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XYZ Magazine Analysis and Recommendations

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Introduction

The XYZ Group (XYZ) is an affiliate club of the national XYZ Club that serves 4+ million members. The scope of this report is to assess the effectiveness of the XYZ's member magazine, XYZ, in meeting the Club's strategic goals, and to evaluate and recommend program extensions that will broaden the reach and effectiveness of the Club's member communications programs.

A key part of the XYZ's member communications strategy is XYZ, a magazine that is offered in print and enhanced electronic versions. The goals of XYZ are:

- To inform members about topics defined by the XYZ brand pillars: Budget, Reassurance, and Pleasure.
- To strengthen the club's relationships with its members and to enhance retention rates
- To educate members about the XYZ-backed public affairs initiatives
- To inspire members to take advantage of added-value services and benefits offered by the club, such as discount programs, insurance and financial services

The analysis that follows reviews the success of XYZ magazine in meeting the Club's goals and provides suggestions for improvements where appropriate and suggestions for utilizing alternative platforms for better meeting these strategic goals.

XYZ magazine

Overview

XYZ is a 48-page quarterly print publication produced in seven regional editions. Half of the magazine's pages are populated with editorial and advertising that is common to all seven versions. The remaining 24 pages are a combination of editorial and advertising that is common to two or more regions and content that is customized to a single region. All regions share the same cover.

XYZ offers consistently high quality editorial. Although heads and decks tend toward the pedestrian, article content is engaging and well-sourced. Layouts are attractive and varied. The photography tends toward the look of average stock, however, and many are too small to provide graphic impact.

The greatest challenge for the print version's design is the large quantity of small space advertisements and the text-heavy design of many larger ads. When the ads are combined with the short-item features at the front of the magazine, the overall visual effect is one of clutter.

Thanks to its proprietary on-screen viewer, the digital edition of the magazine manages to avoid the visual complexity of the print version. Although much of the content is identical to the print edition, the presentation of the digital edition is optimized for viewing on a computer; additionally, the online version includes enhancements like embedded links, reader notes capability and video and slideshows.

Content ratings

For each of the strategic goals listed in the Introduction, I have rated the print version XYZ on a scale of 1 to 3, where 1 = minimal or no compliance; 2 = some compliance; 3 = full (or nearly full) compliance.

- ***To inform members about topics defined by the XYZ brand pillars: Budget, Reassurance, and Pleasure.***

Print Version Rating = 3 The editorial makeup of the issues I reviewed touched upon all of the topic areas defined by XYZ GROUP as critical to the magazine. Enjoyment (Travel) was clearly the most prominent portion of the package, with Assurance (safety, security and services) a close second. Savings was also prominent, though the XYZ savings messages often seemed to be drowned out by the advertisers' savings messages. The magazine also does an excellent job with minor features, particularly the buymanship articles I reviewed on child car seats, GPS units and digital cameras.

Digital Version Rating = 3 The digital version provides almost all of the content of the print version plus extras features such as links and videos.

- ***To strengthen the club's relationships with its members and to enhance retention rates***

Print Version Rating = 2 The authentic local voice of a regional magazine's editorial content is key to developing a lasting relationship with its readers. XYZ does offer regional editions, but that local content seems to get lost in the more national focus of the magazine. Because the covers on all editions are the same, there is no obvious connection to the local club at first glance. Some readers may even assume that the magazine is provided by the national XYZ organization. Readers who dig further will note that there is regional content -- short items in the front of the book and several destination and calendar features in the back. The versioned travel features, in particular, lack a local voice and too often suggest a travel brochure rather than a genuine product of the state or region.

Digital Version Rating = 2 Like the print version, the localized content of the digital edition is not as compelling as the national features.

- ***To educate members about the XYZ-backed public affairs initiatives***

Print Version Rating = 2.5 XYZ gets high marks for tackling some of the most pressing transportation safety related issues facing American drivers. The "distracted driving" article was compelling and eye-opening, with excellent real-life examples. In contrast, the "deteriorating roadways" article, although well researched, suffered from a dry presentation.

Digital Version Rating = 2.5 The comments for the print edition apply equally to the digital edition.

To inspire members to take advantage of added-value services and benefits offered by the club, such as discount programs, insurance and financial services

Print Version Rating = 2.5. XYZ offers a mind-boggling array of value added benefits and services, and it seems as if almost every one of these benefits is given space in the magazine. The result is a mixed bag. The savings opportunities, in particular, are typically allotted postage-stamp space that may cause them to get lost in the clutter. Services that are allotted feature-length space -- in the two issues I reviewed, XYZ credit cards and annuities -- tend to suffer from the "brochure" writing approach mentioned in the review of public affairs articles above. Of course, the real test of the effectiveness of this editorial is the responsiveness of the readers. If the existing approach works, there's no reason to change.

Digital Version Rating = 3 Thanks to the semi-thumbnail presentation of the digital edition, the appearance of clutter is reduced. Readers who want to view a particular offer, can simply click for an enlarged view.

Suggestions for improvement

The print edition of XYZ is at its best presenting feature-length travel editorial and short consumer buying advice. The primary downside of the publication is the visual clutter that pops up regularly. Based on the comments above, here are some suggested changes that would increase the depth of reader engagement.

1. Consider a more sophisticated make-up that allows for at least one feature-length localized article near the front of the magazine. Be sure that all versioned features have a strong voice that celebrates the local people, history, and experiences.
2. Strive to reduce the appearance of clutter with at least one uninterrupted editorial well of 6-8 pages. Add visual excitement to the front of the magazine with more varied layouts and less rigid grids.
3. Limit the length of "issues" articles to 1-2 pages by using bullet points to define the issue, describe XYZ's position and provide a reader "call to action." Use the saved editorial space to add or lengthen Travel or other features.
4. Include a calendar of regional events at a regular location (the last page?) to encourage readers to clip or save the issue.
5. Devote 1-2 pages in the front of the magazine to feature local reader generated content, such as letters, an "Ask the Expert" feature and comments solicited on the website.

Expanding the Communications Footprint

XYZ magazine is a credible component of an effective communications program. But as a quarterly publication, it offers a limited opportunity for outreach to members. In particular, the print edition is constrained by the resources that would be required to increase frequency or book size.

By taking advantage of the power of new and existing media technology, the XYZ magazine concept could be greatly expanded with a modest investment of resources. Here are 25 suggestions for enhancing the reach and effectiveness of XYZ GROUP's member communications effort:

Email Programs

1. A weekly email newsletter featuring a round-up of upcoming events in the XYZ GROUP's eight-state region. Support with a localized advertising or regionwide XYZ promotion.
2. Work with preferred partners to develop sponsored email programs geared to holiday travel, cultural activities, B&B travel, or other high-interest topics.
3. Develop an email program on the topic of seasonal auto maintenance. Link to XYZ National videos on car care.
4. Develop time-limited email educational courses on topics such as personal finance, home safety and cooking for campers.
5. Create a weekly email that provides reviews of cars, SUVs, and auto accessories. Use original content or license reviews from other sources.

Website Enhancements

1. Create a fully functional home page for XYZ magazine that allows for promotion of a wide variety of content.
2. Consider converting XYZ magazine content to HTML to allow archiving and searching of content from back issues.
3. Experiment with editorial extension into areas that have a natural fit with XYZ services, such as home maintenance.
4. Provide direct links from the local XYZ website to XYZ National content, including articles, videos, slideshows and blogs.
5. Create space for user-generated content, including photo uploads, message boards, personal reports and blogs.

Social Media/Mobile

Social media/mobile apps are the tools of choice for a rapidly growing consumer population.

From **Wikipedia**:

Social media measurement refers to the tracking/crawling of various social media content such as blogs, wikis, news sites, micro-blogs such as Twitter, social networking sites, video/photo sharing websites, forums, message boards, blogs and user-generated content in general as a way to determine the volume and sentiment of online conversation about a brand or topic.

Social media monitoring – which is undertaken by a cross section of people including market researchers, PR staff, marketing teams, social engagement and community staff, agencies and sales teams – can allow users to find insights into a brand's overall visibility on social media, measure the impact of campaigns, identify opportunities for engagement, assess competitor activity and share of voice, and be alerted to impending crises. It can also provide valuable information about emerging trends and what consumers and clients think about specific topics, brands or products.

National XYZ has invested resources in a variety of social media, creating an opportunity for XYZ GROUP to adopt a two-step approach to mobile communication platforms. The first step would be to piggyback on the national efforts by selectively linking to the national implementations. The second step would be to create custom versions of the social media that are most effective at meeting the XYZ GROUP's business goals.

Among the social media available for this approach:

1. **Facebook.** Currently, the national XYZ has developed a Facebook presence that includes links to key sections of the XYZ website, a "wall" for dialog with visitors, a lively discussion forum, and a small library of XYZ videos. XYZ GROUP should consider creating its own Facebook presence as a way to create a personal connection between the staff members of the group and its members.

2. **Twitter.** The national XYZ Twitter presence allows the organization to create linkages with other organizations and blogs who have shared interests in travel, transportation policy and safety. This relationship building process enhances the reach of XYZ's communications beyond the current member base. XYZ GROUP should consider whether Twitter could be used to strengthen alliances with its marketing partners, state tourism bodies and influential bloggers.

3. **iPhone Apps.** A free XYZ iPhone application uses GPS location technology to identify nearby businesses offering XYZ discounts. This functionality alone is reason enough for XYZ GROUP to promote the service to its members. In the future, XYZ GROUP should consider integrating its own advertisers and Dynamic Deal partners into a mobile delivery platform.

A second XYZ iPhone application is designed to enhance the organization's roadside assistance service by transmitting location information when the member contacts XYZ via iPhone. The application also assists the member in locating nearby XYZ-approved repair facilities.

4. **YouTube Channel.** Currently, national XYZ has a limited channel on YouTube that offers a collection of the organization's promotional videos and a handful of videos from other sources. XYZ GROUP might consider creating a YouTube channel that showcases travel videos relevant to its members. By enabling comments on the videos, XYZ GROUP can encourage dialog among its members.

5. **"Social Buzz" websites.** Sites like buzzfeed.com and Digg.com aim to highlight the most interesting and important content on the internet. Although much of this "cream of the crop" falls into the "cute kittens doing cute things" realm, there is a place in this universe for serious organizations who want to attract attention to their web presence. With the right content and promotion, the XYZ Living website could benefit from substantial traffic spikes.