

# Print's lasting impression

Philip Cooke argues that travel trade mags are the lifeblood of our industry

Has anyone else wondered why it is that, while local newspapers are closing on a weekly basis and national newspapers struggle to maintain circulation and make money, the UK travel industry is able to sustain a huge and diverse range of hard-copy magazines, provided in full colour, high-quality print format?

With apologies for any that I might have missed, these publications include the following titles: *ABTA Magazine*, *Associate Management*, *Buying Business Travel*, *Business Travel*, *Conference News*, *Conference and Meetings World*, *Destination UK*, *Exhibition News*, *Exhibition World*, *Group Leisure and Travel*, *Group Leisure*, *Group Travel World*, *Group Travel Organiser*, *Selling Travel*, *Travel Bulletin*, *Travel GBI*, *Travel Trade Gazette* and *Travel Weekly*.

Of course, there are some strugglers cutting back on pagination and frequency but, nevertheless, that's an awful lot of newsprint and a lot of journalistic and editorial activity. So, how is it economically viable for these magazines to continue to drop through our letterboxes on a regular weekly or monthly basis, completely free of charge?

The answer must be that these publications, including the one you are reading right now, give their readers what they are looking for and, therefore, are also attractive to advertisers. They provide the travel industry, especially tour operators, with the kind of information that is needed to kick-start a product development, packaging and marketing cycle that ends up with a new travel experience appearing in a tour operator's or travel agent's website or brochure.

Even High Street travel agents have managed to thrive, while many other city centre retail operations have been in decline. There are, for instance, six large travel agents in very prominent locations within 100 metres of my office in the centre of Gloucester and when, sadly, our only Starbucks closed a few months ago, it was immediately replaced by a brand new Miles Morgan Travel Agency. This travel shop is located at Gloucester Cross, the centre of the city since Roman times and a prime retail site.

Returning to travel trade magazines, their popularity and success must be related to the fact that the travel industry's product range is inexhaustible, global and continuously evolving, and individual retailers cannot possibly acquire first-hand knowledge of every potential travel destination or experience that they will be trying to sell.

Tour operators, especially, depend on travel trade magazines for up-to-date product knowledge and for information about new destinations, flights, cruise ship products, hotel openings, festivals and sporting events which can be developed into holiday products and then sold via their brochures, websites or High Street travel shops.

Nevertheless, why do so many of our industry's print magazines continue to thrive in the digital age?

Perhaps it's because print is easier on the eye than online content or perhaps it's because you can tear a page out of a magazine (well, I do, all the time) for future reference while website content is transitory and 'out of sight is out of mind'?

Perhaps, instead of being in competition, print and digital in the travel industry are mutually supportive?

## Good print becomes good digital

One of the most important factors behind the success of the travel industry magazine sector is that good print material almost immediately becomes good digital material, contributing to higher search engine rankings for both the destination and the seller.

Everyone can have an opinion in the digital age and it's easy to send out almost unlimited promotional material online and via social media, but quantity does not equal quality.

Magazine coverage nearly always generates high search engine recognition because the 'inverted pyramid' style of journalistic writing ensures that the most important information, especially the headline and the all-important first paragraph, (called a 'standfirst') is the first to be read by both the human eye and by the search engine's 'bot', both of which are seeking relevant content and making important associations.

This is very different from academic writing where a thesis, dissertation or essay would begin with an introduction, followed by background information, a literature review, a methodology statement, then research findings, then counter arguments and, finally, a set of conclusions.

Journalists and digital content writers think differently; they always place the most important information at the beginning of the piece, before reading decay sets in. This gives both the reader and the search engine the most important information as early as possible, generating high digital visibility for the destination, the seller and the magazine.

This print and online coverage and the resultant high search engine performance is the lifeblood of our industry, but the source material has to be forward looking and actionable journalism, not inward-looking corporate PR. **CN**

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