

Magazines Get Real, Play Readers As Cover Stories

by Erik Sass, Monday, Mar 26, 2007 7:30 AM ET

IN A NEW TWIST, A number of magazines will feature readers on their covers and inside pages. The pubs are positioning the move as striking a blow for "real people"--as well as specific groups that are under-represented on magazine covers, such as ethnic minorities and people over 50. By cultivating a sense of identity and community, these contests also serve to drive reader engagement.

This year marks the fourth-annual cover-model contest for *EastWest*, which targets an upwardly mobile readership of Asian-American professionals, typically second- or third-generation children of immigrants who straddle cultures. In addition to showing pride in their heritage, founder and publisher Anita Malik says cover status "has also been good for previous winners" from a professional perspective. One woman went on to a career in modeling.

After reviewing submissions, *EastWest* editors will post 30 finalists on the Web, where readers can vote for their favorite beginning mid-April. The 2007 will appear on the upcoming December/January issue. Malik said the model contest is a big driver of circulation and Web site traffic for the niche pub, which has a circulation of about 50,000.

At *Muslim Girl* magazine, another niche publication that targets acculturated immigrants and the children of immigrants, the cover-model contest is a full-time operation. Publisher Ausma Khan explains that the editors simply "asked girls to write in to us via the Web site if they would like to be on our cover. We are looking for girls who are proud to be American Muslims, who find their values empowering and who want to reach out to other girls." It doesn't hurt to have interesting life experiences or an impressive resume, as *Muslim Girl* is also "looking for a girl who has a great story."

Niche magazines aren't the only ones spotlighting readers.

On February 27, *More* announced the 10 finalists of its 2006 contest for 40+ models, co-sponsored by fashion emporium Wilhelmina, who appeared in a runway show in New York as part of Fashion Week. Likewise, Dove is sponsoring a national model search as part of its "Pro-Age" campaign, with finalists showcased in a 40-page outsert in *More*. Finally, *Wired* is taking a somewhat different approach. With its March 23 issue, *Wired* is highlighting advertiser Xerox by allowing consumers to personalize the cover of the magazine with their own photos. The first 5,000 subscribers to submit photos will receive the July issue of the magazine with their own face printed on the cover. The effort is to focus attention on PersonalEffect, a company recently purchased by Xerox, which specializes in digital production press and customization software.