

**2019 Gold Quill Awards  
Communication Research Divisions Work Plan**

<b>Entrant:</b> Sylvia Link, MC APR ABC	<b>Division/Category:</b> Division 2 – Communication Research/Category 18: Communication Research
<b>Organization:</b> Retired Teachers of Ontario/Les enseignantes et enseignants retraités de l'Ontario (RTO/ERO)	<b>Time period:</b> May 2017 to November 2018
<b>Entry title:</b> Renaissance magazine readership study	<b>Entrant's role:</b> project lead
<b>Your team members name (if applicable):</b> Sylvia Link, Danielle Norris, Stefanie Martin, Kayla McKenzie, Kaila Smith	
<p><b>Project description:</b>  The <i>Renaissance</i> membership magazine is the main communications tool for RTO/ERO and its 78,000 members across Canada. Through quantitative and qualitative research, a comprehensive readership survey was conducted on the magazine to identify gaps and opportunities for improvement.  After 10 years, this research is the first of its kind for the organization's membership magazine. Research results will serve as a benchmark and helped to guide the complete redesign of the magazine.</p>	

## 1. THE BUSINESS NEED OR OPPORTUNITY

The Retired Teachers of Ontario/les enseignantes et enseignants retraités de l'Ontario (RTO/ERO) is a bilingual member organization. Founded in Ontario in 1968 for retired teachers, we now welcome members from the broader education community (early years, K-12, post-secondary). We own and operate a non-profit group health insurance plan for members. As the largest insurance provider for retirees from the education sector, we provide a united voice for almost 78,000 members across Canada. There are many benefits to belonging to RTO/ERO insurance coverage, social connections and the *Renaissance* membership magazine.

*Renaissance* is produced in print and online quarterly in English and French for our members ranging in age from 48 to 109+. Based on data from our communications audit and membership survey, members list the magazine in their top three preferred ways of receiving information from RTO/ERO. *Renaissance* is the main communication vehicle members use to get information on RTO/ERO, health and wellness and the retirement journey.

*Renaissance* supports our vision of a healthy, active future for every member of the education community. Strategic business goals:

- To be the trusted voice of the education community
- To improve the lives of our members and seniors
- To broaden our membership base

It had been over 10 years since *Renaissance* was redesigned. Much has changed in member communications and magazine publishing since then. Some questions about *Renaissance* were included in the regular member survey, conducted every three years, but the magazine had never undergone an in-depth evaluation. Conducting a readership study was one of the recommendations of our 2015 Communications Audit.

**Communications opportunity:** The marketing team took a research-based approach to improve the most important member communication tool. The following organizational factors contributed to the urgent need for a *Renaissance* readership study:

- The organization had some relevant communications research, including a **regular member survey** with questions about the magazine, **communications audit** to evaluate our strategic approach to gather data on members—demographics, psychographics, needs and perceptions. However, there had never been a comprehensive readership study of the magazine.
- RTO/ERO was starting major changes to its governance structure, including moving to incorporation under the *Canada Not-for-Profit Corporations Act*. Before starting these governance changes, there was a need to understand the priorities of members and the best ways to communicate with them.
- In 2015, a new Executive Director joined the organization and oversaw the development of a new five-year strategic plan.
- RTO/ERO was in the early stages of exploring a strategic plan for rebranding
- Data showed that only 15 per cent of members read the magazine from cover to cover. The membership survey and communication audit showed a drop in member satisfaction and engagement with the magazine over time.
- Printing and production costs for *Renaissance* continued to increase each year. The Board of Directors was seeking clear ROI metrics for the magazine, as the single largest member communication/engagement expenditure. The readership study would help to demonstrate the connection to the organizational strategic goals.

## 2. STAKEHOLDER ANALYSIS

The success of *Renaissance* readership survey relied on understanding our audience and effectively connecting communications efforts with the overall mission, vision and goals of RTO/ERO.

**Audience: RTO/ERO Members**

**General mindset:** At this stage in life, our regular member survey shows that the top three priorities of our members are to enjoy retirement, ensure their health needs are taken care of and to maintain their standards of living. They feel connected to RTO/ERO and other members through *Renaissance* and by participating in activities in their local district. Members are interested in health and wellness, advocacy issues and volunteering. Members enjoyed connecting/interacting with colleagues when they were working and appreciate the connections they make on a district level.

Member characteristics that were considered in designing the research methodology and questions	Research sources for stakeholder analysis
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demographics:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ youngest member 48 and more than 100 members are 100+</li> <li>○ 2/3 female</li> <li>○ 85% teachers; 15% from broader education community</li> <li>○ 5% of members identify French as preferred language</li> <li>○ 5% of members are under 60; 9.5% are 60-64; 21% 65-69; 25% 70-74; 18% 75-79; 11% 80-84; 10.5% 85+</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Communication preferences: email communications, <i>Renaissance</i> magazine are top sources and information preferences</li> <li>• Interests: health, wellness, active lifestyle, travel, volunteering</li> <li>• Well-educated, caring, fun-loving and vibrant</li> <li>• 80% of members are participants in RTO/ERO’s group health insurance plans</li> <li>• Top reasons that members joined RTO/ERO: health insurance plan, social connections and volunteering,</li> <li>• More than 50% of new members join RTO/ERO as a direct result of referrals from existing members</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2015 Communications Audit</li> <li>• 2016 Membership survey</li> <li>• RTO/ERO member demographics from our CRM</li> </ul>

**Audience: RTO/ERO Board of Directors**

The members of the Board of Directors are elected by RTO/ERO membership. These board members have overall responsibility for organizational budget, policies and strategic planning. They are highly involved and influential members, who generally have previous experience in political roles. Their buy-in at all stages of the readership study and the implementation of recommendations was essential.

**3. GOALS AND OBJECTIVES**

Through quantitative and qualitative research, the *Renaissance* Readership survey provides an understanding of the communication needs and opportunities to improve this important member communication tool.

**Goal:** Through quantitative and qualitative research, gain an understanding of the communication needs and preferences of *Renaissance* readers. The readership study provides a benchmark for future communication plans and improvements to the magazine. The readership study provides a research basis for understanding of the return on investment – the extent to which the magazine furthers organizational goals and ways to increase its impact.

**Objectives:**

- Conduct individual interviews with 70% of Renaissance advertisers (advertisers in the previous two years)
- Obtain 2,500 respondents to online member survey, to ensure valid, representative results that could be segmented and cross-tabulated
- Conduct interviews or focus groups with at least 25 members to gain qualitative input.
- Establish current baselines/benchmarks to build upon for future measurement and evaluation.
- Identify key areas for increasing members’ engagement with the magazine and with RTO/ERO.
- Identify current baseline to determine return on investment and impact on the strategic goals and business objectives of RTO/ERO.

**Reliability**

- Likert scale questions were used extensively for the online survey, to ensure reliable results.
- Survey size calculator was used to determine that a sample size of 2,500 would be provide 95% confidence level, with 2% margin of error.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Sample size calculator - <https://www.surveymonkey.com/mp/sample-size-calculator/>

#### 4. THE SOLUTION OVERVIEW

##### Project schedule

Date	Activity
June – October 2016	Based on findings and recommendations of 2015 Communication Audit, sought and obtained budget approval for an external research firm to conduct readership study.
February 2017	Contracted with research firm highly experienced in readership research for member magazines
March - April 2017	Consultation with Board of Directors and key standing committees regarding readership study methodology and focus
April – May 2017	Worked with research firm to develop, test and translate the survey
May 2017	Researcher conducted interviews with advertisers
May 2017	Eblasts went out to members to introduce the readership survey
June 16-21, 2017	Online readership study open for members
July	Research report compiled
August – October 2017	Reviewed readership study findings with Board of Directors, staff and key standing committees
August – October 2017	Budget development and approval to address the key findings of the readership study
October 2017	Survey results shared with readers in fall 2017 <i>Renaissance</i> magazine
December 2017	RFP issued for redesign of <i>Renaissance</i> magazine, based on findings and recommendations of readership study
January 2018	Vendor selected to undertake redesign
February – May 2018	Redesign developed and approved
June 2018	Redesign is launched – Summer 2018 issue of <i>Renaissance</i>
July 2018	“Pulse” survey to gauge response to redesign
May 2019	Feedback on <i>Renaissance</i> magazine will be sought in 2019 member survey

##### Key project components

- Interviews with advertisers – 100% of advertisers from previous two years were interviewed by researcher.
- Interviews and focus groups with key informants to develop readership study questions
- Online survey of members
- Telephone interviews with 300+ members
- Readership study report – highlighting findings and recommendations
- Sharing the research findings – with staff, Board of Directors, standing committees
- Editorial and graphic design changes to the magazine, based on the research findings

##### Survey methodology

- The survey was conducted online in both official languages from June 16<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup>, 2017.
- We received 3,281 completed surveys.
- Survey results are deemed accurately to within 1.7%, 19 times out of 20.
- All questions were cross tabulated by age, region, length of membership, the amount of time spent reading *Renaissance* in print and online, and by satisfaction with *Renaissance* magazine in general. Results were reported only where meaningful.

#### 5. IMPLEMENTATION AND CHALLENGES

##### Budget

- \$11,000 for external research services
- Internal resources were used to support the project – online survey account, RTO/ERO staff managed logistics of focus group recruitment, translation was provided by RTO/ERO, teleconference and venue provided by RTO/ERO

##### Challenges

- Timeline – the readership study was completed between April and June 2017, so the results could inform the 2018 budget.
- RTO/ERO is a bilingual organization, so opportunities had to be provided for members to respond in French or English through both surveys and interviews/focus groups.
- Ensuring that members felt their voices were heard and reflected in research findings – To ensure strong member engagement, all members who wished to participate in telephone focus groups/interviews were accommodated.
- Gaining buy-in from leadership and membership for findings/recommendations – To ensure strong buy-in, themes were shared with leaders, senior staff and volunteer leaders as they emerged. Findings were shared in the magazine and on social media.

**Analysis of research findings**

- The findings of the readership study were shared with the Board of Directors, senior leadership, staff, volunteer leaders and members.
- The findings confirmed the importance of Renaissance as a member communication and engagement channel. When our members are highly engaged and well informed, they are effective brand ambassadors, recommending RTO/ERO to new members.
- The research findings formed the basis of a major redesign of the magazine – refocusing the publication on the content of most interest to members, improving the editorial focus and the quality of writing.
- A graphic design update supports the value members place on the magazine and assists the readers’ journey through the magazine.

**6. MEASUREMENT AND EVALUATION**

Objective	Results
Conduct individual interviews with 70% of Renaissance advertisers (advertisers in the previous two years)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 100% of advertisers were interviewed               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ As a result of the advertising findings, we have increased advertising revenue by 60%. Advertising revenue now offsets about 40% of production costs of the magazine.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Obtain 2,500 respondents to survey</li> <li>• Obtain 95% confidence level, with 2% margin of error.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We received 3,281 completed surveys.</li> <li>• Survey results are deemed accurately to within 1.7%, 19 times out of 20.</li> </ul>
Conduct interviews or focus groups with at least 25 members to gain qualitative input.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gathered qualitative input through 50 phone interviews and 200 written email submissions.</li> </ul>
Establish current baselines/benchmarks to build upon for future measurement and evaluation.	<p>Key metrics/benchmarks from the study:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• RTO is important to members earning a mean score of 4.0 out of 5. 82% say their membership is important.</li> <li>• Half of members agree that magazine is an important part of their membership and nearly half agree that it helps them feel connected. Satisfaction with membership and the magazine increase the longer the person is a member.</li> <li>• Over 90 per cent of our members are avid magazine readers</li> <li>• Readers of the print magazine spend an average of 21 minutes with the publication within a week of its arrival; a third spend another 27 minutes reading the magazine in the weeks that follow               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ After redesign: time spent 39 minutes upon arrival, spend another 20 minutes within the first week, re-read average of seven times</li> </ul> </li> <li>• 1 in 4 members keep the magazine permanently</li> <li>• 90 per cent of members enjoy reading <i>Renaissance</i></li> <li>• Rated it 3.5 out of 5, overall               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Rating in pulse survey after redesign: overall 4.2 out of 5; all sections of the magazine scored above 4 out of 5.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Identify key areas for increasing members’ engagement with the magazine and with RTO/ERO.	<p>Key findings from the study:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Members wanted much more health, wellness and lifestyle information               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Response: Shifted the focus of Renaissance to wellness and lifestyle. Redesigned magazine doubled the amount of health and wellness information; wellness content is now integrated, rather than a separate Health Matters section</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Members wanted more stories about how they can take advantage of their insurance benefits, especially those that may not be well-known such as identity theft coverage. They also wanted real-life scenarios when it came to their insurance plan.               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Response: redesigned magazine features articles about insurance benefits in each issue and real-life member stories</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Members wanted more unique, authentic content               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Response: With the redesign, professional magazine writers are now contracted to write stories of high interest to members; incorporating many member stories as well as other experts on topics identified to be of interest</li> </ul> </li> </ul>