

Ramp up to redesign

Designers and editors share their advice on how to execute an effective redesign

BY ANN MEREDITH BROWN

Celebrating an anniversary? Newsstands sales in a slump? Shifting readership? Facing new competition? Sounds like it may be time to redesign. If your magazine's new year's resolution is a new look, here are a few things to consider (in no particular order) before you get started.

Know your audience

This is one of the first questions a design consultant will ask about your magazine: who is your audience? Before you put finger to mouse, it's important to know exactly who you're designing for.

In an in-house reader survey, year-old Montreal-based fashion and lifestyle magazine *Strut* discovered the majority of its readers were reading American magazines. "[We redesigned] to change it from being so niche to go really mass market and reach as many people as we can...to bring a good mix of [content] that [is] more accessible, more mainstream," says publishing and editorial director Anik Decoste. Such a lofty goal required an aggressive course of action. *Strut* pumped up its circulation by 20,000 copies to 75,000, hired new art director Danielle Le Bel, former AD for *L'actualité* and *enRoute*, and changed printers. The perfect-bound glossy is now printed at Quebec City-based Solisco Printers on 175 line screen. "On the visual side we wanted to make it more user-friendly to bring out the ideas because the visuals were taking over the editorial." Le Bel enlisted the help of creative art consultant Paul Harris and graphic designers Eloi Champagne and M.-Josée Morin to engineer a fresh look that would match the title's new celebrity-driven, entertainment focus as it attempts to go head to head with the American magazines with which *Strut* shares shelf space.

Decide what it is you want to accomplish

Rogers Publishing's trade title *Cosmetics* hadn't had a full makeover since 1985 until it finally redesigned last September. Its new image was fueled by a desire to reflect the look of the beauty industry and its gorgeously designed beauty ads that were appearing in the magazine, says editor Dave Lackie.

And since there's little competition in Canada for this trade title that focuses exclusively on cosmetics and the cosmetics industry, it was decided that *Cosmetics* should go public. The 14,000 controlled-circ bimonthly is doing a test-run with 550 copies on newsstands in Toronto and Vancouver. Results aren't in but its distributor is enthusiastic. "We knew from our in-house research that there are a lot of people who are make-up and beauty enthusiasts and they want to know what's going



Strut's old layout (left) made readers work too hard. Its new design strikes a nicer balance between editorial and art

on in the industry," says Lackie. Therefore it needed a fresh clean look with a strong cover image and more cover lines to compete in the marketplace. Britney Spears graced the cover of its newly redesigned September issue. Redesign to achieve a goal; don't design for design's sake.

Assemble a team

If you decide to solicit the expertise of a third-party designer look for a firm or individual who has experience in magazine editorial design, says *Toronto Life* art director and former design con-

sultant Carol Moskot. "Does this person understand the content and complexities of publication design?" asks Moskot. Often times design firms are hired to re-brand a magazine's corporate identity but they don't understand content architecture from a journalism perspective, she says.

An outside consultant is not a replacement for an art director but an enhancement to the redesign process, says Moskot, adding that consultants can help to engage and prompt ideas from in-house staff and add a fresh eye to the magazine.

Whether you choose to do your redesign in-house or hire a consultant, make sure you have enough people on board as time management is an essential ingredient for a successful redesign.

But don't design by committee

Often when it comes to design, everyone's an art director and everyone has an opinion, says designer Marcello Biagioni. Jim Ireland of Toronto-based James Ireland Design agrees that you can't design by committee. "You need to have a few key stakeholders that make the final decisions. Too many people tend to contradict each other, and the end result is diluted." U.K. art consultant Nick Milton advises editors to trust their designer's instincts. "It is their job to make your magazine readable and enjoyable. Design is not a matter of taste or subjective preferences. It is a skill like any other. Respect it or you are wasting your money."



From drab to fab, Rogers' *Cosmetics* cleaned up its act last fall for a test-run on the newsstands

addition to being user-friendly, templates should allow room for art directors to add their own design interpretations.

Check out your competition

Be cognizant of whether or not your magazine is starting to look like everyone else's, says *Toronto Life's* Moskot. Are you using the same photographers, content, structure and fonts as your competitors? *Canadian Gardening*, then published by Avid Media, was at the top of its game in 2001 when a new competitor, Canadian Home Publisher's *Gardening Life*, sprouted. In an effort to maintain its market position, *Canadian Gardening* decided to redesign. "So the time at that point came to evolve and to redesign it and give it a more updated, refreshed voice and refreshed look," says Moskot, who worked as a consultant on that project. Her own title will be receiving a reinvention this April.

To prepare for *enRoute's* upcoming overhaul in May, editor Arjun Basu has been tearing out pages from magazines around the world to derive ideas and inspiration from his competitors' design strengths.

Avoid an identity crisis

Your logo is your signpost; if you decide to change it be careful your new logo doesn't become so unrecognizable that your loyal readers lose you. That was the case at *Report on Business* magazine. In 2000 it changed its logo to *R.O.B.* and removed any mention of *The Globe and Mail* on its cover. Readers were unfamiliar with its new branding and the magazine's PMB numbers tanked. *ROB* eventually went back to using its full name with *The Globe and Mail* printed below its moniker. "Design has got to be functional," says *ROB's* former art director Marcello Biagioni. "Some people think redesigns are fairly easy...they don't realize that you've got to really analyze [each step]."

Halifax-based typographer Rod McDonald feels that many logos out there aren't very good because most are just set in a regular typeface. "[Your logo] is way too important an issue to do just that," says McDonald, who created *Maclean's* logo and body font. "It doesn't have to be outlandish but it has to be yours." He says it's more common in the

U.S. for magazines to customize their own typeface, conscious of the importance of having a unique voice in the marketplace. And the costs aren't staggering, he adds. In many cases you can hire a typographer for the same amount you'd pay for a professional photo shoot.

For its 20th anniversary last fall, *Today's Parent* hired Barbara Woolley of Toronto-based design firm Hambly & Woolley to help create a new look and new logo. The old moniker was terribly dated, says Woolley, as it hadn't changed in 20 years. "The real desire was to get the words to be bigger and to be more legible and to be friendlier... this [new logo] is even more accessible, open, almost a naïve typeface, it's almost child-like in its square serif." To link both words together the font was custom-drawn so that the Y in *Today's* attaches to the R in *Parent*.

Canadian Education Association's title *Education Canada* was updated last summer. Changing its logo was a major hurdle, says art director Lynn Campbell. Designer Nick Milton was brought in to assist. He created a visual metaphor using an apple to represent education with a bite mark in the shape of a maple leaf. Although the apple is an overused image in terms of education, says Campbell, it really depends on how it's treated. Milton agrees that it wasn't an easy sell. "Someone once said that the duty of the designer was not to give clients what they want, but to give them something they never dreamt they could have." And with many of these examples, their well-executed redesigns did just that. M



The quarterly had no identity before it redesigned, says consultant Nick Milton

Designer Barb Woolley says its new customized logo has more movement

BRIEFLY

ADCC AWARD WINNERS 2004
Receiving top honours in the editorial design category of the 2004 Advertising & Design Club of Canada awards were *Coupe*, *Flare* and *Saturday Night*. *Coupe's* Rock and Roll issue, 011, won two golds for best cover and art direction for an entire issue (silvers went to *Prefix Photo* for issues 8 and 9 and *Azure* for its

March/April 2004 edition). *Coupe* was also awarded two silvers for best cover, for the front and back covers of issue 10. *Flare* won gold in fashion photography. *Saturday Night* walked away with a gold and silver for portrait photography. And *Toro* garnered two silvers for illustration and photojournalism.

2004 FOLIO: OZZIE AWARDS
Only two Canadian magazines

came home with Ozzies last November. *Today's Parent* and *enRoute* received three honours apiece in the consumer under-250,000 category at the New-York based *Folio*:

magazine's design awards. *Today's Parent* won bronze for best use of illustration and silvers for best use of photography and best feature design (*enRoute* took bronze for best

feature design). The Spafax Canada inflight title also snatched a second bronze for best overall design and a silver for best cover, all for its September 2003 issue.