

# Creating advantage

*Travel trade publisher develops interactive DEs*

BY ANN MEREDITH BROWN

**B**axter Publications Inc. wants an edge over its competition and to grow its titles' circulations, all while saving on the high cost of printing and distribution. Its solution? Digital editions. The Toronto-based publishing and Internet services company was the first, and so far only, trade publisher to launch CCAB-audited digital versions of its weekly business publications *Travel Press* and *Travel Courier* back in April 2003. Earlier this year, Baxter launched an enhanced version of these digital editions called IDEA (Interactive Digital-Edition Advantage), offering readers and advertisers an opportunity to interact with the magazines' content.

When Baxter set out to launch its first digital versions two years ago, it began by developing an online subscription service with which readers can request free subscriptions in print, digital or both. Following strict CCAB guidelines, Baxter has to make sure its digital versions include the exact same editorial as its print editions; that readers who receive both digital and print versions aren't counted twice; and it has to ask for certain information from the subscriber, such as a mother's maiden name, for audit verification since the subscriber doesn't sign anything when he or she orders online.

Its first digital rendering was a low-res, screen version PDF, stripped to make the file as small as possible for ease of downloading. Subscribers were sent e-mails with a link to the PDF. This link would change every week, encouraging readers to subscribe and renew their subscriptions every year while keeping its electronic mailing lists up-to-date, a method Baxter still practices. "We want people to subscribe. We don't want you to pass along the link to somebody else. [Then] we don't

know that he's going in there and reading it and he doesn't count as a subscriber," says executive vice-president, operations Wendy McClung.

Not long after its first digital version appeared, readers started wanting more.

"Once you start giving people something, they start making demands on you... which is good because it spurs us on to greater things."

Baxter went on to create a high-



Production manager Wayne Labourn and executive VP, operations Wendy McClung demonstrate Baxter Publications' Interactive Digital-Edition Advantage features

er-resolution PDF edition with sharper text and pictures for readers with a faster Internet connection. And yet readers still wanted more. There was such a demand for the high-res PDF version that when e-mails were sent out every week with the link, everyone was trying to download it at the same time, causing congestion and slowing down the process.

That's when Baxter moved to its new Web-based IDEA model. Now readers can click on the link and it takes them right to its Web site, no downloading required. However, subscribers are also given the options of a downloadable, printable PDF that they can save to their desktop and read offline and a text-only printable version that

is easy to e-mail. "We're giving them a lot of options and no excuses not to read it," says McClung.

Baxter's in-house typesetting, graphics and Web development departments, spearheaded by production manager Wayne Labourn, built IDEA using existing software (PHP, Adobe Acrobat) and the digital files that are sent to its printer. The company's Web department has developed over 100 Web sites and programs for the travel industry and hosts approximately 80 sites.

The benefits of digital editions are three-fold, says McClung. IDEA offers readers easy navigation, interactivity, archiving, accessibility and timeliness. Yukon subscribers, for instance, were receiving the weekly print publications two weeks late. "Now we're saying to them, you can get it the minute it comes off the press." Advertisers have the option of adding interactive features to its standard print ads such as a link to its home page (\$200); links to video and audio clips (maximum 30 second length for \$325); pop-up order forms, business reply cards or

registration forms (\$325) and digital brochures (\$300 for up to 16 pages, each additional page is \$10). An earlier digital edition of *Travel Press* included a video of the musical *Mama Mia!* and a Disney digital brochure. The interactivity of IDEA can also be used to enhance editorial. A freelance writer was in Thailand during the tsunami. His video footage was connected to his digital article and was flagged as a bonus DE feature in the print edition. "It works hand in hand with the printed publication. But it doesn't work without print. We've built

up our reputation over the years based on our publications. This is not about doing one instead of the other... it wouldn't be as successful without the print version," says McClung. "We don't want to eat away at our print subs, we want to build on our digital subs." And as a result, grow its audited request circulation at no additional printing or mailing costs. According to its CCAB audit statement, *Travel Press's* circulation grew steadily for the six-month period ending September 27, 2004: print: 9,952; digital: 1,927; both: 787.

Since most publishers don't have their own in-house computer programmers, Baxter is considering selling its customized software to those interested in launching digital editions. ■

## BRIEFLY

### WEB SITE SURVEY

The International Federation of the Periodical Press, based in London, England, launched a survey on successful consumer magazine Web sites, the results of which will be released at FIPP's Congress in New York in May. The success of a Web site may be determined in terms of generating online revenue,

attracting new audiences, creating new online products or by measuring its success against other defined objectives. Contact: fipp.com.

### ONLINE AD STANDARDS

Interactive Advertising Bureau of Canada was shocked to learn that one of the reasons online spending among advertisers was low was because they often had to design 200 pieces

of creative for one online campaign, says executive director Paula Gignac. As a result, the Canadian Universal Ad Package (modelled after a similar initiative in the U.S.) was created to eliminate inefficiencies and reduce costs associated with planning, buying and creating online media. Its three standard ad sizes, Super Banner, Big Box and Skyscraper, will be enforced starting June 1st for

Web sites whose revenue model is based on display advertising. A second phase of CUAP will cover standards for rich media, video, pop-ups, pop-unders, floating ads, water marks and so on. Contact: iab-canada.com.

### FREE DIGITAL EDITION

*Chatelaine* launched a sample digital edition in February as a promotion to sell print subscrip-

tions. Using various Rogers' electronic mailing lists, *Chatelaine* encouraged e-mail recipients to click on a link for a free digital copy of the magazine, which included a linked table of contents and required no downloading. *Chatelaine*, however, will not be offering digital subscriptions to the magazine, says group director, consumer marketing Marisa Latini. Contact: 416-764-2000.