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Text Messaging Makes Magazine Ads Interactive

Digital Technology May Be Poised to Support Traditional Ad Sales

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NEW YORK (AdAge.com) -- The push to make magazine pages more interactive is building mass and, dare we say it, even real momentum as major publishers and advertisers adopt a pair of technologies centered on the cellphone.



ShopText: Burger King ad

Hearst Magazines, the most recent example, is building on a nearly two-year experiment incorporating a text-messaging system called ShopText into the pages of CosmoGirl. It has adopted the technology across its portfolio, which includes brands from Esquire to Good Housekeeping. Its readers will soon see many opportunities, in editorial promotions and in ads, to make purchases, request samples or enter sweepstakes just by sending brief text messages. If magazine publishers like the results, they should remember to thank New York ad agency Anomaly, which started developing ShopText back in 2005. (It was spun off in November 2006.)

Magazines including Rodale's Men's Health and Wenner Media's Rolling Stone are pushing ahead with a potential rival system called SnapTell, which allows readers to take camera-phone photos of ads, send in the shots and receive whatever message a marketer has arranged.

If readers continue to respond well, digital technology may be poised to support traditional ad sales more directly than ever. That's good news for magazine publishers, who have watched advertisers concerned about the economy and enamored with the internet's efficiency reduce their ad-page purchases 5.5% in the first half of this year.

"Hearst magazines have been great drivers of people taking action," said Chuck Cordray, VP-general manager for Hearst Magazines Digital Media. "The ShopText approach just makes it a little more immediate than other methods, because most people have cellphones immediately at hand."

Immediate response

Hearst's tests at CosmoGirl have included sweepstakes signups and offers for teen-targeted product samples such as skin cleansers. "This gives them an immediate way to say, 'Yes, I would like to try that product,'" Mr. Cordray said.

Burger King has introduced ShopText-enabled ads in magazines including Time Inc.'s People, Bauer's In Touch and Wenner's Us Weekly, according to Steve Roberts, CEO of ShopText. "Get \$5 free when you text to buy a \$20 BK Crown Card," the ad reads. "It's what we call 'Kingflation.'"

Rolling Stone, meanwhile, has completed one go-round with SnapTell and plans another for the fall, said Publisher Ray Chelstowski. Readers responded strongly to the ads, he said, citing one from the Discovery Channel promoting the season premiere of "Man Vs. Wild."

"You got a video back of the host of that show drinking animal blood," Mr. Chelstowski said. "That one really resonated."

"If this does take hold," he added, "what it really does is narrow that transactional gap for advertisers that takes you from not only print media to mobile but to actual transactions."

John Hadl, general manager at Brand in Hand, said he's used both technologies -- and thinks they're here to stay. "The value of digital is that it's a productive medium," Mr. Hadl said. "Mobile starts to bring that to other channels that have been one-dimensional, like print."

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