

MEDIA/PUBLISHING

Generational elasticity a necessary strategy for print titles

May 5, 2017



Town & Country's October 2016 issue celebrated 170-years in print

By JEN KING

NEW YORK Today's newsstands have more magazine titles than ever before, an indicator that print is certainly not dead and that readers crave a physical interaction with something real, says Town & Country's style director.

Subscribe to **Luxury Daily**
Plus: Just released
State of Luxury 2019 **Save \$246 ▶**

During a fireside chat at Luxury Roundtable: Engaging Gens X, Y & Z May 3, the Hearst-owned publication's Whitney Robinson discussed content and media strategy with Luxury Daily's editor in chief, Mickey Alam Khan. In addition to speaking on content and media strategy, Mr. Robinson shared how Town & Country has navigated the last 171 years of continuous print.

"Town & Country is a brand that has survived the jet age, the space age, the digital age and we're still here," said Whitney Robinson, style director of Hearst's **Town & Country** magazine.

"It's something to be 171 years old," he said. "It's something we are really proud of.

"It is also something we're aware of the sort of baggage of the past as well. We want to be sure we're a brand that's moving clearly into the future."

Luxury Daily produced Luxury Roundtable: Engaging Gens X, Y & Z on May 3.

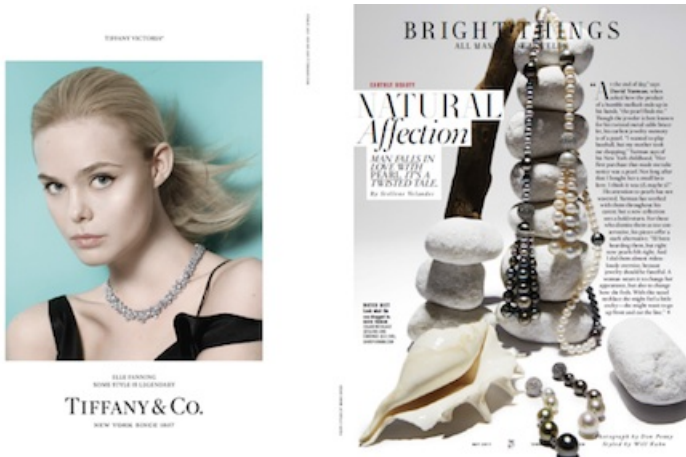
Caught up

By relying too heavily on the past, brands use their bygone days as a crutch too often, which has prevented many from moving forward and adapting to the current environment. Instead, Mr. Robinson suggests an offense versus defense approach to bring a brand forward.

While evolving with the times is an offensive move, brands can effectively play defense by outwardly defending their ethos and values. The defense of history is what millennials often "sniff" as they migrate toward a luxury brand, regardless of industry sector.

If a brand has a deep understanding of its ethos and what it stands for, especially in the leisure, luxury and fashion print media category, there is still a need and room for growth.

Recently, an enormous amount of attention has been spent on how brands can cater to the multiple consumer generations active in today's market, but is it really so complicated? Mr. Robinson doesn't think so, feeling that there are too many acronyms, subgroups and letters differentiating the generations.



Tiffany & Co. advertisement with millennial actress Elle Fanning as seen in the May 2017 issue of Town & Country

"We're all getting so caught up in it," Mr. Robinson said. "It's not that complicated."

And, possibly most importantly, brands need to move away from the mythical notion that there is an allusive millennial out there who only carries a Birkin handbag and loves Celine, because she does not exist, and that's okay.

As the importance of generational marketing gained momentum, the ideology that print was dead blossomed due to the emergence of social networks and digital media.

Mr. Robinson feels that the cry of "print is dead" is the industry's fault because media has prescribed to it as the environment evolved, rather than keeping pace. Print media was never a volume business and publishers became fixated on having a social following on par with Kim Kardashian West, for example.

"We fell into that trap, and a lot of people fall into that trap, of having to reach this mass, huge audience," Mr. Robinson said. "True luxury is really knowing your reader, knowing your consumer. Knowing how their tastes change, but really, I don't think it's all that complicated."

Curated and tangible

Print has maintained an active audience. Instead of the geriatric readership it often is summed up as, print is capturing the attention of millennial readers with the onslaught of niche and mass titles currently available in the leisure, luxury and fashion category.

In a world where there is so much social media noise, consumers yearn for something that is curated, vibrant and tangible, and print media is the solution.

During the fireside chat, Mr. Robinson explained that he is print-first, as he can spend the most time curating and developing editorial concepts. For example, it took a number of years for supermodel Naomi Campbell to agree to be featured on Town & Country's cover.



Naomi Campbell's cover story appeared in Town & Country's March 2017 issue

The development of editorial is what leads to a piece or cover going viral, not the other way around. Everything that social radiates around is what happens in print first.

This is not to say that Town & Country does not actively speak to millennials, but instead of narrowing in on viral content, the title takes an intergenerational approach that proactively speaks to younger and mature generations.

For example, the "T&C 50 Modern Swans" editorial feature found in September's edition, is an annual who's who of the year's "of the moment" women. The empowering editorialized list speaks to younger readers without segmentation ([see story](#)).

Town & Country also leverages its archives to inform what the publication does in the present ([see story](#)).

"I want to make sure that Town & Country is the most irresistible magazine visually, because that's the first thing people see," Mr. Robinson said. "They see a cover star, and I want to make sure it's actually dialing into something that's happening in the world around us, be it in politics, in the White House, in celebrity, happening wherever.

"I think far too often there's been a balance between consumer news and fantasy," he said. "What I want to bring back to this magazine is that sense of playfulness, that sense of immediacy, that sense of dream books.

"That's why people picked up these things in the first place. I think we lost that somewhere along the way, and if we come back to that, people will come back to our brand."

© 2020 Napean LLC. All rights reserved.

Luxury Daily is published each business day. Thank you for reading us. Your [feedback](#) is welcome.