

Esquire looks to energize print with 3-D animation

October 29 2009, By ANDREW VANACORE , AP Business Writer

(AP) -- Hold Esquire's December issue in front of a webcam, and an on-screen image of the magazine pops to life, letters flying off the cover. Shift and tilt the magazine, and the animation on the screen moves accordingly.

Robert Downey Jr. emerges out of the on-screen page in 3-D, offering half-improvised shtick on Esquire's latest high-tech experiment for keeping print magazines relevant amid the digital onslaught.

Esquire's top editors are clearly enthused about the new technology, called "[augmented reality](#)."

"I felt like a caveman seeing fire for the first time," says David Curcurito, the magazine's art director.

Triggering the animation is a box just below Downey's cover image, resembling a [crossword puzzle](#) and looking a little out of place. The magazine has printed about a half-dozen boxes inside the issue, each calling up a separate interactive feature, plus a couple of ads. The issue will be available nationally by Nov. 16.

At a fraught time for the magazine industry, one could draw a lot of conclusions from Esquire's attempts at innovation: It may be the future of print or just a dying medium's last desperate grab at attention as the Internet swallows more of peoples' time.

With the Web drawing some ad dollars and readers from print, publishers have made various attempts to give more oomph to the medium. Time Inc. has tested personalized magazines that allow readers to mix and match sections from eight different titles. Entertainment Weekly ran a video screen in some copies of its fall TV preview issue. Last year, Esquire animated the front of its 75th anniversary edition with digital e-ink, the same stuff used in Amazon's Kindle [electronic-book reader](#).

Though Esquire is being forced to rein in expenses like most publications, the augmented reality issue is one sign the magazine's parent company, Hearst Corp., isn't taking as big an ax to its properties' budgets. Hearst, a privately held company, publishes 14 other magazines, including Good Housekeeping and Cosmopolitan.

While declining to give out a dollar figure, Esquire Editor-in-Chief David Granger acknowledged the issue is costing more than usual to put together. The car maker Lexus is absorbing some of the expense by agreeing to buy space for two "augmented reality" advertisements in the issue. Granger said the magazine won't be able to use the technology every month, but would like to as often as possible.

Economics aside, the technology is about keeping things fresh. As Granger and Curcurito spoke - both sporting Esquire-type gear, blue jeans and sport coats - it's clear that ginning up new ways to get the magazine noticed is a job they enjoy.

"For us, it's just fun," Granger says. "We've tried all kinds of things - and yeah, some of them have been stunts - to try to get people interested in the magazine."

He grabs the December issue from Curcurito to show off the next trick.

On the page is Esquire's regular men's fashion spread, while on the screen, the model is pelted by a computer-animated snow storm. Granger gives the page a quarter rotation, the weather turns sunny and the model starts throwing on summer clothes.

The magazine's regular "Funny Joke from a Beautiful Woman," feature gets a new twist from actress Gillian Jacobs in a gray nightgown. She'll tell a second, "dirtier" joke should readers return after midnight.

Clearly not all is fun and humor in the magazine business.

The number of ad pages Esquire sold in the first half of the year fell to roughly 319, down 26 percent from 431 the year before, according to the Publishers Information Bureau.

And Granger isn't aloof from the debate raging about the future of journalism and media. He simply believes print still has some surprises to offer.

Explaining why Esquire has decided to pursue things like e-ink and augmented reality, he said, "I got so sick of people talking about old media versus new media. I wanted to prove that print is still kind of cool. I think of it as kind of our job to show people the strength of our medium."

He may be doing something right. Unlike many printed publications, Esquire has managed to hold onto its readership even as the Internet grows. Its online audience is relatively modest - 362,000 unique visitors in September, according to comScore Inc. - as Esquire keeps some of its lengthier features off the Web. But its average print circulation grew this decade by about 38,000 copies - to 718,000 in the second half of 2009, according to the Audit Bureau of Circulations. Both subscriptions and newsstand sales have climbed.

But that still leaves Esquire and the rest of the business in a waiting game to see if advertisers return as the recession eases.

With all the dazzle in the December issue shown off, Granger rests back in his chair, the view of midtown Manhattan behind him out of the 21st-story window of Hearst's glass and steel tower on 8th Avenue.

"I just hope it starts coming back soon," he says. "It's got to, right?"

©2009 The Associated Press. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed.

Citation: Esquire looks to energize print with 3-D animation (2009, October 29) retrieved 20 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2009-10-esquire-energize-d-animation.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--