



December 2004

### **The Immediacy Initiative – Update**

At its 2003 retreat, the MPA Board charged MPA with examining the entire manufacturing process from Ad Close to On-Sale Date because advertisers and agencies have raised concerns about the inflexibility of monthly magazines and their three-month lead times. Several agencies, in fact, have suggested that the three-month lead-time is causing magazines to “leave pages on the table.”

Based upon this charge, MPA formed a cross-disciplinary Steering Committee comprising publishers (including those with expertise in Consumer Marketing, Publishing, and Manufacturing), printers, fulfillment service bureaus, and wholesalers/distributors to examine the production and distribution schedule for monthly magazines and identify opportunities to “buy back time.”

The Steering Committee recognized that changes to the current schedule would come in incremental stages as new digitization opportunities are revealed and the standards setting process is defined.

### **Actual Ad Close Date**

In examining the schedule for producing magazines, the Steering Committee found that the time between the official ad close dates and when magazine readers view the ads is actually two months or less since monthly magazines arrive in subscribers’ homes and on newsstands significantly before the magazine’s cover date. Since then, MPA has informally examined and provided feedback on sales material to ensure that it publicizes this fact.

The Steering Committee also found that, due to technological advances (including the digitization of ads and improved production and distribution processes), ads can be and frequently are accepted weeks after the official ad close date.

To allow publishers to accept ads later in the process, MPA and its member companies (in partnership with the IDEAlliance) have worked together to establish and revise multiple specifications for electronic communication to automate magazine advertising, production, and distribution workflows. These specifications include:

- **Production Order Specification/XML (PROSE/XML)** – Specification to standardize method for publishers to communicate job specifications to commercial printers
- **Publishing Requirements for Industry Standard Metadata (PRISM)** – Specification to assist in the automation of publishing production processes and content exchange.
- **Digital Image Subscription Criteria (DISC)** – Set of specifications for use by creative professionals as a standard format prior to submission; allows for maximum reproduction print quality while expediting production workflow.
- **Mail.dat™** – Standard describing each characteristic of a mailing.
- **Address Data Interchange Specification (ADIS)** – Uniform specification for the interchange of address data both domestically and internationally.

Many major publishers and printers use these specifications, saving time and money, reducing errors, and allowing them to accept ads later. In fact, using these specifications, some publishers accept ads as late as the press date.

MPA is also working with the IDEAlliance, American Association of Advertising Agencies, AdsML, and Newspaper Association of America to develop a specification -- Specification for Publisher & Agency Communication Exchange, Production Order Specification/XML (SPACE/XML) – to automate business transactions for ad space

reservation, insertion order, creative material, job ticketing, and invoicing. This specification, which is currently being tested and is expected to be available in mid-2005, will allow publishers to digitize their advertising workflow.

MPA will also hold educational seminars on how publishers can use these specifications to streamline magazine advertising, production, and distribution workflows.

### **The 6-8 Week First Issue Paradigm**

While publishers continue to advise their readers to expect first-issue delivery in between “6-8 weeks”, first-issue delivery typically occurs much sooner. In fact, we found that first copies are delivered in an average of 4 weeks. Given recent industry trends, we expect this time to drop further.

Last year, the Immediacy Steering Committee identified the “co-mingling” of multiple publications as an opportunity to reduce the time from when a new subscription is ordered to when the subscriber receives the first issue. Since then, based upon the introduction of MPA-supported postal discounts for co-palletizing smaller mailings (e.g., supplementals), the availability of co-mingling services has increased significantly.

Since these discounts were introduced last year, 75 million mail pieces (from more than 400 different titles) that would have been sacked and entered at postal facilities far from the delivery address were co-mingled with mail from other magazine titles, palletized, and entered at postal facilities close to the delivery address.

The amount of co-mingled publications should increase further over the next year as existing vendors increases the frequency with which they co-mingle publications and additional companies begin to offer these services. Three companies have recently announced plans to begin or expand their co-mingling operations. Additionally, MPA is continuing to encourage the Postal Service to increase discounts for palletizing and entering Periodicals closer to the delivery address, which should further expand the availability of co-mingling services.

In addition to improving delivery times, the increased availability of co-mingling services should allow publishers to increase the frequency with which it pulls labels for supplemental mailings since co-mingling allows smaller mailings to qualify for postal discounts. To facilitate more frequent label pulls, MPA and its members are working with the IDEAlliance to establish a specification – the Electronic List Information Standard (**eLIST**) -- for the electronic communication of list information between fulfillment houses and printers. This specification, which will allow list information to move directly between fulfillment houses and printer systems without the need for re-keying, should be finalized in early 2005.

### **The Retail Distribution Cycle**

MPA is working with the IDEAlliance to customize its Shipment and Logistics Specification (S'nL) -- an industry standard for efficient communications among those providing delivery instructions, transportation planning, and distribution services for shipment of printed product – to be used as an electronic communication tool for retail magazine distribution.

A workgroup that includes representatives of all aspects of retail magazine distribution as well as technical experts that were involved in designing the S'nL specification will meet next month to develop and beta-test a prototype S'nL specification for retail distribution.