Specialist Magazine Startup Passes Crucial First Renewals Milestone

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Just over a year since its launch, independent print-and-digital quarterly journal The Aviation Historian (TAH) reports first-time renewal rates an encouraging ten per cent higher than anticipated.

"We were expecting about 65 per cent of print subscribers to come back to us when renewing for the first time", says Managing Editor Mick Oakey, "which is in line with specialist-magazine averages we've seen over many years' experience in the industry. But we're actually doing much better than that.

"Our first round of renewal-notices went out with our Issue No 4, and those renewals closed at 76·23 per cent, while our Issue 5 renewals are currently running at 76·92 per cent with six weeks to go."

First-time renewals are always lower than subsequent repeat renewals, because they weed out the readers who find that the publication is not for them, and also the people who have received one-off subscriptions as a Christmas or birthday present but do not want to subscribe in their own right.

"We are hoping for repeat-renewal rates of well over 80 per cent," says Mick, "and our goal is 90 per cent — but we mustn't run before we can walk. Our first repeat renewals won't happen until July".

Describing itself as providing "aviation history for connoisseurs", TAH is a 132-page compact-format journal similar in size and feel to National Geographic. It is run and staffed by a four-person partnership, and currently outsources only printing and website services. It is not sold through the newstrade ("far too expensive and wasteful for a very specialist title such as ours", say Mick), but relies on its website for 95 per cent of print sales. The remaining sales are through non-traditional outlets such as specialist aviation book-dealers, aircraft museums and pop-ups. Digital-edition sales are handled by Pocketmags.com.

TAH remains guarded about its total circulation figures — from a standing start at launch in October 2012, and with less than £1,000 spent on promotion so far, readership is around the 1,000 mark and growing every quarter. "In a very specialised niche-within-a-niche such as ours, we can reach a lot of potential subscribers through aviation clubs and associations and via social media", says Mick. "Other than paying to create a premium-quality product in terms of content and print, we are keeping costs and overheads to an absolute minimum, preferring to grow the business organically."

The high renewal rates are being achieved without the benefit of direct-debit print subscription payments — "We're not big enough to make DD viable yet, so it's all still done through putting paper renewal-slips in issues, plus minimal reminder e-mails and letters", says Mick. "We are taking a very traditional, personal, cottage-industry approach to our operations and customer service, but we have a global outlook and the flexibility to shift our main focus between print and digital depending on market developments".

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About The Aviation Historian:

1. Worldwide circulation split is approx 75 per cent UK, 25 per cent overseas, with the Eurozone being the single biggest overseas market.
2. Co-founders Mick Oakey and Nick Stroud previously worked for many years on IPC Media's award-winning Aeroplane magazine, as Editor and Deputy Editor respectively.
3. TAH is based in London and West Sussex.
4. A UK annual print subscription (4 issues) is priced at £44 inc p&p.
5. TAH's website is at www.theaviationhistorian.com.

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