

Marquette University  
Office of Marketing & Communication

# Newsletter Readership Survey Report

May 2008

## SUMMARY

Marquette University *News Briefs* is widely recognized and read by the vast majority of the internal university community. Employees especially rely on News Briefs for current information, with 90 percent of respondents opening it the same day they receive it. 78 percent of students open it the same day they receive it. Although widely read, *News Briefs* has potential for improvement regarding headline links, table of contents, length and formatting. Based on the feedback from the survey, the primary recommendation is to redesign the publication.

*Marquette Matters* is also widely read by employees, with 73 percent reporting that they usually look at it — 67 percent within two days of receiving it. The publication recently underwent a substantial redesign, which appears to have been positively received. Format and photography also rate well. The most significant recommended change is to reallocate the word count to better meet readers' desire for more and shorter articles.

*Compendium* poses the biggest challenges, not only because of the survey results but because of larger issues involving how the university collects and uses this type of information. There is no centralized repository of scholarly accomplishments on campus, which is what is needed to truly make *Compendium* an effective publication. If resolving the information collection issue is not a strategic priority for the university, administrators will need to decide if the current approach to *Compendium* is strategically acceptable.

## **INTRODUCTION**

In its ongoing efforts to better meet the needs of the campus community and improve communication whenever possible, Marquette University's Office of Marketing & Communication conducted a readership survey about its internal *News Briefs*, *Marquette Matters* and *Compendium* newsletters from Tuesday, April 22, until Friday, May 2, 2008.

Employees were surveyed about:

- *News Briefs* — Marquette's semi-weekly e-mail newsletter about campus news, events, activities, etc.
- *Marquette Matters* — Marquette's monthly (during the academic year) tabloid about campus news, features about faculty, programs and research, etc.
- *Compendium* — Marquette's semi-annual tabloid listing faculty publications, research, presentations, leadership, etc.

Students were surveyed about *News Briefs* only.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The survey was developed by Tim Olsen, communication manager in the Office of Marketing and Communication, and revised over several months with input from Mary Pat Pfeil, senior director of university communication, other members of OMC, and the Marquette Online Survey Committee.

Two main groups of Marquette community members were targeted for the online Opinion survey — students and employees. To attain a 95 percent confidence level for responses, Dan Gemoll, director of institutional research, recommended sample sizes of 1,865 students and 1,350 employees with a goal of 373 completed student surveys and 337 completed employee surveys. Due to a conflicting survey targeting seniors, no graduating seniors could be invited to participate in the survey.

Each group, employees and students, received initial e-mails April 22 inviting them to participate in the survey by May 2. Reminder e-mails to those who hadn't responded were sent April 25 and 30. Participation was anonymous.

The final number of participants was 480 students and 450 employees, which was more than sufficient to attain the 95 percent confident level for responses.

## DATA SUMMARY

### STUDENTS — *NEWS BRIEFS*

- Respondents are distributed very equally among classes, except for seniors (6 percent), which was pointed out under “methodology” — freshmen, 24 percent; sophomores, 23 percent; juniors, 23 percent; and graduates/professionals, 23 percent. The College of Arts and Sciences is most heavily represented (27 percent) followed by business (18 percent) and health sciences (14 percent). Most respondents are female (64 percent) and live on-campus (56 percent).
- All students receive *News Briefs* through the student e-mail database. They appear to be highly aware of *News Briefs*, with the majority (78 percent) opening it the same day they receive it. 92 percent of students report receiving their *News Briefs* e-mail at least three times in the previous month and 71 percent report having opened their *News Briefs* e-mail at least three times in the previous month. 17 percent report not opening the e-mail at all. **As such, the additional data below (except the last bullet) reflect the responses of the 398 student readers who do open their *News Briefs* e-mail.** Students who cite reasons for not opening *News Briefs* generally feel that it doesn’t interest or pertain to them.
- When they open the e-mail, students overwhelmingly, 90 percent, use the table of contents to choose what they want to read. Unfortunately, nearly a third of students report that the links from the headlines in the TOC to the articles below rarely work. Only 19 percent report that they always work. There were a number of comments by students expressing their frustration with the lack of this function. Almost half, 48 percent, report saving their *News Briefs* e-mails at least temporarily.
- More than half of students, 52 percent, report reading “some,” “most” or “all” of *News Briefs*, with the remainder reading “a little.” As a result, 51 percent report responding to something in *News Briefs* at least twice in the past semester. Fewer, 46 percent, report sharing information they learned about in *News Briefs* with someone else at least twice in the past semester.
- Of four characteristics given, accuracy is rated highest, at 4.28 on a five-point scale. Timeliness was 3.79, followed by usefulness of information at 3.67 and how interesting content is, 3.09.
- University closings (4.42), safety alerts (4.26), student events (4.14) and university events (4.09) are the highest rated topics of interest. Interchange updates (2.49) rate lower than all the others, followed closely by administrative changes (2.56).
- There does not appear to be significant interest in expanding *News Briefs* distribution beyond the current two days per week. Most prefer receiving *News Briefs* either one (37 percent) or two days (46 percent) per week. Monday is by far the most preferred day (65 percent) to receive *News Briefs*. Friday is the only day for which there is little support.

- Overwhelmingly, 90 percent, students feel that the *News Briefs* articles are a proper length. 60 percent, though, feel that no more than 10 articles is an appropriate maximum number. An additional 29 percent feel that 15 is an appropriate maximum. Fewer than 10 percent feel that more than 15 should be included per issue. Many comments submitted by students expressed concern about the number of articles per issue preventing them from reading *News Briefs*. Although students believe the number of articles should be limited, 61 percent of students do prefer to see some articles run more than once.
- More than a third, 37 percent, rate “overall value of *News Briefs* articles to you” at either a 4 or 5 on a five-point scale. Fewer than 20 percent rate its importance at a 1 or 2. Many students express supportive comments about *News Briefs*, indicating that they appreciate the information and look to *News Briefs* to stay informed about what’s going on at Marquette.
- Student attitude toward an online archive seems largely indifferent, with only 20 percent expressing their level of interest as either a 4 or 5 on a five-point scale. Only 12 percent are aware of the current online presence.

#### **EMPLOYEES — *NEWS BRIEFS***

- The breakdown of respondents is 44 percent administrators, 31 percent faculty and 26 percent staff (totals more than 100 percent due to rounding). 52 percent of respondents have been employed at Marquette for more than five years. 60 percent are female. The College of Arts and Sciences represents the largest source of respondents, at 17 percent, with no other leadership area at more than 8 percent of respondents. For purposes of this report, the respondents for the *Compendium* newsletter were further segmented (see the Employees — *Compendium* section).
- All employees receive *News Briefs* through the employee database, and they appear to be highly aware of *News Briefs*, with 90 percent opening it the same day they receive it. 78 percent of employees report receiving their *News Briefs* e-mail at least five times in the previous month and 68 percent report having opened their *News Briefs* e-mail at least five times in the previous month. Just 3 percent report not opening the e-mail at all. **As such, the additional *News Briefs* data below (except the last bullet) reflect the responses of the 435 employee readers who do open their *News Briefs* e-mail.** Employees cite reasons such as lack of interest and e-mail overload for not opening *News Briefs*.
- Overwhelmingly (93 percent), employees review the table of contents to decide what articles to read. The links from the articles in the TOC tend to work far better for employees than they do for students, with 68 percent reporting that the links usually or always work. More than half of employees (53 percent) report saving their *News Briefs* at least temporarily, with almost a quarter (24 percent) saving them for at least a week.
- *News Briefs* is widely read by employees, with 75 percent reporting that they usually read at least some of it. 56 percent report having responded to at least two *News Briefs* items in the past semester, and 55 percent to having forwarded or told someone about at least two *News Briefs* items in the past semester.

- Accuracy (4.34) rates highest on a five-point scale of four characteristics to evaluate. Timeliness of content (4.06) was followed by usefulness of content (3.83) and how interesting content is (3.52).
- University closings (4.36) and safety alerts (4.32) rate highest for content of interest to employees, followed closely by university events (4.18). All other topics average in the “3” range, except for Interchange Updates, which rank far below all other topics, at 2.54.
- There is minimal interest in expanding *News Briefs* distribution beyond its current two days per week, with only 17 percent indicating a preference of three days or more per week. Mondays are the preferred day to receive *News Briefs* (57 percent). Second-most-preferred days, though, are Tuesdays (29 percent) and Thursdays (26 percent).
- Employees overwhelmingly (95 percent) report that *News Briefs* articles are a proper length. Although 62 percent prefer a limit of 10 articles per issues and another 28 percent recommend a limit of 15 articles, 66 percent also like to see repeat articles.
- 61 percent of employees rate “overall value of *News Briefs* articles to you” at either a 4 or 5 on a five-point scale. Just 9 percent report its value as 1 or 2. Many employees express supportive comments about *News Briefs*, indicating that they appreciate the information and look to *News Briefs* to stay informed about what’s going on at Marquette.
- A third of employees (34 percent) report their level of interest in an online *News Briefs* archive as 4 or 5 on a five-point scale, but 41 percent report their level of interest as 1 or 2. 31 percent are already aware of its limited online presence.

#### **EMPLOYEES — MARQUETTE MATTERS**

- 68 percent of employees report receiving the most recent issue and 73 percent report that they usually look at it. 67 percent say that they look at it within two days of receiving *Marquette Matters*, with just 12 percent reporting that they don’t look at it at all. As such, the additional data below (except the last bullet) reflect the responses of the 394 employee readers who do open their *Marquette Matters* newsletter.
- 70 percent of employees report that they usually read at least some of each issue, with 47 percent reporting that they save their copies for at least a week. Reasons for not looking at *Marquette Matters* mostly concern lack of interest. 34 percent report discussing information they saw in *Marquette Matters* with someone else.
- Accuracy of information (4.04) and photography (3.90) rate highest on a five-point scale, followed by quality of writing (3.73) and layout/design (3.72). How interesting the content is rated lowest (3.42).
- Interestingly, Campus and Marquette Happenings rate highest by far for the kinds of items that most interest readers, with an average of 4.09 on a five-point scale. This is consistent with readers’ heavy preference (79 percent) for more and shorter articles, rather

than fewer and longer. Yet, readers also overwhelmingly (82 percent) state that the length of articles is “about right.” Second highest for the kinds of items that most interest readers is academic programs, at 3.77. The bottom cluster consisted of financial donations (3.26), anniversaries (3.23), On the Side (3.15), Take Five (3.15) and retirements (3.15).

- The headline is the most influential factor in determining if an employee reads a particular article or not, cited by 48 percent of respondents. The next most influential factors, in order, are images, subhead, photo caption and skimming text.
- 41 percent rate the overall value of *Marquette Matters* to them as either 4 or 5 on the five-point scale. Just 22 percent rate it as 1 or 2. Still, 55 percent feel that it should be published bi-monthly or quarterly, rather than the monthly schedule it has now.
- Although 35 percent rate their interest in an electronic version of *Marquette Matters* in place of the printed version as 1 or 2 on the five-point scale, 46 percent rate their interest as 4 or 5. There is less interest in an online archive of issues, with 45 percent citing their interest as 1 or 2.

#### **EMPLOYEES — *COMPENDIUM***

- Although staff were included in the survey sample and are included in the full data report, a separate cross-tab of faculty and administrator survey results concerning *Compendium* is attached. Since that publication is developed and distributed specifically for those two audiences, the data from that report are reflected in this section. Of that group, 334 participated in the *Compendium* survey. Just 44 percent recall receiving the winter issue of *Compendium* and 49 percent claim to usually look at *Compendium*. Although 63 percent of respondents report opening it within two days of receiving it, fully 34 percent report not opening it at all. As such, the rest of the data cited in this section reflect the responses of the 222 (well below the 337 threshold needed for the 95-percent confidence level of the rest of the survey) who do look at *Compendium*. Even so, *Compendium* clearly suffers from a lack of recognition. Not only are 30 percent of respondents unsure if they even received the winter issue, many comments reflect uncertainty of what the publication is or if they ever saw it.
- When they look at *Compendium*, respondents tend to either skim it (36 percent) or look for their own name first (27 percent). Otherwise, in order, they look at their department section, their school or college section and particular colleagues. They don’t discuss content with others, with 83 percent reporting 0 or 1 occurrence of that during the semester.
- Although respondents do rate how interesting the content is slightly higher (3.46 on a five-point scale) than other attributes, they seem fairly apathetic about the rest of the characteristics — 3.25 for usefulness of information, 3.09 for photography, 2.93 for layout and design, and 2.78 for tabloid format.
- Respondents have stronger opinions about what should be included in *Compendium*, with awards (3.73) ranking highest on the five-point scale and closely followed by

publications (3.70) and grants (3.58). Patents (3.35), presentations (3.32) and edited works (3.22) rank lowest. For overall value, 32 percent rate it as 4 or 5 and 25 percent as 1 or 2. The remaining 43 percent rate it as 3, which likely means indifference.

- Despite respondents' dichotomy of response regarding overall value, 79 percent still felt *Compendium* should be distributed semiannually (current distribution) or quarterly. 46 percent have an interest in it being distributed electronically rather than in the printed version, and many written comments also support that option. Fewer, however (31 percent), support the idea of an online, searchable database of *Compendium*.

## **SURVEY WEAKNESSES**

Although the absence of any data from graduating seniors probably does not have a significant impact on the overall student data, the survey would have been more thorough with their inclusion (see the “Methodology” section for more information). In the future, the survey should be administered when all necessary audiences can be included.

The employee segment of the survey was quite lengthy. There was concern in developing the in-depth, three-part employee survey that the time commitment may be prohibitive for invitees, especially without a participation incentive. In the end, there were enough participants to reach the response goal for the 95 percent confidence level, but the length of the survey will likely continue to be an issue. The only exceptions to the length issues are if the respondent answered “I don’t” to the questions about opening each publication, then that respondent skipped most of the questions regarding that publication, significantly shortening the survey.

Most questions required a response or the survey mechanism wouldn’t allow the participant to continue. This was done to prevent lazy or apathetic respondents from choosing “NA,” “no opinion” or a similar option throughout the survey. These “forced responses” were criticized by at least four respondents and are a legitimate concern. Those responses may also be evident in the high number of “3’s” given in the questions involving a rating matrix and may reflect that indifference to certain topics.

Selecting the area that the respondent “works in or is part of” seemed to cause confusion for some respondents and needs to be improved in the future. Furthermore, “Research and dean of the Graduate School” was inadvertently omitted as an option and should have been included.

Another weakness in the responses was the categorization of response options. Some questions offered a response option of 0-1 or 0-2 occurrences. There is too much of a practical difference between zero occurrences and one or two occurrences for those options to have been grouped together. In retrospect, “0” should have been an individual response option and other occurrence options grouped together, rather than with the “0.”

## RECOMMENDATIONS

For all publications, there is a needed balance between what readers want and what is strategically important to the university. Although the purpose of the survey is to effectively gauge reader habits and preferences, survey results don't automatically dictate corresponding changes to the publication if the university has an overriding strategic interest. For example, the university's need to communicate a strategic priority, such as academic developments, may not rate as an area of high interest by readers but would override indications to discontinue running those items.

### *NEWS BRIEFS*

Considering the related nature of all the recommendations below, except the last one, a redesign of *News Briefs* is needed to effectively integrate each of these issues. The recommendation is to work with the OMC Web team and graphic design teams to incorporate the applicable suggestions below for an effective redesign.

Non-operational table of content links are a widespread problem for *News Briefs*, especially for students. The recommendation is to work with the OMC Web team and IT Services to find a reliable solution to the non-functioning links.

In a related matter, no survey questions specifically addressed the layout and design of *News Briefs*, but many respondents, especially students, express their disdain for the "boring layout." The recommendation is to meet and brainstorm with the OMC Web and graphic design teams to design and present *News Briefs* in a more visually appealing and functional format.

Although not supported statistically, many comments express the concern that some articles are simply too long for *News Briefs*. The vast majority of articles are truly "brief," but for major announcements they tend to be very comprehensive. The recommendation is to establish a reasonable word count limit, such as 200 words, for major announcements and link to the remainder of the text elsewhere.

Several respondents express an interest in "sections" of articles or highlighted articles of special importance. Dividing articles into topical areas in each issue may be too varied to carry out consistently, however there is merit to highlighting the top article or articles in each issue. Articles are currently prioritized by the editor, with the most important article listed first, followed roughly by the second, third, etc. based on a number of factors including strategic significance, timeliness, broad appeal, etc. The recommendation is for this prioritization to continue, but develop a way to highlight the top one, two or three articles as needed to emphasize those above the others as needed.

Conflicting preferences by readers are their desire to limit the number of articles per issue to 10 or 15 while preferring to see repeat "reminder" articles and not distributing *News Briefs* more than its current two days per week. With these characteristics in mind, the challenge is to continue to provide timely information while limiting the number of articles to be included (during the busiest times of the school year the editorial line-up can exceed 30 articles). Furthermore, students and employees both report high interest in

event-related news. Reformatting *News Briefs* to more effectively include events and repeat items, while not overwhelming the reader with an extensive editorial line-up, is needed. The recommendation is to add an “Old News” or “You’ve Heard It All Before” section of previously announced, ongoing opportunities that would continue to run there until they expire. Just the headline would run, linking to the full text elsewhere (OMC Web team support will be needed to execute this function). Higher profile items from this section can still be rerun in the regular editorial line-up as needed, but most could be relegated just to this new section. Another recommendation is to add a “soft limit” of 15 articles to the posted *News Briefs* guidelines, citing 15 articles per issue in the posted *News Briefs* guidelines as an additional discretionary reason for OMC to postpone running an article. An additional recommendation is to include with each issue a link to the Marquette event calendar.

Although the level of interest in an online archive of previous issues of *News Briefs* was just 20 percent among students, it was significantly higher among staff. There is sufficient interest among these groups, as well as strategically for OMC, to create an online archive and make it accessible to the campus community. The recommendation is work with the OMC Web team to create the archive and post a link to it in each issue of *News Briefs*.

With significantly lower interest in the weekly Interchange Highlights article, the recommendation is to drop it as a regular feature. Significant interchange news can still be added as articles as needed.

### ***MARQUETTE MATTERS***

Although 82 percent of readers state that article length is “about right,” readers also prefer “more and shorter articles,” as opposed to fewer but longer articles. This is reinforced by the readers’ rating Marquette and Campus Happenings highest among the items that interest them most. The current word allocation in the editorial line-up for each issue is two articles at 600+ words and three at 300+ words, for a total of 2,100+ words per issue (not including regular features such as happenings, anniversaries, On the Side, etc.). As such, the recommendation is to expand the “happenings” items from six to eight per issue and reallocate the word distribution to one 600+ word feature story and five 300+ stories. This allocation would not be absolute, since some topics and months would require more than one 600+ article. In general though, the reallocation would be the default format.

Almost half of readers rate their interest in an electronic version of *Marquette Matters* in place of the published version as either a 4 or 5. The recommendation is to introduce a transitional phase of distributing an electronic version of *Marquette Matters*.

Five topic areas rated significantly lower than the others offered. Covering large financial donations is strategically important to the university, however, and On the Side and Take Five are new features that may suffer from lack of familiarity. As a result, with Anniversaries and Retirements receiving the other two lowest ratings of all editorial topics surveyed, the recommendation is to drop the section to better use the space for expanded “Happenings” post anniversaries on the Human Resources Web site.

Since “How interesting the content is” rated lowest among five characteristics and several comments expressed concern about seeing “repeat” information in *Marquette Matters*, there are two recommendations. One is to expand the existing “submit information to” line to make it more evident and comprehensive to solicit article ideas. The other recommendation is to put greater emphasis on avoiding duplicating articles in *Marquette Matters* that have previously run elsewhere.

### **COMPENDIUM**

*Compendium* clearly suffers from lack of awareness about it and acknowledged lack of comprehensiveness in content. The awareness issue is clearly indicated in the data and respondent comments. The comprehensiveness and accuracy issue is expressed in a number of comments from respondents. If the intention for *Compendium* is to just reflect a strong representation of campus scholarship, a core group of faculty and administrators are finding value in that. If the intention is to be all-inclusive, it will never reach that level as long as the content is primarily self-reported by faculty. Larger issues regarding the use and reporting of campus scholarship transcend recommendations regarding *Compendium* based strictly on this survey. With that in mind, the recommendation is to more fully evaluate, with the assistance of key campus departments, how accomplishments are documented and gathered campuswide and evaluate possible solutions into centralizing all scholarship into one multi-use method.

### **NEXT STEPS**

- Run any additional cross tabs and finalize this report.
- Route individual copies of the final report to the Online Survey Committee, vice president of OMC and each OMC team and/or present the report at an OMC quarterly breakfast meeting.
- Develop a version of this summary and results to post online and run a notice in *News Briefs*.
- Prioritize recommendations to be acted upon and begin addressing those recommendations.
- Monitor usage and effectiveness of these publications by administering this readership survey every two years.

## **ATTACHMENTS**

(Available upon request.)

Student Survey  
Student Summary Report  
Student Survey Comments

Employee Survey  
Employee Summary Report  
Employee Survey Comments  
Faculty & Administrator Compendium Report

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