

Ackermans gets a rebrand A+

By Leigh Andrews

8 Mar 2016

It's one thing to create a successful local brand and something else entirely to successfully rebrand 100 years later. Here's how Ackermans did so with the February edition of its Ackermans Club magazine, based on reader input.

Ackermans celebrated a century of successful trading with a new look and content structure in the February 2016 edition of its Ackermans Club magazine.



The new-look February and March 2016 magazine covers

As the first custom publication in the New Media stable 18 years ago, it's fitting that the New Media team managed the change, led by magazine editor Elmari Rautenbach and Andrew Nunneley, GM at New Media. They started with a new masthead featuring a "shorter, simpler, more direct and modern A", with a font that's easier to read in darker environments and content that holistically reflects all aspects of its 250,000 subscribers' lives, complete with informal tone that even combines English with vernacular language when appropriate, as reader feedback played an important part in the research process.

Nunneley and Rautenbach let us in on a few secrets of this successful rebrand and how they managed the process...

1. What sparked the need for a makeover?

Nunneley: Ackermans is very focused on understanding their consumer's needs and everything they do is directed by their main purpose of bringing value to the lives of their customers. Over the past year, Ackermans has spent a lot of time listening to customers, interviewing shoppers and even spending time in their homes. The information they gained enabled us to do a review on the magazine armed with the knowledge of what readers desired or needed. The refresh is the result.

2. Explain the redesign process to us from a design perspective.

Rautenbach: The design process took around a month. Our first step was to mine the information from Ackermans and define who our reader is – where she reads, how she reads, her background and living conditions. Then, when it came to content, we were guided by Ackermans' overall value pledge to give the reader 'even more' than what she expects. It was important that we viewed the reader holistically in order to provide real-time "value to life". The content also had to be evaluated in terms of the time that the reader realistically has to engage with the magazine.



Rautenbach

We identified a number of priorities and then unpacked them. This included:

- A layered approach: Every page would from now on contain a number of short, visual entry points to layer information and keep the reader engaged.
- A design device tying everything together: While playing around with the A of Ackermans, we turned it on its side. This led to the diagonal line that features throughout the magazine as a dynamic shape, ensuring a modern yet understated feel.
- An easier, more comfortable read: We understand our readers don't always have proper light or good quality glasses. They also often commute long distances. So we changed the body font, headings and column sizes for better legibility. In addition the flags were simplified to navigate the magazine with more ease, and more infographics were introduced for simple, visual communication.
- A fresh, modern masthead: We experimented with numerous options and finally decided on the shorter "A." that Ackermans use in their newsletters. This is in keeping with the trend of mastheads in a square, which can easily live online too. The payoff line underneath was changed from "Your exclusive magazine" to the more personal, informal "Even more for you", clearly communicating our values.
- A more playful, personalised look and feel: After adding more colour throughout the magazine, including in the headings, we introduced "handwritten" notes as if from a best friend. The notes point to unique features of the merchandise, express delight or point out something to remember. These notes tell the reader the magazine knows her and understands what makes her feel – and look – her very best.

The overall effect is fresh, modern, inviting and fun – offering loads of practical information in easily digestible ways, and sporting a look that is immediately recognisable as the new Ackermans Club magazine.

3. Talk us through the value of custom publishing and how it works to build brand loyalty.

Nunneley: When done properly, custom publishing has the power to significantly improve brand loyalty and profits. By providing an editorial package rooted in the customer's needs, we are able to not only build loyalty amongst Ackermans customers but also drive sales for Ackermans. With Ackermans, we have been able to prove that ongoing, frequent and valuable communication makes a difference to the bottom line. Ackermans are able to monitor spend of customers who receive the magazine and, over a period of time, their spend gradually increases. After two years of receiving the magazine, these customers spend on average over a third more than customers who don't receive the magazine. Interestingly, this increased spend isn't always on specifically featured product lines which indicates that the communication is building a more general level of loyalty and awareness rather than a direct response to a special price or specific communication. Building a trusted and commercially valuable relationship with customers through content is not a short-term play, but over time it builds brand trust that no other marketing initiative can match."



Nunneley

4. Looking further afield, what are the biggest trends we can expect in custom publishing in 2016?

Nunneley: Utility - There's just so much content out there and much of it doesn't add real value. We can only expect to get customers' attention if we provide something that they perceive as valuable.

Video - As smartphone penetration and the availability of high speed internet access opens up in South Africa we will follow the rest of the world with an insatiable demand for video content. Clever brands will not only provide video content but facilitate their customers sharing their own content.

Distribution - The rate of content production by brands, publishers, consumers and just about everyone continues to grow, but half of it is never seen! Without a solid distribution strategy that puts your content in front of the right people, on the right channel, at the right time, it's going to get lost in the crowded content universe. Expect traditional media spend to start

to shift to the distribution of valued content through a new world of customer touch points.
Seems we're set for a revolution in custom publishing as a whole.

[Click here](#) for more on Ackermans and New Media, and [here](#) for more on #BrandManagerMonth.

ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

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