



Youth 2.0:

A Study of Resources Used by Newspapers to Attract Young Readers

“We are not making large efforts to attract young readers to our print titles. We believe that younger consumers are more attracted to digital sites. We are investing in sites that enable readers to not just be passive consumers, but engage their participation.”

- Daily Newspaper publisher

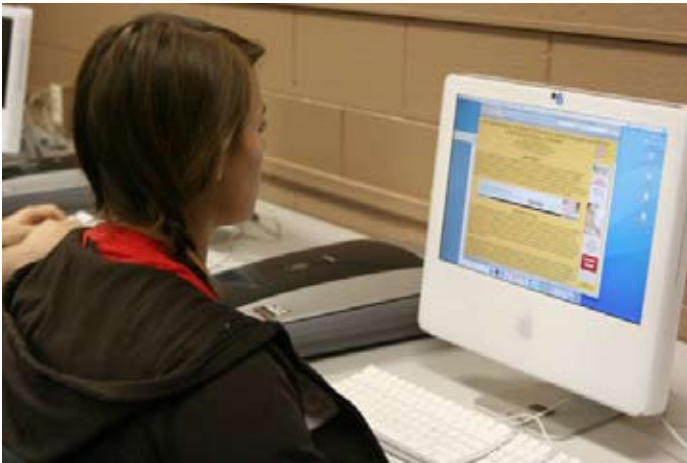
REPORT

August 2008
- Geoffrey M. Graybeal



SUMMARY

This study, a theoretically-driven, nationwide survey of U.S. daily newspaper publishers, looked at the issue of “youth content” from a management and economics perspective focusing on resources. Of the newspapers surveyed, publishers have placed a higher priority in attracting children and teenagers to the Web than in print. Findings suggest that a greater investment in resources for attracting youth can produce more content that appeals to youth and potentially lead to more frequent youth oriented advertising. Revenue from youth content pays for itself at only one-third of the newspapers.



OVERVIEW

- Newspapers *are* targeting young readers- both children and teenagers
- All newspapers surveyed use comics. Comics are not a unique resource.
- Newspapers use a variety of strategies to attract young readers- publishing content in a separate youth section is not an either/or proposition isolated from integrating content with the rest of the paper.
- Almost all of the publishers consider attracting young readers to the online editions important, whereas some publishers consider attracting young readers to the print edition as unimportant.

- The following patterns were found:

- 1) higher percentages of surveyed newspapers that have printed youth content enjoy growth in youth readership than surveyed newspapers without youth content.
- 2) higher percentages of surveyed newspapers that invest more resources have more youth content than newspapers investing fewer resources.
- 3) Higher percentages of surveyed newspapers with youth products also attract more frequent youth-directed advertising than surveyed newspapers without youth products.

ONLINE TREND

- Some newspapers published youth sections for years in print. Now, almost everyone says they are online.
- Many newspapers with youth content began their efforts in print. Now, most newspaper publishers surveyed in this study indicate the Web is priority No. 1 when it comes to attracting young readers.
- Again and again, publishers cited a need to increase their online presence and efforts to attract young readers on the Internet.
- Newspaper publishers are investing more resources in producing youth content on the Web than in print.
- Publishers in the survey have seen results online. A majority of respondents (56%) indicate that over the last five years the number of children and/or teenagers reading the online edition has grown.

“Young people don’t read the newspaper, they look to the Internet for their information. Newspapers need to figure out how to attract young people to their Internet sites.”
- One newspaper publisher



PRINT TREND

- Some newspapers have eliminated efforts to attract youth in print. The online focus could be at the expense of printed youth products, but this study cannot answer that question.
- The effort in print appears to be to *hold ground*. Only 8% of newspapers surveyed say that the number of children and/or teenagers reading the print edition has grown. Almost one third of publishers (32%) reported print readership among children and teenagers has declined over the past five years. However, almost half (46%) say it has stayed the same.

RESOURCES

- Some newspaper publishers say they have fewer resources to devote to efforts to attract young readers. In the current environment, youth efforts are one of the first things to go. Most newspapers are integrating youth content with their main products.
- Many newspaper publishers recognize the tough choices that are made in resource allocation and that most newspapers are only investing a small percentage, 10% or less, of their budgets and space, toward youth.
- Newspapers surveyed clearly are not allotting a lot of money or space to youth content now. Responses to staffing questions show newspaper publishers are willing, however, to allot personnel to create youth content.
- When it comes to staffing, newspapers use more part-time than fulltime staff, with the exception of copy editors and reporters who work on youth coverage as part of their duties. Fulltime staff only focus on youth content as part of their regular duties.
- Children under the age of 17 who create content for newspapers are more likely to be unpaid than paid.

“Recent cutbacks have forced painful choices. One is that we have no one who has their total focus on driving youth readership. It is part of a myriad of duties and so it gets the partial attention consistent with this scenario.”

-Another newspaper publisher

ADVERTISING AND PROFIT

- The majority of newspapers’ youth-oriented advertising comes from local retail stores.
- Revenue from ads targeting young people does not pay for youth content at the majority of newspapers. At one-third of newspapers surveyed, however, revenue from ads targeting young people either pays for youth content or makes a profit.
- The percentage of newspapers that say they have youth directed advertising appear daily and monthly is higher for those who publish a youth section than newspapers that do not have a youth section.

DEMOGRAPHICS

A survey was sent to U.S. daily newspaper publishers. There were 126 responses. Of them:

- 99 respondents provided demographic data
 - 83 male
 - 16 female
- Average age: 54
- Average daily paid circulation: 26,201.





OVERVIEW

The basic research question asks about the current extent of efforts to target young readers, and whether those efforts work. Descriptive results provide a partial answer. Some questions were not answered by every respondent.

Results for 126 respondents show that most of the newspapers (88%) are publishing content for children and/or teenagers. A majority (57%) of these newspaper publishers also reported they are targeting both children and teenagers. One out of five newspapers responding target only children 12 and under, while slightly fewer target only teenagers.

All 98 newspaper publishers who answered a question asking if comic strips and funnies regularly appear in their newspapers said they do. Eighty publishers (82%) included comic strips and funnies among types of content used to attract young readers. Only 10 publishers (10%) reported that comic strips and funnies are not important for attracting young readers. Only two publishers, or 2%, said funnies and comics are the primary type of content used to attract young readers, while the remaining six publishers responded that they did not know how important funnies and comic strips are for attracting children and teenagers to the newspaper.

However, the questionnaire also specified respondents should exclude comic strips and funnies when responding to other questions about content. Since all newspapers surveyed reported having comic strips and funnies, they would not necessarily be a unique, unimitable resource.

Of newspapers surveyed, 105 newspapers publish a section in print, 101 newspapers integrate content in print, and 100 newspapers both integrate youth content in print and publish a section. Sixty-nine newspapers publish a section on the Web for youth content, 68 newspapers integrate youth content on the Web, and 60 newspapers integrate and have a special section on the Web.

Slightly more than one out of four of the 134 newspapers use local young people to produce content for children and teenagers. This number holds regardless of the type of content, from a youth page or section in print (29%), to youth content integrated in the main newspaper (27%), to a section of the website targeting young readers (27%), and content targeting young readers integrated in the main website (27%). Respondents could check all the content strategies employed at their newspaper, so the number of responses per category exceeds the number of newspaper respondents. This suggests that some newspapers use a variety of strategies to attract young readers. For many newspapers, publishing content in a separate youth section is not an either/or proposition isolated from integrating youth content with the rest of the paper.

Newspapers are more likely to have staff working to produce youth content for the Internet than for print. Twenty-five percent of respondents have staff producing print youth sections compared to 42% with staff producing youth website sections. For newspapers that integrate youth content into the main paper, 35% use staff, compared to 44% of newspapers that use staff to produce youth content that is integrated into their websites. Respondents are much more likely to use syndicated content in print than online.

Respondents were experienced with youth content. Almost half of the 97 respondents who indicated the years they have been publishing content targeting young readers have published youth content for 10 or more years (46%). Only 20% of these respondents had published youth content for five years or less.

RESOURCES

Newspapers in the survey are spending very little to attract children and teenagers. Of 86 newspapers publishing in print, 75 newspapers, or 87%, said they devote 10% or less of non-



advertising space to content for youth. Of 81 newspapers publishing online, 72 newspapers, or 90%, of respondents devote 10% or less of their non-advertising space each week to content for young readers. A vast majority of respondents – 76 of 84 – also said they devote 10% or less of their newsroom financial budget, their non-newsroom financial budget, and their total financial budget to producing youth content in print and online.

Some newspaper publishers say they have fewer resources to devote to efforts to attract young readers.

One publisher cited “dwindling total resources and the need to try and serve our core (older) readers while still providing something compelling to young, increasingly, web-oriented news and information consumers” as the “single most important issue” newspapers face attracting young readers to the print and online editions.

A third newspaper publisher has decided to focus the print newspaper on readers ages 50 to 90 rather than devote “much time and space” to attracting young readers.

“We no longer have the budget, staff or newsprint to try and be all things to all people in print,” the publisher wrote. “We have made some meager attempts at reaching young readers online, but that is mosting (sic) in the area of prep sports and photo galleries.”

Respondents cited top management as having the most influence shaping their strategy to attract young readers. Of the 81 respondents to this question, more than half, 53, stated the managing editor, editor or publisher had the most influence over strategy.

For the 93 and 86 newspapers, respectively, responding to questions about the number of fulltime and part time staffers producing youth content each week, the average newsroom staff, including employees who do not produce youth content, was 32 fulltime employees and 4 part

time employees. On any given week, newspapers use a variety of staff to produce content targeting young readers, including editors, reporters, copy editors, and paid and unpaid stringers. The newspapers that use stringers 17 or younger on average used about 3 unpaid stringers. When these stringers were paid, newspapers used an average of 2. Newspapers don’t have any clear preference for paid or unpaid part timers, except when it comes to the young stringers. Young stringers are on average more likely to be unpaid than paid for covering youth topics.

Newspapers assign small numbers of full-time staffers to cover these topics, except for copy editing and reporters occasionally covering youth topics. This suggests that newspapers’ full-time staff produce content targeting young readers as part of, but not all of their responsibilities.

STRATEGY

One hundred and one respondents completed the entire questionnaire. For 99 of these newspaper publishers, the Web is the answer to attracting young readers. A majority of publishers consider it important to attract children and/or teenagers to the online edition of the newspaper. Almost all of the publishers still consider attracting young readers to the online editions important, whereas some publishers consider attracting young readers to the print edition as unimportant.

These responses are consistent with responses showing newspaper publishers are investing more resources in producing youth content on the Web than in print. Publishers in the survey have seen results, but only online. A majority of respondents (56%) indicate that over the last five years the number of children and/or teenagers reading the online edition has grown. Another 19% say readership has stayed about the same. A significant number of publishers, 24%, did not know how their online readership has changed.

Only 8% of newspapers surveyed say that the



number of children and/or teenagers reading the print edition has grown. Almost one third of publishers (32%) reported print readership among children and teenagers has declined over the past five years. However, almost half (46%) say it has stayed the same.

Thirty-three out of 83 newspaper publishers who answered the open ended question cited the Internet, technology and changes in communication patterns as “the single most important issue” newspapers face attracting young readers to the print and online editions.

“I believe the single most important issue facing print editions is the change in communication technology and the means by which today’s youth seek information and connect with their peers,” one publisher wrote. “Online editions may fare better if the content available is of particular interest. Here, however, younger readers have a wide variety of sources to surf in their attempts to satisfy their needs. Our dead wood editions are not appealing to younger readers because of their evolving electronic communication habits. At this point content doesn’t really matter. And NIE (newspaper in education) programs don’t make any impact because newspapers are viewed more as old communication devices.”

Another publisher predicted that the print version of newspapers “will cease to exist, except in small pockets of population, in the next five to seven years.”

“Without consistent print products in front of students, that attrition of print readers will diminish even faster,” the publisher wrote.

Another newspaper publisher wrote that “much like online companies, who continually refine product offerings, we need to leap out of our comfort zone and throw new products out to the market place and see what ‘sticks’.” “It is easier to lead older readers to young content than it is to lead younger readers to older content,” the publisher wrote.

Again and again, publishers cited a need to increase their online presence and efforts to attract young readers on the Internet.

“Online areas certainly make more sense and should be explored further,” one publisher wrote. “Young readers go online much more than the print product,” wrote a second publisher. “Young readers are getting most of their news from the Internet,” wrote a third publisher.

“We are not making large efforts to attract young readers to our print titles,” wrote a fourth publisher. “We believe that younger consumers are more attracted to digital sites. We are investing in sites that enable readers to not just be passive consumers, but engage their participation.”

Newspapers “should be on the forefront of Web innovation- they should be leading the pack,” wrote another publisher.

Another newspaper publisher wrote that newspapers must offer different content online.

“Until the newspaper industry understands and learns that it cannot use a web site as simply a place to ‘hang the paper’ and ‘try and sell some ads’ it will never transition into the Internet and blogosphere world successfully,” the publisher wrote. “Newspaper Internet sites have to have their own editors that are in as much competition with the printed product as anyone else is and are not so much ‘gate-keepers’ of information but facilitators.”

One newspaper publisher said the paper’s digital efforts to attract young readers are working.

“The printed newspaper is becoming a dinosaur and has already lost the young audience who can get the information they want much easier and faster through electronic media and the Internet,” the publisher wrote. “They have a need for ‘instant gratification’ which drives them to find ways to get what they want, right now. At this time we see no reason to try to bring those kids back to the printed



page unless there is a wholesale lifestyle change in the younger age group in the country. That isn't likely. The Internet and other electronic media are a different matter. We can provide the 'instant gratification' through constantly updated websites that include information young people want, presented in an abbreviated style. We are doing that with our website that includes local school sports information, movie schedules, concert information, etc. We are also doing it through our Direct Connection (sic) to cell phones where we offer a number of services branded with our name and sponsored."

YOUTH ADVERTISING OVERVIEW

One hundred and one publishers answered a question asking if they sell advertising that targets young readers. Most of these respondents (81, or 80%) answered yes, and the rest said no. Half of the respondents answering yes, or 40, reported youth-targeted advertising appears weekly in their newspaper.

One respondent who answered yes did not answer two other questions about advertising. Results show 51, or 65%, of the remaining 79 respondents get the majority of their youth-oriented advertising from local retail stores. National retail is a distant second, with 12 or 15% listing that as their major source of youth ads.

Revenue from ads targeting young people does not pay for content at 47 newspapers, or 60% of newspapers responding to these questions. Of the remaining newspapers, 16 newspapers, or 20%, reported advertising pays these costs while 9 newspapers, or 11%, reported advertising more than pays these costs.

ABOUT THIS SURVEY

The questionnaire and research plan were approved by the University of Georgia's Institutional Review Board (Project Number 2008-10535-0).

Questions about participants' rights can be addressed to the Institutional Review Board, University of Georgia, 612 Boyd Graduate Studies Research Center, Athens, Georgia 30602-7411; Telephone (706) 542-3199; E-Mail Address IRB@uga.edu

FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

See Unpublished Master's Thesis:

Graybeal, G.M. (2008) *Youth 2.0: A Study of Resources Used by Newspapers to Attract Young Readers*, University of Georgia, Athens

Available from University of Georgia Libraries.

TABLES

The following tables represent the major statistical findings from the study. The questionnaire was administered between May 16, 2008 and June 25, 2008. None of the tests in the categories are statistically significant, most likely because of the low number of respondents who don't publish youth content and the low number of respondents in each category.

The questionnaire asked about comic strips and funnies but also specified respondents should exclude comic strips and funnies when responding to all other questions about content. Since all newspapers surveyed reported having comic strips and funnies, they would not necessarily be a unique, unimitable resource. Therefore, the discussion of youth content excludes comic strips and funnies.

Table. Do you publish content for children and/or teenagers?

Answer	N	Percent
Yes	111	88%
No	15	12%
Totals	126	100%

**Table . Types of youth content published**

Where content is published	N	Percent
Page/section print	105	94%
Integrated print	101	90%
Page & integrated print	100	89%
Section web	69	62%
Integrated web	68	61%
Section & integrated web	60	54%

Table . Source of Youth Content (N = 134, respondents could select multiple answers)

	Youth Content Staffing			
	Page/Section in Print	Integrated in print	Section on web	Integrated on web
Staff Produced N	25% (42)	35% (58)	42% (41)	44% (45)
Parent Co. N	2% (3)	1% (2)	3% (3)	4% (4)
Syndicates N	38% (64)	32% (53)	18% (17)	19% (19)
Local Young People N	29% (49)	27% (45)	27% (26)	26% (27)
Other N	6% (10)	5% (8)	9% (9)	7% (7)
Total	168	166	96	102

Table : Importance of attracting young readers to newspaper editions.

1 = not important, 5 = very important			
Question	Average	Std. dev.	
Importance of attracting readers to print edition N = 99	3.76	1.060	
Importance of attracting readers to online edition N = 98	4.21	1.008	



Table : 5-year changes in youth readership

Edition	Growing	Declining	About the same	Don't know	Total
Print	8%	32%	46%	14%	100%
N	8	32	45	14	99
Online	56%	1%	19%	24%	100%
N	56	2	19	24	100

Table . Major source of youth advertising

Ad Source	N	Percent
National retail	12	15%
Local retail	51	65%
Local classified	4	5%
Other	5	6%
Don't know	7	9%
Total	79	100%

Table : Do ads targeting young people pay for content targeting young people?

Answer	N	Percent
Does not pay for the cost of the content	47	60%
Pays for the cost of the content	16	20%
More than pays for the cost of the content	9	11%
Don't publish content targeting young people	7	9%
Totals	79	100%

**Table :** Change in Youth Readership in the Print Edition over the Past 5 Years

Publish Content	Growing	Declining	About the Same	Don't Know	Total
Yes	9%	30%	45%	16%	100%
N	8	26	39	13	86
No	0%	46%	46%	8%	100%
N	0	6	6	1	13
TOTAL	8%	32%	46%	14%	100%
N	8	32	45	14	99

Table : Change in Youth Readership in the Online Edition over the Past 5 Years

Publish Content	Growing	Declining	About the Same	Don't Know	Total
Yes	53%	1%	20%	26%	100%
N	46	1	17	23	87
No	77%	0%	15%	8%	100%
N	10	0	2	1	13
TOTAL	56%	1%	19%	24%	100%
N	56	1	19	24	100

Table : Youth Content Level Crosstab with Level of Staff Resources

	Low Content	High Content	Total
Low Resources	55%	45%	100%
N	35	29	64
High Resources	42%	59%	101%
N	12	17	29
TOTAL	51%	50%	101%
N	47	46	93

**Table :** Crosstab Advertising Frequency with Publish Youth Section

Publish Youth Section?	Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Other	Total
Yes	24%	50%	15%	12%	100%
N	16	34	10	8	68
No	17%	50%	0%	33%	100%
N	2	6	0	4	12
TOTAL	23%	50%	13%	15%	100%
N	18	40	10	12	80

Table : Number of Staff Members Producing Content Targeting Young Readers

Full Time Staff Position	Avg.	Part Time Staff Position	Avg.
Editors supervising lower level editors	1	Part-time editors working on youth content	1
Std. dev.	(1.064)		(.740)
Editors supervising reporters	1	Part-time reporters paid to cover youth topics	1
Std. dev.	(.913)		(2.383)
Editors supervising desk personnel	1	Paid adults such as school personnel or social workers covering youth topics	1
Std. dev.	(.754)		(1.078)
Copy editors	2	Unpaid adults such as school personnel or social workers covering youth topics	1
Std. dev.	(1.688)		(2.021)
Reporters covering youth topics fulltime	1	Paid stringers 17 or younger covering youth topics	2
Std. dev.	(1.557)		(5.897)
Reporters occasionally covering youth topics	2	Unpaid stringers 17 or younger covering youth topics	3
Std. dev.	(1.912)		(8.313)
Other	3	Other	0
Std. dev.	(5.948)		(.267)
Total full-time newsroom staff ^a	32	Total part-time newsroom staff ^a	4
Std. dev.	(35.829)		(5.824)

Includes staff who do not produce youth content