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Thursday, 11 June 2009

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Borders builds confidence in digital editions

Wed, 10 Jun 2009 | By Luan Goldie, [Suzanne Bearne](#)

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High street bookseller Borders is to launch a digital newsagent to sell magazine downloads as the popularity of e-zines continues.

It said it was in the early stages of building an e-zine service to complement its in-store range of magazines. Meanwhile retailer Boots is trialling an e-zine of its Health & Beauty customer magazine.

Borders' online marketing manager Claire Bending said, "We're keen to support digital formats as much as print. This type of product would support Borders' overall digital content strategy."

The move by Borders returns confidence to the market, coming a week after the collapse of John Menzies Digital (JMD), which specialised in offering magazines on-demand.

JMD offered consumers titles such as *Top Gear* and *Grazia* via subscription or 'click-and-mix' credits, as well as providing white-label services enabling content owners to create their own digital newsagents. It claimed to have distributed 85,000 digital copies of its 140 titles.

WHSmith, which was a customer of the white-label service, said it remains keen on e-zines despite the closure of JMD. "We believe that downloadable content is a growth market and we continue to monitor developments in this area," said a spokesman for WHSmith. It currently offers e-books, audiobooks and legal documents on [whsmith.co.uk](#).

Supermarket giant Asda, which launched its own digital newsagent through JMD last November ([nma 20 November 2008](#)), said it had no plans to replicate the service, adding that the partnership to offer shoppers 130 titles was a trial only.

Keith Grainger, CEO of custom publisher Redwood, which is producing the Boots e-zine, said brands recognise the need to provide consumers with different options. "Boots recognises its customers are online as well as offline. Brands realise some customers like to be communicated to in different ways."

E-zine publishers have defended the format, blaming the collapse of JMD on a poor business model rather than a lack of consumer interest.

Ross Murphy, commercial director of e-zine specialist PageSuite, said, "Part of the problem was JMD hosted the content rather than the publishers." PageSuite was appointed this week by Associated Newspapers to produce free digital editions of Metro and London Lite.

"If you just stick up a magazine online there's no pressure to drive traffic and get people interested, so it goes stagnant," said Murphy. "But if it's integrated then there are revenue aspirations and a legitimate reason to drive people to it."

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Joan Sola, president of interactive publishing house Zinio Global, said flexibility was key to success in the market. "Publishing is the last analogue media and you have to be dynamic to push it forward. You have to explore formats, not just magazine downloads but mobile and e-readers, to bring revenue and opportunities for ecommerce," he said.

James Tye, CEO of Dennis, which offers digital publications Monkey, iGizmo and iMotor, said, "When you just replicate print magazines in a digital format it's not enjoyable. It's hard to read a 1,000-word feature online. That's where JMD got it wrong - its products were flat.

"Our e-zines are nothing like a print magazine. They have video and are interactive. They're free to view, have less than 40 pages and are emailed straight to the customer," he added.

Dennis supplies digital magazines for Ford, Sony and Waitrose, and plans to grow the contract publishing side of its business. It's also launching digital men's magazines in Denmark, Norway and Sweden this year.

Major supermarket chains Morrisons and Waitrose said they had no plans to sell magazine downloads.