**Opportunities Abound to Engage Young Readers**

There isn’t a news publication on the planet that is ignoring the need to explore new and better ways to engage younger readers. So when news executives from 22 countries met in Warsaw for a two-and-a-half-day Youth Engagement Summit sponsored by the World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers (WAN-IFRA) in early December 2013, they didn’t waste time defining the problem, but zoomed in on potential responses.

Among the most commonly raised points during the conference was this: Publications must concentrate on life-stage interests and content rather than focusing exclusively on chronological age. While this turned out to be a key consideration, it led to the inevitable question: How can publications transform a focus on interests and content into strategies to create long-term readers? While there are many answers to that question, there are a few ingredients that should be common to any approach.

* **Print still rules.** Interestingly, while today’s young people typically count on the Internet as their source of news, researchers have found that they nevertheless value print publications — especially when their names and photos are featured. This is why special sections featuring young people continue to do well, particularly in smaller markets where people are likely to recognize the names and faces. Ideas? Consider highlighting young leaders, young artists or young volunteers in your market, either via a special section or a sponsored blog. One Ontario publisher holds an annual “Search for Great Kids” program, which honors young people ages six to 18 for academic excellence and giving back to the community.
* **Reconsider content.** Research has also uncovered that today’s young media consumers are less concerned with objectivity and more focused on action. In addition to expecting to access information quickly, they want media to demonstrate their involvement in issues and causes that are important to readers. Ideas? Publications that sponsor community-focused events and activities should take every opportunity to promote their involvement and show readers how they can support the cause along with other members of the business community. A Michigan publisher takes the idea one step further by engaging young people in writing and producing their own community-oriented special section.
* **Incorporate interactivity.** The younger generation values publications that not only impart news and information, but are platforms for discussion and interaction. Ideas? Whenever possible, pair print products and promotions with vehicles for feedback and dialogue. This is where multiplatform promotions can be particularly effective for both readers and advertisers. An Iowa publisher scored with young adults by launching an entertainment guide offering several ways for readers to chime in regarding their preferences and suggestions.

While this list is not exhaustive, I hope it provides food for thought — and action!

*This article was written by Jo-Ann Johnson of Metro Creative Graphics, Inc.*