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## How To Make Readers Really Want You

James Erik Abels, 09.17.08, 2:00 PM ET

Forget Anna Wintour, famed editrix of *Vogue*. Just like New York's Fashion Week, which ended last Friday, she's so over. The big ideas for keeping *Vogue* hot are coming from the business department down the hall—and it is betting big on the appeal of Web television.

At the top of the list: *Model.Live*, a 12-episode Web video series now playing on Vogue.TV that follows three young women as they try to break into the business while journeying to Fashion Weeks around the world. The show has been viewed over a million times across the Internet since launching in late August.

Not only is there original content under the *Vogue* name, but there's money behind the effort too: The show is sponsored by EXPRESS.com and produced by IMG Sports & Entertainment. *Vogue* is coy about the numbers, but some reports place production costs at \$3 million. With single magazine ad pages going for as much as \$121,000, show sponsors may be getting exclusive access to *Vogue*'s name—in full motion video—on the cheap.

That's quite a powerful advertising pitch for the magazine industry. Faced with declining circulation and stagnant Web strategies, print products like *Vogue* are becoming online television networks. Last week, *Vogue*-owner Conde Nast launched Glamour.TV for *Vogue*'s sister magazine.

"The advertisers are pursuing what's trendy," says Rebecca McPheters, a magazine industry consultant. "This way, the magazine publishers can say we're aggressively growing and developing new media as well."

"Branded" shows like *Model.Live* are an increasingly popular route into the Web TV business. Unlike video ads sold against editorially created Web shows, advertisers work directly with business departments to create and underwrite branded programs. It's a cost effective model because it doesn't steal editors away from focusing on the print publication.

That is, after all, where *Vogue* still makes its money. Last year, the Publisher's Information Bureau reported it had roughly \$419 million in sales from some 3,201 ad pages.

Putting *Vogue*'s business chief, publisher Tom Florio, in charge of content named after *Vogue* is a powerful example of how far magazines will go to reinvent themselves as powerhouse digital properties.

Tinkering with an editorial model that has kept *Vogue* printing for 116 years may be necessary. In the first six months of 2008, *Vogue*'s paid subscriptions fell 2.1% by dropping year-over-year to 782,397. More troubling, Compete.com reports its Style.com Web site only had some 565,000 unique visitors in August. That's not much compared to the almost 4.8 million visitors at Glam.com, an Internet media upstart that caters to women about topics like fashion.

A *Vogue* spokesperson counters that Compete's numbers are unreliable and says Conde Nast's internal figures show some 1,474,340 unique visitors to Style.com last month.

Still, what seems clear is that dangerous fault lines are forming beneath some of the industry's biggest names. Though Florio says *Vogue* is set to have its second-best year of ad sales ever, he's worried about keeping the brand relevant for the next generation of readers. So he—not Wintour—is creating Web shows like *Model.Live* with his 16-year-old daughter in mind.

"I'm comfortable with it, because I feel that the principals of what we're doing are based on the same principals as the brand," he says. If Wintour objected to the content, he says he would kill it. A Conde Nast spokesperson said that Wintour understands Vogue.TV is run by the business department and stays informed about its programs. Wintour is attending Fashion Weeks in Paris and Milan and was unavailable for comment.

At the helm of Vogue.TV, Florio is able to experiment with the medium in ways Wintour can't by offering advertisers like Express a value the magazine can't provide.

For instance, the clothing company sells clothes directly to the Vogue.TV audience in an e-commerce store that sits beside each *Model.Live* video. Express keeps the sales in an effort to avoid diluting Wintour's fashion-setting tastes. "What we're doing is a cost-effective business model," says Florio.

If he can build a business off of these Web shows, the upside for *Vogue* could be compelling. Web video portals are hungry to find fresh content they can syndicate that isn't tangled up in the complex licensing rights that often gum up deals with network or cable shows.

"I can assure you that *Vogue* did not give us their content for free," says TidalTV CEO Scott Ferber. His site is one of five Web video sites on which *Model.Live* is also being distributed. "They are making money on it." That could wind up being a sweet new source of revenue for *Vogue*.

Still, syndication fees like these are based on the reputation of *Vogue* and its editors—not partners like Express. That highlights the risk: These new efforts could dilute the *Vogue* brand.

"I talk about the 'elasticity of content'—how far out can you take it to satisfy advertisers is something of a concern for sure," says Tom Hartle, owner of the influential music magazine *Spin*. Also facing circulation decline, his magazine is about to announce its own branded show about international music that will run in 63 markets worldwide. "I think a lot of this innovation is coming out of the business departments and that can be problematic to the health of the brand," he says.

For now, the point may be moot. Florio says *Vogue.TV*'s shows couldn't survive without the magazine's support.

So, on second thought, don't forget about Wintour just yet.

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