The Secrets of Editorial Packaging

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Anyone who reads print magazines has encountered an editorial package, even if they aren't familiar with the term. A single article made up of a collection of shorter articles on a specific theme, an editorial package gives editors the opportunity to tell multiple stories under one umbrella theme. Packages are highly reader friendly, thanks to their multiple points of entry and variety of visuals. They give readers a needed break from the columns of text they might have encountered in the preceding stories in the magazine. Here are some key elements of a strong editorial package.

1. A mix of story type, structure and length. In most cases, mixing up the type, structure and length of all the individual elements of a package makes it more engaging, both to read and to look at. (See sidebar "Mix it up!" for a list of different story types.)

2. Strong art direction and visual identity. For a package to be successful, it needs to have a confident and deliberate look and feel that sets it apart from the stories before it and after it.

3. An effective structure. The pacing of an editorial package should be thoughtfully considered, just as you'd consider the pacing of the overall magazine. Here are some options:

- **An anchor story.** A strong opening story can set the tone for what's to come. For example, a service-filled package about family travel could open with a compelling first-person essay by a parent who has travelled with her kids.
- **Repeated elements that anchor the package.** Maybe an anchor story doesn't make sense, but a story type that is repeated throughout the package helps readers feel grounded as they move through it.
- **A story order that makes sense.** Is there a chronology to the stories that should be respected? If so, respect it to create logic and order and, again, to move the reader and the story forward.

4. Points of entry. One of the benefits of a package is that there is more likely to be something for everyone—but readers won't know that unless they can easily scan the pages and find it! Consider heds (not just deks) on every story and sidebar, and other options include slugs, labels, photo captions, pull quotes, bursts/bubbles, infographics and statistics. Give the designer lots to work with when you provide the copy, and be sure to mark which are essential to include and which are nice-to-haves.

RED ALERT!

While there are plenty of upsides to creating a package, there are some downfalls and challenges to be aware of.

They can be a lot of work.
Conceiving, assigning and editing ten short stories requires a lot more time and effort than one long story. Designing an editorial package is like putting together a puzzle, and requires collaboration and communication among the editor and designer to ensure each story is given the appropriate weight and that the pacing feels right.

They can be expensive.
Even with the same total word count, assigning multiple short stories often costs more than one long one, and the art elements needed throughout can add up as well.

They can exhaust a topic.
Since you'll be covering so many angles in one story, your publication might feel it cannot revisit the topic for a while, and that may be problematic (for example, if the topic is something your audience expects covered in every issue).

MIX IT UP

Editorial packages often benefit from a mix of different story types and structures. Here are some examples to get you started.

- Personal essay
- Reported essay
- Service piece with subheds
- Listicle
- Q&A
- Product/gear roundup
- Book/resource roundup
- Diary
- Checklist
- Captioned or annotated photos/illos
- Terminology definitions
- Quote roundup
- Talking heads (headshots w/ quotes)
- Chart
- Infographics
- Timelines
- Comic