

## Digital Thought Leaders

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Numeriques

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“The main journalists from the print magazine now go online to enrich the blogs”



For sixty years Elle's magazines have been media icons. With a new enthusiasm they're embracing the web, and they're taking on board the new models of publishing. With 39 editions and 20 websites, Clement's brands have come a long way from a single media proposition. But only continued innovation will let them succeed in an increasingly challenging online market.



Making sense of a digital world

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### Speed read

Elle is an icon in magazine publishing.

The HFM group has appreciated the threat from the new landscape of media consumption and created a powerful online brand.

The online services have continued to innovate and the management team are embracing several of the ideas behind the 'Web 2.0' networked communication models.

In particular they are incorporating 'user generated content', as part of the drive towards engaging the audience within the editorial ideas, using the Elle writers' materials as the starting point for an entertainment journey.

## Elle: sixty years on

The HFM magazine group set up dedicated editorial teams to work on the web, but the relationship to the printed titles remains strong. 80% of the content on the websites is additional to what gets printed, which suggests they've succeeded in grappling with the editorial challenge of web content development. Part of this means absorbing the trend towards daily publishing cycles – a continuing challenge for the magazine industry - in spite of the weekly or monthly cycles of the printed titles.

In France more than half the population is now connected to the net, and 80% of those with access are on broadband. As with the rest of Western Europe and Scandinavia, the shift to a broadband in the home access market unlocks a step-change in the potential of audiences watch, engage and buy.

### Audience focus shifts: tracking time spent is key

The effects are clearest in terms of the time people spend with different media channels and how this is changing over time. French users spend around 40minutes online daily.

Interestingly half the internet audience is multitasks while consuming their media; tuning in to Radio and TV at the same time as being online. The media dynamics are clearly changing, and with this comes the new reality in cross-media consumption we've been tracking across the rest of Europe. "The internet is a new window into the room", explains Clement.

### Challenges for publishers

"The challenge for most of us as traditional media brands that have moved to the web is that our focus is on content", explains Clement. "Thanks to the web, we're competing for people's time with many new players: the role of service websites (like the rail network SNCF) continues to grow, and the conversational websites [like the 4m people who visit France's popular discussion space Skyrock.fr every month] are placing discussion at the heart of the internet experience for many."

### Audience time

How viewer's 'media time' divides up between channels in France

- Internet 22%
- Radio 29%
- Daily Newspapers 8%
- Television 32%
- Magazines 9%

Share of media minutes per week

## “Thanks to the web, we’re competing for people’s time with many new players”

In April Elle launched a broad range of discussions and user participation tools. The first blogs are gaining momentum on Elle.fr. “The main journalists from the print magazine now go online to enrich the blog”, explains Clement. The participation by audiences quickly led to the creation of new topics and content areas: fashion shows, news events, international projects – they’ve all spurred fresh content and new services. In the Web 2.0 model of user-centric publishing, Elle appears to be successfully transiting into using its content as the starting point for a greater debate, discussion or user journey.

## “The main journalists from the print magazine now go online to enrich the blogs”

But there’s a clear gap between devising the plan and achieving real change. “Technical solutions are not enough, you have to change the culture of the organisation,” says Clement, echoing the views of more than a dozen magazine publishers we spoke with this month. And he’s honest enough to admit that much work is yet to be done: “We think there’s a real challenge in both what to do and how to do it. We’re flexible, and ready to develop special services and special microsites; this is the start of the new revolution for the group.”

### Where do their readers come from?

Understanding the origins of online audiences is critical to commercially successful web publishing. Not surprisingly search engines are the key and Elle – like most publishers - is working to increase the amount of traffic it gets from search engines. Their aim is to harness search more effectively, “getting better listings within search engines so we reach more new users”. Elle has changed its pattern to bring its search engine optimisation in house, rebuilding its pages to significantly improve its rankings in natural search. Get that strategy right and a publisher saves a small fortune on buying traffic through harnessing the right keywords.

“Our rankings were okay, but now we’ve harnessed the editorial resources, we’re expecting them to dramatically improve. The way you write your headlines really matters; journalists have to think about the search engines when they write their articles. They know how important this is”.

With many publishers wrestling with the role of search engines, it’s interesting to see the pace of development being achieved at Elle. Several senior publishing directors we’ve recently interviewed remain deeply uncomfortable with free content.

Where Elle’s readers come from:

- 24% Google
- 25% Links
- 51% Direct access

### New alliances: co-opetition

In spite of the growth in audiences and the leaps in online advertising, magazines still find it tough to get onto the schedule for many campaigns. The problem is one of reach. Many magazines have an audience that is one twentieth (at best) than that of the national web portals, and joining up many small media can be costly in terms of time and resources for media planners. If magazines are to successfully tap into the exploding volumes of online advertising, then they have to find new ways to achieve this.

That’s what Elle has embraced within France. The MediaFemme.com alliance has seen more than a dozen titles – including fiercely competitive brands like Elle and Vogue – join forces to create an attractive proposition to advertisers. Collectively the network has 1.5m unique users every month and the combined reach of all the women’s titles provides a powerful alternative to media buys on portals.

## Implications? Our take...

Elle is making the transition to a networked publisher. Their original online publishing model used dozens of the elements of the first generation of web publishing. It enjoyed success, both in terms of readership and revenues, but the market moves on and it’s time for the next wave of innovation. When Antione Clement talked with us in Stockholm, he gave a frank vision of what Web 2.0 means for Elle, but also of the organisational and managerial challenges of achieving it. The interview was in May 2006, and by the Autumn of this year – when audience statistics will have been released – it should become clear whether the vision has delivered. Change on this scale for a magazine is both challenging, and needed. Elle is one to watch.

### Links

Elle.fr and Elle.com – New publishing models from an iconic magazine brand

## Actions

**Publishers:** Review your content model – are you placing the viewer at the very heart of the entertainment and information experience?

**Advertisers:** Have you explored the new participatory models for marketing, building dialogues with customers inside content frameworks they control? Have you found your brand's communities online? Have you begun your conversations?

## Meet other Digital Thought Leaders

Here are three other Digital Thought Leaders who are pioneering user-generated content. Their brands and models are each different, but in times of huge economic and social change, this type of knowledge becomes a critical success factor. That's why we created the Digital Thought Leaders interviews: to bring you closer to people and brands shaping the digital networked economy.



**Vince Broady, Founder, GameSpot.com**

Ten years ago, Vince set out to create an online magazine for gamers. What he's succeeded in building is one of the web's pioneering community sites, with millions of avid gamers chatting, messaging and now videoing for each other. GameSpot is a laboratory of early adopters.

**Craig Newmark, Founder Craig's List**

This vast network of local communities covers 175 cities in more than 30 countries. The List offers a free place to post adverts and information, and it's triggered a wholesale migration of classified advertising in North America.



**Pete Clifton, Head of BBC News Interactive**

The BBC's enthusiasm for user generated content is clear. Clifton explains the change in the group's strategy and talks about the many ways they're now seeking to involve their audience in discussion and debate. Find out what's in store, and reflect on how this will change UK viewer expectations.



## About the author

Danny Meadows-Klue has been a commentator on the digital networked industries since 1995. He managed the UK's first online newspaper and has helped run web businesses ranging from mass market portals and consumer magazines, to online stores, search and email services.

Among his industry roles he is the co-founder and former chairman of the UK and European Internet and Interactive Advertising Bureau, and has been lecturing on digital marketing for more than a decade. He set up Digital Strategy Consulting in 2000 to help firms accelerate their own digital networked media strategies.



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