

The rituals and habits of a newspaper reader

How wonderful it must have been to have a butler draw back the bedroom curtains, place the breakfast tray down with two boiled eggs, warm toast, marmalade and pot of tea and then ceremoniously present the freshly ironed newspaper to be savoured and devoured. (*Actually do you savour and devour a newspaper?*). Ah nostalgia isn't what it used to be.....

Well the ruling classes' precisely ironed newspaper ritual may have disappeared like Lord Lucan over the horizon, but we still enjoy our newspaper foibles. Some of us repair back to bed to flick through the pages. Others need a brew by our side before reading can begin. Some of us divvy it up into sections to distribute around the family – sport for him, business for her, fashion for the daughter, the gig guide for the son. And then the habit bit comes into play. Are you a start-at-the-front and read straight through person or do you head straight to a particular section – sports page perhaps? What's the order of attention – business section first to enjoy the *schadenfreude* of someone else's financial decline? Or check out the sales ads? Each to their own is very much the order of the day.

There's a certain group of fiendish people who take the paper and fold the bloody thing into bits, butchering the sections and creating merry hell for the next poor reader. These physical attributes add to the whole experience of newspaper reading as Tim Hall, CD Saatchi & Saatchi said, "*Newspapers are good for holding, folding, tearing, creasing, wrapping and so on. Physical properties that can create their own form of interactivity.*" God help you trying to find a particular section and refold it into a semblance of normalcy after Mr or Mrs 'tear apart' has had their go, however. And then dear reader (*for those of a delicate nature stop reading here*) there are those amongst us whose daily read is structured around a bowel motion. This group repair to the 'lav' paper tucked under arm to consume the news at a leisurely pace. Some don't reappear for quite a while, relishing the peace and tranquillity and uninterrupted time, alone with their paper.

Actually one of the nice things about working in the newspaper industry is the complete acceptance of sitting at one's desk and reading the paper first thing in the morning. After all one is studying the layout, checking the ads, counting the pages and weighing up the quality of today's publication – honestly! In other words 'working'! Woe betide the phone interruption or work colleague who breaks this daily ritual.

So, we have established that everyone seems to attack a newspaper in a different way, but what's also interesting is the way newspaper sections are prepared. There is method in the madness. Reader panels and focus groups enable publishers to avoid fatal errors and upsetting the 'norm'. Nothing happens by chance these days. Fonts, colour coding, section and content order, feature writer performance, blogs, crosswords – everything is dissected and weighed to deliver a newspaper that enables its readers 'quiet enjoyment'. Changes are usually subtle, intended to

enhance the reader experience. Rarely are sections moved around or major changes made, or suffer the wrath of a reader!

So how do you read your newspaper? In print, online, in bed, at the table, laptop, PC, folded, ironed, with eggs and toast? However you savour it, we are creatures of habit, so tapping into, becoming part of these rituals, is sure to reap rewards for regular advertisers.