

Back to the future at www.listener.co.nz

by Karl Puschmann

The brave new frontier of cyberspace proved barren and hostile to the *Listener* when it first rode into town on an expensive online show-pony back in 1999. Despite an exorbitant amount of money spent on the project, it bombed and was quickly shut down.

Once it had closed, visitors to the web address were greeted with an Arnie-like message stating that the *Listener* would be back. It did not say when.

Three years later, Finlay Macdonald, editor at the time, decided to resurrect the website but knew it had to be vastly different from its previous version.

The biggest change was the decision to run as much as possible from within the magazine itself.

Mark Revington became the site's online editor simply because he was the person on staff most interested in new media.

"The site was something we wanted to keep in-house because we'd already had one attempt at a *Listener* website and it was pretty much run by an outside agency," he says.

"It cost us a fortune and it was really ugly. So this time we decided to keep it in-house and keep the costs really low — because by that stage everyone had realised that websites weren't going to make you tons of money.

"It was agreed a website was something the magazine needed to go into the 21st century, so the obvious solution was to get someone on staff to run the thing."



PHOTO: KARL PUSCHMANN

REVINGTON: Bringing the *Listener* into the 21st century.

With that decided, Revington entered into a series of "rather intense" discussions with web-designers Cactuslab on how best to represent the magazine online.

"We decided to concentrate on the books and arts content because that's a very strong feature of the magazine and something it does better than any other print publication in New Zealand," says Revington.

"We also decided to leave off some of our really popular columnists and also leave off a great chunk of each week's features."

With the content discussions concluded, both parties realised these answers had raised more questions — the biggest being whether a visitor to the site should be able to see the content they were missing out on or not. The answer was: sort of.

"You don't see any of the columns that aren't there like politics, food or page 94.

"But you do see the features that you're missing," says Revington before adding, "The web designers won that one."

"They said the site does function like an ad. You need to remind people what's in the mag

so that maybe they'll rush out and buy it."

The philosophy behind the revamped website was to keep it as unfussy as possible, enabling easy navigation while still keeping things looking good.

"The *Listener* website succeeded in that. It looks great. It's very, very clean; it's really, really sharp and it's incredibly simple to use."

According to Revington, there are two basic factors a website that evolves from a print source must have:

"Ease of use and good content. Which is where the *Listener* wins out. We already have really great content. We just put it online."

Ask Revington whether the magazine's website plays second fiddle to the magazine and you'll receive a muffled guffaw for your troubles.

"No, of course not," he says.

"It's seen as an adjunct to the magazine and a necessary part of the publication going into the 21st century."

He says after the relaunch he encountered minor difficulties in getting some staff to realise the website was just as important as the magazine.

"Getting the content flowing not only to the print edition but off to the website as well was an initial teething problem."

Revington says those problems are worked out now and the website is seen as on an equal footing with the magazine and integral to it.

"The *New York Times* ran a story that said you shouldn't see the print publication as necessarily being the flagship, and

everything else around it," he says.

"You should see what you do as producing content and that content is distributed via a number of means. And that's pretty much how we see it too."

Following the successful relaunch of the *Listener* magazine on the web, Revington is ready to unveil the role he plans for the site.

His vision is to encompass many new features that will not only complement the magazine, but also encourage people to visit the website on a regular basis.

He says the main problem is that the site is updated once a week and there is a huge surge of visitors on Monday and Tuesday, with little incentive for them to return until the next update.

He says improvements must be made to ensure not only its success but also its survival.

"We need more blogs, we need email alerts, and we need other online content such as interview transcripts and Q&As. Content that we don't necessarily carry in the magazine," says Revington.

"We also need to put more website-only content on there to drive people there seven days a week."

The expansion of speedier internet connections coupled with the continued growing popularity of the web leads Revington to cite predictions that there's another online boom on the way.

"Broadband access means that online content will become more and more important."

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Online media a flexible option for advertisers

by Ridma Mendis

The advertising industry is still struggling to come to terms with the new media platform, seven years after online media ads made their debut.

Colenso BBDO online strategist Polly Foote says new media outlets are more flexible and cost less than other forms of advertising.

"You can book space and deliver three or four different creative messages if you want to, aimed at four different people," says Foote.

Even though online media provide a platform for more interactivity than traditional media, limited file sizes and spaces in new media can restrict the creative side of advertising.

"You treat your online advertising as your headlines, and if people want the full story they will have to click through," says Foote.

Bank of New Zealand marketing communication manager Karla McQueen says limiting size and cost create problems.

"The message has to be very simple and short and it's hard to sell something like a loan without going into complex details."

Instant measurability is another unique feature of online media. It allows advertisers to measure the responsiveness of online users and the success of a campaign.

"We can measure right through to how many people went on to enter a competition or how many people went through to book an online airfare," says Foote.

But Foote says having instant measurability is not always seen as a good thing. "It's too measurable and clients are

sometimes horrified at the results if their expectations are quite high."

McQueen says click-throughs work for some campaigns but not for others and it's hard to measure whether an online ad has worked.

Kim Walbridge of Air New Zealand says a substantial amount of their bookings and ticket sales are done online.

He says instant measurability shows how effective an online campaign is.

"You can track down how many people have booked tickets online, whereas in print media it's hard to make that connection."

Foote says clients who have e-commerce-capable sites or any sort of web authority spend more on online advertising than others with fast moving consumer goods.

Online advertising is popular among financial services, computing, travel and telecommunication.

But McQueen says less than 10% of BNZ's advertising budget is used on online ads.

"Choosing to advertise online depends on the target audience. If our target audience is over 50-year-olds then online advertising is not effective, but if it is for 17 to 25-year-olds we are likely to use online ads."

New Zealand has a small online advertising market and that affects the growth of the online industry. In bigger markets competition is high with more publishers in the market.

New Zealand has fewer sites and most of them are small. "If you approach an advertiser and they say no, you can't go anywhere else," says Foote.