



INMA Awards 2015 The Gympie Times entry Category 8

Best idea to encourage print readership or engagement

Idea: Project engage

ABOUT OUR NEWSPAPER

The Gympie Times has served the people of the Gympie region for 146 years and continues to be the most trusted and popular source of news in the Gympie region.

The GT, as it is affectionately known, operates in a competitive market with three television stations, three radio stations, two websites and a community paper competing for stories.

The Gympie Times continues to lead the local news agenda in print, online and social media by concentrating on hyper local stories that matter to readers. We pride ourselves on unique local content both in news and sport reporting.

Our readership area takes in a diverse region of about 45,000 people nestled between the bustling Sunshine and Fraser Coasts in Queensland, Australia.

The heartland is Gympie, the town that saved Queensland when James Nash discovered gold in 1867, but our masthead also covers the fertile soils of the Mary Valley to the south west, the holiday havens of Rainbow Beach and Tin Can Bay to the east and the cattle grazing lands of Kilkivan and Goomeri to the west.

The Gympie Times newsroom is a small team (nine FTE) that cares about the community and makes local news the number one priority. It's this commitment to great local coverage and the implementation of Project Engage that has seen the paper record the best newspaper circulation result in Australia for 2014 (ABC figures).

Current research shows a total audience growth (including online) of 5.4% over the past 12 months.



The GympieTimes

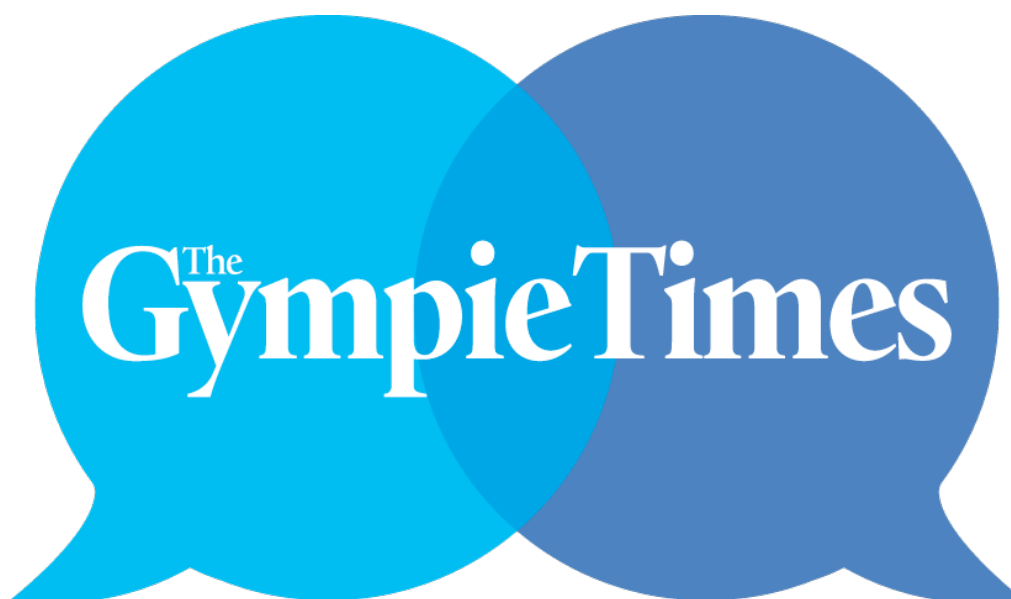
PROJECT ENGAGE

Early in 2014 The Gympie Times editor Craig Warhurst and deputy editor Shelley Strachan sat down with advertising manager Tracey McKean to come up with a marketing plan to engage readers, help increase advertising revenue and circulation of the daily newspaper. We came up with Project Engage.

Project Engage came in two parts, News First and Community Connect. News First was designed to get more people to pick up The Gympie Times at the news stand and increase causal sales. We changed the look of the front page, transitioning to hard hitting dynamic front pages to sell the strongest news story of the day. We used The Gympie Times Facebook page and webpage to market the paper and source reader feedback on local issues, in real time, and we incorporated those local voices into the news content. In 2014 we had more local opinions in print than ever before.

Community Connect was the second stage of the plan and showed our readers we cared about the community and were willing to campaign for and promote the region. We decided to build on our current community work by championing a major event or promotion each month during 2014. We used our online and print power to market the ideas across the region boosting our profile in the community and providing advertising revenue opportunities for the sales team.

The Gympie Times hosted a range of events and promotions to engage readers. Some of the key initiatives included a campaign, Heart of Gympie, to promote our “dying” CBD, school photo features, hosting a public meeting to campaign for flood mitigation ideas, a free concert with our X Factor star Caitlyn Shadbolt, entering a float in the annual Gold Rush street parade, sponsoring and marketing the Gympie Music Muster and campaigning all levels of government to fast track the killer national highway south of town.



MONTHLY RUNDOWN

FEBRUARY

Heart of Gympie advertising campaign

The campaign was implemented to drive business back to Mary St, the heart of Gympie's CBD. The 12-month campaign combined advertising, a map of the CBD and photos of shoppers in a double-page spread in an effort to try to bring shoppers back to a "dying" CBD. In the lead-up to Christmas the paper championed two late night shopping events. They were an enormous success with thousands of people enjoying free carriage rides, wine tasting, entertainment and shopping in Mary St.



MARCH

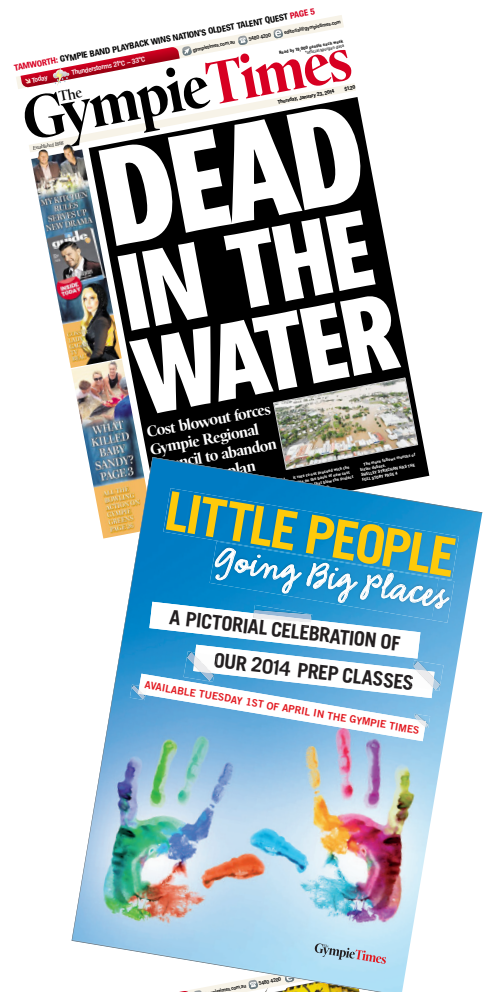
Flood Forum public meeting

The Gympie Times hosted the forum, more than 100 people attended and workshopped ideas to help mitigate flooding in the region. The meeting led to at least two flood mitigation projects being adopted by the council. Other ideas mooted at the meeting are still on the drawing board and planned for 2015. Readers who didn't attend the meeting got to comment on our Facebook page about ideas they thought had merit.

APRIL

Little People Going Big Places special feature

Little People Going Big Places was a 24-page publication featuring all children starting school in 2014. It was a big success boosting circulation of The Gympie Times by 20% on the day of publication. The Gympie Times used Facebook, online and radio to market the product.



MAY

Gympie Show (Agricultural show) sponsorship and promotion

The Gympie Times was one of the Show's major sponsors. The paper ran competition coupons in the paper for a \$6000 giveaway at the Show. Sponsored bundled paper sales were included in the admission price to the show on People's Day, giving readers an extra chance at the \$6000 prize and helping to boost circulation. The Gympie Times' journalists were on the ground throughout the Show and produced more than 40 pages of local content over the three-day event.



JUNE

Dino Cards giveaway

The Gympie Times and parent company APN launched Dino Cards. Special coupons were printed in the paper which readers cut out to receive a dinosaur card from their newsagent. Some cards were lucky, with the holder winning prizes. The cards were also linked to an online learning tool to learn more about the pre-historic creatures. The Gympie Times had great feedback from the public on this, with many kids collecting the whole set of cards and swapping them with friends helping boost circulation and community engagement.



JULY

Fast Track the Bruce campaign

Fast Track the Bruce was a campaign started to pressure all levels of government to fix up the national highway south of Gympie. The deadly stretch is one of the worst in Australia and many Gympie people had been killed on the road. The paper's five-month campaign spoke to victims' relatives, emergency services personnel and road safety campaigners about the horror stretch. The campaign paid off this January with the government promising \$26 million to fix two of the deadly intersections on the highway.



AUGUST

Gympie Music Muster sponsorship, promotion and special publication

The Gympie Music muster is the biggest event on the Gympie calendar. About 60,000 people attend the five-day country music event in the Amamoor Creek State Forest. The Gympie Times and APN are major sponsors, using our network of papers, websites and Facebook pages to promote the national event. The Gympie Times uses in-paper competitions, social media and online to market the event and the paper. The paper produced a special Sunday Muster edition with 24 pages of photos from the event. The Gympie Times also helped to organise and promote a Pre-Muster Street Party in Mary St, before the event, to attract campers to the town centre.



SEPTEMBER

Help Keep Caitlyn's X Factor Dream Alive campaign

Gympie country singer Caitlyn Shadbolt was a finalist in the national reality television show X Factor. The Gympie Times got behind the local singer on Facebook and in the paper, urging residents to vote for Caitlyn. The Gympie Times campaign helped the singer make it to the top five on the show. Through Facebook the paper was able to communicate in real time during the show with readers. The paper encouraged readers to post photos of support for the singer, asked what song Caitlyn should sing next, what she should wear and many other questions. These ideas were turned into stories for the paper. Facebook posts about the singer were the most popular on our Facebook page in 2014. In fact, Caitlyn posts took out the top four posts. The campaign led to a very successful free concert, initiated by The Gympie Times, the Gympie Regional Council and Caitlyn's family. More than 3000 people turned up for a Sunday afternoon concert. Part of the campaign included a free Caitlyn poster inserted into the paper and Caitlyn stickers handed out at the Gold Rush Festival.



OCTOBER

Gold Rush Festival street parade and promotion.

The Gold Rush festival celebrates the birth of Gympie and The Gympie Times got right behind the event promoting and participating in the birthday. The Gympie Times entered a float and marched in the street parade. The majority of the staff marched, giving them a chance to engage with the public. They handed out free balloons, stickers, lollies and posters promoting the paper and showing our support to the community in a more personal way.



NOVEMBER

Formal Fever special feature

The Gympie Times Formal Fever special feature was our most successful of the year, giving us a circulation spike of 24% on the day of publication. The Gympie Times published photos of every Year 12 student graduating in 2014 and put them together in a 24-page tribute engaging with our younger readership. The product is a keepsake for all involved and heavily relies on Facebook, online and radio promotion for its success.



DECEMBER

2015 Calendar special publication

The Gympie Times harnessed the power of Facebook and asked our readers to submit local photos for inclusion in our free glossy calendar. We had a huge response with The Gympie Times' readers posting photos on to our page. The Gympie Times then picked the 12 best images and included them in our free calendar.

There has also been many other smaller projects designed to boost circulation during the year.

RESULTS

Results from Project Engage speak for themselves.

The adoption of the first phase of Project Engage, News First, saw The Gympie Times become the top performing daily newspaper, in circulation, across Australia for 2014 (ABC audit results). In the third quarter of 2014 The Gympie Times grew circulation by 1%, the only daily paper in the nation to grow circulation in that period (ABC audit results). Our online and Facebook audience continued to grow. Facebook likes grew by 65%, giving readers unprecedented input into the newspaper.

Two of our Community Connect projects, the second phase of Project Engage, Little People Going Places a pictorial celebration of the 2014 prep students and Formal Fever a 24-page pictorial lift-out of the 2014 formals boosted circulation by 20 and 24% respectively when published.

Our Community Connect flood mitigation campaign and public meeting to come up with ideas to help mitigate flooding in the Gympie Region saw two flood mitigation projects get underway in 2014 with other projects on the council drawing board for 2015.

Another Community Connect campaign to fast track a killer section of the national highway also produced results. After a three-month campaign State and Federal Governments promised to spend \$26 million to upgrade the deadly stretch in early 2015, a move that will save many lives.

Because of the change in direction under Project Engage The Gympie Times went on to win the prestigious PANPA Daily Newspaper of the Year award in the Community Daily section, the paper also won the APN Newspaper of the Year award for 2014.

Financially, The Gympie Times has also performed. In a tough local market, The Gympie Times produced group leading financial results for APN in 2014. Profit was up more than 40% year on year and local advertising and audience revenue both increased by approximately 5%. Staff retention for the past two years has been high and this stability, at a time of high churn in the industry, helped to produce the outstanding bottom line results.

UNIQUE CONCEPTS:

PROJECT engage was unique in the way it used a two pronged approach to sell newspapers, increase revenue and connect with the community. The Gympie Times ramped up news coverage with eye catching front pages but at the same time engaged the community via Facebook, online and newsprint to give the community more of a say in their local paper. Strong front pages helped sell papers but a connection to the community and good local content helped return new readers to the paper. It was holistic approach, targeting all readership areas.

STRONG CREATIVITY:

Creativity was at the centre of The Gympie Times success in 2014. Creative front pages, promotions, competitions and story ideas kept the paper ahead of the market.

INNOVATIVE THINKING:

Innovative thinking was paramount in Project Engage. Although a plan was put in place in early January, staff had to be able to think on the run and take advantage of opportunities as they arose throughout the year. Campaigns like the one that helped country singer Caitlyn Shadbolt make the top five of X Factor and Fast Track The Bruce, overtook other initiatives planned for that month. The Gympie Times quickly adapted and carried out those campaigns by thinking innovatively, using social media and involving the community in the discussion to drive the news agenda.

WINNING SYNERGIES ACROSS PLATFORMS

Winning Panpa Newspaper of the Year (Community Daily), APN Newspaper of the Year and having the best circulation result of any daily newspaper in Australia for 2014 show how the Project Engage has been a winning initiative. That, coupled with an increase of 65% in Facebook likes, online growth and a 40% increase in profit, in tough economic conditions shows The Gympie Times has had a stand-out year.

