

## Assessing the current experience your newspaper delivers

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The best way to gauge how consumers experience your newspaper is to ask them. For instructions on conducting a newspaper experience survey see the “Measuring Results” report at <http://www.readership.org/consumers/NewsExp.htm>.

Even with that data, however, it’s important to do an internal review of content, service, brand and marketing that contribute to, or thwart, the experiences you have identified as opportunities to enhance readership.

You should also consider how internal realities — culture, structure — support or do not support more of these experiences. All of this should be done before moving to brainstorm ideas of how to enhance the identified experiences.

As an example, let’s imagine that you decide to look at “Something to talk about.”

1. First, make sure you have a good understanding of what consumers were saying.

### **Something to talk about**

*Summary: The newspaper stimulates me to think about things and gives me things to talk about with others. It is important to remember what I read. The newspaper helps me give information to other people—something I really enjoy.*

Statements:

I bring up things I've read in this newspaper in conversations with many other people.

I like to talk about the national news and current events I read about in it.

I like to talk about the local news I read.

I like to give advice and tips to people I know based on things I've read in this newspaper.

I show things in the newspaper to people in my family.

I remember at least some of the things I have read in this newspaper for a long time.

It is important to me that I remember later what I have read in this newspaper.

I am mentally involved in this newspaper while reading it.

2. Pick three issues of the newspaper at random, so that the discussion centers around something concrete, not generalizations, or what staff recalls or thinks tends to happen.
3. Use the following points as a seed list of questions to get started. (Please note that it is by no means complete. We will revise it as we get comments from newspapers and others in the industry who work with the experiences.)

- What content do you have that's uniquely yours i.e. that people couldn't get elsewhere? Be sure to include advertising as well as news, and visual information as well as text. .
- What's the rough ratio of "commodity" information — i.e. content that is generally available — to unique content?
  - Do you think that's enough?
- Is it distributed throughout the newspaper, or does it tend to be in one section?
  - What kind of prominence does it get?
- Of that unique content, what items have talkability — e.g., you could imagine people chatting about it in the coffee room, the local talk show picking it up etc.
- How apparent was it that that content was in the paper?
  - Was it promoted in some way? In-paper and in other ways?
- Did the presentation — headlines, packaging etc. — draw attention to it?
- Are there alternative ways to present the content that could have stimulated thought and discussion? For instance, a set of questions about the story? An invitation for readers to react? Or to submit their questions?
- Can we put a unique angle on "commodity" information — i.e. news generally available — that makes it talkable?
- Are there items in the paper presented and constructed to stimulate thinking? Or do they simply represent polar positions or in other ways discourage the need for discussion)?
- At the assigning stage, and at news meetings, do we flag stories that have this potential and pay special attention to treatment?
- Do we consider graphic and pictorial possibilities for this content?
- How do our messaging, branding and promotional activities support the concept?
- Are we providing enough "talkable" material around which to do serious marketing?
- Do POP material, rack cards, consumer sales scripts etc. focus on "something to talk about"?
- Do we know enough about our target groups to recognize the sorts of things that make them want to "talk about it"?
- Do our own people know that this something important and that we want to encourage?
- How could we enlist our people to continually provide "some things to talk about"?
- Are news beats constructed to maximize the discovery and reporting of unusual stories?
- Do we encourage and reward the production of 'talking point' or unpredictable items?
- Is our staff sufficiently grounded in the community and the way ordinary people live to recognize talkable items?