

The Newspaper Experience Study

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Executive summary

A new Readership Institute study of 4,400 readers of local daily newspapers shows that they “experience” the newspapers in many distinct and measurable ways that are closely linked with whether they read more, or whether they read less.

For instance, newspapers that give readers “something to talk about” with colleagues, friends and family create a positive experience and encourage a readership habit. If they could intensify that experience, the research suggests, they could enhance readership.

Conversely, if readers feel that the newspaper contributes to their sense of being overwhelmed by news, they tend to read less. If newspapers could minimize that experience, and provide ways to help people manage what they perceive as a flood of information, they could enhance readership.

Many of the 44 distinct newspaper-reading experiences identified in the study are positive – we call them Motivators — and are associated with higher readership; some are negative and linked with lower readership (Inhibitors). (See the appendix for a more detailed explanation.)

Here’s why this is important. If motivating experiences are significantly improved by major changes to content, service, brand and marketing, readership should improve. And there is plenty of room for improvement: while readers report having many positive experiences, they tend to be only moderately positive.

The findings of this new study take the industry’s understanding of readership beyond “what” people read, into how and why they read, how they react and interact with the newspaper, and how they feel about it all. Producing a newspaper is more than just providing discrete pieces of news and information, and associated pieces of service, but creating an overall engaging experience for the consumer.

The new research also shows which experiences are more crucial for various groups.

The special challenge for newspapers is to grow readership among lighter readers, about two-thirds of whom are younger (under 40). Generations X and Y are less likely to find that newspapers inspire them, have stories about people they know, have writers with whom they can identify, or help them be smarter or be more interesting. But

newspapers do provide these experiences for other groups; presumably they could do so for younger readers too. What will it take to make it happen? The results of this and earlier Readership Institute research suggest two major requirements:

1. A much better understanding of readers and how they use, process and prefer to receive news and information, and how they experience the newspaper. Intentionally or not, every newspaper creates a variety of experiences for its readers. Understanding the experience of current readers — especially lighter readers — is the first step to make it much better.

The research found that newspaper executives tended to over-estimate readers' experiences. That is, they thought readers had far more positive experiences, and far more negative experiences, than they actually did.

This misalignment indicates newspapers are not poised to take advantage of the readership opportunity that's there — but with some attention, and a will to change, they can be. A better understanding of readers' experiences will help newspapers develop new products, change existing ones, add or enhance services, improve story-telling techniques, allocate resources to initiatives with the best chance to increase readership and market the newspaper.

2. Innovation. When we looked at readership among the same group of people in 2000 and again in 2003, we found that generally people with a well-established reading habit were reading more, and lighter readers were reading less. What that tells us is that while improving current practices will grow readership over-all, something quite different is necessary to reach lighter, younger readers.

The need is to innovate — with significant changes to content, service and marketing — to make the newspaper a far more engaging experience for these targets.

The pages that follow cover the results of the experience study in more detail

- What is “experience”?
- How the research was conducted
- Positive experiences – Motivators
- Negative experiences – Inhibitors
- A suggested plan for identifying and acting on reader experiences you want to enhance or minimize

Related reports can be found at <http://www.readership.org/consumers/NewsExp.htm>

These reports include

- Details on each experience
- Assessing the current experience your newspaper delivers
- Measuring Results: How to tell whether experience innovations are working
- Reader Behavior Scores 2000 – 2003

What do we mean by “experience”?

The Impact study of readership identified several principal drivers or cornerstones of readership. As the model below shows, **news and advertising content** drive readership directly, and also help create brand perception. **Service excellence** drives readership and, like content, helps shape brand perception, or the image of the newspaper in consumers’ minds. **Brand perception** affects readership too but it does so through a mediating factor, which is whether the newspaper, overall, provides a relevant, engaging experience to readers.



It was to gain a better understanding of what different groups of people experience as they read a newspaper that the Readership Institute (RI) undertook this study.

Building readership goes beyond the mechanics of what is in the newspaper or the kind of service it delivers. It is also influenced by how a reader interacts with, reacts to, feels about and engages with a newspaper.

If newspapers can better understand the dimensions of “experience” from a reader’s perspective, they can work to substantially change it for the better — and build readership.

We urge newspapers to approach experience through the context of lighter readers, who tend to skew younger. Local daily newspapers currently provide an experience that is much less rewarding and motivating for younger adults (under 40) than for any other group. There is much longitudinal evidence that shows people do not naturally read more heavily as they mature. Without significant intervention from newspapers to create a more engaging experience, prospects are alarming.

Methodology: How The Research Was Conducted

Qualitative phase

RI researchers conducted over 250 one-on-one interviews with newspaper readers in 2001 and 2002. Interviews represented a mix of age, income, gender, education, and ethnicity. About two-thirds were light readers, the group where newspapers' largest challenge and opportunity lie. These interviews produced 275 statements that describe how people feel about and react to their local daily newspaper.

Quantitative Phase

In January-February 2003, RI mailed 10,000 mail surveys to readers who had responded to the Impact study in 2000 of 100 U.S. markets. Respondents had to be at least light readers, with Reader Behavior Scores of 2.0 or more. We received 4,437 completed surveys. Responses were weighted according to age, gender and newspaper market.

As well as RBS, media usage and demographic questions, respondents rated the 275 statements according to how much they agreed or disagreed that each statement described their own experience with their local daily newspaper. These statements were analyzed and statistically combined using factor analysis into 44 distinct reading experiences. For more detail about the analysis, see the appendix.

The same survey was also sent to the publisher and four department heads at each of the 100 Impact newspapers. Each executive was asked to complete the survey as they thought the newspaper's typical reader would do.

Findings

Motivators — Experiences that have a positive effect on newspaper readership

The research revealed 26 distinct experiences, or Motivators, that have a positive impact on readership. These experiences drive readership to varying degrees. In other words, the more people have these experiences, the more they tend to read.

These findings are actionable: making the newspaper significantly “more” of any one or several of the high-potential experiences should have positive results on readership.

Each Motivator is named below, with a brief description.

(Full details on each Motivator, including consumer statements and demographics is at <http://www.readership.org/consumers/NewsExp.htm> in a report titled “Details on each experience.”)

MOTIVATORS

Regular part of my day

Reading the newspaper is a habit for me. I follow a set routine in how and when I read the paper.

Looks out for my interests

Reading the newspaper helps me to participate and get the most out of being a member of the community. To not read, even for a short time, would be to become socially isolated and disadvantaged. The newspaper acts as a watchdog for citizens and society. It makes me enjoy the community more by helping me plan what I want to see or do.

Something to talk about

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.

Makes me smarter

Reading the newspaper is educational for me. I learn a lot from both the editorial and the ads. The newspaper is a source of ideas and insight for me. I value the special sections and appreciate the paper's efforts to make stories more understandable. I enjoy stories in other media more because I have read the newspaper.

People I know

I am interested in detailed local information about people I know, weddings, obituaries and crime in the community.

Touches & inspires me

The newspaper inspires me both to improve myself and to do new things. It enhances my self-esteem and makes me take pride in the accomplishments of other people. It makes me feel good and touches me emotionally.

High quality, unique content

I feel that the newspaper is a quality product. It is professionally produced, interesting and has content I can't get elsewhere. I think the newspaper compares favorably to well-known newspapers.

I connect with the writers

When I read an article, I notice who wrote it. I feel like I get to know certain writers and look forward to their work.

My personal timeout

For me, reading the newspaper is a way of relaxing and taking a break from more stressful activities. I think of it as a treat to myself. When I read, I get comfortable and just lose myself in it.

Makes me more interesting

The newspaper makes me more interesting and knowledgeable to other people and gives me a sense of belonging. I want other people to know I read the paper because I feel it enhances my status. I enjoy sharing the newspaper with others.

Commands my attention

When I read the paper, I really get into it. It is hard to put down and annoying when I get interrupted.

All sides of the story

The newspaper gives me different points of view. It seems to me to be accurate, fair and balanced. I can count on it to tell the truth and not sensationalize things.

Shows me diversity

I feel the newspaper includes people of color and represents minorities.

Taking a stand

I like to hear other people's opinions. I would like to see the newspaper take positions on more issues.

My dining companion

I like to read the newspaper and have a meal or snack at the same time.

Turned on by surprise and humor

I enjoy the surprise and unexpected news that the newspaper brings — offbeat stories, funny stories, stories about celebrities.

Clip & save

I enjoy keeping and filing stories and sending them to others. There's something satisfying about the physical nature of the newspaper.

Grabs me visually

Photos make a strong impact on me — they draw my attention and make me want to read further.

Makes me want to read

Big news events bring me into the newspaper. Front-page stories usually interest me most. I like to know what's in the rest of the paper before I dig in.

Pass it around

I share the newspaper with others around me.

Ad credibility

Seeing advertising in this newspaper makes me think more highly of the advertiser.

Value for my money

The newspaper gives me good value for money.

Pick up or take with me

Being able to get or read the newspaper as I go about my daily business is important to me.

Guide me

I like the TV and movie guides and would like to see similar guides for other things.

News junkie

I'm addicted to news and try to get as much of it as I can. I prefer hard news to soft news.

Ad usefulness

I find the ads quite useful, especially for knowing what is on sale and finding new things. I like the ads as much as the news stories and read the classifieds even if I'm not looking for a specific item.

The following page shows the Motivators rank-ordered according to their relation to higher readership; how strongly readers overall agreed that they shared this experience; and how strongly different age groups shared the experience. Pay particular attention to experiences with the highest correlations to RBS (0.15 or higher). These are the experiences that have the greatest potential to drive readership. Also, differences between younger and older readers – scores with a difference of 0.2 or greater are significant.

MOTIVATORS	Correlation to ¹ Readership	Average Rating ²	Age Categories		
			Gen XY Boomers (<39)	(39-58)	Over 59
Regular part of my day	0.46	3.55	3.39	3.55	3.68
Looks out for my interests	0.44	3.16	3.00	3.15	3.32
Something to talk about	0.38	3.48	3.44	3.48	3.52
Makes me smarter	0.35	3.53	3.49	3.52	3.59
People I know	0.29	3.15	3.01	3.12	3.28
Touches and inspires me	0.26	3.08	2.95	3.08	3.16
High quality, unique content	0.25	3.20	3.19	3.18	3.27
I connect with the writers	0.25	3.04	2.88	3.01	3.20
My personal timeout	0.24	3.04	3.02	3.04	3.07
Makes me more interesting	0.24	2.61	2.50	2.59	2.71
Commands my attention	0.23	2.77	2.84	2.73	2.80
All sides of the story	0.20	2.99	3.01	2.97	3.04
Shows me diversity	0.19	2.44	2.49	2.45	2.36
Taking a stand	0.19	3.30	3.14	3.29	3.43
My dining companion	0.17	3.11	3.03	3.10	3.20
Turned on by surprise and humor	0.17	3.02	3.04	2.99	3.05
Clip & save	0.16	2.65	2.54	2.64	2.75
Grabs me visually	0.16	3.11	3.09	3.09	3.17
Makes me want to read	0.14	3.05	3.06	3.05	3.05
Pass it around	0.10	3.31	3.40	3.27	3.31
Ad credibility	0.08	3.26	3.20	3.25	3.33
Value for my money	0.08	2.56	2.58	2.53	2.59
Pick up or take with me	0.05	2.76	2.93	2.79	2.59
Guide me	0.05	2.80	2.85	2.73	2.87
News junkie	0.01	2.70	2.63	2.73	2.72
Ad usefulness	0.01	3.11	3.15	3.11	3.09
Average Ratings	0.20	3.03	2.99	3.02	3.08

¹ **Correlation to Readership:** The number represents the strength of the relationship between this experience and the readership (time, completeness and frequency). Those with higher correlations have stronger potential to increase readership.

² **Average Rating:** Indicates how strongly readers tend to agree that this experience describes their experience.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

Inhibitors — Experiences that have a negative effect on newspaper readership

The research revealed 18 distinct experiences, Inhibitors, which are linked with lower readership. Statistically speaking, these experiences have a negative correlation with RBS. In other words, the more people have these experiences, the less they tend to read.

In most cases, respondents' level of agreement with the various Inhibitors was fairly low, meaning that most respondents claim not to have these experiences as much as they do the Motivators. But remember this is a study of readers — people with an RBS of 2 or more. Light readers in the sample tended to experience the Inhibitors more strongly, and it is likely that non-readers or light readers with an RBS of less than 2 would be even more negative.

Each Inhibitor is named below, with a brief description.

(Full details on each Inhibitor, including consumer statements and demographics is at <http://www.readership.org/consumers/NewsExp.htm> in a report titled “Details on each experience.”)

INHIBITORS

Wasting my time

Reading the newspaper is a waste of time and I am reading less than I used to. The content doesn't grip me and it's not relevant to my life. I can get the news from other sources.

Skim & scan

I “taste” the newspaper — skimming headlines and stories, going only to sections I want to read, and preferring short stories.

Drowning in news

The newspaper is becoming too much for me — I feel like I am drowning in a flood of news. I feel pressed for time and my mind wanders as I read it. Often I don't even open the newspaper.

Lacks distinction

The newspaper doesn't convey a distinct personality or a presence in the community.

Too much

The newspaper has too many pages overall and the stories are too long.

Awkward to handle

The newspaper is awkward to handle and takes up too much space.

Lack of local focus

The newspaper does not have enough local news and flavor in it. This paper could be from anywhere.

Reading on the Web

I enjoy reading the newspaper online. I save articles I've read and I use the Internet to follow things I've seen in print. My readership of the printed newspaper has declined.

Poor service

Getting the newspaper when I want it, and in good condition, is a problem.

Unappealing stories

The newspaper covers topics that don't appeal to me and sometimes offend.

Gender bias

The newspaper caters to one gender or the other.

Unwilling to share

I don't like sharing the paper with someone else.

Annoyed & unimpressed by ads

The volume of ads is off-putting to me. They lack distinctiveness and are boring. Often they have no relevance to my needs.

Media multi-tasking

I read the newspaper while using other media at the same time.

Uninformative ads

I want more information in ads about prices and more ads for things that are new to me.

Political bias

I think the newspaper is too partisan.

Makes me anxious

The newspaper makes me fearful and depressed.

Like to critique

I critique the newspaper as I read it and am bothered by errors.

The following page shows the Inhibitors rank-ordered according to their relation to lower readership; how strongly readers overall agreed that they shared this experience; and how strongly different age groups shared the experience.

Pay particular attention to experiences with the highest correlations to RBS (0.15 or higher). These are the experiences that have the greatest potential to affect readership.

Also, differences between younger and older readers — scores with a difference of 0.2 or greater are significant.

Inhibitors	Correlation To ³ Readership	Average ⁴ Rating	Age Categories		
			Gen XY (<39)	Boomers (39-58)	Over 59
Wasting my time	0.47	2.43	2.50	2.45	2.32
Skim & scan	0.29	3.10	3.19	3.10	3.05
Drowning in news	0.29	2.28	2.34	2.31	2.19
Lacks distinction	0.24	2.52	2.56	2.54	2.48
Too much	0.20	2.47	2.38	2.46	2.53
Awkward to handle	0.19	2.41	2.39	2.43	2.37
Lack of local focus	0.16	2.56	2.53	2.57	2.56
Reading on the web	0.16	2.25	2.37	2.25	2.15
Poor service	0.15	2.42	2.45	2.44	2.35
Unappealing stories	0.13	2.80	2.80	2.80	2.80
Gender bias	0.13	2.61	2.62	2.62	2.57
Unwilling to share	0.05	2.12	2.12	2.18	2.03
Annoyed and unimpressed by ads	0.04	2.79	2.67	2.79	2.86
Media multi-tasking	0.03	2.99	3.08	3.00	2.93
Uninformative ads	0.03	3.19	3.10	3.24	3.19
Political bias	0.02	2.89	2.91	2.87	2.89
Makes me anxious	0.01	3.03	3.08	3.01	3.03
Like to critique	0.01	2.94	2.89	2.95	2.94
Average	0.14	2.66	2.67	2.67	2.62

³ **Correlation to Readership:** The number represents the strength of the relationship between this experience and the readership (time, completeness and frequency). Those with higher correlations have stronger potential to increase readership.

⁴ **Average Rating:** Indicates how strongly readers tend to agree that this experience describes their experience.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

Newspaper executives' perceptions of readers' experiences

The publisher of each Impact newspaper, and heads of the news, advertising, circulation and marketing departments were asked to complete the consumer survey, answering as they believe a “typical reader” would. This aspect of the study will be reported in more detail and results will be posted at <http://www.readership.org/consumers/NewsExp.htm>.

Overall, newspaper executives tended to overestimate both the positive and the negative experiences. In other words, their answers to the experience statements were more extreme (higher for the positive statements and lower for the negative statements) than the reader respondents. They felt that readers experienced the newspaper more positively, and more negatively, than they actually do.

In fact, readers are less passionate about the newspaper — both positively and negatively — than newspaper-producers perceive them to be.

There are two major implications from this dissonance. First, the relatively moderate view that readers take toward the reading experience underscores the importance of making it much better for them. Second, to do that, newspaper people need a much better understanding of how readers use and respond to the newspaper if they are to enhance the reading experience.

Next steps: How Newspapers Can Use Experience Research

Acting on the research to provide a substantially different and better experience for readers requires truly innovative thinking. It's not a matter of making tweaks and improvements around the edges.

Participants in this process need to feel comfortable being inventive, entertaining ideas that at first may seem outlandish, and in the initial stages not reacting with reasons “why it can't be done.”

Here are some suggestions for how to get started:

- 1. Review the experience findings to make sure you and your colleagues understand them and feel confident in answering questions from staff about them.**
- 2. Since it's impossible to try to do everything at once, choose a limited number of high-ranking experiences you want to enhance at your paper.**
- 3. Form a cross-functional group to guide the process.**
- 4. Assess how your newspaper currently performs on the chosen experiences.**
- 5. Brainstorm new ideas across content, service, and brand that would significantly change the experience for the readers you want to reach.**
- 6. Implement and test a number of changes in a controlled way so that you don't “bet the farm.”**
- 7. Measure long-term results.**

1. Review and understand the research

Not every one of the 44 distinct newspaper-reading experiences identified by the research has a strong effect on readership. Ask yourself these key questions:

- What is the experience and how do readers describe it?

Each experience consists of at least two — usually many more — statements from the reader survey, that are summarized in a short description.

Consider, for instance, “Something to talk about”:

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.

The statements are:

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.

Take time to discuss the statements thoroughly, so that you are very familiar with the ideas to which consumers are reacting and the kind of experience to which they respond.

- Next, consider the effect of each experience on overall readership.

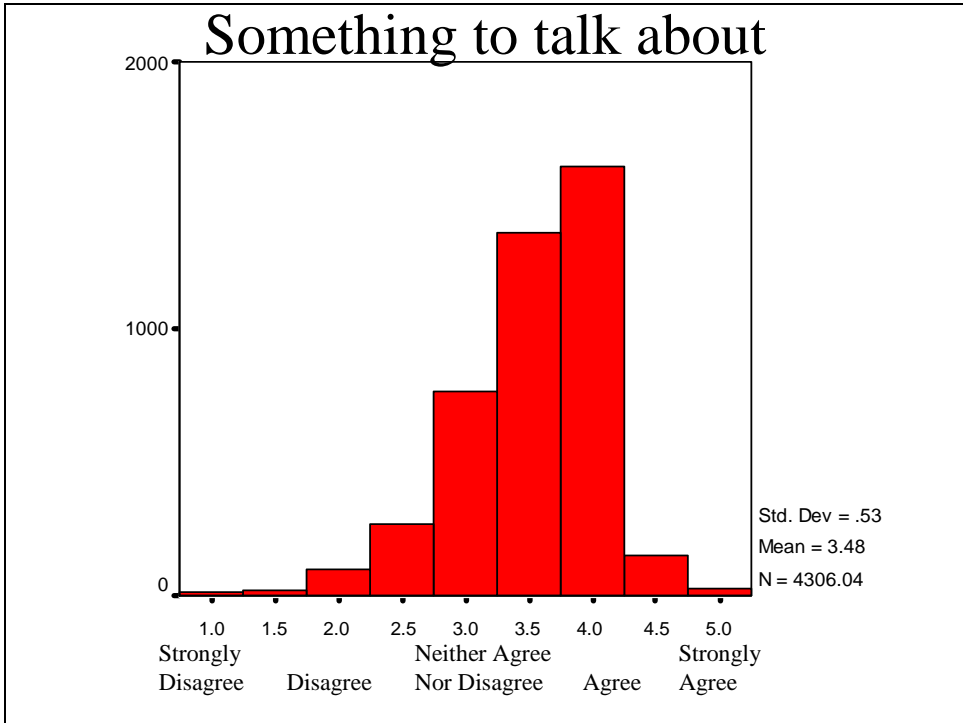
The higher the correlation score, the larger the effect on overall readership. High scoring Motivators are experiences that have a strong positive impact on readership (the more readers have this kind of experience, the more likely they are to read). Lower scoring Motivators are positive experiences that do not drive readership as much.

Conversely, high scoring Inhibitors have a strong negative impact on readership (the more readers have this kind of experience, the less likely they are to read). Lower-scoring Inhibitors have a relatively weak negative impact on readership.

In considering the effects on over-all readership, it's helpful to see the range of the results. (This information for all factors can be found at <http://www.readership.org/consumers/NewsExp.htm> in a report titled "Details on each experience.")

For example, the overall mean score for "Something to talk about" is 3.48, indicating that the majority of respondents tend to agree that the experience describes them. (A score of 1 would mean respondents strongly disagree the experience describes them; a score of 5 would mean they strongly agree; a score of 3 would mean respondents, on average, were neutral.)

The distribution in the chart below shows the range of answers. Few respondents disagree that they have this experience, and few "strongly agree" that it describes them.



- What demographic groups tend to have this experience?

Each mini-report also includes a table of mean scores for various demographic groups. For example, mean scores for "Something to talk about" are as follows:

	Readers	Execs	Gen XY	Boomer	59+	Male	Female	HS	Some College	College Grad	<\$35K	\$35-75K	\$75K+
Score	3.48	3.81	3.44	3.48	3.52	3.45	3.52	3.47	3.49	3.48	3.46	3.47	3.52
Average	3.03	3.32	2.99	3.02	3.08	2.99	3.07	3.08	3.06	3.00	3.09	3.03	3.02

2. Choose a limited number of Experiences you want to enhance at your paper

It is difficult, if not impossible, to focus on several experiences at once, so choose a small number — perhaps three — to tackle first. Consider these issues in making your choices:

- Choose from among those with the strongest correlation to readership.

Building strategies around experiences with low correlation to readership amounts to innovating in areas that will have relatively little effect. So start by short-listing the top 10-12 Motivators and the top 5-6 Inhibitors.

- Select at least one experience which will give you an early “win.”

The goal is to improve the newspaper experience for readers in dramatic, visible ways. Choose experiences that present a strong likelihood for real change to content, services, marketing and/or branding. Some experiences may be better suited to your market, staff, or competitive circumstances. Some experiences may simply be easier to create strategies for. Be sure to select at least one experience you are confident you can execute successfully.

- Consider your targets.

While all of the top experiences have strong correlation to readership, several have significant variation by demographic segments. The detailed report on each factor highlights scores for age, gender, income, and education.

Let’s assume you are interested in increasing readership among younger adults. Experiences with significantly different scores by age category are marked below in gold. In these cases, responses were significantly lower for young people, indicating that when enhancing these experiences, newspapers have extra room for improvement among young people.

Motivators	Correlation to Readership	Average Rating	Under 35	35 to 59	Over 59
Regular part of my day	0.46	3.55	3.39	3.55	3.68
Looks out for my interests	0.44	3.16	3.00	3.15	3.32
Something to talk about	0.38	3.48	3.44	3.48	3.52
Makes me smarter	0.35	3.53	3.49	3.52	3.59
People I know	0.29	3.15	3.01	3.12	3.28
Touches and inspires me	0.26	3.08	2.95	3.08	3.16
High quality, unique content	0.25	3.20	3.19	3.18	3.27
I connect with the writers	0.25	3.04	2.88	3.01	3.20
My personal timeout	0.24	3.04	3.02	3.04	3.07
Makes me more interesting	0.24	2.61	2.50	2.59	2.71
Commands my attention	0.23	2.77	2.84	2.73	2.80

Inhibitors	Correlation To Readership	Average Rating	Under 35	35 to 59	Over 59
Wasting my time	0.47	2.43	2.50	2.45	2.32
Skim & scan	0.29	3.10	3.19	3.10	3.05
Drowning in news	0.29	2.28	2.34	2.31	2.19
Lacks distinction	0.24	2.52	2.56	2.54	2.48
Too much	0.20	2.47	2.38	2.46	2.53

With all these considerations in mind, you might come up with the following list for initial consideration.

First Tier

Looks out for my interests	Motivator
Something to talk about	Motivator
Touches and inspires me	Motivator
Makes me more interesting	Motivator
Drowning in news	Inhibitor

Second Tier

People I know	Motivator
Makes me smarter	Motivator
Lacks distinction	Inhibitor
I connect with the writers	Motivator

3. Form a cross-functional group to guide the process

Regardless of which experiences make the final list, the next step is to assess how well the newspaper is currently performing with regards to each experience and to brainstorm changes in content, service, and brand as well as cultural improvements to support your efforts.

Adopt a task force process that is inclusive without becoming cumbersome.

Don't assign this to staff in one department. Include employees from every department to ensure many different perspectives and to increase the level of engagement and support for the project across departments.

Make sure to include employees with a mix of age, gender, race/ethnicity, responsibility and tenure with the paper. If, for instance, your aim is to target younger lighter readers, make sure there are several members who match the profile.

You may choose to meet in a series of group meetings, break into smaller groups that develop ideas independently, or have individual committee members come up with ideas

on their own. However you choose to do it, we recommend having four to eight people involved, depending on newspaper size, in the core steering group or task force.

4. Assess the current experience through the eyes of your target group(s)

Before developing new ideas, the group should have a clear understanding of how the newspaper currently rates for the experiences in question. This assessment can range from a readership/experience survey to discussion groups to one-on-one interviews with target readers. Budget and timing constraints will determine how you approach this aspect of the project.

To view a document outlining how to conduct a readership / experience survey see “Measuring Results: How to tell whether experience innovations are working” at <http://www.readership.org/consumers/NewsExp.htm>

Regardless of the method you choose, taking time to look at what you do now, through the lens of the target group(s) vis-à-vis each experience, will help ground you in reality. A list of questions to help you begin to assess the current experience is at <http://www.readership.org/consumers/NewsExp.htm> in a report titled “Assessing the current experience your newspaper delivers.”

5. Brainstorm ideas that would significantly change the experience for the readers you want to reach

Encourage group members to be as innovative as possible in developing initial ideas. Although some ideas may not turn out to be feasible, it is important to first get as many out in the open as you can. Committee members should be encouraged to think as creatively as possible, without worrying, at first, about realistic constraints.

Develop ideas for changes to existing content and service that would enhance the experience in question.

Develop ideas for new products or services (regardless of how feasible they are) that would enhance that experience. These ideas should be tailored to the target reader, but do not need to be exclusive to that target. Identify additional information needs and next steps for each idea

Identify cultural issues (for instance, expectations of people, management practices, degree of reader orientation) that will aid the effective implementation of the changes.

Develop ideas for communicating the changes internally to the other employees and externally to readers and potential readers in your market (although primary responsibility for this aspect of the project will fall to the management team).

To get broad input, group members may want to consult others inside and outside the newspaper — particularly those who are not currently heavy readers. The objective is simply to generate ideas.

6. Implement significant changes in content/service, with an internal and external marketing campaign to support them

At the conclusion of the assessment and brainstorming process, the management team will need to decide which ideas to pursue. Depending on the nature of the ideas, you may want to follow an iterative process that relies heavily on reader feedback.

For instance, you may develop prototypes that embody the ideas. These can be anything from rough sketches to storyboards to carefully constructed prototypes. In the case of service consider using a short descriptive outline.

Use qualitative interviews to test the reaction of target readers and to prompt ways of improving on the execution. Repeat the process until you feel you've created an experience to which the targets are responding well.

At this point, depending on the nature of the ideas, you may also want to test them with older, heavier readers to ensure the changes do not alienate them. Remember, though, that this group is generally happy with the way things are and may not see reason for change. This doesn't mean you shouldn't change — you need to do it with their concerns in mind.

Depending on the nature of the changes, it may be appropriate to test within a limited geography or press run, or for a limited timeframe.

From the beginning we have emphasized the involvement of marketing in the process but we will not attempt to describe an external marketing plan, since it depends largely on the nature of the changes. But we do want to stress that an important part of the plan is internal communication to ensure that people in all departments know about the changes in content and services and the strategic reasons behind them, and can represent the company well in their interchanges with the public.

7. Measure the results

Within a few weeks, conduct some qualitative research with people in your target demographic to gauge awareness of and reaction to the changes.

It is important to note that this is not a one-time process. To create a culture of innovation in the newspaper that is focused on improving readership, it should take place regularly.

Appendix: Analysis of readers experiences

The questionnaire included 275 statements about the newspaper reading experience. Using factor analysis, the statements were grouped into 44 distinct experiences. Factor analysis clusters questions that respondents tend to answer in the same way: if respondents strongly agree with one of these statements, they tend to strongly agree with the others in this group.

Each factor is named in a way that captures the experience from the reader's perspective.

For example, factor analysis revealed that the following statements clustered together.

- 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.

We named this factor “Something to talk about” and created a brief description:

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

Each of the 44 experiences is made up of specific statements from the questionnaire. Each has a name and brief written description that summarizes the experience.

Correlating the Experience to Readership

RI calculated an experience rating for each of the 44 experiences by averaging responses to each of the relevant statements. For example, respondents' experience rating for “Something to talk about” is simply the average rating for each of the statements listed above.

The experience ratings were correlated to RBS. Some experiences (like “Regular part of my day” or “Looks out for my interests”) have a very high correlation to readership. That means that people who are having this kind of experience tend to have higher readership. Other experiences (like Ad usefulness or Guide me) had low correlation to readership. This means that people who have these experiences do not necessarily have higher readership. The pattern (or correlation) between these experiences and readership is less clear.

The implication, therefore, is: Improving experiences with the highest correlation to readership is more likely to increase readership than improving experiences with lower correlation to readership.

Motivators and Inhibitors — Experiences that motivate and inhibit readership

In addition to measuring the “strength” of the relationship between a given experience and overall readership, RI also measured the “direction” of the relationship. Most relationships were positive, meaning that as the experience ratings goes up, readership goes up. For example, the more readers make the paper a “Regular part of my day” the more they read. RI refers to these experiences as motivators. Enhancing these experiences motivates readership.

However, some experiences are negative. This means that as the experience ratings goes up, readership goes down. For example, the more readers feel the paper is “Wasting my time” the less they read. RI refers to these experiences as inhibitors because they inhibit readership.