



Marketing Messages

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Gauging the Lower Mainland's appetite for a daily Dose

Being a self-confessed print media junkie, I've watched with great interest the latest free daily newspaper battle unfold. Print media relies heavily on the support of readers and advertisers. Marketing is their game. In less than a month we have been inundated with over 3,000 new newspaper boxes and 370,000 copies of new newspapers throughout the Lower Mainland. Three free dailies are now vying for readership in an increasingly crowded newspaper market. Do we really need three new papers? Not likely, but some big money supporters think there's growth in the "quick read" category aimed primarily at younger readers. Until the battle for eyeballs has been waged, we won't know who will survive. Why so much interest so quickly? Statistics tell us that readers of paid daily newspapers are aging. The **Vancouver Sun** average reader age is 49 yrs, The **Province** 45 yrs, The **Globe** 44.9 yrs and The **National Post** 45.4 yrs, while the average age for those living in the GVRD is 45 yrs. The logic behind the roll out of new free dailies is that if you don't cultivate younger readers, it's bad news for your business model long-term. These new players feel that existing daily papers are not serving those under 40, or it may just be that they want a piece of the action from alternatives that do reach this market. All three new entrants claim to have created a product that appeals to younger readers, those who are technically savvy, raised in a culture of sound bites and the internet, used to getting their information and entertainment for free, and aren't interested in longer editorial. Or so goes the focus group feedback.

Lets debunk some of the information surrounding the infusion of new reading material and what it means to you as a reader and as a marketer. First, some facts:

Metro is jointly owned by Canwest (the owners of The Vancouver Sun and The Province), **Torstar** and **Metro International**. Metro was started in 1995 and is now the fastest growing newspaper in the world with 47 Metro editions in 69 cities worldwide. They distribute 145,000 copies Monday - Friday in Vancouver, and also have editions in Montreal and Toronto. Their target is the 18-49 year old urban commuter seeking an intelligent, quick read. 70% of their readers are under 45 yrs. The sell: Free, quick read, relevant news on the go. The edge: First market entry, big money backers, and an established brand.

24 Hours is jointly owned by **Quebecor**, a subsidiary of **Sun Media Corp** and **The Jimmy Pattison Group**. 24 Hours was started in 2003 with editions in Toronto and Montreal. They distribute 145,000 copies Monday - Friday in Vancouver and have been at the center of the controversy over placement of boxes without city permission. Sun Media is the largest chain of tabloids and community newspapers in Canada. Their target is a broad age range of active people with limited time to become informed and entertained. The sell: Free quick read tabloid style journalism made widely available. The edge: Smaller size newsmagazine glossy, established backers, high visibility and publicity.

Dose is owned by **Canwest Global**. They distribute 80,000 copies Monday - Friday in Vancouver. They have also just launched editions in Calgary, Edmonton, Ottawa, and Toronto. Their target is urban 18-34yrs, defined as 20 something singles and 30 something couples. Dose is a print product which is complimented with an interactive website for forums and pier discussion. The on-line product has e-commerce capabilities, contesting, email programs and database marketing capabilities. Dose's wireless portal offers such things as movie listings, polls, and games. Concert tickets, and MP3 downloads are also available on-line. The sell: A new mix multi-media brand for young Canadians, by young Canadians. The edge: Unique approach and content entrusted with talented youth to reach their peers.

In Toronto and Montreal, free commuter dailies have gained a substantial number of readers at the expense of some traditional newspapers, NADbank readership figures show. However, NADbank also shows that overall newspaper readership across the country remained stable between 2003 and 2004. It is questionable whether new free dailies will actually pick up a substantial new market of younger readers, with the possible exception of Dose, which seems to be squaring off with the Georgia Straight. Time will tell if their innovative print and electronic vehicle will cultivate a loyal following. If Canwest can resist the temptation to send in someone over 50 to fix it if it doesn't deliver good quarterly results, it may well find a youthful niche. Early return rates are reportedly as high as 75% for Metro. They do not have an exclusive transit distribution agreement here as they do with the TTC in Toronto, so they are relying on surface street commuters for pick up. Return rates for 24 Hours were not available, but as long as there is a battle over distribution boxes their pick up numbers will be in flux.

Over the coming months the new free dailies will be battling for the hearts and minds of readers and advertisers. Market leaders are not easily dislodged, and it takes time to carve out a new niche. Email me you opinions. I'd love to hear what readers of Business in Vancouver think.

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