



Print Still Drives Conversation, Buzz

Print '09 Panel: But Customized Editions Inevitable

By Jeremy Mullman

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CHICAGO (AdAge.com) -- At the annual Print '09 conference here during a future-focused discussion entitled "What's Print Got to Do with It?" a panel featuring media and marketing heavyweights such as Ogilvy & Mather Chairman Shelly Lazarus, Deutsch CEO Linda Sawyer, Wired Magazine Publisher Howard Mittman and Kodak Chairman-CEO Antonio Perez discussed the medium's future, and, for the most part, arrived at sunnier conclusions than fans of the printed word are used to hearing.

To Mr. Mittman, print's most valuable role is as a source of increased reader engagement and as a driver of traffic to Wired's websites. He pointed to a story in the magazine's September issue on how to vanish without a trace in the digital world that drove 2 million unique visitors to Wired's website, spawned more than 10,000 "tweets" on Twitter and ultimately was featured on ABC News. It drew 68 million press impressions, he said.

"Print can do what the other [media] can't," he said. "It has a level of engagement that really begins the process."

Ogilvy's Ms. Lazarus said she expected print to remain a vital ingredient in any successful campaign's media-mix "cocktail," also because of its usefulness as a traffic "driver." She talked about learning that lesson during the launch of Ameritrade, which struggled to draw traffic during an online-only campaign, and only really took off once offline media -- including print -- kicked in.

Even IBM, a major Ogilvy client and a leader in all things online, "wouldn't dream of not using print. They know it's an essential part of the argument."

Deutsch's Ms. Sawyer, likewise, praised the medium's "gravitas and weight" as making it invaluable, and Kodak's Mr. Perez declared that the "relevance of the printed page will continue to be phenomenal."

Of course, while everyone agreed that print will remain a vital part of the media mix, none of the panelists were asked -- and none volunteered -- whether its slice of the pie would somehow manage to avoid shrinking as online ad models continue to evolve.

There was broad agreement, however, that the sooner printers find a way to allow for narrowly targeted custom editions -- something technology currently allows but profit margins don't -- then the medium will have a tremendous advantage.

"It's possible now to send people their own custom version of a magazine, but we haven't ... made it pay out because it's costly," Ms. Lazarus said. "But within 10 years, the Time you get will be different from the Time someone else gets, and the promise of that ... is as good as it gets."

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