

Behind the Digital Mobile Production Magic

By Jill Baker

Many of us “on the other side of the building” think that the creation of digital editions and mobile apps happens by magic, but Texterity’s director of operations, Rachel Summers, assures us otherwise.

During her 12 years with Texterity, Summers has seen the company evolve from a custom data conversion resource to an early ebook technology provider to a template-driven digital and mobile publishing leader. Over the past six years, customer expectations have changed dramatically, and publishers are constantly innovating to improve reader engagement, revenue and relevance.

“Three years ago, if we had two video clips in a single digital edition, that would have been a lot – and a major headache,” said Summers. “But this week, we had 50 video and audio clips going into Birdwatcher’s Digest and it was just business as usual.”

Digital and mobile platforms greatly expand a publisher’s content distribution to the Web, digital editions, smartphones and tablets. Yet except for a few unique terms and technologies, the production process for digital and mobile conversion is not too different from print. The same core production competencies we value in print also apply in digital: workflow efficiency, cost containment, attention to detail, adherence to standards, reviewing, testing, innovating – and, of course, delivering on deadline.

In this article, we’ll explore the process of converting a print publication to one that is available on smartphones and tablets, taking advantage of these platforms’ capabilities.

A PRODUCTION WALK-THROUGH

Once a publisher signs a contract with Texterity’s sales team, a work order is placed and a project manager is assigned as the publisher’s go-to contact throughout the conversion process. The project manager matches the product options with the publisher’s program goals, answers questions and coordinates with the production team to deliver on schedule.

After a setup meeting with the project manager and account manager, the publisher’s production team receives a series of “Getting Started” documents, along with access to a Publisher Dash-

board, an intuitive interface that lets publishers monitor and control aspects of the job status.

Content should be delivered in the form of PDF pages (300 dpi or higher resolution), either stitched together or provided as individual pages. Most publishers simply utilize what they’ve prepared for print, but some design or redesign specifically for digital displays. PDFs generated using Quark or InDesign are preferred, and output guidelines are available.

Texterity secures a domain for the publisher that will be used to host the content. Even though Texterity hosts the content, publishers can display their digital edition on their website in an “iFrame” (boxed area) if they wish. Texterity provides a string code for the url that allows the publisher to control the size, which can then be added to their website. This functionality has been used successfully for such “open access” titles as The Kit, Global Golf Post and Centro Y Sur.

Many associations are also using another method of distribution, “member authentication,” in which access is granted to members through a designated link using the publisher’s existing log-in and user accounts. The most common way to distribute digital editions and manage subscriptions, however, is by email, which supports both open and secure access to published content.

PREPARING DOCUMENTS

As in print production, a prepress specialist checks incoming files for down-sampling quality, making sure that page numbers are correct for digital display and that inserts are provided in the right places.

Converting documents from PDF to digital editions involves three steps: linking, imaging and article text extraction. The linking process is semi-automated, using Texterity’s patented technology, where the PDF is analyzed for page number linking, cross-reference links, indexes and urls. The linking team checks and adjusts the results and creates the table of contents based on the print table of contents.

All supplied PDF pages are automatically output to images that will be used to display the pages in the digital edition. Each page is reviewed by quality-control specialists who apply corrections



where needed. At this point, text can also be extracted from articles for mobile reading.

Next, rich media and other optional customizations, such as blow-ins, videos, slideshows or banner ads, are applied. Interactive “modules” like 360-degree animation or Twitter hashtag feeds can be added at considerable savings in apps. The publisher supplies these source files along with their PDFs and instructions for placement.

All of the conversion steps come together so that a review version of the digital edition can be made available – first for the project manager to verify and then for the publisher to check – before the publication is presented to readers. Corrections or additional customizations can be made at this stage. Once the publisher approves the issue, it goes “live.”

Email notifications deployed by Texterity for the digital edition typically go out the following day to a publisher-provided list. The publisher can use either Texterity’s standard email template or one of its own. The publisher has 24/7 access to Texterity’s reporting systems for digital edition tracking and app analytics.

Five days after the mailing is deployed, Texterity issues an email with a link to the performance report to publishers that use the email service. This report indicates number of emails viewed, number of emails opened, the number of clickthroughs and bounces.

APP PUBLISHING (WHERE THE CROSS-PLATFORM MAGIC HAPPENS)

Although the publisher doesn’t have to do any additional file preparation to enjoy the benefits of a magazine-branded app (iPad, iPhone and Android smartphone platforms are available), the publisher will be asked to provide a few specific elements so that the app can be built, such as an icon, logo, blurb and splash screen images. A checklist is provided.

Texterity then reviews and compiles the elements to build and submit the app. Apple has to approve iPhone and iPad apps, whereas Android apps are generally live the day they are submitted. New issues appear seamlessly in the live app’s library as soon as they go live on the Web. Texterity submits app updates every few months that include new features or functionality changes within its core app platforms.

SIMULTANEOUS DEVELOPMENT ON MOBILE

While a mobile Web edition might not be as sexy as an app – it won’t have interactive features like RSS feeds and text is not automatically extracted for optimization – a mobile edition offers yet another way to engage subscribers. Mobile edition readers can enjoy their non-Flash digital edition on any modern Web-enabled device, BlackBerry or Windows phone. Since building a mobile edition is part of Texterity’s digital production process, additional submissions or approvals by device

manufacturers are not required. App customers receive text extraction for their mobile edition as part of their package pricing; non-app publishers may opt to buy it.

Carl Scholz, Texterity's COO, sees scalability as a critical part of the production pro-

cess. "Our ability to help a publisher transition from print to digital or roll out simultaneously on digital and mobile channels means we can be a partner in implementing this specific strategy. The nice thing is, once they're on board, they can evolve

with our innovation. They don't need to reinvent the wheel."

To date, Texterity handles more than 800 digital editions, has more than 135 magazine-branded apps in the iTunes Store and over 60 in the Android Marketplace. ■■

Premier Guitar Amplifies Its Reach

On the surface, *Premier Guitar* appears to be just another print magazine. But thanks to its exposure across the Web, digital media channels and a new content curation site called Guitar Squid, the Premier Media Holdings publication has established itself as a multichannel brand, using email, print and Web advertising, e-commerce, lead generation, research and cross-promotions to establish its identity.

Premier Media Holdings Managing Director Peter Sprague and his team were committed to a digital magazine long before many publishers even knew what a digital magazine was. Since 2007, *Premier Guitar* has attracted nearly 100,000 subscribers just to its digital edition. And the free digital subscription has not cannibalized the print subscriber base in the least. "Our print subs and single copy sales keep increasing," said Sprague. "They've actually doubled, year to date, in 2011. We regard our digital edition as a sampling and rate base device. Our September issue, for example, contains a banner and video embed promoting a trial print sub, and the first day orders were exceptional — exceeding 300 new print subscribers.

Even better, these people pay with their order, so there's no billing or collections."

Premier Guitar was the first Texterity publisher to launch a mobile magazine app and did so with the iPhone. Their iPhone app immediately drew attention

from industry expert, Steve Smith, who gave it a thumbs-up review in *min*. Having digital apps on mobile devices and tablets frees *Premier Guitar* from its text-only constraints. "We are also using Texterity's technology for digital songbooks and soon, for catalogs," Sprague said. "The Texterity platform has allowed us to move seamlessly and quickly into apps and tablets, and our mobile trajectory on our apps has been phenomenal — about 40,000 sessions a month and growing like crazy. New downloads are running about 2,500 to 3,000 a month and also growing sharply."

Premier Guitar's media kit, which is available online as a digital edition (Texterity offers a free digital media kit to full-service clients), demonstrates this kind of integrated cross-platform thinking. *Premier Guitar* began bundling print, Web and digital magazine advertising this year, as well as selling premium positions. *Premier Guitar* says that its audience for print and digital combined has grown 14 percent this year and that unique website visits are up 35 percent, according to Urchin 6.6 licensed software from Google.

"Whenever you purchase an ad in *Premier Guitar*," Sprague tells advertisers, "we deliver your message to readers across four formats: in *PG's* print magazine, digital magazine, on PremierGuitar.com and on mobile: iPhone, iPad and Android. That gives you access to the largest verified, unduplicated monthly audience of 850,000 serious guitarists who are hungry for new gear and information."

Sprague is also fond of comparing *Premier Guitar's* approach to Arlo Guthrie's Alice's Restaurant, where readers can get "anything

they want" in terms of location, time, and preferred method of content consumption.

Certainly not every title can enjoy the "cool" factor that helps *Premier Guitar* excel, but it's great to know that even a small publisher can "rock with the best of them" when they use integrated channels to build their brand.

Premier Guitar Metrics

- The average monthly distribution of Premier Guitar across various platforms:
- 30,249 for the print magazine (verified by single-copy sales reports and printing/distribution invoices)
- 68,838 for the digital magazine (primarily read on desktop/laptop computers and verified by iDev email database)
- 582,683 unique visitors for magazine content on PremierGuitar.com (verified by Urchin 6.6)
- 23,236 unique visitors for magazine content on PG's mobile-optimized website (launched in 2010 and verified by Urchin 6.6)
- 7,194 users of PG's iPhone app (also launched in 2010 and verified by Flurry analytics).

As you can see, digital readership is exceeding print readership.

