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PUBLICATIONS ANALYSIS

NAME: Riley Paulsen

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The Anderson Herald Bulletin has never been particularly trendsetting in terms of information design, but what it lacks in presentational luster, it makes up for in its excellent photography department and use of telling images to illustrate its stories. The paper follows a traditional newspaper format with a focus on longer articles and typically only includes information graphics when they are available from wire services. This may be an indication that the paper is without the financial and/or technical means to produce these elements on a regular basis.

The paper serves a conservative and older community. News pages tend to contain the leads of around four stories and usually make use of large pictures. These factors imply that it is designed for someone who reads the paper front to back. Scanners and samplers can find some solace in the newly added entertainment section on page two which showcases what is happening to various celebrities in compact briefs. The majority of the paper contains virtually no white space and is packed with information from the front page to the last. Boxes highlighting vital information are used infrequently, with about one appearing in each section. In short, the paper appears not to take scanners and samplers into much consideration. The sports pages are usually the only pages that show any attempt at page design, but this may only arise from the availability and use of score charts which break up the long, text-filled pages.

To better serve its readers who do not participate in cover-to-cover reading, The Herald Bulletin could interrupt its monotonous pages with just about anything, because it currently contains nothing but text and large, albeit descriptive, photos. Currently, all of the stories on every page receive the same formatting treatments, thus they all look the same. When color is used as a background element, it is often a bland tan color that is similar to the newsprint, which has little effect of drawing attention to the element. A major change that could free up room for more leads would be to limit the size of photographs used to accompany articles. By converting parts of some lengthy articles (which are primarily fact-based anyway) into formats that better present information, such as call-out boxes or even simple bulleted lists, the paper could dramatically make improvements to the way it caters to some of its less enthusiastic readers.

Popular Photography & Imaging has to be one of the most meticulously designed publications, in that it contains short informal pieces on nearly every page, while at the same time manages to run full length articles right next to them. Combine this with the fact that it manages to keep most of the technical information off to itself *and* accompanies each article with numerous images and product shots, it is clear to see that there is little room for anything else. White space rarely makes an appearance; however, it is just as rarely missed. As it is primarily a visual publication, comparison photographs are sometimes used in place of graphics to illustrate concepts and techniques.

Nearly every page of this magazine (that does not feature a full page ad) has something for every reader. Some stories are broken up into question-and-answer sessions and, frequently, the magazine makes use of long captions to tell the story of photographs. This ensures that readers get the story behind the image, even if they choose to forego the body text. The long articles investigate topics further and provide detailed information to reward the readers who stick it out. There are also plenty of how-to's that contain short step-by-step directions that will encourage readers to follow along. One of the most innovative sections, "The Fix," goes so far as to "write" (using a handwriting font) necessary corrections directly on top of original images which appear next to re-edited versions of themselves. This tactic is clearly meant for the scanners who can then figure out the rest of the story by comparing the two images.

Color is used only sparingly throughout the magazine's text which is perhaps intentional. Headlines and backgrounds tend to be tints of black. By using this desaturated palette, color photographs receive an emphasis that puts them on par with other visual elements. Pages are generally well-balanced with each part layered evenly, including articles' body text. The reason that the long stories can compete for attention with the large photos can be attributed to the hierarchical breakdown of information, as most articles have sections and/or headings to give scanners and samplers a chance to jump in at any time.

One opportunity that is being missed is the use of in-issue referencing, which should be a given for such a magazine. There are plenty of chances for stories to refer to other pages and taking advantage of this and bringing these relationships to attention could get scanners and samplers to take in more of the magazine. Aside from this one problem, the publication appears to have little wrong with it and serves as a good example of how to manage a lot of information while still keeping that content appealing.

If there was ever a medium designed for the conveyance of information, the Internet is the closest to it. In an excellent realization of this potential, Slate Magazine, an online publication, has made the web its base of operations and functions in a way that utilizes technology, while still retaining the familiar feel of a publication. Slate covers a variety of topics and, thanks to digital storage, is free to run as many stories as it has available. The site is not overly technical in terms of web architecture and relies on basic CSS formatted text to tell nearly all of its stories. Simple design helps to relieve the reader from the overwhelming burden of information overload that can come from viewing the either the front page or each of the departmental pages. While the magazine is updated daily, links to stories from previous days remain on the front page to expand the amount of content available.

The site is held together by a common color scheme and a traditional multi-column design. Font choices have been made well, considering the limitations of the unpredictable, but inevitable, nature of page rendering differences across platforms. An information graphic lies at the top of the content section and provides links and headlines for some of the top stories. At the top left, there is a listing of the magazine's departments which displays a fly-out menu upon hovering, which in turn lists several of the section's newest stories. A novel idea that graces the homepage is a horizontal menu across the top of the page that links to each day of the week. This simplifies the search for an past article. It goes without saying that the scanner's interest will be well captured by the plethora of stories available for browsing.

The Internet publication format is not particularly accommodating to the sampler or the full time reader, but this shortfall can be compensated for by the use of tabbed browsing and/or the available RSS feeds. Accommodations should be considered for readers who want a longer overview of the stories; perhaps an expanded view could be chosen which would display a short summary of the article by the author.

The articles are well set off from the rest of the site, with unobtrusive ads running down the right side, but often the story's text is all that is provided. By breaking up the stories and adding side information, the publication could help to maintain the interest of scanners and samplers. Doing so, however, could cause problems for the site's administrators, as uniquely formatted articles are often more of a challenge to integrate into current site structures, especially in Slate's case, since the site contains years of previous content. Overall, the site does what it set out to do and is able to cater to a far larger audience through its use of the Internet. In doing so, Slate Magazine has become a premiere web publication.