



CASE STUDY

AUGUST HOME
PUBLISHING COMPANY

CASE STUDY: INCREASING REVENUE AND CIRCULATION AT AN UNDERPER- FORMING PUBLICATION

HOW ALIGNING WITH THE WAY IT'S READERS THINK
LED TO A FIVE-FOLD INCREASE IN
MAGAZINE REVENUES



OBJECTIVE:

To boost the company's performance by turning around an underperforming publication in its portfolio.

August Home Publishing (AHP) publishes seven award-winning, nationally distributed magazines, serving home woodworkers, gardeners and those who love to cook, as well as DIY enthusiasts.

When consultant Dee Peters began working with AHP, she had been given a very clear objective—to improve readership and increase revenues for one of the company's publications, *Cuisine at Home*, a magazine that simply wasn't performing up to its potential.

AHP had experienced strong growth since its founding in 1979, publishing award-winning magazines and being recognized twice by *Inc.* magazine as one of the 500 fastest growing privately owned companies in the U.S. However, the company's overall performance was being hindered by the flat performance of *Cuisine at Home*.



CHALLENGES:

To united the staff's different groups, which were struggling to collaborate effectively.

Donald Peschke, founder of AHP, speculated that the incompatibility of the magazine's staff was contributing to its lack of growth. He saw the staff as being divided into two profoundly different groups, often in opposition to one another. One group included the creative minds: writers and photographers who were imaginative and playful. The other group consisted of accountants and editors who were organized, analytical and procedural, people who focused on details, numbers and deadlines.

Both groups were integral to the success of the magazine, but the two just couldn't collaborate successfully. Peschke asked Peters to help him unite his staff and develop an action plan to improve the magazine's performance.

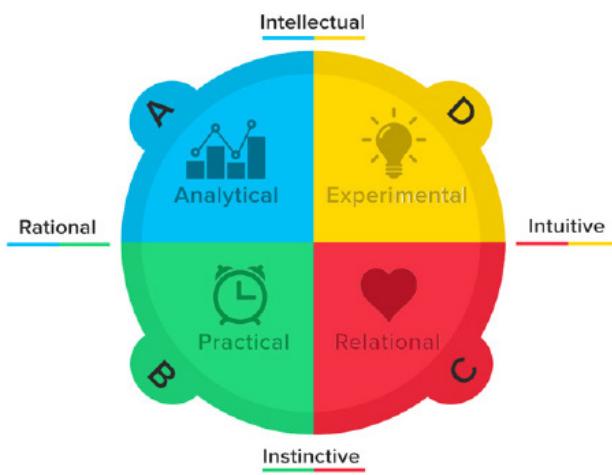


SOLUTION:

Recognizing, appreciating and leveraging the thinking within the team and within the target reader population, and then realigning for success.

Peters, an HBDI® Certified Practitioner, recognized that these two groups were likely approaching the work from two very different mentalities, and that while that diversity of thought was essential to putting out a magazine, it wasn't being fully understood, valued or leveraged.

The HBDI® (Herrmann Brain Dominance Instrument®) assessment defines and describes thinking preferences across the four quadrants of the Whole Brain® Model. Peters realized that the consulting engagement would need to include an opportunity for each employee to complete the HBDI® and learn about their own thinking preferences, the thinking preferences of others and how those differences in thinking contributed to the results they needed to achieve. But first, she needed to use the Whole Brain® approach with her own process.



The four-color, four-quadrant graphic and Whole Brain® are registered

As she began the consulting process, Dee took a Whole Brain® approach by tackling the challenge from the point of view of the various “audiences” the project would reach. In looking at the issues the magazine was facing, she and Peschke realized that applying Whole Brain® Thinking principles to solve the problems the team was experiencing might only uncover half the information needed to truly make changes at the magazine. They decided to also apply the same analysis to the readership of the magazine in order to make a “Whole Brain” shift in practices.

Peters set out to assess the market value of the magazine by conducting a formal comparison of the content and design of Cuisine at Home and four competing publications. Through a thorough examination of the magazines’ verbal and visual components, she was able to create a pro forma HBDI® Profile representing the mentality of each publication. She also conducted focus groups with target readers to measure and plot their thinking preferences and to find out what they valued most in the magazines. Peters then measured Cuisine at Home’s profile against what the readers valued.



To address the personality conflicts within the organization, all employees completed the HBDI®, and Peters provided feedback about their individual thinking preferences. The individual and team profiles were openly shared and discussed among the employees.

Next, the magazine and reader analyses helped the staff understand how the magazine communicated with readers, and which elements the readers wanted. Based on Peters’ findings, the staff made significant editorial and design changes to cater to readers’ preferences.

According to Peschke, this process encouraged them to start paying attention to how the readers related to the magazine. They realized that many of the features that worked so well in AHP’s other publications, such as Woodsmith, simply weren’t appealing to the mentality of the readers who were Cuisine at Home’s target

audience. As a result, they decided to “open up” the magazine, adding more white space and eliminating many of their hallmark bounding boxes. They also altered their use of photos and reduced the step-by-step instructions

SOLUTION:

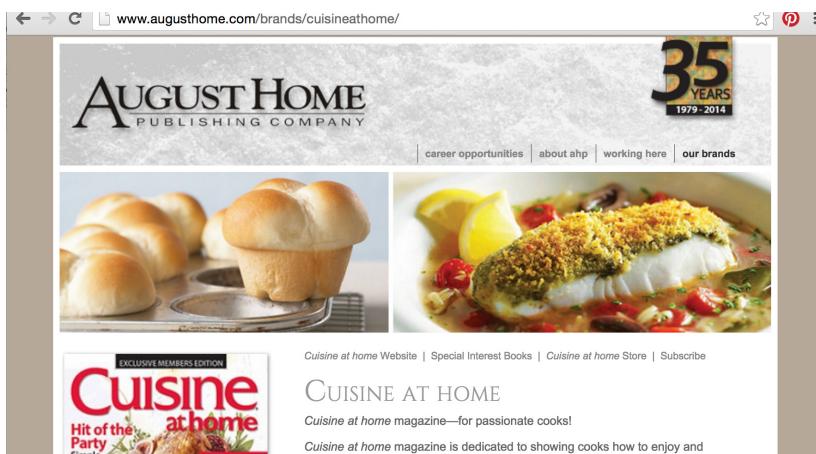
Revenues skyrocketing in just two years, with improved teamwork, morale and appreciation for diversity of thought across the organization.

“The HBDI® profiles and the principles of Whole Brain® Thinking helped create a cultural climate in which staff members were motivated to improve their working relationships.” – Dee Peters, Consultant

After completing the HBDI®, the employees finally understood why their two groups were so different. As they shared their own individual thinking preferences, they started to recognize and value each others’ strengths. Their new awareness gave employees a common language in which to communicate and cooperate as they explored their differences and similarities.

“The HBDI® profiles and the principles of Whole Brain® Thinking helped create a cultural climate in which staff members were motivated to improve their working relationships,” Peters says. “We didn’t need to convince employees to participate once they received their profiles and understood the concept, because they were as invested in the outcome as we were.”

Peschke credits Whole Brain® Thinking and Peters’ analysis for better teamwork and improved morale at August Home Publishing. With her readership evaluation, Peters also laid the groundwork for ongoing monitoring of new content for the magazine. The magazine’s whole-brained team worked together to increase the annual revenues of Cuisine at Home from \$80,000 to \$450,000 during a two-year period.



Following this project with August Home Publishing, Peters has applied these lessons to other work groups and has been able to achieve equally measurable results. In fact, she redesigned her consulting business based on the model she created while working with August Home Publishing.

UNLEASH THINKING POTENTIAL

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