The Subscriber Demographics of Consumer Magazines

REPORT BACKGROUND & BRIEF

The proportion of consumer magazine sales in the UK which is sold via subscription is currently small, but is growing fast. As this growth continues, questions are arising as to who these subscribers actually are and whether they are significantly different from retail buyers?

In the USA, where the magazine subscription market is much larger than the retail market and where subscription price-discounting is very widespread, there has been a long-term debate among advertisers and agencies as to the real value of subscribers. Are they demographically different from retail buyers? Are they as valuable as retail buyers from the point of view of being advertising prospects? Should they be given an equal weight in advertising campaigns?

Questions like this are not **yet** being asked regularly in the UK by media planners and buyers. This is due in part to the fact that the advertising sales process is much more based on readership data in the UK, whereas circulation is the starting point for rate-base negotiations in the US. It is also due in part to the fact that subscriptions still account for a relatively small part of the UK magazine scene. Yet as subscriptions grow, questions about their status and value will become more common.

It was with this as a background that the PPA commissioned Wessenden Marketing to assemble currently available data on the subject so that an agenda for future debate and research can be set. The subject is one in which many publishers are very interested, but about which few have any real data or insights. Thanks must go to those publishers who have helped in this project through sharing detailed data, much of which was commercially sensitive.

Due to the vast scope and complexity of the subject, this report concentrates purely on the consumer magazine market. The business magazine market with its mix of retail sales, subscriptions and controlled circulation has a totally different set of dynamics and drivers which are not covered by this report.

Report Background

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MANAGEMENT SUMMARY

■ UK consumer magazine subscriptions are growing as a result of two factors: (1) a rising penetration of subscription purchasing among UK adults and (2) a slight rise in the average number of subscriptions held per person. What is particularly encouraging is that although subscription purchasing still does not have a strong penetration in the youngest age-group of 15-24 year olds, it is growing rapidly here.

■ The majority of subscribers (65%) continue to buy magazines via both the retail and postal channels, choosing one route or another depending on how easy it is to obtain a particular title or whether a particular promotion or offer has attracted them. This "mixed economy" approach is also seen in the USA where these "dual-channel purchasers" are the heaviest magazine buyers.

■ The UK market is still dominated by convenience issues as the motivation for subscribing, though price is becoming more important.

■ The average length of time that consumers have subscribed to a particular publication is just under 3 years. This average subscription length is dropping as more consumers start to use this purchase channel for the first time.

■ Subscribers provide a stable target, being exposed to the particular publication each issue for the duration of the subscription. Retail buyers provide an element of churn, purchasing an average of 83% of available issues of weekly magazines and 78% of available issues of monthly magazines.

■ Each purchase channel has its own demographic centre of gravity with subscribers generally being significantly more upmarket and older than retail buyers. This basic demographic bias filters through into a host of other characteristics so that subscribers are usually higher earning and higher spending consumers than retail buyers.

■ Subscribers also seem to have very strong links with the magazines they subscribe to, spending longer reading each issue, reading more of each issue, trusting more in what they read within the magazine and being more ready to try products which they read about within the magazine.

■ There are indications that subscribers physically read the magazine in a different way from retail buyers, working steadily and methodically through the issue, whereas retail buyers are more likely to zoom in on the articles which originally caught their eye on the cover. There are also indications that the atmosphere of the reading occasion can be different, with subscribers reading purposefully, actively seeking information about their chosen interests, whereas retail buyers are more likely to flick through in a more relaxed state of mind.

■ There can often be subtle but real differences between what subscribers and retail buyers actually like about and look for in the magazines they have bought. These can be simple differences in which articles they like or dislike. It can also extend to more subtle issues such as whether they prefer the literary qualities of the title or the visual gloss and presentation values.

■ The US market offers a **possible** future of what a more developed UK subscription market **might** look like in a few years' time. Yet even in the USA which has more cut-price subscriptions and a much higher penetration of subscription purchasing, subscribers are still significantly more upmarket and older than retail buyers. US subscribers also appear to read the magazine they have bought with the same intensity as their retail counterparts.

■ Subscriptions offer access to a distinct and attractive subsector of a magazine's pool of purchasers. Whether subscribers are **better** than retail buyers as ad prospects depends entirely on the individual campaign objectives.

CONSUMER MAGAZINE SUBSCRIPTION GROWTH

The ABC circulation figures have consistently shown over successive periods that subscriptions are growing from a small base (around 5% of total consumer magazine annual volumes), but that they are growing fast at a rate several times that of retail sales.

This picture is also supported by work undertaken by RSGB on behalf of Royal Mail on samples of respondents to the National Readership Survey in 1992 and 1995. This project has been tracking the two dimensions of subscribing: (1) the number of people who actually use a postal subscription as a means of buying a magazine or SUBSCRIPTION PENETRATION and (b) the number of subscriptions these consumers actually hold at any one time, or the INCIDENCE OF MULTIPLE SUBSCRIPTIONS.

1. SUBSCRIPTION PENETRATION

The table below shows the percentage of all adults who claimed to have "any magazine subscriptions currently"

% of Adults Claiming to use Postal Subs as a Magazine Purchase Method

Year	***% of All Adults***
1992	*8.8%*
1995	*14.6%*

(Source: RSGB NRS Analyses)

What is clear is that the usage of magazine subscriptions is becoming much more widespread. There are also indications as to where this increase in penetration is taking place as the table below shows.

Demographic Profile of Postal Subscribers

		1992	***1995***	***Change***
SEX				
	Male	*46.8%*	*51.2%*	*+4.4*
AGE				
	15-24	*1.6%*	*8.4%*	*+6.8*
	25-44	*32.4%*	*38.3%*	*+5.9*
	45-64	*38.8%*	*34.4%*	*-4.4*
	65+	*27.2%*	*18.9%*	*-8.3*
		100%	*100%*	
CLASS				
	AB	*37.3%*	*37.8%*	*+0.5*
	C1	*29.1%*	*30.6%*	*+1.5*
	C2	*18.4%*	*18.5%*	*+0.1*
	DE	*15.2%*	*13.1%*	*- 2.1*
		100%	*100%*	

(Source: RSGB NRS Analyses)

- There has been a significant increase in subscription penetration among **males**

- There has also been a strong increase among the **younger age-groups**, although subscription penetration into the 15-24 year old group is still very low. The 25-44 group has now become the largest in terms of subscribers.

- There have been no dramatic shifts in terms of **social class** with subscribing remaining heavily skewed to the higher categories.

2. MULTIPLE SUBSCRIPTIONS

Although the vast majority of subscribers still have just one subscription, the incidence of multiple subscriptions is rising as the table below shows. In 1995, the average number of subscriptions held was 1.56 per subscriber.

Incidence of Multiple Subscriptions among Adults with Magazine Subscriptions

	1993	***1995***	***Change***
One title	*79%*	*68%*	*-11*
Two titles	*16%*	*19%*	*+3*
Three titles	*4%*	*8%*	*+4*
Four titles +	*1%*	*5%*	*+4*
	100%	*100%*	

(Source: RSGB Royal Mail Research 1995)

The table below looks at the incidence of multiple subscriptions by basic demographics, indexing each category on the national average. A higher index is an indication of more multiple subscriptions.

Multiple Subscription Index by Basic Demographics in 1995

SEX	
Male	*106*
Female	*92*
AGE	
16-24	*85*
25-44	*103*
45-64	*103*
65+	*92*
SOCIAL CLASS	
AB	*112*
C1	*98*
C2	*86*
DE	*83*

(Source: RSGB Royal Mail Research 1995)

- There is a slight bias to multiple subscribing among men.

- There is definite low point in multiple subscribing in the youngest age-group (16-24 year olds) with a less pronounced trough in the retirement group.

- Predictably there is a very clear skew towards the very highest social grades.

SUBS vs RETAIL PURCHASE: UK

All the research undertaken by publishers points to the fact that the majority of consumers who buy subscriptions do not buy **all** their magazines exclusively through the post. Most use both retail purchase and subscriptions in parallel to satisfy their magazine consumption habits, choosing one route or the other depending how easy it is to get a particular title or whether a particular promotion or offer has attracted them. The RSGB research confirms this as the table below shows.

Magazine Buyers: Method of Purchase

Subscription as primary purchase channel	*8%*
Retail as exclusive purchase channel	*77%*
Mixed subscription and retail purchasing	*15%*
	100%

(Source: RSGB Royal Mail Research 1995)

- Over three quarters of magazine buyers have no subscriptions and use the retail route exclusively to obtain all their magazines.

- Only 8% of magazine buyers (35% of all subscribers) stated that subscription as opposed to retail purchase was their "normal" purchase route.

- For 15% of magazine buyers (65% of all subscribers) their magazine purchasing was a mixed economy of both retail and postal subscription.

SUBS vs RETAIL PURCHASE: UK vs USA

UK publishers often look over to the USA where subscriptions account for 82% of consumer magazine sales as a guide as to what **could** happen in the UK as the subscription market develops. The table below compares the RSGB Royal Mail research with data from a major 1991 research project commissioned jointly by the Magazine Publishers of America and Publishers Clearing House into magazine buying patterns.

UK and US Magazine Buyers: Method of Purchase

	UK	***USA***
Retail Only	*77%*	*17%*
Subscription + Retail	*15%*	*59%*
Subscription Only	*8%*	*24%*
	100%	*100%*

(Source: RSGB Royal Mail Research & MPA/PCH Project)

The figures underline the much larger penetration of subscriptions into the US consumer market. However, what is interesting is that the "mixed economy" approach of consumers using both retail outlets and the mail is still by far the most popular, accounting for 59% of US households.

The MPA/PCH study went on to look at PRIMARY CHANNEL, concentrating on which method did the consumer **usually** use (ie. over 60% of their total magazine purchases) as opposed to **ever** use.

US Magazine Buyers: Primary Method of Purchase

	US Magazine Volume	***Per Capita Consumption Index***	***Magazine Repertoire***
Mainly retail buyers	*30%*	*91*	*5.4 titles*
Both retail & subs equally	*21%*	*124*	*7.5 titles*
Mainly subscription	*49%*	*98*	*5.8 titles*

(Source: MPA/PCH Project)

The **MAGAZINE CONSUMPTION INDEX** is an indicator of the volume of issues bought each year with the dual-purchasers having by far the highest consumption levels.

The **MAGAZINE REPERTOIRE** shows the average number of magazine titles bought through the year with, again, the dual-purchasers buying from a significantly wider portfolio than other purchasers.

The US experience, therefore, is that consumers who feel equally at home with both retail and subscription purchasing buy significantly more magazines than consumers who are biased to just one route. Dual-purchasers are confident and practised consumers who use whichever channel suits their requirements at any particular time. In turn, consumers who are dedicated to subscriptions buy more magazines than those dedicated exclusively to retail purchasing.

REASONS FOR PURCHASE METHOD

So what makes someone take out a subscription rather than buying through retail? All the research (from Royal Mail, individual UK publisher studies and the USA) points to there being a handful of key factors for each method of purchase:

MAGAZINE BUYER	
RETAIL	SUBS
Selectivity Price Choice Service	Convenience Price Added Value

WHY CONSUMERS BUY FROM RETAIL

- By far the most common reason given for buying from retail is the ability to be **selective**. "I pick out what interests me". "There's too much to read in every issue - I get the issues which catch my eye at the time."

- The second most common reason given is **price**. Not the relative price of a subscription copy to a retail copy - it is surprising how little the consumer is aware of relative prices unless the copy of a subs ad tells them explicitly - but the psychological advantage of being able to "pay as you go" rather than having to pay a lump sum up-front.

- The third reason is **choice**. Consumers like the "shopping experience", the freedom to browse and flick and sample before buying.

- The final reason given is **service**. Consumers often feel that they get their copies quicker if they buy from retail.

WHY CONSUMERS BUY SUBSCRIPTIONS

The three key issues which pull consumers to subscription purchasing are:

- **Convenience**. "I want to be sure that I get every issue"; "I cannot get this magazine from the newsagent"; "Getting it through the mail is faster than buying it at a shop"; "I like the convenience of having it delivered to my door".

■ **Price**. "I saw a special offer that caught my eye"; "Subscribing is cheaper than buying from a shop".

■ **Added Value**. The development of reader clubs is leading to more and more consumers being aware that by subscribing they can have access to special offers/newsletters/etc.

In reality, all these different pulls interact together in a complex process which can make the decision to buy at retail or to subscribe a surprisingly impulsive one. What is clear is that there is a large pool of readers who feel very at ease with subscriptions as a source of magazines, but a source which sits very comfortably along-side a retail purchase.

What is also clear when comparing UK research data with US publishers' experience and with the MPA/PCH project is that PRICE is the prime motivation for the US consumer to buy a subscription due to the history of cut-price subscriptions in America.

LENGTH OF TIME SUBSCRIBING

As UK publishers promote subscriptions more aggressively, the subscription base will grow beyond the hard core of long-term and loyal readers. In 1993, 49% of respondents claimed to have held their subscriptions for 5 years or more; by 1995 the figure had dropped to 34%.

The number of people claiming to have held their subscription for one year or less has increased significantly. The average length of time subscribing has now dropped to just under 3 years.

Average Length of Time Having Been Subscribing

	1993	**1995**	**Change**
One year or less	13%	29%	+16
2 years	19%	20%	+ 1
3 years	14%	12%	- 2
4 years	5%	5%	-
5 years or more	49%	34%	-15
	100%	100%	

(Source: RSGB Royal Mail Research)

FREQUENCY OF VISITING A MAGAZINE RETAILER

The wide retail availability of magazines has been one of the historic characteristics of the UK market, although there are concerns that this is now under threat for more specialised titles. The strength of the retail channel is seen in the table below which shows that 84% of the UK adult population visit a retail outlet selling newspapers and magazines at least once a week with the average number of visits per month being 15.9.

Percent of Adults visiting a Newspaper & Magazine Retailer

Every day	*28%*
Most days	*18%*
Once or twice a week	*38%*
About once a fortnight	*5%*
About once a month	*5%*
Three or four times a year	*1%*
Less often	*5%*
	100%

(Source: RSGB Royal Mail Research)

Predictably, those consumers who have subscriptions tend to visit magazine retailers less regularly than those with no subscriptions, but it is not a dramatic gap and still allows ample visits for the subscribing consumer to purchase via retail.

Average Visits per Month to a Newspaper & Magazine Retailer

Subscribers	*13.5*
Non-subscribers	*16.3*

(Source: RSGB Royal Mail Research)

HOME DELIVERY & SHOP SAVES

As an interesting side-note, the sample involved in the RSGB Royal Mail research was asked whether home delivery and shop-save schemes were available from their local independent newsagent. The results of the question are shown below.

Retailer offers home delivery	*62%*
Retailer offers shop saves	*61%*
Retailer offers both home delivery and shop saves	*41%*

(Source: RSGB Royal Mail Research)

The consumer's **perception** of the availability of home delivery and shop saves is less than their **actual** availability, suggesting that the service is under-promoted by the retail sector. Home delivery and shop-saves are interesting in the context of postal subscriptions as all are pre-ordered sales where the consumer has made an advance commitment to the publication. Although home delivery purchasers have a distinct demographic bias (they tend to be older than postal subscribers and mid-way between subscribers and retail buyers in terms of class), there is a widespread assumption that many home delivery buyers are being converted into subscribers when publishers undertake in-magazine subscription promotions.

PURCHASING FREQUENCY OF RETAIL BUYERS

A major and obvious distinction between subscribers and retail buyers is that subscribers are buying every issue for the period of their subscription while retail buyers form part of a constantly churning audience. It is clear from the limited research which has been undertaken in this area that "retail churn" varies dramatically from market to market and from magazine to magazine. What the RSGB Royal Mail Research did was to make an assessment of average retail churn across the whole magazine market.

WEEKLY MAGAZINE FREQUENCY OF RETAIL PURCHASING
(Base = all adults who buy weekly magazines nowadays from retail outlets)

Every issue	*65%*
3 out of 4 per month	*10%*
2 out of 4 per month	*15%*
1 out of 4 per month	*6%*
Less than this	*4%*
	100%

Average number of issues bought per month = 3.3 or 83% of available issues.

(Source: RSGB Royal Mail Research)

MONTHLY MAGAZINE FREQUENCY OF RETAIL PURCHASING
(Base = All adults who buy monthly magazines nowadays from retail outlets)

Every issue	*52%*
9 or more per year	*13%*
6-8 per year	*19%*
3-5 per year	*12%*
Less than this	*4%*
	100%

Average number of issues bought per year = 9.4 or 78% of available issues

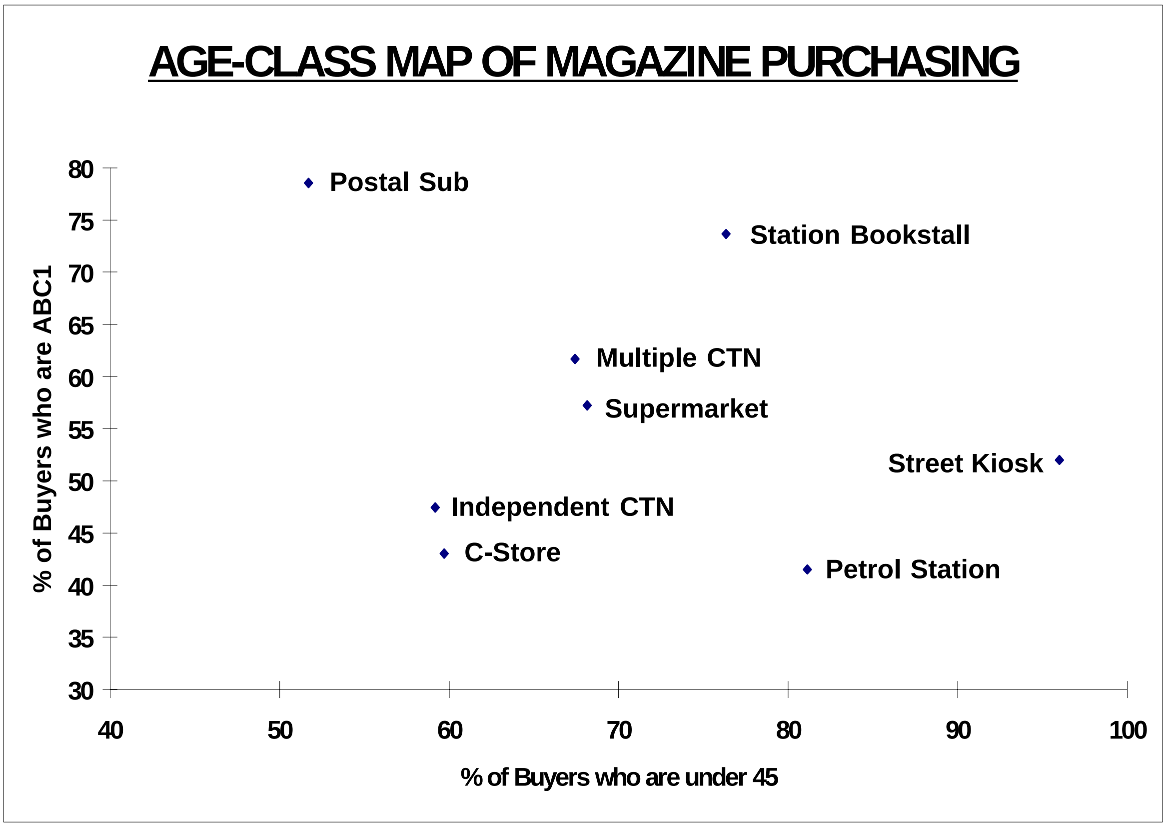
(Source: RSGB Royal Mail Research)

THE DEMOGRAPHICS OF PURCHASING

It is only as the magazine retailing universe has expanded over the last few years that it has become clear just how much the shopper profiles of individual retailers, retail chains and retail sites can differ from each other. In addition, every piece of research, whether industry-wide (NRS, TGI, the RSGB Royal Mail Research) or title-specific, confirms the fact that postal subscribers are significantly older and more upmarket than retail buyers. The age-class map below based on data from the RSGB Royal Mail Research illustrates this clearly.

Respondents were asked "where do you normally buy your magazines from nowadays?"

The vertical axis charts the percentage of magazine buyers who fall into the ABC1 socio-economic categories. The horizontal axis charts the percentage of magazine buyers who are under 45 years old.



SUBSCRIBER BUYING POWER

The title-specific case studies later in the report provide more background to the potential buying power of subscribers, yet the National Readership Survey is able to provide some broad indicators by tracking such characteristics as credit card ownership. The table below indexes magazine readers who claimed that a subscription was the source of their copy on normal average issue readers.

CREDIT CARD OWNERSHIP OF SUBSCRIBERS
Subscriber Readers indexed on Average Issue Readers (100)

Cheque Book	*123*
Access / Mastercard	*141*
Visacard	*130*
Switch Card	*127*
Diner Club Card	*290*
American Express Card	*241*
Amex Gold / Platinum Card	*261*
Other Gold / Platinum Card	*234*
Other Credit / Charge Card	*157*

(Source: National Readership Survey)

The high indices on those cards which are related to income criteria emphasise the spending power of subscribers.

SUBSCRIBER MEDIA CONSUMPTION

The tables below and on the next page index magazine readers on the National Readership Survey who claimed that a subscription was the source of their copy against normal average issue readers.

The data on newspaper readership underlines the upmarket nature of subscribers. The TV and ILR data shows that subscribers are lighter viewers/listeners to broadcast media and, therefore, more difficult to reach via other media.

COMMERCIAL TV VIEWING INTENSITY

Heavy	*65*
Medium / Heavy	*89*
Medium	*111*
Light / Medium	*120*
Light	*134*
None	*118*

WEIGHT OF LISTENING TO COMMERCIAL RADIO

Heavy	*70*
Medium / Heavy	*82*
Medium	*89*
Light / Medium	*92*
Light	*107*
None	*112*

(Source: National Readership Survey)

NATIONAL NEWSPAPER READERSHIP

Daily Express	*143*
Daily Mail	*142*
Daily Mirror	*69*
Daily Record	*86*
Daily Star	*52*
Daily Telegraph	*200*
Financial Times	*175*
Guardian	*123*
The Sun	*68*
The Times	*168*
Today	*100*
Independent on Sunday	*129*
Mail on Sunday	*126*
News of the World	*70*
Observer	*145*
The People	*76*
Sunday Express	*154*
Sunday Mail	*86*
Sunday Mirror	*71*
Sunday Post	*102*
Sunday Sport	*43*
Sunday Telegraph	*186*
Sunday Times	*155*

(Source: National Readership Survey)

SUBSCRIBER RELATIONSHIP WITH THE MAGAZINE

A concern which is sometimes voiced is that because subscribers have made a one-off purchasing decision to receive copies over an extended period, they do not relate to **individual** issues of the magazine as strongly as a retail buyer who has made a clear decision to buy a specific issue.

This topic is touched on in the individual title case studies, but the RSGB Royal Mail Research also asked respondents to register their agreement with various attitude statements about magazines. The scores for subscription buyers are indexed on those for retail buyers so that an index of 100 would indicate that subscribers had the same views as retail buyers

Subscriber Index: Agreement with Attitude Statements

I often try new products which I find out about in magazines	*130*
I trust what I read in magazines	*148*
I'm interested in trying things which I see recommended in magazines	*139*
Proportion of articles normally read or looked at in magazine	*123*
Proportion of advertisements normally read or looked at in magazine	*114*

(Source: RSGB Royal Mail Research)

The figures show that in a number of key areas in the relationship between the buyer and the magazine, the subscriber has a significantly stronger and more trusting relationship with the magazine which he reads more thoroughly than retail buyers.

Many of the more illuminating insights into subscriber behaviour are from title-specific research. While the conclusions of such projects cannot be held to apply to all magazines, they still provide useful indicators of some of the key issues of reading behaviour. Three individual case studies are summarised on the following pages.

MAGAZINE A CASE STUDY:
A WOMEN'S MONTHLY HOME TITLE

A mainstream, women's, home-based, monthly magazine undertook a postal questionnaire among its subscribers. Over 12,500 completed questionnaires were returned of which 2,000 were randomly selected for analysis. The subscriber profiles were set against those of average issue readers of Magazine A on the National Readership Survey and the Target Group Index. The figures below index the subscribers' performance against that of the Average Issue Readers.

The survey confirmed the normal age and class distinctions between subscribers and other readers, but also produced specific spending power comparisons in such areas as Household Income and Home Ownership as well as in key areas of expenditure such as holidays, entertaining and multiple car ownership.

Interestingly, the presence of children seems to be a very strong factor in distinguishing subscribers from average issue readers with subscribers featuring strongly among mothers with very young children (presumably where shopping patterns have been disrupted by the arrival of a baby) and among mothers with adult children who have left home (when reading habits have become well entrenched, which is the classic subscription time of life).

Subscribers are generally less frequent shoppers than retail buyers. People who have recently moved house are less likely to subscribe for obvious reasons; at the other extreme people who have been in their current house for a long time are less likely to subscribe.

	Subscriber Index
HOUSEHOLD INCOME	
Under £5,000	*28*
£5,000 - £14,999	*64*
£15,000 - £19,999	*101*
£20,000 - £24,999	*128*
£25,000 +	*144*
ANNUAL EXPENDITURE	
Fashion goods	*157*
Cosmetics	*109*
HOME OWNERSHIP	
Own home	*112*
Home with a garden	*103*
PRESENCE OF CHILDREN IN HOME	*210*

	Subscriber Index
AGE OF CHILDREN	
Under 2 years	*534*
2-15 years	*123*
16-20 years	*110*
21 or older	*397*
SHOPPING: FREQUENCY OF MAJOR GROCERY SHOP	
Every 2-3 days or more	*47*
Once a week	*97*
Once a fortnight	*184*
Once a month	*149*
Every 6 weeks or less	*333*
ENTERTAINING: FREQUENCY OF INVITING GUESTS FOR MEALS	
Once a week or more	*74*
2-3 times a month	*123*
Once a month or less	*111*
Never	*10*
HOLIDAYS	
Holidays abroad last year	*133*
Holidays in UK last year	*176*
HOUSEHOLD CAR OWNERSHIP	
1 car	*87*
2 cars	*151*
3 or more cars	*125*
LENGTH OF TIME IN PRESENT HOME	
Under 1 year	*53*
2-9 years	*107*
10-19 years	*104*
20 years or more	*65*

(Source: Publisher research + NRS & TGI)

MAGAZINE B CASE STUDY: A WOMEN'S STYLE & FASHION MONTHLY

A questionnaire was inserted at random intervals into half the print run, including subscriber copies, of a style and fashion-based women's monthly. 1,058 completed questionnaires were analysed. The questionnaire asked many detailed questions about the content and presentation of the current issue

GENERAL DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

Subscribers were much more heavily skewed to the 45+ age groups while the under 24's were dominated by retail buyers. Subscribers were 50% more likely to be married than retail buyers. Subscribers were 39% more likely to have children and 89% more likely to have children who had left home.

CURRENT ISSUE COVER

The cover of the researched issue was aimed at the younger and more aspirational reader which the magazine was aiming to attract in its circulation building campaign. The result was that the cover was much better liked by retail buyers than by subscribers: this covered the model, the colours used and the cover lines. Retail buyers felt that the whole magazine itself was more stylish than did subscribers. Age was clearly an important discriminator in the responses which obviously feeds through into the subscriber / retail buyer split.

Readers were then asked "How well do you think the cover reflects the content and style of this issue?" 71% of subscribers felt that it did "very well or quite well" in comparison to 79% of retail buyers.

CURRENT ISSUE COVER LINES

Subscribers and retail buyers were in broad agreement about the relative appeal of the cover lines although there were subtle distinctions between the two groups. The subscribers came out more strongly in favour of a feature on gardens and a serious piece on violence in society. The retail buyers were noticably more attracted by cover lines on fashion, sport and a rock music personality.

REASONS FOR BUYING THIS ISSUE

"What attracted you to buy this issue?"

For subscribers this question was irrelevant: they had not made a distinct buying decision about this particular issue. For retail buyers the most popular reasons were:

I buy it every month	*34%*
The cover picture	*32%*
Interesting cover lines	*24%*
It stood out on the newsstand	*28%*

ASSESSMENT OF EDITORIAL

Respondents were asked which features they would like to see more of in the magazine.

Subscribers wanted more everyday fashion, health, interviews, general interest features, information on food and restaurants. Retail buyers wanted more designer fashion, jewellery and accessories, beauty, travel, social news and arts coverage.

Subscribers appeared to be more down-to-earth and less style conscious than retail buyers.

QUALITATIVE ASSESSMENT IN COMPARISON TO OTHER TITLES

When asked what aspects of the magazine they liked, subscribers felt more strongly about the "standard of writing" and "coverage of topical subjects". Retail buyers were more impressed by the "standard of photography".

Subscribers felt that the magazine was better value for money than did retail buyers.

FEELINGS ABOUT THE MAGAZINE

Buyers were asked to rank various statements about their general relationship with the magazine. Again, the answers of subscribers and retail buyers were broadly similar, but with subtle distinctions. Subscribers were much more likely (+35%) to make the commitment that "it is my favourite magazine" than retail buyers .

READING STATE OF MIND

Buyers were asked about their feelings when they were reading the magazine. Subscribers were 45% more likely to describe the reading occasion as "an absorbed, thorough read" and 4% less likely to describe it as "a casual, relaxed read.

Although the differences between the two groups of buyers were very small, there is a slight tendency for subscribers to read more intently than retail buyers.

MAGAZINE NAVIGATION

Subscribers tend to work their way methodically through the magazine while retail buyers will either (a) go to the contents page presumably to find the article which had been coverlined and which had attracted their attention in the shop, or (b) will flick through in no particular order.

"Consult contents page first"	*subscribers 11% **<u>less</u>** likely than retail buyers*
"Read methodically through"	*subscribers 10% **<u>more</u>** likely than retail buyers*
"Read in no particular order"	*subscribers 13% **<u>less</u>** likely than retail buyers*

LENGTH OF TIME SPENT READING

The average length of time spent reading was 2.8 hours per issue with subscribers spending 6% longer than retail buyers.

PURCHASING OF OTHER MAGAZINES

Here there were some real and important differences between the two groups. Subscribers were more likely to buy home-based titles as part of their repertoire. Retail buyers were more likely to pick younger, fashion & style titles.

ATTITUDES TO ADVERTISING

Subscribers were more likely than retail buyers to find the advertisements a good source of information. Yet retail buyers enjoyed browsing through them more than subscribers.

SUMMARY

The demographics of Magazine B's subscribers fit the normal pattern of being older and more upmarket than retail buyers. When it came to attitudes towards the magazine there were few dramatic differences, but many subtle ones, with subscribers appreciating the more serious and practical side of the editorial. While retail buyers liked the style, the gloss and the visual aspects of the title, subscribers appreciated the literary qualities and liked hard factual information. These distinctions between the two groups in their approach to the editorial extends to their views of the advertising with subscribers looking for information to guide buying decisions while retail buyers browsed the advertisements for their gloss and atmosphere.

MAGAZINE C CASE STUDY: A MALE, SPECIALIST INTEREST MONTHLY

Magazine C is a male, specialist interest monthly, straddling the consumer and business markets, which carries considerable data to aid the reader in purchasing decisions. Retail buyers' profiles were ascertained through 274 face-to-face interviews in W H Smith and J Menzies stores. Subscribers' profiles were gathered through 500 telephone interviews sampled at random from the subscription list.

READER PROFILE

Subscribers in comparison to retail buyers are:

■ Older: average age 43.4 years compared to 36.1 years for retail buyers

■ More senior: 13% more subscribers are in senior management positions than retail buyers. 21% more subscribers manage departments

■ Wider purchasing power:

* 23% more subscribers had a wide sphere of buying influence within their companies.
* 22% more subscribers had actual budget responsibility for purchasing.
* 33% more subscribers were committed to significant expenditure over the coming 12 months.
* Yet 14% fewer purchase recommendations had been made by subscribers over the previous 12 months

READERSHIP OF THE MAGAZINE

■ Subscribers spend slightly less time reading each issue than retail buyers (3.1 hours as opposed to 3.2 hours).

■ The pass-on readership of subscriber copies is slightly lower than retail copies (2.3 readers per copy as opposed to 2.4 readers per copy).

■ Yet subscribers are more likely to hold on to their copies once they have finished reading. 21% more subscribers will store their copies or put them into a company library. Retail buyers are much more likely to throw their copies away once they have finished reading them.

MAGAZINE NAVIGATION

■ Retail buyers were much more likely to flick through the magazine to identify the articles they would come back to later: 41% of retail buyers claimed to do this compared to only 24% of subscribers.

■ Retail buyers were also much more likely to use the front cover as the prime reference point (21% of retail buyers compared to only 10% of subscribers), picking out the cover lines which has attracted them in the first place in the retail outlet and then going to the contents page to find out where in the magazine they were sited.

■ The subscribers' top ranking response was that they worked systematically through the magazine.

The overall impression is similar to that formed from the Magazine B case-study. Namely, that subscribers have bought the **magazine** and will work through the product methodically each time they receive it. Retail purchasers have bought that specific **issue** and will either (a) zoom in straight away on a particular article which may have prompted the original purchase decision or (b) will flick through quickly, making decisions as to what they will come back to read later.

The implication (although it must be emphasised that this is no more than an implication) is that page traffic scores are much more likely to be more evenly spread with subscribers, whereas retail buyers are more likely to have bigger peaks and troughs.

THE USA - THE SUBSCRIPTION FUTURE?

Although the US magazine market is fundamentally different in a number of key respects from the UK market, it does provide a few pointers as to what the UK market **might** look like in the future as subscription sales develop.

An often-voiced assumption of UK publishers is that as subscriptions develop as a more common channel in this country, then they will gradually lose the upmarket & older characteristics which distinguish them currently from retail purchases. This assumption is not born out by US experience.

Another assumption is that as heavy subscription price-cutting is a much more widespread feature of the US market that this must devalue subscriber profiles, pulling them downmarket and reducing the link between reader and magazines. Again, these assumptions are not born out by US experience where the source of copy does not appear to affect the degree of reader involvement in the publication

US Consumer Demographic Profiles by Main Channel of Magazine Purchase

	Subs	***Retail***	***Subs Index***
SEX			
Male	*48%*	*43%*	*112*
Female	*52%*	*57%*	*91*
	100%	*100%*	
AGE			
18-34	*28%*	*50%*	*56*
35-54	*33%*	*35%*	*94*
55+	*39%*	*15%*	*260*
	100%	*100%*	
HOUSEHOLD INCOME			
Less than $15,000	*15%*	*20%*	*75*
$15,000-$34,999	*38%*	*43%*	*88*
$35,000 or more	*47%*	*37%*	*127*
	100%	*100%*	
EDUCATION OF CHIEF WAGE EARNER			
Some high school or less	*18%*	*24%*	*75*
Completed high school	*31%*	*38%*	*82*
Some college or more	*51%*	*38%*	*134*
	100%	*100%*	
OCCUPATION OF CHIEF WAGE EARNER			
Retired / unemployed	*31%*	*19%*	*163*
Blue collar	*24%*	*47%*	*51*
White collar	*12%*	*14%*	*86*
Professional/Managerial/Owner	*33%*	*20%*	*165*
	100%	*100%*	

(Source: MPA/PCH Project)

The data on the previous page emphasises the fact that, despite the market being much more highly subscription biased, magazine subscribers are still markedly older and more upmarket than retail buyers.

The data below addresses the issue of the quality of the link between buyer and magazine as measured by simple indicators such as time spent reading, etc. Even though subscriptions are sold heavily on price, US magazine subscribers' links with the magazines are just as strong as those of retail buyers, if not stronger.

US Consumer Link with Magazine by Main Channel of Magazine Purchase

	Subscription Copy	***Retail Copy***
Total time spent reading last issue	*1.1 hrs*	*1.0 hrs*
Number of occasions last issue read	*3.3 occasions*	*3.6 occasions*
Percent of pages opened on last occasion	*55%*	*53%*

(Source: MPA/PCH Project)

If the USA **does** offer a glimpse of what the UK subscription future might be, then all it suggests is that, apart from the volume of subscriptions sold, the basic demographic profiles of subscribers will be little changed from the present.