

**THE ROLE OF DESIGN IN THE NEWSPAPER REDESIGN OF THE BOCA RATON NEWS:
THE KNIGHT-RIDDER 25/43 PROJECT**

By

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The decline in newspaper readership figures in the last 20 years has forced newspaper management into a period of soul searching on what to provide readers. In 1988, Knight-Ridder corporation executives initiated the 25/43 project to capture the waning newspaper interest of the baby-boomer generation, presently the largest demographic age group in the United States.

The project included readership surveys in all of the chain's newspaper markets and focus-group sessions in which readers reacted to various newspaper design prototypes. In the spring of 1990, 25/43 project members applied their findings to the redesign, remarketing, and advertising overhaul of the Knight-Ridder-owned *Boca Raton News*, which was renamed *The News*.

This thesis presents a case study of how qualitative and quantitative research findings were used to direct the 25/43 project members' design and content decisions. The methodology includes analysis of prototypes, review of focus-group reaction to the prototypes, and personal interviews with project leaders and newspaper staff members.

The quantitative survey data were used to provide a profile of baby-boomer habits and interests and to pinpoint baby-boomer focused content, which was then used to create the newspaper prototypes. The qualitative data in the form of focus-group feedback also contributed significantly to the philosophy of the new design. When the prototypes were introduced to the Boca Raton focus groups, participants liked many experimental aspects of the design pertaining to

- the specific baby-boomer oriented news stories the new *News* design implemented,
- the incorporation of useful information such as phone numbers, calendars and indexes in the new design,

- the manner in which content was organized to make the design easy to scan,
- the no-jump policy of all news stories in the prototypes,
- the larger body copy size, wide typographic variation, and pastel color palette,
- the plethora of maps, graphics, photographs and illustrations, and
- the use of "rewards," or short information to encourage more reading.

Several of the more experimental elements of the prototypes were eliminated in the new *News* design because of a negative focus-group reaction. These elements included

- the more avant-garde labelling of the prototype sections and design elements,
- the heavy emphasis on local-news content by providing an all-local news front page, and
- the classifieds section front concept that forced readers to flip the section upside-down.

The case study also examines the limitations of the focus-group data used in *The News* redesign. These limitations include the difficulty of generalizing to a larger population and the difficulty nonreaders had communicating what they wanted from newspapers. Some of the other limitations included the one-point-in-time-nature of prototypes that eliminated the opportunity for focus-group participants to become familiar with the new design and the novelty factor affecting the participants' appraisal of the design.

The researcher concludes that

- *the News* staff has to continue to take advantage of the flexibility of the design and foster a teamwork approach in the newsroom to ensure the success of the 25/43 project,

- the 25/43 project did not answer the question of how to determine what nonreaders want from a newspaper, and that

- other newspapers need to follow the 25/43 project's process to determine how to serve their markets better.