

“IF THEY NEED IT THEY’LL READ IT” - UNDERSTANDING READERS’ NEEDS

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1. Background

The Newspaper Advertising Bureau (NAB) represents the Daily Newspaper industry in New Zealand. The NAB’s Research Department seeks to use research at both a tactical and strategic level to provide Daily Newspapers with a competitive advantage, and through this drive circulation, readership and advertising revenue.

In 2001 the NAB asked the newspaper industry if it really understood the needs and motivations of its readers. The intention was to encourage the industry to manage their newspapers in the same way a marketer would manage a branded product. Although the industry had come along way towards gaining a better understanding of its readers, there still remained a significant knowledge gap in terms of what was fundamentally driving people to buy and read newspapers. With the intention of filling this knowledge gap, the NAB commissioned a major qualitative research study on behalf of all New Zealand’s daily newspapers.

Released in 2002 the study met 4 main objectives:

- 1) To understand the macro trends driving change in the media environment.
- 2) To understand the role of different mainstream media in the lives of consumers.
- 3) To provide an understanding of the needs of readers at a functional, social and emotional level.
- 4) How newspapers actually work as an advertising environment – How do they build brands and drive consumer action?

2. How Would This Research Be Used To Drive Future Strategy for Daily Newspapers?

This research would provide significant insight into the “world of newspapers”, both from the ‘macro’ *media environment* perspective as well as from the ‘micro’ *consumer needs* perspective. This would facilitate the creation of not only short-term strategies to drive the future of newspapers, but the ability to look further ahead, with the development of longer-term strategies for growth.

In the longer-term, an evaluation of the **total media environment** (including the impact of ‘new media’), would allow us to understand the differences between each of the media, from a consumer’s perspective. It would also provide insight into how consumers relate to, what they think about and how they use newspapers in relation to these other media.

Declines in readership are a clear indication that newspapers are losing relevance. This research would give the direction and understanding needed to develop long-term strategies to ensure newspapers remain relevant to consumers in the future and to grow the readership of daily newspapers.

Continuing with this longer-term view, the research’s focus on **reader needs** would provide an understanding of how consumers use newspapers and how newspapers fit into their every day lives. This study was designed to look beyond the rational and superficial motivations and mindsets of consumers to understand the **core needs** that drive readership of newspapers.

By gaining a deeper level understanding, we can establish what are the **core deliverables** that newspapers must provide in order to maximise the relevance of newspapers. Once we know we are delivering on these core elements, we can then build the image, content, format and tone of our newspapers on to these foundations. If this is done well, then there is no reason why circulation and readership should not increase.

As readership grows, so will the opportunity to sell newspaper advertising. In the short-term the research would provide an immediate advertising sales tool. It would give us the ability to understand how newspapers, in comparison with other media, build brands, influence decision-making and develop brand relationships. The research would look at the role newspapers currently play, and potentially could play in driving awareness, consideration, trial, repeat purchase, brand loyalty and preference.

3. Programme of Qualitative Research – Objectives and Methodology

In order to be able to gain a comprehensive understanding of all reader needs, including the core emotive needs, a programme of **qualitative research** was adopted. The programme was composed of three sequential stages.

3.1 Stage 1 – Background Understanding

The key objective of this first stage was to gain an understanding of the “big picture” context, within which the dynamics of newspaper readership operate. This included investigating areas such as, social issues and trends, the structure of consumer needs, existing advertising and content issues and ‘networks of influence’ impacting on readers.

The methodology for this stage involved a combination of **in-depth interviews** and **desk research** (using the Internet and other existing data already available from within the NZ media marketplace).

Each in-depth interview lasted approximately two and a half hours and four key groups were consulted - consumers, advertising agencies, experts and newspapers (as detailed Table 1 below).

Table 1 – In-Depth Interview Composition

Interview Group	Number of Interviews	Breakdown of Interviews
Consumers	8	50% male, 50% female 50% Auckland, 50% Wellington
Agencies	5	2 media, 2 creatives, 1 suit
Experts	4	Experts in future marketing, technology marketing, planning strategy, sociology, journalism
Newspapers	4	Editorial teams from the four key Metropolitan Newspapers

3.2 Stage 2 – Consumer Category Review

The second stage of the research programme took the form of a consumer category review and focused on the consumer’s understanding of newspapers in terms of:

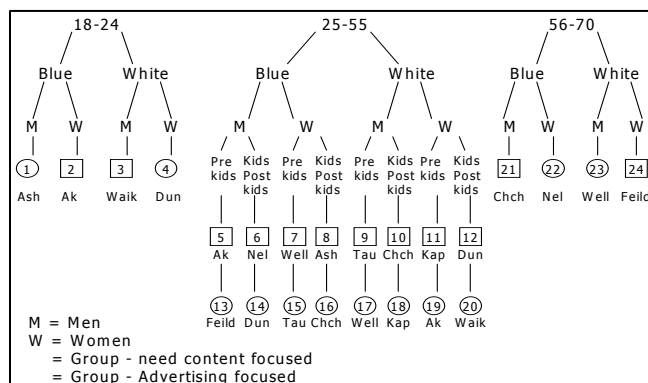
- Positioning within the competitive media environment
- The needs driving the choice to read and use newspapers
- The role of newspaper advertising

The methodology for this second stage consisted of a series of consumer discussion groups. A large number of groups were required, as it was necessary to cover a wide range of demographic, psychographic and ‘readergraphic’ variables, to ensure that a comprehensive consumer perspective was researched.

In total, 24 3-hour discussion groups were conducted. Figure 1 below details the composition of the groups and the geographical spread throughout New Zealand. The geographic location of the groups was a key design consideration, as the New Zealand market has a number of strong regional daily newspapers, as well as those covering the key metropolitan centres.

Half the group interviews were focused on reader needs and half on newspapers as an environment for advertising.

Figure 1. – Group Discussion Composition



3.3 Stage 3 – Future Strategy Workshop

The final stage composed of a series of future strategy workshops, involving researchers, NAB personnel and key newspaper industry representatives (covering both the metropolitan and regional daily papers). The key objective of these workshops was to stay future focused and use the information and insight gathered from the first two stages of the programme to establish direction for:

- Driving growth of circulation and readership through increased relevance to consumers
- The development of newspapers as an environment for powerful and effective advertising
- Driving growth in advertising expenditure within newspapers

The outputs from the workshop needed to be usable and action-orientated. They were focused on:

- Identifying future scenarios
- Developing short, medium and longer-term strategy
- Establishing specific development plans
- Confirming actions to be taken

What Did We Find Out And How Are We Using It?

4. Key Findings From The Research

The study has given insight from both an editorial and advertising perspective. It has provided an invaluable consumer-focused tool, within the context of which daily newspapers in New Zealand have been able to improve their delivery to readers and advertisers. This has included establishing and delivering a highly relevant yet unique brand image and improving the structure and content of their publications to ensure a positive reading experience. In addition, the research has enabled daily newspapers to emphasise to advertisers and agencies the ‘unique’ quality of the advertising environment provided by their medium.

It is not possible however, within the confines of this symposium paper, to detail all the relevant findings from the research. As such, we have provided only a broad overview of some of the key insights.

4.1 The Role of Media

When evaluating newspapers it is important to do so in the context of the whole media environment, rather than as a separate isolated medium. This research study has provided an understanding of the role of different media from a consumer perspective, as a source of advertising, a source of information and a source of entertainment.

One of the primary findings is that the role of all media is to **connect with the audience**. The media is the filter through which a piece of information, entertainment or advertising is delivered to an individual. The key thing to understand is that different media ‘connect’ differently.

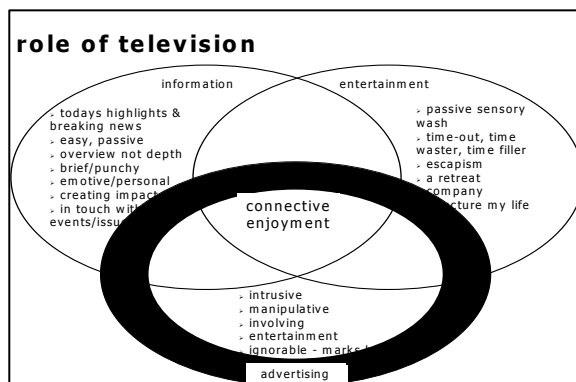
Connection is a fundamental human need and can happen at both a functional and an emotional level. This connection however, does not necessarily have to be directly with other people, it can be a connection with other things such as, information or music for example. Newspapers are often seen as a rational and functional medium, but their connection with readers is equally about emotional needs.

The research showed the different ways in which media connect with consumers.

Television – Connective Enjoyment

Television operates primarily from a platform of **entertainment and enjoyment**. Television allows people to be informed and entertained in a relatively passive way. The visual and auditory input, allows the ‘watcher’ to sit back and have the experience wash over them with very little active effort. Because of this, advertising on television needs to entertain first, and then communicate. For this reason, there is often a sense of manipulation with television as people feel they have been ‘tricked’ into watching an advertisement.

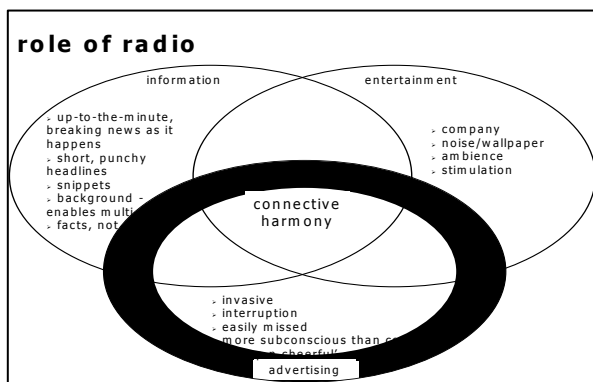
Figure 2. – The Role of Television



Radio – Connective Harmony

Radio operates primarily from a platform of **background company**. When listening to the radio people are able to also do other things. The radio provides ambience, creating a background mood and feeling. The advertising on the radio also operates in the background and is experienced as either very passive or is very intrusive.

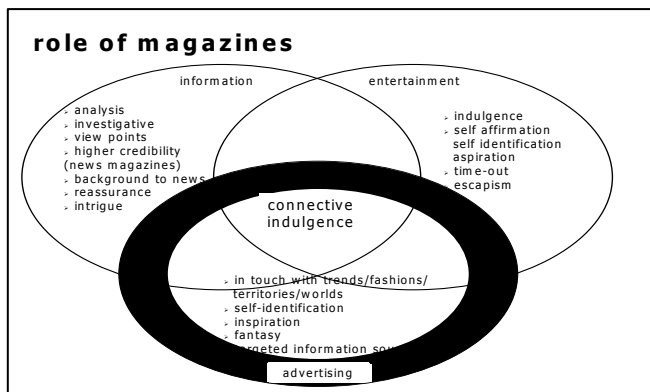
Figure 3. – The Role of Radio



Magazine – Connective indulgence

Magazines operate from a platform of **escape and pleasure**. They meet a need for indulgence or a treat that reflects people’s aspirations and mindsets. People are able to chose a magazine that reflects a particular interest or focus and when reading it they become absorbed in that ‘world’. People use the advertising in magazines to keep in touch with key trends or to target specific areas of interest. The advertising is a part of a very specific environment and read when the reader is in a specific mindset reflecting the nature of the magazine. Advertising in magazines has the potential to disconnect when the balance of advertising and editorial is tipped. This is because people have usually paid a significant cover price and consider the magazine a ‘treat’, so can become resentful if the publication feels like it is full of ads. Magazine advertising can also disconnect when the advertising does not reflect the brand values of the magazine.

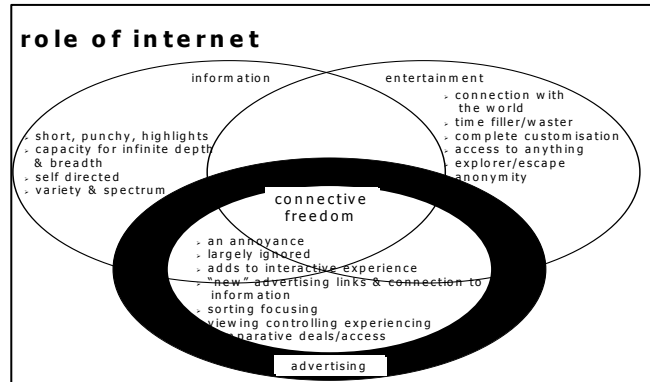
Figure 4. – The Role of Magazines



Internet – Connective freedom

In many ways, the internet shares some ‘common ground’ with newspapers, particularly in terms of the sense of breadth and depth of information provided by both. The critical difference seems to be in the way that people actually sort and search through the internet. Our learning style is still inherently based on hard copy information. As such, it is still much more efficient for humans to search visually through a hard copy of something, than it is through an electronic media. This makes the internet search a difficult process for many people. The process tends to actually narrow down the information received – delivering more depth but actually significantly less real breadth and overview. From an advertising point of view, advertising in the internet is ‘new territory’. There is still some way to go before this new advertising environment is fully understood. Currently traditional passive advertising is an intrusion that is largely ignored if possible. New approaches to advertising based on information navigation and problem solution are likely to be more relevant in the future of this medium.

Figure 5. – The Role of Internet



Daily Newspapers – Connective Clarity

Daily newspapers operate from a platform of **providing connective clarity**. The breadth and depth provided in a format that allows each individual to create their own reading experience, helps people connect with many aspects of their world and deliver insight and clarity of understanding. They help people connect to their world with clarity by providing content that has integrity and authority, that helps give them a sense of control in their life and allows them to break down barriers and understand people and issues in the world around them. The advertising in newspapers is also read in a search and seek mode, helping people feel connected to the world around them. Because of this they have a very active relationship with the advertising in newspapers.

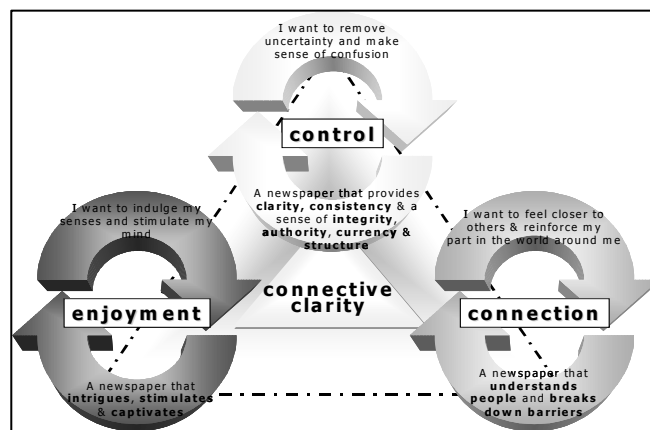
4.2 What are Newspaper Reader’s Core Needs?

The research has also provided a comprehensive ‘consumer-focused needs model’ that can be used by newspapers to evaluate their brand and product delivery to reader and advertiser needs.

A key strength of newspapers is that they can simultaneously meet a large number of needs. Each reader creates their own experience by filtering in and out aspects of interest. What we have to understand is how to structure the newspaper to make sure it enables readers to do this most effectively. As we have seen, if newspapers are fundamentally about one thing, it is ‘connective clarity’. If we can deliver connective clarity through all the elements of brand, content, structure and advertising, newspapers will be more effective and more relevant for both readers and advertisers.

So what exactly is ‘connective clarity’? How do we define this in a tangible way? As Figure 6 shows, it is a mix of three key components, *connection, control and enjoyment*.

Figure 6. – The Core Newspaper Needs



It is an unquestionable human need to feel connected with the world around us. This first component, **connection**, can be defined as ‘*feeling closer to others and reinforcing my part in the world*’. The impact of this is that people are looking for a newspaper, ‘*that understands people and breaks down barriers*’.

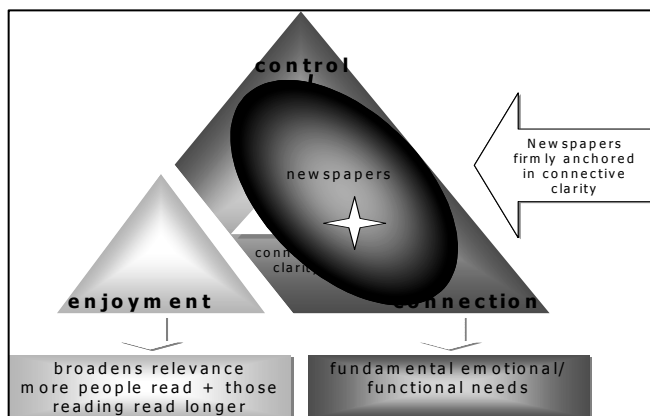
The second key component of connective clarity is **control**. This is of primary importance, as it is this value that is probably best owned by newspapers, in comparison to other media. The need for this sense of control is defined in two ways. One is an overall desire to be in control of ones life. The other is about being able to control the experience one gets from a newspaper, because you can read it and take from it what you want. Ultimately, ‘*I want to remove uncertainty and make sense of*

confusion'. The impact here is that people are looking for a newspaper, *'that provides clarity, consistency, and a sense of integrity, authority, currency and structure'*. These should be recognised as critical values that newspapers must deliver on.

The third element of connective clarity is **enjoyment**. This is a core value for all media, and can be best defined as wanting to *'indulge my senses and stimulate my mind'*. For newspapers this is about providing an environment that *'intrigues, stimulates and captivates'*.

Really critical for a newspaper is the control and connection part, this is core newspaper territory (see Figure 7). If newspapers brand image moves too far away from control and connection and into enjoyment they will risk losing relevance. All newspaper brands should have their image, values, and 'structure' strongly anchored in the control and connection side of things. Enjoyment is delivered within the editorial and to a degree, advertising **content** of the newspaper.

Figure 7. –Core Newspaper Territory



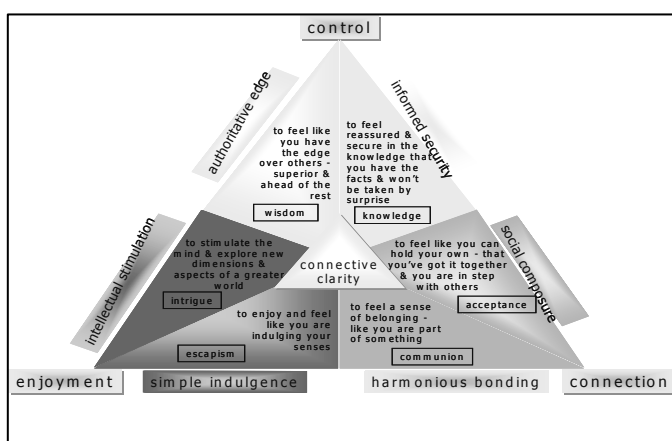
What enjoyment does is broaden the relevance of the newspaper and allow more people to read and become involved with it. This will happen through delivering a better enjoyment experience, which is all about providing intrigue and stimulation.

4.3 The Six Reader Needs Segments

We have now established the three core needs driving readership of newspapers. The model further divides readers' needs into six key groups. This model can be used as a blueprint for looking at how well newspapers are delivering, both at an overall brand image level, within the newspaper overall, and within the different sections.

Figure 8 illustrates the six needs segments. A brief definition of each segment has also been provided.

Figure 8. – The Readers' Needs Segments



The first need is a need for **informed security** or a real sense of knowledge. It is about feeling reassured and secure in the knowledge that you have the facts and won't be taken by surprise. This is basically the information that newspapers provide on a daily basis and *'I know about them and I feel secure because of that'*.

The second key need is also a control one, but it is about taking information one-step further and giving it a real **authoritative edge**. *'You like to feel like you've got an edge over others, you're superior and ahead of the rest'*. Some people's lives are not necessarily that stimulating and the newspaper is a really critical way in which they can feel that they have got some access to

thought in the world. This is where unravelling and explaining what is going on and outlining the implications and the impact *'for me'* is really critical for newspapers. This aspect is critical to the future of newspapers when insight and understanding adds value in a world where other media are much more able to deliver absolutely breaking news.

The third key need which is more connection orientated is one of **social composure** and acceptance. What this is about is basically being in touch, so that I can interact with other people in the world. To feel like you can hold your own, that you have got it together and are in step with others. It is about giving people a point of commonality when they are with a group, who they otherwise may not have much in common with.

The next need is a need for **harmonious bonding**. This is about having a sense that you belong, that you are part of something, that you have got a place in the world. So it is a real sense of, we belong, this is who we are, this is our view of the world. This is particularly relevant for newspapers, because 'place' and 'community' are part of newspaper's core equity. Understanding the local view of the world is also critical to establishing a unique and relevant overall brand image for each newspaper. Delivering *'the world through our eyes'* with our values and perspective will ensure connection of the local paper with the local 'community' and strengthen ownership and connection with the brand.

The next need, which is more enjoyment orientated, is **simple indulgence**, a sense of escapism and feeling like you are indulging your senses. This is probably best reflected, (but not solely) in the lifestyle sections of newspapers. However, escapism is likely to be different for different people. For some it may be the lifestyle section, for others it may be a well-written analytical article, for others sport, for others entertainment.

The last need, **intellectual stimulation**, is one of real **intrigue**, to stimulate the mind and explore the dimensions and aspects of a greater world. This is really challenging ones thinking, looking at relationships, what the world means to me.

One final, but essential point needs to be made regarding these reader's needs. This is that these needs should be **viewed as modal**. What this means is that one person does not have only one need for a newspaper, but rather that their needs can change during any one particular day, or at different times of the week or year. For example, an individual will be in a different needs segment during their holiday time, than say a Thursday morning at work. They are looking for the newspaper to provide a different experience at each of these times. A highly relevant paper will be able to be read at different times of the day delivering different experiences.

5. What Are The Implications Of This Research For Newspapers?

In essence, this research has provided the newspaper industry with a model or framework, which can be used as a tool to evaluate whether or not they are:

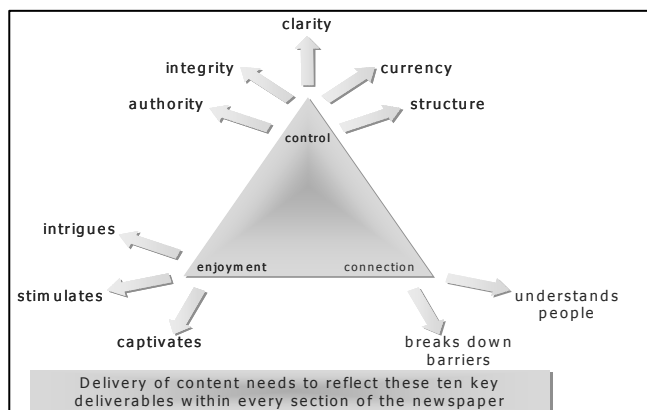
- Delivering effectively to meet readers' needs – in terms of the format, content, tone, look, feel etc. of their 'brand'
- Delivering effectively to meet advertisers' needs – in terms of providing both a 'quality' environment and a 'quality' audience

5.1 Delivering More Effectively To Readers

The implications of this research with regard to the physical newspaper product are many, and too numerous to do full justice to within this paper.

They range from indicating 'ideal' delivery, tone and format options that 'best' fit with each of the reader needs segment, through observations on improving navigation and structure, layering and accessing articles in different ways, to recommendations on delivering better content both overall and within sections.

Figure 9. – Ten Key Deliverables For Newspaper Content

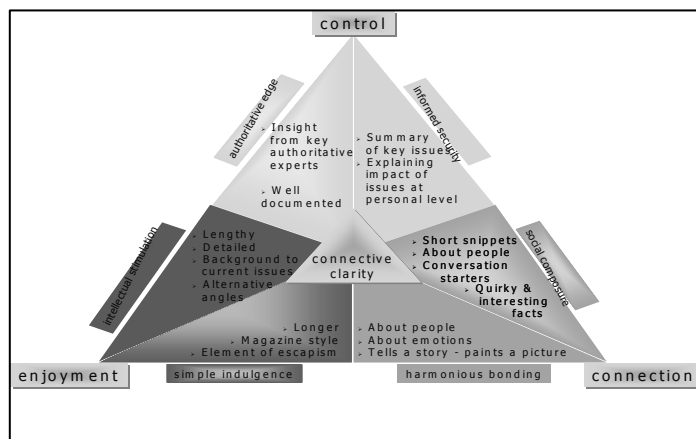


As an example of how the research can be used, we will look at the issue of providing ‘better’ content. Fig 9 (above) shows the ten key deliverables relevant to newspaper content and illustrates how they relate to the core reader needs of connection, control and enjoyment. The research further defines what these ten deliverables mean to the reader and how the content of newspapers can meet these needs.

- Clarity – content that enables understanding and clarity. What are the implications and impact for me and my world?
- Consistency – content and layout that remains consistent over time – I know what to expect and when and where to expect it.
- Currency – content that is relevant today.
- Structure – layout that is clear, easy to follow and well signposted. Layering is used to ensure easy access to articles and to help me decide whether to read further.
- Integrity – content that I can trust.
- Authority – Opinion and analysis that I respect.
- Captivates – holds my attention with issues and ideas that are fresh and interesting.
- Stimulates – stimulates my senses and mind – provokes an emotion.
- Intrigues – presents ideas and issues from different angles and fresh perspectives.
- Understand people – unravels issues in terms of impact on people – emotional and rational. Reflects ‘our’ values.
- Breaks down barriers – helps me connect and feel part of the world. I have things in common with the person next door and the person on the other side of the world.

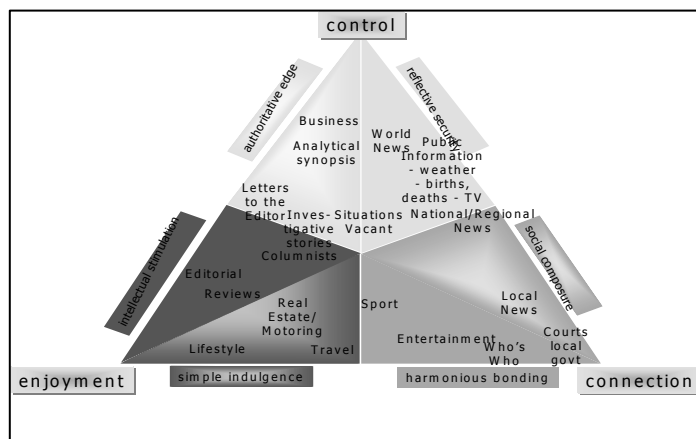
In addition to defining core content deliverables, we can use the needs model to map the ‘ideal’ content for each needs segment (see Fig 10).

Figure 10. – ‘Ideal’ Newspaper Content



The model also allows us to go beyond the overall newspaper brand and understand each of the sectional sub-brands. Fig 11 shows the indicative positioning of some common newspaper sections on the model. What is illustrated here is each section’s **dominant** needs position in terms of its overall ‘feel’. However, each section must consider and deliver on **all** needs.

Figure 11. – Positioning of Some Common Sections



Let us take the sports section as an example. The sports section overall is very much about connection and enjoyment, and as such is positioned in the bottom right of the model. This does not mean however, that this section must not also be delivering on the control needs by providing news, analytical synopsis and authoritative expert opinion.

5.2 Delivering More Effectively To Advertisers

The research also provided extensive insight into how readers relate to and use advertising in newspapers. This has allowed us to truly identify for advertisers the benefits of using newspapers as an advertising medium.

The study showed that readers have a much stronger relationship with newspaper advertising than some advertisers understand. It also showed that, in contrast to the traditional view that newspapers are best for informational, action-orientated advertising, they are also an appropriate environment for brand and image related advertising. As with editorial, newspaper advertising is also about connection, and this connection happens at both the functional and emotional level.

The study identified a number of key ways in which people use newspaper advertising:

- Advertising in newspapers not only helps people build a picture of what is around them, it keeps them in touch with new brands, services and organizations. All this is about driving **awareness**, the first stage of brand building.
- A continued presence in newspapers allows readers to build confidence towards the advertisers so that they become part of the **consideration** set. Just by seeing the ad in the newspaper within an environment of credibility and integrity means that a reader is developing a **relationship**, at least at a passive level and when they are in the market for a particular category it becomes a more active relationship.
- Readers actively use newspaper advertising as a source of **information**. This is happening **mentally** – readers have built up an awareness of where and when regular advertisers advertise so when they are in the market they can go straight to that ad. For example they know that banks regularly advertise their mortgage rates in the newspaper, or garden centres are always advertising in the Saturday paper. This is also happening at a **physical** level with many readers tearing out advertisements, sticking them on the fridge, sending them to friends and family or actually tearing them out and taking them to the shops like a shopping list.
- Readers are actively looking for deals and if there is a real deal they know they will find it in newspapers. There is also an impression that newspapers have **‘the best deal’**. They understand that newspapers are a daily medium and perceive that deals are as fresh as the news.
- People are using the newspaper for **inspiration and ideas**. Particularly with any home ware or interior type products. Anything to do with lifestyle or image – cosmetics, cars, mobile phones. This is an area where editorial and advertising works extremely well, with lifestyle sections providing destinations for complimentary advertising.
- It is about **discovery and treasure hunting** and for some there is huge kudos in finding something new and exciting.
- Readers use advertising to **determine their value**. This may be anything from understanding the market value of their house to their own worth on the job market.
- Newspaper advertising is a **time saver** acting simply as a research tool.
- For some it is a sort of **entertainment**, almost like **window-shopping**.
- It is also about **smart shopping**. People who use the advertising in newspapers actually feel a sense of superiority towards those who do not. They feel clever and proud of the fact that they are in touch with the world around them.

The overriding finding is that consumers **actively use** the advertising in daily newspapers. It adds value to the total experience. Consumers **accept, understand and value** the advertising in newspapers.

The main benefits of advertising in a daily newspaper can be summarised as:

- **Quality of the involvement. This is key.** Readers treat the newspaper as a valued resource; they actively seek ads that are relevant to them. The use of sections, topics and styles of content mean the advertiser can target mindsets. The reader feels in control and there is no sense of manipulation because they can choose not to engage.
- **Credibility** of the environment. Newspapers are seen as honest and authoritative and the advertising benefits from these values.
- **Currency.** It allows daily contact with the ability to tap into topical issues.

- **Exposure.** Readers are not reading the newspaper once. They pick it up several times a day, throughout a weekend, sometimes referring back to previous additions. They cut and keep ads.
- **Accessible.** Newspapers are accessible to most advertisers. They have a low cost of entry and an effective newspaper ad does not have to be an expensive newspaper ad. There is an ability to change creative frequently or by region.

6. Where To From Here?

This qualitative research programme has provided a comprehensive exploration of the competitive media environment, where newspapers sit within this environment, the relationship between readers and newspapers and the quality of the advertising environment offered by newspapers. The findings of this study have been well received by both advertising agencies and Australasian Newspapers.

From the newspaper industry's perspective, the development of a model of readers' needs has provided a tool that allows them to evaluate and ultimately improve their performance in terms of delivering effectively to their readers.

From the agencies perspective, the quality of the involvement that readers have with their newspaper and the advertising within it, has shown that newspapers can deliver an excellent environment for both functional, informational and brand building advertising.

As our media environment becomes more fragmented and the options for where to place advertising grow, the pressure to prove that newspaper advertising works will continue to increase. What marketers, media planners and advertisers are looking for is not just exposure, but **connection**, the ability to have a relevant and meaningful dialogue with the consumer. The newspaper industry is in an ideal position to be able to deliver this, with different sections within the newspapers delivering different mindsets and needs. The critical issue is how do we measure it.

Our next challenge therefore, is to develop a measurement system that can **quantify** the unique, involving and quality relationship between newspapers and readers that this qualitative study has identified. The Newspaper Advertising Bureau is currently working in conjunction with research suppliers in New Zealand to explore ways in which this measurement can be achieved.