



"Practical Problem-Solving Advice for Publishers"

Changing an Association Magazine Title: An Interview with Liz Novak of IAPD

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Liz Novak, editor-in-chief of the International Association of Plastic Distribution (IAPD) recently changed the title of its membership magazine, *The IAPD Magazine*, a name it has had since its inception in August 1986. This **McHugh Expert Interview** will explore the process of changing the title of a membership magazine and how to secure buy-in from key constituencies, as well as possible pitfalls.

Novak had long thought that a change was due because the magazine, while considered a benefit of membership, was also sent to potential members and end users of plastics as a marketing vehicle for the association and for the performance plastics industry.

Given the high probability that these other two audiences would not recognize the name IAPD, Novak was concerned that the magazine wasn't resonating with them the way it could.

She was convinced that changing the name to give it a performance plastics focus would better engage these audiences and help IAPD broadcast the benefits of performance plastics and the value of its membership. For those reasons she proposed this change.

JM *Why did you decide to change the name of The IAPD Magazine?*

LN Our leadership tasked the association with growing the market for performance plastics back in 2010. As part of this initiative, we started sending the magazine to end users of plastics, such as engineers, materials specifiers, designers, architects, basically anyone in a position to choose plastics over other materials for an application.

This meant that approximately two thirds of the circulation of our magazine was going to people who weren't members of IAPD and probably didn't know anything about IAPD. It's easy to glance at a cover of a magazine and if it doesn't say, "you need to read me," chances are good that people won't even flip through it. I knew it needed an

attention-grabbing name that would still honor the association but would also appeal to a broader audience.

JM *What new title did you select? How did you select that title and why that title?. Did you propose more than one title? What other titles did you consider?*

LN Our rebranded magazine name is *Performance Plastics*. We are using the subtitle “A Publication of the International Association of Plastics Distribution.” Selecting the *Performance Plastics* name was fairly easy, as our leadership decided last year to adopt the term “performance plastics” to differentiate IAPD’s engineering-grade, industrial plastics from single-use plastics such as bags and bottles.

The plastics industry itself is vast and definitely not homogenous, but most people hear the word “plastics” and think of bags and bottles. That’s not the kind of plastics our members manufacture and distribute. Performance plastics can be stronger than steel, lighter and more durable than glass, stand up to harsh conditions better than wood; the list goes on of their benefits. So, we always knew that “performance plastics” would be in the title. We played around with variations of that, such as *Performance Plastics Today* or *Performance Plastics World* but ultimately decided that *Performance Plastics* speaks for itself.

JM *How did you get buy-in from the magazine’s key constituencies such as your boss, Board of Directors, Editorial Committee, membership and your staff colleagues?*

LN I started by proposing the idea to my CEO, who agreed with me about all the reasons I wanted to change the name. She proposed it to our Executive Committee, who approved the name change and gave me the green light to move ahead with the Editorial Committee to get the details finalized. I then spoke to the chair of our Editorial Committee, who liked the idea, and we presented the idea at the next committee meeting. When I told the rest of the IAPD headquarters staff about it at a staff meeting, it was like seeing a lightbulb go on over everyone’s head – they all loved the idea and felt that it made a lot of sense, since it helps reinforce our “performance plastics” branding initiative while also contributing to more successful end-user outreach.

Readers have just received the first issue of the rebranded publication. The membership at large was not aware of the change beforehand, although the advertisers have been told, so they won’t be surprised. We sent this issue out with a tip-on card on the cover. The card looks like a regular magazine cover, with our old logo on it, but in the corner there’s a note to “peel back to see our new look.” Once people peel off the card, they will see the cover with the new logo. The reverse side of the tip-on card explains the change, what to expect in the magazine and invites people to sign up to ensure they receive the magazine on an ongoing basis.

JM *How did you work the change with the magazine's advertisers? Did they have any input? How did you announce the change to the advertisers?*

LN We posted news about the change in several issues of our members' only newsletter and our sales manager informed the advertisers about it, letting them know that they are charter advertisers in the rebranded magazine. Since the association is celebrating its 60th anniversary this year, it's exciting to be able to do something so new and daring with its flagship publication.

JM *Do you need to work with the USPS to comply with postal regulation when you change the title of a periodical?*

LN We've worked with a mail house for years and I informed them as soon as I knew about the change. They told me I didn't need to do anything differently as far as mailing the magazine.

JM *What was the communications rollout plan to announce the title change to membership?*

LN As people receive the magazine; we will be sending a press release to all our contacts and posting it on the home page of our website, www.iapd.org. Since we're also changing the order of the content, I wanted to ensure that our members knew that we weren't getting rid of any of their favorite features, but we've reorganized so the association news is near the end of the publication and the application-related stories are closer to the front, as that will be of more interest to our non-IAPD member audience. We are also broadcasting messages via social media.

JM *How does the new title, Performance Plastics, fit into the bigger picture of rebranding IAPD?*

LN The new title is a natural extension of what we're doing in terms of promoting the phrase "performance plastics" to differentiate IAPD's plastics from other, single-use plastics. Having it as our magazine name will help reinforce that message and get our members and the association in front of new audiences.

JM *From start to finish, how long did the new title selection process take?*

LN I first proposed the idea in January 2016 and we implemented the change with our August/September issue. We had a logo selected and could have made the change with our June/July issue, but we decided to hold off because the June/July issue is the one issue each year that goes to our members only. It includes our membership directory, which we consider a members' only benefit.

Also, since it's an anniversary year, we added a section to the June/July issue that celebrated the 60-year history of the association. It would have been strange to rebrand an issue that featured so much association history. The theme we've adopted for this year is "Looking Back, Moving Forward." I like to think that the June/July issue was our way of looking back, and the rebranding with the August/September issue is us moving forward. The August/September issue also has a section previewing our convention in October, so I wanted to make a big splash with this issue.

JM *Did you check on the use of the term "performance plastics" in terms of possible trademark infringement and other potential intellectual property issues?*

LN I did some research at the outset, looking for other uses of "performance plastics." In addition, IAPD's attorney did a trademark search and we have a trademark application pending.

JM *What pitfalls did you discover during this process? What three or four tips can you leave with our readers?*

LN We weren't crazy about our first set of logo options, which we commissioned from a freelance graphic designer during a time when we didn't have an in-house designer. Once we hired a graphic designer, one of her first projects was to develop some logo options for the magazine and she came up with four good ones. The Editorial Committee and staff all agreed on the logo we are using.

The tips I'd leave with readers are as follows:

- 1) Don't let tradition get in your way. Just because something has been done a certain way forever doesn't mean it makes sense or it can't change.
- 2) Get the support of your leadership first. In my case, it started with my CEO, then went to our Executive Committee, then the Editorial Committee. Staff were informed along the way as well. Since so many people are supportive of this change, I feel that even if there are complaints, I have the backing of our leaders.
- 3) Have a great graphic designer. A polished, professional looking publication is a great way to get the attention of your readers. If you don't have one in-house, contract with one to ensure that the look and feel of everything you do is consistent. You want to have an easily recognizable brand.
- 4) Have some fun with it!

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About Liz Novak and John B. McHugh

Liz Novak, MBA, CAE

Liz Novak began her publishing career in the early 1990s at *PC Magazine*. After enjoying 17 years as a magazine editor for various technical magazines, and seeing the impact of the internet on the publishing industry, she returned to school and earned her MBA. After graduation, her freshly minted MBA landed her a job as magazine editor for the flagship publication of the International Association of Plastics Distribution (IAPD). Six months into the job, she added Marketing Director to her title and has relished the opportunities that combining the association's publishing and marketing departments have afforded her. Contact: www.linkedin.com/in/lnovak.

John B. McHugh

John B. "Jack" McHugh is a 40-year veteran of the publishing business. Jack has worked as an executive for Houghton Mifflin, Wadsworth, and Saint Mary's Press. Jack is also an experienced association publishing executive. For seven years, he was Publisher and Director of Programs at the American Society for Quality and for a two-year period, he served as the Interim Publisher at the Project Management Institute. He is a member of the ASAE Advisory Board for Publishing, Communications, and Media Issues and Practices.

Jack's specialties include association/nonprofit publishing, book publishing, executive recruiting, journal publishing, rights and permissions, new ventures, organizational design, and social media strategy and policy.

McHugh and Liz Novak, of IAPD, are co-authoring a series of papers on ***Networking Techniques***. Jack Mc Hugh is also the manager of two LinkedIn™ groups, ***Association*** and ***Nonprofit Publishing*** and ***The Self-Employment Forum***.

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