

Executive summary

For newspapers around the world, reaching young audiences is the Holy Grail. However, newspapers that have developed young reader strategies have learned firsthand that the youth market is elusive. Youth are faced with a multitude of media choices and they are currently less likely to read newspapers than in previous generations. Media channels of choice for young people trend toward TV, mobile and the Internet.

The World Association of Newspapers is committed to assisting newspaper companies in reinvigorating young readers' appetite for newspapers.

WAN's Shaping the Future of the Newspaper project has developed the Engaging Young Readers report to explore the opportunities to reach the young reader, and to understand the content preferences and media usage patterns of the young.

In order to achieve those goals, this report will delve into three key areas of strategic development for capturing the elusive youth audience:

1. Research: Identify myths about youth media consumption and execute research to identify truths; study publisher/editor attitudes and plans about young readers.

2. Strategy: Create strategies to reach youth market.

3. Tactics: Follow through on strategies by producing new products on a variety of channels.

The chapters in this report detail the three components of Young Reader strategic development.

1. Research

WAN has for two decades researched sundry aspects of the young readership field of study. In 2007, WAN has conducted two studies: The Shaping the Future of the Newspaper Young Readers survey of editors and publishers, and the WAN/DECODE 2007 Youth Media DNA Exploratory Study of young readers in 10 countries. Together, the two studies uncover important facts from the two essential stakeholders in the youth readership equation: newspaper publishers and their young readers.

The DECODE study, which was launched in 2006 and will continue into 2008, in this report explores a variety of hypotheses about young readers, and dispels myths by citing research study after research study. Some of the hypotheses that are explored include:

- Young people are getting news and information from many media sources, not just one.
- Young people spend less time with traditional media and more with new media.
- Although online usage is high among young people who have access to the Internet, use of newspaper Web sites is low.
- Young people do not have a clear news ritual.
- Being well-informed is a desirable quality for youth.
- The biggest competition for news and information in the future are young people themselves and their social networks.

The SFN survey asked editors and publishers about their attitudes toward young readers, their approaches to engage young readers, their objectives for young reader programmes and about who should be responsible for young reader programme development at their companies. The Web-based survey generated 227 responses, with a wide representation from around the world, and from a range of business sizes and job functions. Among the findings:

- Most responding newspaper companies are optimistic that newspapers can attract young readers. More than six out of ten respondents said young readers at primary school levels can be attracted by both the printed and electronic platforms, and another 20 percent think they can be reached by the printed version only.
- Half of the respondents think young people use mobile phones to access news and information more than any other medium, while TV news programmes, newspaper Web sites, other online news sites and blogs are also used quite often.
- Although printed newspapers are not the most-consumed medium for news and information among young readers, they are the most trusted – half of the respondents picked newspapers as “highly trusted,” and nearly nine out of 10 picked newspapers as at least “fairly trusted.”

2. Strategy

Strategies to reach young readers are executed in widely different ways around the globe. What works in one city may not work in another. The newspapers that get it right are those that know their audiences and understand what young readers want.

For some newspapers, the key to success is in giving schools low-cost learning materials based on newspaper content. Studies have shown that students who learn to read with newspapers are more likely to be loyal readers in the future. For other newspapers, connecting with young readers means creating a publication targeted to them, giving them a forum in print and online to find out about the day's events and important issues, while also entertaining them and allowing them to be a part of a dialogue with newspapers, rather than listen to a one-way monologue.

Each newspaper profiled in this chapter has found a way to give young readers in their areas of the world what they are looking for, many times before those readers even knew there was something missing.

3. Tactics

Newspaper companies can capture the imaginations and loyalty of youth readers with a variety of tactics, which are enumerated in this report, and complemented by examples of media companies that have executed these tactics:

- Avoid stereotypical portrayals of the young, such as youth as victims.
- Tightly focus youth supplements, and make content highly relevant to young people.
- Give young people the chance to contribute real journalism.
- Create and package news to reach young people in credible and relevant ways on media channels they prefer.
- Focus on parents and teachers to help encourage more newspaper readership.
- Be there for young readers' “firsts,” that is: First byline in the newspaper, first blog, first civic action, first job, first baby picture, etc.
- Take a multi-platform approach to publishing that matches the natural approach youth take to consuming media.