Measuring preferences of current, former, and potential subscribers: an effort to learn how to keep the magazine sustainable

Kerry Linehan
Greg Jenkins
Dain Palmer

September 26, 2012

North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission

Magazine cover photograph by Todd Pusser
Magazine background

- First edition published in November 1937
- Monthly printing started in 1948
- “Official educational publication of the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission”

Magazine cover illustration by Gary Palmer
Magazine Evaluation Purpose

- To examine the demographics, reading and subscription behaviors, and preferences for the magazine of current, former, and potential readers (anglers and hunters).
- To inform magazine content
- To plan for magazine marketing
- To develop a long-term plan for magazine
Methods

Focus Groups

- Why: To develop survey questions
- Who:
  - Hickory and Rocky Mount (current subscribers and anglers and hunters)
  - Raleigh (lapsed subscribers)
Methods

Surveys

- 1220 questionnaires mailed to each of the three groups
- Adjusted response rates
  - Current subscribers – 69%
  - Lapsed subscribers – 34%
  - Anglers and hunters – 25%
- Non-response check
Who are current subscribers?

- 87% male
- 85% 45 years or older
- 50% with at least 4-year degree, 22% with graduate/professional degree
- 75% are licensed hunters or anglers
- 93% approve of fishing; 89% approve of hunting
Subscription lapse

Top reasons for subscription lapse:
1. Forgot to renew – 27%
2. Did not have time to read magazine – 24%
3. I subscribe to other magazines – 22%

47% of lapsed subscribers said they plan to subscribe again
Angler/hunter familiarity

- 80% have heard of the magazine
- 66% percent have read the magazine
- 24% have subscribed to the magazine

Magazine cover photograph by Todd Pusser
Angler/hunter intention to subscribe

- 27% plan to subscribe, 25% no, 48% unsure

- Reasons for not subscribing:
  40% - In general, I don’t subscribe to magazines
  29% - I subscribe to other magazines
  21% - I don’t have time to read the magazine
  20% - There are not enough hunting and fishing articles
What do people want to read about?  
(Current/lapsed subscribers)

1. Threats to fish and wildlife
2. Threatened and endangered species
3. Coexisting with wildlife
4. Game fish species
5. Freshwater fishing
What do people want to read about?
(Anglers/hunters)

1. Places to fish in NC
2. Freshwater fishing
3. Threats to fish and wildlife
4. Game fish species
5. Fishing equipment
Who is the audience now?

- Hunters and anglers: 16% (Current subscribers), 14% (Lapsed subscribers)
- People who do not hunt or fish, but who are interested in North Carolina's wildlife: 4% (Current subscribers), 10% (Lapsed subscribers)
- All individuals interested in North Carolina's wildlife: 74% (Current subscribers), 64% (Lapsed subscribers)
- Unsure: 7% (Current subscribers), 11% (Lapsed subscribers)
Who should the audience be?

Survey population
- Current subscribers
- Lapsed subscribers

- Hunters and anglers: 9% (Current), 13% (Lapsed)
- People who do not hunt or fish, but who are interested in North Carolina's wildlife: 2% (Current), 3% (Lapsed)
- All individuals interested in North Carolina's wildlife: 88% (Current), 81% (Lapsed)
- Unsure: 1% (Current), 3% (Lapsed)
Will current subscribers read if magazine is online?

- 55% very unlikely
- 18% somewhat unlikely
- 10% neither unlikely nor likely
- 10% somewhat likely
- 7% very likely
Will former subscribers subscribe if it is online?

- 30% very unlikely
- 14% somewhat unlikely
- 26% neither unlikely nor likely
- 17% somewhat likely
- 12% very likely
Advertising

What level of advertising would you find acceptable in the magazine?

- 28% no advertising
- 48% a small amount in the back
- 20% small ads throughout the magazine
- 4% full page ads throughout the magazine
Discussion

- Determine purpose/mission/goals of magazine
- Content – common topics and online presence
- Increase awareness to hunters/anglers
- Modify/enhance methods of contacting lapsed subscribers

Magazine cover photograph by Todd Pusser
Where are we now?

- Developed a business plan focused on reducing expenditures and increasing circulation
- Reduced number of issues to 6 a year with two outdoor guides
- Increased the amount of hunting and fishing content
- Digital subscription
Thank you . . .

- Coauthors: Dain Palmer and Greg Jenkins
- Focus group participants
- Survey respondents
- Data entry team: Wanda Mugo and Susan Wagner

- Sport Fish Restoration Program