

Made-to-order magazine lets readers choose

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This magazine cover illustration released by Time, Inc., shows Time Inc's customized magazine "mine" that combines reader-selected sections from eight publications as it tries to mimic in printed form the personalized news feeds that have become popular on the Internet. (AP Photo/Time, Inc)

(AP) -- Time Inc. is experimenting with a customized magazine that combines reader-selected sections from eight publications as it tries to mimic in printed form the personalized news feeds that have become popular on the Internet.

Called "mine," the five-issue, 10-week experiment also aligns readers with the branding message that its sole advertising partner, Toyota Motor Corp., has for its new Lexus 2010 RX sport utility vehicle: It's as

customizable as the magazine carrying its ads.

The magazine is free, but the print edition is limited to the first 31,000 respondents, while an online version is available for another 200,000.

Sign-ups are available immediately at <http://www.timeinc.com/mine> , with the first issue to be shipped in the mail in early April, and then once every two weeks. Online subscribers will get digital editions that look just like the printed version, but in a special format that allows virtual page turns with clicks. A promotional push for the magazine kicks off Friday.

Readers can select five titles from eight published by subsidiaries of Time Warner Inc. and American Express Co.: Time, Sports Illustrated, Food & Wine, Real Simple, Money, In Style, Golf, and Travel + Leisure.

Editors will pre-select the stories that make it into every biweekly issue, and readers won't have the option of changing the picks from issue to issue.

There are 56 editorial combinations in all (the Lexus SUV has 22 customizable settings, plus eight options handled by a dealer). Those who fill out an online survey will also find that advertisements fit their personal circumstances in a form of hyper-targeting.

A sample ad tag line for a respondent named Dave, who lives in Los Angeles and eats sushi, might read: "Hey Dave, your friends will be really impressed when you drive down Van Ness Avenue on your way to get sushi."

Lexus, which came up with the idea, will be the lone advertiser and will buy four full pages of ads for each 36-page magazine.

"I wouldn't call this an ad, this goes much beyond this," said David Nordstrom, Lexus' vice president of marketing. "Our message of 'driver-inspired' and 'customization' will come through a lot stronger."

Without specifying, Nordstrom said the venture did not cost more than other advertising campaigns. He suggested that the potentially higher costs of individualized printing would be worth it if the ads got a better response from a greater number of readers.

Both companies plan extensive research on how consumers react.

[Time Inc.](#)'s president of advertising sales and marketing, Stephanie George, said the magazine strikes the right balance between reader choice, advertising and the company's editorial control.

"This is the most unique project that we've ever done that combines their messaging with our magazines," she said. "It also showcases our great edit."

The "mine" experiment represents the latest effort by traditional media organizations to appeal to readers increasingly accustomed to picking and choosing what they read on the Internet. Online advertising, through growing, hasn't generated enough revenue to offset declines in print; personalized print products could help fill some of the gap.

This summer, MediaNews Group, publisher of The Denver Post, the San Jose (Calif.) Mercury News and other newspapers, plans to experiment with its own reader-created publication, likely at its Daily News in Los Angeles.

Readers will be allowed to choose specific stories, or those by author, keyword or subject. The customized publication will be laid out like a newspaper and sent with targeted advertisements as a digital "PDF" file

for printing at home or viewing on computers or mobile phones. Details on that venture are expected next month.

Joshua Benton, director of Harvard University's Nieman Journalism Lab, remained skeptical of the ventures.

In Time's case, for example, the use of a single advertiser does not allow for targeted marketing the way Google Inc. has succeeded with matching ads to a user's search terms or a site's content. In other words, Lexus won't be selling golf balls and khaki pants even if a reader's editorial picks clearly signal an interest in those products.

A blog on the Nieman site likened the MediaNews innovation to a radio gadget that sent a facsimile newspaper to readers' homes - in 1939. It flopped.

"I'm skeptical that print media are ever going to be able to offer the customized experience that the Internet can," he said, adding, however, it was worthwhile to try the concepts out.

On the Net:

Time Inc.'s mine magazine: <http://www.timeinc.com/mine>

American Express Publishing: <http://www.amexpub.com>

Nieman Journalism Lab: <http://www.niemanlab.org>

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