to readers' requests or preferences. Because it applies formats to content on the fly, it's a viable strategy for cross-media publishing.

How to do it

The first step to creating successful cross-media publications is to start with a clear vision of what you're trying to accomplish. This is quite distinct from the way print publishers have moved to the Web.

"Typically, a newspaper publisher will take a print workflow, then add an XML workflow on the end of it. It may work OK, but it's backward," says Bill Rosenblatt, president of New York consulting firm, GiantSteps Media Technologies. "Online media are usually more time-critical, so web publishing should come before print. But that's hard for an organization with an ingrained print work habit."

Don't separate content creators, designers, and publishers by medium, says Rosenblatt, but instead, integrate them into a single production workflow. "The challenge is to get people to think about creating content with print and web output in mind."

"Know at the outset what the highest-demand medium is," recommends Romano. For instance, make sure your photos have enough resolution to print well—web resolutions of 72dpi just aren't enough on paper.

"The last thing you want is when the client's asking for a four-color print brochure with the same graphics as on the website, and he wants it yesterday, to find that all you've got is a 72dpi GIF," says Pelland.

While you want to preserve a "common look and feel" across different media, don't forget that each medium has its own requirements. "On a web page, you may place your logo in the center of the page, but when you're designing a brochure that will go in a display rack, you have to remember that only the top inch or so may be visible," says Pelland.

And of course, color is inherently impossible to control on the Web, because it depends on every viewer's monitor and how rigorous he's been about calibrating it.

Ultimately, the key, as always, is knowing your audience. As Bill Rosenblatt puts it, "The real win in cross-media publishing is the ability to publish more content to more people for more revenue."

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