

# Reader Involvement

## Survey on Magazine "Wantedness"—Results Summary

**H**ow and why readers are involved in magazines is more than just a hot topic in the advertising industry. In fact, the "wantedness" of a publication has gone from being an industry buzzword to being one of the most powerful among all the measures available to media planners. "Wantedness" is important to advertisers, as it provides proof of the value the readers assign to—and the passion they have for—individual magazines. Moreover, it provides a vital means for media buyers to gauge the communication value of an ad.

*Guideposts* recognizes how essential understanding involvement and "wantedness" is to making informed media buying decisions. The proof? Starting



with our participation in the Involvement Alliance, *Guideposts* set out to help clients improve their ROI by looking for methods to measure emotional connection, not just reach. The resultant Involvement Index based on MRI has become a significant new benchmark in advertising—a way to provide the best possible chance that an ad will be viewed and acted upon.

*Guideposts* has been—and will continue to be—deeply committed to helping advertisers understand the impact of wantedness... so keep watching. In the meantime, if you want more information on the many factors that make this one of the most-wanted publications in the industry, click here. ([http://www.guideposts-media.com/re\\_wantedness.html](http://www.guideposts-media.com/re_wantedness.html))

**The following are the highlights of a study conducted online to gain insight from active media/advertising decision-makers:**

### What is the impact of being "Wanted"?

In the advertising communications paradigm, it could be one of the most powerful among all the media measures available to planners—as evidenced by the vast majority of respondents to this survey who stated that a magazine that could demonstrate strong reader involvement should deserve greater consideration in media selection. For all the metrics available to media planners and buyers for assessing the value of magazines in their media plans, the one thing they seem to coming into agreement on—more than ever—is that the concept of "Wantedness" is

gaining a major level of traction in their evaluation of a magazine's potential place in their recommendations... and how they define the potentially ambiguous concept of "wantedness" is remarkably similar. The survey's objective was to learn how media people and especially print planners and buyers feel about the issue of Reader Involvement and its impact on buying decisions. The survey was sponsored by *Guideposts* Magazine and was designed by leading marketing services firm DJG Marketing.

The extent of responses clearly lent an indication to how broad the concept of "Wantedness" is, and to the specific elements planners and buyers feel best demonstrate the phenomenon—many garnered from readily available information in syndicated research, circulation statements and

from sales calls.

A total of 414 people responded to the survey, with roughly 100 moving all the way through the survey to provide some very in-depth responses to questions regarding reader involvement and measures that they felt were growing in importance in their media evaluations.

As an initial measure of the impact of "Wantedness," 90.4% of respondents believe the ability to evaluate or determine "Wantedness" is growing in importance in print media selection. While largely they define "Wantedness" on their own terms, the key descriptors they mention range from subjective measures to more hard data.

They used more subjective answers to describe "Wantedness" such as, "an engaged audience vs. a passive

one," "a reader's burning desire to get and read a magazine," "the consumer's priority towards a medium—a first-read—a primary involvement," a description of how tight the relationship is between the reader and the publication," "the degree to which you have a vested interest in a magazine" and "the active desire on the part of the consumer to read the publication."

When asked to speak on the difference between "Tangible" and "Intangible" indicators of "Wantedness," the respondents cited the following for each type of measure:

#### Tangible Indicators Intangible Indicators

- Time Spent Reading
- Sense of editor's engagement with reader
- Subscription Renewal Rates/Growth
- Tone of editorial, relevance to lifestyle
- Reader Loyalty (4 out of 4 issues read)
- Buzz, Word of Mouth, PR about magazine
- Readership growth/vitality
- Competitive/Quality advertisers
- High Average Subscription Price Paid
- Investment in editorial, production values
- "One of My Favorites"
- Letters to the editor
- Paid subscribers with little or no discounts
- A gut feel about the edit quality and content

Given that the respondents seem to define the phenomenon on their own terms, it was not a surprise to see that when asked if they believed that the definitions of "Wantedness" and "Reader Involvement" are mostly interchangeable, 65% saw the two as comparable in meaning.

Relative to the role reader involvement plays in overall print evaluation, 94.1% of respondents see it Somewhat important or more—with 31% citing it as "Critical," and

another 39% noting it as "Very Important and growing in importance." Only 6% viewed reader involvement as not very important.

As to the future, 88% view reader involvement evaluation as being more important in the future, 44% see that reader involvement will be very important in assessing the bond with a magazine's reader, and another 27% noting it as being much more important than it has been in the past; 87% of respondents state that they currently use any factors to evaluate reader involvement. When asked which they use, the leading factors mentioned were Reading Time—79%, Reading Loyalty—79%, Subscription Renewal Rate—68% (which is interesting given that only a handful of magazines actually report the number), "One of My Favorites"—62%, Average Price Paid for Subscription—57% and Overall impression of editorial product—46%. A notable newcomer among the factors mentioned was the new tool, the "Involvement index," with a strong showing for a new measure of 31%.

Asked which factors were Most Important, respondents cited Reading Time—60%, "One of My Favorites"—60%, Reading Loyalty—53% and Actions Taken (clipped articles, coupons, called for info.) as the leading tools in assessing reader involvement. As a measure of how broadly they are used, 54% stated that they request reader involvement information in their Requests-for-Proposals (RFPs). The most likely sources of this information, as stated by the respondents, was a dead heat at 66% between "information that sales reps present to me" and "I run the data myself to analyze," followed by promotional mailings (23%) and "data requested from my research department" (20%).

While the respondent's overall perceptions of reader involvement information appear very strong, the real proof of its value would seem to be borne out in how they use the tools—

41% view it as "an integral part of the media selection process," 36% see it as a primary evaluation of a magazine's bond with its reader, and 41% view it as a tie-breaking tool. Most important though, is that they put the information to use!

The majority of respondents (63%), however, do not have any policy or official point-of-view where they work on evaluating reader involvement information. The remaining principally cite a "situation-by-situation" evaluation (33%) of this information, with only 4% stating that there' is a standard policy throughout their company for evaluating reader involvement data.

On the developing tools front—awareness of the new "Involvement Index" calculation has already reached a noteworthy 39% among respondents even though it was only brought into existence in mid-2002. Respondents did an exceptional job in correctly citing the 3 key elements that comprise the calculation of the Involvement Index—80% correctly said Reading Time, 73% said Reader Loyalty and 62% said "One of My Favorites." These three correct mentions far surpassed the next mention of Action Taken (18%) and Average Price Paid for Subscription (18%). The biggest hurdle "Involvement Index" seems to face is getting people more familiar with its benefits—61% said "Yes, they possibly intend to make use of "Involvement Index" in the future, but they would like to know more about it first."

As a testament to what this information could be worth to magazines, the vast majority of respondents (74%) stated that if a magazine that could demonstrate strong reader involvement it should deserve to gain greater consideration in the media selection. 27% said "Yes, absolutely," and 47% said "Yes, I would give a magazine greater consideration." Regarding those who cannot bring that kind of proof—75% felt that a magazine should be penalized if they can't

demonstrate meaningful reader involvement—principally (56%) saying “it would probably make them the loser in a tie-breaker.”

As a capstone open-ended question, we asked “What do you believe is the most important issue concerning reader involvement for media planners/buyers?” While the numerous responses were wide-ranging, the consensus seemed to surround the following topics: Making sure the tools and methods used are fair and effective, Verification/Enhancing the reliability of reader involvement information and Demonstrating with confidence that it makes a difference in

the overall equation.

The media planning/buying community certainly seems ready to embrace effective measures to dimensionalize the benefits of magazine reader involvement—magazines would be well-served take the opportunity to develop tools that present their stories of passionate reader bonds and the benefits that can accrue to the advertiser as a result.

To learn more about “wantedness” and reader involvement, go to: [http://www.guidepostsmedia.com/re\\_wantedness.html](http://www.guidepostsmedia.com/re_wantedness.html)

This survey on magazine reader involvement was conducted by a leading online media industry site among

people who in the course of their work recommend magazines for inclusion on media plans.

There were 417 total respondents to the survey—which consisted of 24 questions, four of which were posed in an open-ended format.

The survey was sponsored by *Guideposts* Magazine and was designed by leading marketing services firm DJG Marketing, which also produced this summary report. Data from individual respondents is strictly confidential, consistent with standard industry privacy policies. The survey was conducted from Nov. 4 to 19, 2002.) ■

---

## “Wantedness” Beyond the Numbers

### How and Why Readers are Involved in Magazines from an Editor’s Perspective

By Edward Grinnan, Editor in Chief of *Guideposts*

The hows and whys of the reader’s role in magazines has been the better part of my professional life for some 17 years now. And while *Guideposts* readers’ behavior no longer surprises me, it hasn’t stopped amazing me. Frankly, it’s a subject that fascinates me. The truth is that as long as there have been magazines, there have been relationships between them and their readers. Today, it’s safe to say, *everyone* has a magazine relationship.

I rely on *Sports Illustrated* and *ESPN Magazine* for college sports, I go to *Newsweek* for international news, etc. I read *Gourmet* because I enjoy dining out when I travel. Any half-dozen people could come up with a list of magazines that fills *all* of our needs—for information...or amusement, or entertain-

ment...or to bolster the ideas and causes we believe in. As we all know, magazines do this particularly well—targeting interests that range from the universal to a universe of minutiae...to *audiences* as varied in their own demographics.

But that’s not what I mean. In fact, that’s a long way from “*wantedness*”—and how I see it demonstrated every day at *Guideposts*.

“Wantedness” has a wider meaning. In our everyday lives it’s the act of making all the personal choices of who and what we want to make part of our lives—what’s important and meaningful to each one of us—and the emotion we invest in our choices. So, I’m talking about those qualities in a magazine that take it beyond meeting a need to *forming a long-term bond emotionally*—like the difference between an acquaintance and a *best friend*.

Whether you call the latest magazine marketing yardstick a gauge of “*involvement*” (which is somewhat measurable) or “*wantedness*” (a more behavioral understanding), what none of the hard facts and cold research numbers will tell you is how readers *feel*. What makes them *want to get involved* with a magazine...what *keeps* them involved—sometimes for an awesome amount of time. In the case of *Guideposts* for generations.

With all due respect to my publishing, marketing and research colleagues, maybe it takes an *editor* to put some meat on the bones of this new way of looking at magazines—so that you can get a more personal understanding of “*wantedness*.” In any event, however important (or nice to hear) the research or involvement indexes are, they don’t tell the whole story.

In general—and, we probably

see it more at *Guideposts* than other magazines—we believe there are four universal ways that readers develop closer, more personal relationships with a magazine: The short version is: **Community, Ownership, Trust and Accessibility.** We think of it as a solid, four-cornered base for *reader involvement*, each part of which is active (rather than passive), dynamic (rather than static) and can lead to greater understanding of “wantedness” because, above all these are each anchored in emotional honesty.

Let's take them one at a time.

**Community.** Community is what happens when readers look to magazines to keep in touch with each other—for a sense of connectedness. Especially today, I think people are searching to connect. I think it's as simple—and as complex!—as a *change* in the course of history. Baby Boomers aren't quite sure where to find answers to a lot of questions. Sure, we asked them in college...but then we got caught up in the excesses—wretched or otherwise—of the '80s and '90s. Now in the 2000s, it's as if an entire generation is saying, “My God. I can't figure this one out!”

But it goes beyond boomers, of course. That's why at *Guideposts*, we have stories from all ages, all generations—like our Kathy Ireland cover interview or the 11-year-old boy who raised money in his school so a village in Africa could drill a deeper well for clean drinking water.

I agree with those who say that this search for community is at the heart of our fascination with cyberspace and digital technology. From instant messaging and palm pilots to internet chatrooms, we're all looking to *connect*. I think it's also why “inspirational” is such a hot category in magazines and, not so incidentally, why “reality” programming is so hot on television.

Actually, *Guideposts* was the *forerunner* to chatrooms—and is the *original* “reality” magazine. It's in our charter: “to connect contemporary men and women with real stories of personal challenge and growth” using stories of reassurance, that the world makes sense, that there is an order that we can see. The plot is the same, only the sets and costumes have changed. What we're doing in 2003 is what Norman Vincent Peale, who founded *Guideposts*, had in mind in the middle of the last century. The basic human feelings in Mr.

**“We believe there are four universal ways that readers develop closer, more personal relationships with a magazine: Community, Ownership, Trust, and Accessibility.”**

Peale's day are the same in our day, too. It hasn't varied in 59 years, though the stories our readers tell reflect all the changes that make today's world a *very different* place than in 1945! We stay so in touch, so up-to-date because our readers are telling us (and each other) what's currently happening in their lives.

One *reason* for that is the strong sense of **ownership** *Guideposts'* readers have about the magazine, the second building block of reader involvement. They're very proprietary—and no wonder. *Guideposts'* stories *are* their own, true stories—they tell them, their *names* are on them. We shape and edit them, of course, but readers *really do* write the magazine. We think of our-

selves as their *delivery system*.

Whenever we make any change...when we added advertising...when we redesigned the magazine... we got letters. We got calls, all of which were variations on: “I wondered what you were going to do to *My Guideposts*, but then I realized you made *My Guideposts* better.”

It's like we should change the title of the magazine! We joke about re-naming it *My Guideposts* because that's what our readers call it. A sense of longevity and continuity, also, is ingrained communication we get from our readers. Almost every time we talk to or get a letter from a reader—and not a day goes by that I don't do both—what I invariably hear or read is: “This magazine has been in my family for X number of years...or, more often, generations.”

There wouldn't be so strong a sense of community or ownership without the all-important element of **trust**. This quality is as hard to define, and certainly to *quantify*, in a magazine as it is with people. What makes us *trust* what we hear, what we read? Certainly the external factors of good journalism—timeliness, accuracy, completeness, etc. are important. But, it doesn't *stop* there. It isn't just...“Wow! That guy rescued a woman! Wow! I saw the news photo!” When we say it's a true story...the *real* truth in a *Guideposts* story is the *emotional truth*. At editorial meetings, we always ask ourselves “is it *true?*”—on a deeper level than just a factual level. All editorial judgments, about content, style, tone, all of that, spring from this essential element of trust in the relationship between readers and *their* magazine.

I should add that that's probably because our focus on *emotional* truth takes us (at least) one step farther than other media. On a techni-

cal level, it helps that the subjects get to see the story before it's published. And that's the same whether it's a celebrity or just an everyday person. We tell them, "Tell us anything. Put everything into the story. It's *your* story, you can take what you don't want out later, if you like." Sometimes we spend hours getting to this level of emotional honesty. But it's always worth it. That's why our readers go one step further, why we have their trust, why they keep renewing year after year—that's what makes a *Guideposts* story different—our readers know that people tell us things they don't tell anybody else.

But none of this: readers' *trust*, their sense of *ownership* or of *community*, could exist very long without readers' knowing that it's reciprocal. **Accessibility**, then, completes the base that supports *true* reader involvement. As I've said before, I doubt that a day goes by when I don't relate directly to a reader. And that's true of all our editors—of everyone, really—at *Guideposts*. We know they *expect* us to "*be there*." And we will, by definition as well as by design. Editors and staff *make* as well as take calls and *write* as well as read and sort letters because we all understand and that building and maintaining connections with readers is the lifeblood of this magazine.

For example, I don't know how many other Editors in Chief get—or actually *take*—calls from a reader saying, "I know *you'll* help me with my billing problem." I certainly do. The other day, just after I got back from lunch, a nurse in Iowa who was trying to track a billing problem for one of her patients was on the phone. She said that she, too, was a reader of *Guideposts* and although she knew the customer service number, she'd read my *Editor's Notes* and knew she could call me directly. And I got it sorted

out. I know, if I did that all day long I wouldn't have time to edit the magazine. But I also know that it takes that kind of relationship to build and to maintain the kind of reader involvement that gets to the heart of *real* "wantedness." That kind of **accessibility**... that level of **trust**...in little things as well as big issues...that feeling of *ownership*... that sense of **community**.

So, my goal here is been to give you a at least a glimpse at how and why our readers develop and possess a "wantedness" for "their"

**"The essence of a  
*Guideposts* reader  
is this capacity for  
sharing, caring,  
helping, giving."**

*magazine*. I thought I'd briefly add a few examples of how that "wantedness" manifests itself at *Guideposts* and how we, as editors, help make that happen, which is to say: how *editorial values translate into reader involvement*.

Not only do they connect with one another, our readers demonstrate their *desire to help* others, to make a difference in someone's life...what we've all been reading and hearing a lot of these days. Well, the *essence* of a *Guideposts* reader is this capacity for sharing, caring, helping, giving. This is so dramatically manifested by the 55,000 manuscripts a year of their personal stories they send us to share with others, and also by the countless numbers of *Guideposts* issues they recycle to friends, relatives, libraries, hospitals—you name it.

The best example of how responsive and giving our readers are and

how much the magazine is part of their lives is a story that hasn't even ended yet. Brigitte Weeks, one of our former editors, grew up in England as a girl, knitting sweaters for Oxfam. And Oxfam, which is a British charity, took all those sweaters that British girls and mommies knit and passed them out to poor kids around the world. One day she saw a sweater—just an Oxfam sweater, I don't think it was even one of hers—on a little kid in *The New York Times*...in a picture from a refugee camp in Bosnia. She wrote a column in *Guideposts* about it, saying she had knitted sweaters for Oxfam and that it gave her a great sense of accomplishment to feel that the kind of work she did with her knitting needles actually ended up with a picture of a real little boy in *The New York Times*.

Once that ran, she started to get letters from readers saying, "Wow, that's great. How can we do that? Send me the pattern." So we began mailing out patterns. The people who couldn't knit sent yarn for us to send to the knitters. So we connected them. It was remarkable ...there was a whole "lot of knittin' goin' on" all over the country—it was heartwarming for us, too, I hasten to add.

What we *didn't anticipate* is that they would send *us* the sweaters. So far, we've gotten 200,000. Well, of course there's no Oxfam here to accommodate this—so, we tried shipping them to England for distribution. But no dice. So, we contacted other agencies. We've sent more sweaters to Bosnia. We've sent them to Afghanistan. We've sent them to Africa. We've sent them to Native American charities out West. We've sent them to Appalachia. Everywhere in the U.S. and the world—and to anybody who will deliver them for us.

It's crazy. We're editors, except to

*Guideposts* readers. We're friends. We get pictures of readers' special sewing groups—*Guideposts'* "Knit-Wits" in Nebraska being one of my favorites. They tell us that making these sweaters is like hugging a child in Bosnia. We know that they knit sweaters for the same reason that they tell their stories, because helping others is a part of their lives. And we're an integral part of that. And, of course, they're still sending us the sweaters—about 2,000 a week come in—and in five years I estimate we'll have gotten almost 1 million.

Even we at *Guideposts* may have underestimated the power of readers who want to be inspired to act. *Inspiration* is at the heart of our readers' involvement with "their" magazine. And, inspiration is—hallways stacked with sweaters notwithstanding—central to our mission and our mandate. That's where *translating editorial values to reader involvement* comes in. Our editorial platform is to be inspirational—just like *O: The Oprah Magazine*, *Real Simple*, *Organic Style* use inspiration—so that read-

ers who come to the magazine can find a means or message to help improve something in their lives.

While we're adamant about "staying on message" (as they say in the ad world), *because* the magazine is reader-driven, *Guideposts* also *stays current*, "moves in the cultural mainstream," as I believe I put it earlier. It's pretty easy to see why: Any issues that are talked about outside *Guideposts* are talked about in the magazine. In the '50s it was the threat of communism. Today it's overcoming racism. Readers used to be talking about World War II...then Korea...Vietnam...Desert Storm—now, Iraq. Stories about people's emotions *don't* change much over the years. As one reporter explained recently, our themes of inspiration are "as contemporary-sounding as the self-esteem movement and the popularity of yoga and meditation." [*Orange County Register*, 3/25/02] Basically, our stories are about the things that people talk about when they talk to each other...to their friends. Especially when you really get

*down* with your friends and start *having a heart-to-heart with your best friend*.

From stories, calls, and manuscripts to sweaters, those things tell you much more about *Guideposts'* reader involvement than our 2.6 million ABC-audited circulation...or our 77% renewal rate...more than being ranked No. 1 for adults and women in the new Involvement Index based MRI...or more even than being America's **No. 1** "inspirational" magazine. They tell you *why*. They show how *Guideposts is* truly unique, even in the "Inspirational" category. We're not celebrity based, we're not named after someone famous. We don't agitate or scare, we *comfort*. We pride ourselves on **accessibility**... we hold readers' **trust** sacred, we honor their **ownership** and we offer readers a sense of **community**. Really nothing more, or *less*, than sticking to our original formula: true stories told by real people to help each other and stay connected.

And it works...And it makes our readers really *want* *Guideposts* as a part of their lives. ■