

Who wants a beautiful pancreas?

By  Roger Hislop 18 Nov 2010

We all want three things. Health, wealth, and happiness. Make that four things. To look hot. *Shape* magazine has the problem that it's peddling the same pipedreams as the women's magazines that sell three times its numbers.



The difference is that *Shape* wants to be the one telling the truth, being responsible, having editorial principles that allow it to talk authoritatively about health and wellness with some level of authenticity.

This immediately restricts its audience, because it can't pander to the masses with loads of celebrity candyfloss, pseudo-research and shameless commercial promotion.

That's not to say *Shape* is a heavy read - far from it. The mag seldom dips its toes into anything other than the health, wealth, happiness and looking-hot waters. But it has an ideology which it steadfastly sticks to: trustable information on health for women.



Shape magazine editor Toni Younghusband.

Been around for 10 years

The magazine has been around for 10 years (it's just celebrated its 10th anniversary with a minor redesign and freshening up). Says editor Toni Younghusband: "What distinguishes us from the women's magazines is we specialise in health and know a lot about it."

This is a subject she gets quite worked up about: when you're writing about health, you have a massive responsibility to your readers. A bad recommendation or unchecked fact could cause pain, injury, death or worse.

We don't use scientific language, says Younghusband, but the magazine has a firm science basis: a well-respected team of doctors, nutritionists and fitness experts (including the likes of Dr Tim Noakes and Jane Badham).

"It's a huge responsibility to work on a health magazine," she says, "If you don't get this you shouldn't be working on it."



Shape online.

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Three main topic areas

The magazine is built around three main topic areas: fitness, nutrition, and me-time (which includes aspects such as mental health, stress, life coaching and finance information). "We're not a diet magazine," insists Youngusband - it's a pigeonhole she has to fight to stay out of.

The South African version of the magazine is a little different to the US parent (America Media Inc) - it's more focused on real woman, rather than the perfect role model.

The most popular section is "Personal Success" which talks about personal triumphs, rather than global firsts. "These are stories by other women like us that have succeeded. It inspires them. We don't have a lot of celebrities - they have support that normal women don't have - personal chefs, dieticians, etc.

"Since we launched we were never the same as the US issue - they've been very tolerant of us doing our own thing," adds Youngusband.



Shape on Facebook.

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Magazine readership

The readership of the magazine is still heavily oriented towards 30-40-something tertiary-educated, financially independent white women. *Shape*'s black readership is growing as fitness and health become ever more of a priority to a burgeoning middle class - but are often more inclined towards the online sites, especially the Facebook group (www.facebook.com/ShapeSA) and its live wellness workshops. The enjoyment of healthy living and a desire to get involved is strong - but a culture of magazine buying by this market is still in its early days.

Part of the Women360 group at Media24, *Shape* is published alongside *Sarie*, *FairLady*, *Léef* and *Psychologies*.

"No children, no men. *Shape* is about women," says Youngusband. "Women often put themselves last - but if you can have a healthy platform to work from, then you can then take up the husband, the boss, the kids."

Online strategy



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Shape has a busy website (Shapemag.co.za) and Facebook page (facebook.com/ShapeSA; 17 015 likes). The magazine and online audience often overlap, but are not the same. Visitors to the online properties are generally interested in the workout routines and downloadable fitness plans, and the "ask the expert" Q&As. There is a Twitter profile ([@shape_SA](https://twitter.com/@shape_SA) with 1196 followers)), but the Facebook page has proved vastly more successful in building community, probably because it meets the interactivity requirement better.

The magazine's online strategy is intended to be complementary to the print magazine, which is a product that is intended desirable on its own terms - tactile, and you can take it to the bath. Younghusband is very excited about the possibilities of book readers or iPad-type devices, which could allow exciting cross-platform ideas.

Stories for the website are typically provided by the same writers as for the magazine, although copy will vary for the intended platform. Online has a dedicated editor.

Who's who

- **Editor: Toni Younghusband** ([@edatshape](https://twitter.com/@edatshape); toni.younghusband@media24.com). Toni steers the ship and make core editorial decisions, as well as doing some writing.
- **Deputy editor: Catherine Davis** ([@Cath_Davis](https://twitter.com/@Cath_Davis), catherine.davis@media24.com). Toni and Catherine share copy editing and commissioning of articles. She also writes, and is the best place to start if you have a story idea to pitch, send a product news story.
- **Managing editor: Kassabaine Petersen**. Kassabaine manages the production of the magazine, which largely involves chasing people to get things done on time and to quality. She also contributes to the writing.
- **Online editor: Ashlin Simpson** ([@AshlinCT](https://twitter.com/@AshlinCT); ashlin.simpson@media24.com). Ashlin selects and edits content for the Shapemag.co.za site and handles the social media properties. She is also a good place to send news, new products and other stories.
- **Pictures editor: Pippa Briers-Danks**. Pippa makes the mag look great, and the people in the pics in the mag look better.

How to pitch

The magazine publishes to a three-month lead time (so if you have "Festive Season" stories, you should have pitched it by September already). The magazine editorial calendar is structured around loose themes that relate to time of year - the March issue focuses on careers, September is workout-tastic as people panic coming into summer, May looks at winter cocooning stories.

The magazine is 80-90% local - some stories are lifted from the US edition, although often just the concept and some elements are picked up. Many of the workouts are lifted because shooting them well is very expensive.

This means that PRs have a lot of opportunities to pitch in interesting feature ideas that focus on health and fitness - something often welcome is an interesting expert that can be worked into an issues-based story. If you mostly have product sell-ins, look to the product news sections (Shape your life/Shape your body) and the beauty sections.

There are also possibilities in the food section, but obviously nothing unhealthy, banned, etc.

As usual, the bottom line is to read the magazine to get a feel for its content, and pitch accordingly. Health and fitness relevance is a must.

A major bugbear for Younghusband is thoughtless pitches... there's a simple golden rule: "We're a health magazine, not a fashion magazine."

Fact file

- ***Potted bio: Toni Younghusband - editor of Shape***

Toni already wanted to be a journalist by 14, with a particular love for magazines, but started her career at *The Star* the health beat after being told, "The best journalists come from newspapers." She finally moved to magazines after 7 years in news journalism, joining Jane Raphaely as deputy editor on *Femina*. She's now been editor of *Shape* for seven years, and says she loves every minute of it.

- ***Readership stats (ABC June 2010)***

- ABC circulation: 41 290, paid
- Demographic (AMPS):
 - High LSM - 58% are 9-10
 - 36% of readers are black, 46% white, 7% coloured, 11% Indian
 - Overwhelmingly women (83%) and younger (30% 15-24, 23% 25-34, 31% 35-49, 16% 50+)

ABOUT ROGER HISLOP

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