

Keeping innovation affordable

Diversity in publishing is essential for survival. Mary Hogarth takes a look at List for Life – an innovative new title to emerge from Time Inc's Innovation Lab.

Many publishers targeting 18-34 year olds have spent time and money on researching ways to develop relevant content in a format their audience will love. Now it seems Time Inc is leading the way forward with its *List for Life* launched earlier this year. An analysis of the site reveals relevant content that has been thoughtfully treated. Laid out in a format that would work well on any device, it favours infographics, iconic imagery and attractive content over text-heavy articles.

I can see why the platform would appeal to this age group. This is confirmed when I casually ask some of my undergraduate multimedia journalism students if they like the site and would they use it.

List for Life was developed in the company's pioneering hub, aka the Innovation Lab. Keith Walker, digital director of Time Inc UK's Innovation Group tells me the Lab is "dedicated to a lean structure, rapid development, or rejection, and is not limited to traditional media products".

Is the company pioneering a new way forward in trialling new launches and, if so, does the lean element compromise a traditionally lengthy development process? Apparently not. "We use our insight to identify an opportunity and this is then backed up by market research," explains Keith. "This data informs the prototype which is put out into the 'real world' to test how it performs. The test cycles only last between two days and two weeks so we can either learn fast or fail fast."

He reveals that more than 60 products have been tested and evaluated by the lab to date. Out of these, only six have passed the rigid test criteria by being tested in the 'real world' and therefore are deemed more likely to succeed.

"Those six products are the *NME Daily* app, *Look's Fashion Drop*, *Now's Gossip Cam*, *Powder*, *List for Life* and the newly launched *Live-Smart* site. Some of these products are being incubated before being released to the wider business and managed outside of the Lab and some are being developed into version two and will be evolving in the near future."

The lab is run by employing low cost, but keen, millennials and giving them control. Many would see this as forward thinking, but in reality has this risky strategy worked? Yes, according to Keith who says he has been "constantly impressed by the application and imagination of the teams of content-creators I've worked with on *List for Life*. They understand the market and the medium we are using to deliver the product and are enjoying the responsibility that Time Inc UK is giving them."

Lessons learned

As with any new start up, lessons were learned with *List for Life*. "Don't assume anything unless you have the data to back it up," says Keith.

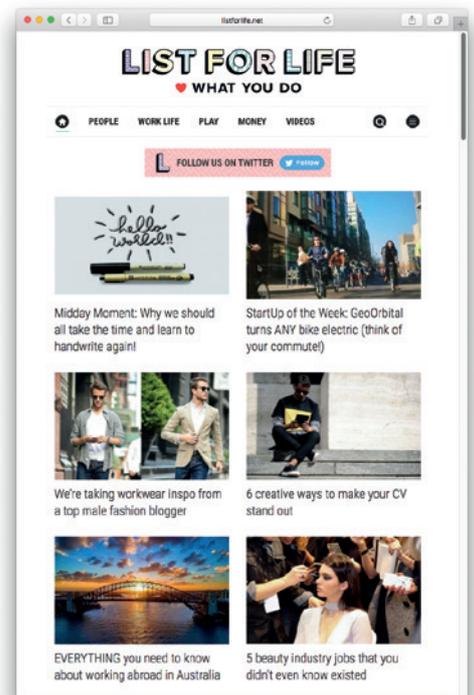
"In the lab, insight is the basis for our product development. We use it to identify gaps in the market and build prototypes, so it is crucial to our product development." Part of that is being "ready to accept you were wrong when a test indicates you were. It's better to regret a decision than not to make one. Moving fast and maintaining momentum is important in an agile team like the lab."

Research and audience testing are essential. But are traditional new launch methods outdated and if so will more publishers be setting up labs? Perhaps, but audience testing is still paramount to building sustainable content.

An editor's perspective

List for Life's editor, Emily Wadsworth – aged just 23 – was chosen for her "ability to self-start, passion for the brand and market knowledge," says Keith. However, Emily feels it was her storytelling skills plus her ability to "relate to other millennials and understand their attitudes towards achieving a work / life balance that got her the job".

Emily became involved with the Innovation Lab while working as a diarist for the *Mail on Sunday*. The lab's research identified a gap in the market showing that 93% of the 14-25 demographic felt they weren't getting the career advice they needed. Inspired by the fact that a



□ "All our content has a 'work hard, play hard' angle."

publisher was keen to develop content to fill this gap, Emily saw an opportunity.

"I know how difficult both the job market and the 'career ladder' are for millennials," reveals Emily. "So I jumped at the chance to get involved and to help shape the concept into what *List for Life* is now – a solution to this problem with the aim of changing this shocking statistic".

From concept to launch, the platform took around nine months, with much of that time spent obtaining feedback from both industry professionals as well as the target audience. The concept, she explains, evolved from the Innovation Lab's findings: that while listicles do well, peer insight is a must-have for this demographic.

List for Life it seems has tapped into authenticity – telling real-life stories with which the audience can identify. "We are sharing real-life stories that tell our readers about how someone launched their own business or landed the career of their dreams, for example. It's important we cover a wide range of industries so that there is something for everyone, so we could be telling the story of a bedroom DJ who has made it as a music producer, or someone who has built up a fashion brand from scratch to the catwalks of London Fashion Week."

"A focus on careers in the form of work life was always going to be among the core pillars of content," says Emily. "But we also wanted to have an outer layer of entertainment editorial to draw readers in. We found out quickly that we were right about the need for useful career advice because it started out-performing all other content very early on."

The other pillars are 'People', 'Play' and 'Money', each identified by the platform's editorial team using that tried and tested

method of putting the audience's needs first. For any new launch, this is a must – because it's not about the publisher / editor / team – it's about those who are going to consume the content and making sure they get what they want.

"We now know what works and are committed to giving our audience what they want and need. All our content has a 'work hard, play hard' angle and *List for Life* has a very strong brand identity."

Having a somewhat wide demographic of 18-34 could be considered risky, but the team has that aspect covered too. The platform has different content to appeal to both the older and the younger range of this demographic. "For example, we have practical advice for university students and also inspiration for those thinking of having a career change," explains Emily. "Through a differing tone, references and themes, we cater to the entire millennial demographic."

Like most editors of a new launch, she has a very clear vision for the platform. "I'm dedicated to making sure the brand grows and makes a name for itself. Whether I'm interviewing a body language expert about

how our readers can nail a job interview, or talking through an aspiring entrepreneur's crowdfunding pitch with them, I'm always thinking about how this could help others to make sure I am telling the right stories in the most useful way."

Shareability is a key word. Emily wants stories from readers' peers with whom they can identify. She actively seeks contributors encouraging people to email her with their stories and ideas. In fact, *List for Life* is very much a platform for emerging talent. "We work with contributors to develop their ideas and turn them into something our audience is going to find useful."

To ensure continued user engagement, the editorial team monitors viewing rates to identify popular stories. This, she feels, is a crucial strategy to achieve the core objective to "create a loyal readership and a substantial dwell time".

Brand collaboration

Collaboration is already acknowledged by many publishers as being the way forward. At Time Inc, it forms a key part of the brand

values. To ensure this filters down through the company, Paul Cheal, group managing editor for the Innovation Group has instilled a 'One Team' thought process.

As part of this ethos, the team collaborated with its sister brand *NME*, an iconic brand in the stable that targets a similar demographic. This formed part of *List for Life's* pre and post launch. *NME* promoted *List for Life's* pre-launch by sharing posts that were likely to appeal to its audience.

The secret to a successful collaboration is ensuring both parties win. "It's a virtuous circle where both brands get great content and support," explains Keith. "The *NME* collaboration was vital for testing content pre-launch and promoting the site post-launch."

While Time Inc won't disclose exact costings for the start-up, Keith does confirm the team didn't go over budget. "We didn't exceed the planned spend. As I mentioned, the very nature of the lab means we run lean and it is all about targeting our audience and testing." Although unwilling to reveal if the platform is in profit yet, Keith says he is delighted with *List for Life's* performance so far.

According to Keith, diversity is one of the company's key strengths. "The range of brands we have at Time Inc UK and the different platforms these brands are on means there are lessons we can draw on from around the company, which is a great benefit. This puts us in a strong position to innovate by building on all the knowledge and talent we have here."

Time Inc, it seems, is leading the way in diversity, innovation and shareability while maximising its resources in order to grow.

My verdict? Both the Innovation Lab and *List for Life* are great concepts, the latter I will be keeping a close eye on to see if it can become a sustainable concept in the long term. ■



Emily's lessons for success

“There are two very poignant life lessons I've learned in my career journey so far. The first is that persistence is everything. When I was at university and was thinking about a career in journalism, I emailed every editor and stalked them all on social media until I eventually landed some work experience. That snowballed and led to me getting a place on the Magazine Journalism MA course at City University. I would advise anyone to be persistent and not feel embarrassed to ask for what they want. If you don't ask, you definitely don't get.

The second thing is that people are just people. I learned this when I went to interview Victoria Beckham. I stood outside her dressing room feeling absolutely terrified – and I kept thinking what on earth would my 13-year-old self, dancing to the Spice Girls in her bedroom, think? I don't think I've ever been so nervous in my life, but when I got in the interview room, Victoria was really lovely (she does smile). She totally put me at ease. That experience taught me pretty quickly that however intimidated you may feel by the people you admire, you need to just go for it. I now take this into every interview I do.

To do my job, you need to be very resilient so having a thick skin and self-confidence is vital.”

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About Mary Hogarth



Mary Hogarth has nearly 20 years' experience of magazine publishing. An educator, media specialist and writer, Mary led the Features Journalism programme group at Southampton Solent University and now lectures at Bournemouth University. She recently published *How To Launch A Magazine In This Digital Age* and has a consultancy practice (themagazineexpert Ltd) specialising in new title launches, editorial development, business strategies as well as audience engagement.

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