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Men's Health Spies Way to Meld Mags, Mobile

Upcoming Issue Will Let Cellphone-Camera Users Access Digital Promos

By [Nat Ives](#)

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NEW YORK (AdAge.com) -- One of magazines' biggest strengths in the dawning digital age -- that engrossing environment often said to be so conducive to glossy branding campaigns -- isn't much help when the economic downturn is pressing advertisers to cut any ad spending that lacks quick, quantifiable results. Witness magazines' 6.4% slide in ad pages during the first quarter of this year.



Jack Essig, VP-publisher of Men's Health

But now Men's Health is planning a July/August issue* that will test its ability to deliver just such immediate consumer reactions. Every ad in the issue will be camera-ready -- or, should we say, camera-phone ready. Consumers who use their cellphones to snap pics of ads will get promotional bounce-backs from marketers.

"The results -- responsiveness, call to action -- are measurable in a way that's not usually available in traditional print campaigns," said Jack Essig, VP-publisher of the Rodale title. "Given the economic climate, it's the best possible time to go the extra mile and see what this partnership can do."

Future plans

Marketers including Axe, Westin, Powerade and Samsung are talking with the magazine about the best way to test the concept. Men's Health -- and perhaps other titles, too -- will look for ways to use the technology more consistently going forward.

The concept isn't new; Google and QVC want to use bar codes to deliver readers from print to online ads via cellphones too. But Men's Health plans to try SnapTell image-recognition technology, which doesn't require software downloads from readers or even bar codes in the ads. The "Snap.Send.Get" technology from SnapTell in Palo Alto, Calif., enables regular print advertisements to function interactively. Marketers run whatever creative they want without needing to include special bar codes or other marks.

Readers who do photograph the ads with their cellphones can send the shots to SnapTell via multimedia-message service, which matches the image against its database and quickly replies with whatever message each marketer has designed. Replies can take a variety of forms, including coupons for price deductions, price information, ringtones, wallpaper, games and contest entries.

Part of the near-term trick will be to rouse readers from their mellower magazine habits, Mr. Essig said. "Usually people are in a relaxed environment reading their favorite magazine," he said. "We're trying to change habits here: You can right there and then take out your phone, take a photo of the product or service you're interested in, and it calls it up immediately."

Audience habits

Changing people's habits is never a slam-dunk. Certain magazines and audiences also might prove more receptive than others. Women reading the shopping title Lucky, for example, are probably more prone to train their camera phones on attractive ads than, say, readers settling into The Paris Review.

But grafting digital-style feedback onto analog media is an appealing idea, said Robin Steinberg, senior VP-director of print investment at MediaVest. "I applaud their thinking for bringing this technology, immediacy and customization to offline media," she said. "It's a risk worth taking. That's what we need to do more often."

There's also an intriguing possibility that magazine consumption habits are already changing amid the modern multimedia milieu. "This will give us insight as to how the consumers' behavior has evolved with the magazine reading experience," Ms. Steinberg said.

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***CORRECTION:**The article originally misstated the timing of the issue that will carry ads recognizable by camera phones. It is the July/August issue, not June/July.*

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