

Anticipating the Trend of Reading, Build a High-quality Lightweight Imprint

■ Han Zhi (Founder and CEO of Unread & Light Reading)

□ Qu Jingfan

□ The trade book market of China has suffered a lot from price wars in recent years due to shoppable videos and live commerce. Since you founded Unread, you have tried various new paths, such as WeChat official accounts, Unread flagship store APP, the development of merchandise, and the launch of the "Light Reading Library" in January this year. What kind of experience have all these innovations brought to you?

■ Our innovation firstly comes from our brand gene. From the day Unread was born, it was destined to go off the beaten path, and the spirit of adventure and exploration has always been the spiritual core of Unread. You can see this from the products we have made, the activities we have planned, and even our crew. Secondly, from a business perspective, innovation is the way for Unread to survive. In our market, the iterative cycle of books is getting shorter and shorter, not to mention that the only two things we can rely on are the mass market and the readers who are still willing to pay for the books. Therefore, if we don't take the initiative to innovate, we will probably be forgotten by the readers and will be kicked out of the market. So looking back on the past decade, although the cost of trial and error is extremely high, innovation is still the source of power that drives the continued growth of a company and a brand like us. Let alone it is also the essentiality of the cultural and creative industry itself.

□ Light Reading Library has initiated a new business model of no discounts and physical bookstore premieres. Since the launch of this brand, what is the status of your original vision, current product development, channel cooperation and market's feedback? Do you have a "benchmark" in mind for this cultural brand? What is your future business plan for the brand? For all the sub-categories in it (Q Library, T Library, N Library, C Library, and π Library), do you think there is any experience to share with Unread in terms of attracting new readers?

■ I have always defined Light Reading as an experiment. But I didn't choose to launch a Light Reading Library on a whim. I put all the 10 years of experience from Unread into a new brand, and I spent three years working out the details before I started, and then took more than half a year testing the format and paper.

When I talked with young people, I often felt that the generation gap is everywhere, and it is difficult to form a consensus with them on hobbies, interests, or viewpoints. But talking about reading is the easiest to find a common topic between us. I think young people have a natural affinity for books. In terms that reading is a process that requires slow progression between stages, the books our market can provide is limited. It is such a shame, so I have been thinking: well, is it possible for us to make a reading brand for Gen-Z? When considering the brand's "attributes" in relation to the current consumption trends of young people, lightweight became the first choice—lightweight in brand proposition, product form, and content.

By the way, we are not positioning Light Reading as teenager's books, but we can make the book very vivid and youthful, and even attract adults' attention and reading interest. That's why we don't have an age limit on readership in Light Reading. It can be

very rich in the range of subjects, as well as being layered within the brand.

For now, we have released series of libraries, each with a different positioning. In the future, the libraries will become more and more diverse, eventually erasing the age boundary and leaving only a touch of youthful as its eternal quality. When the readers have built up their own system of reading, with an advanced reading ability, needing more in-depth, systematic perspective and content, they can switch to our Unread for advanced reading to meet their further needs.

Since the 10 books of Season 1 of Light Reading Library have launched in January 2024, we have reprinted them all so far. The following 13 books of Season 2 are mainly from N Library and π Library, also received excellent feedback from our readers. At present, all the books of Light Reading Library have a sales rate of more than 80%. Besides, Light Reading Library is mainly sold in physical bookstores, with the offline channel accounting for 95% of the circulation. On the contrary, the mainstream of trade book market in China now relies heavily on online channels.

In terms of future business plans, I hope Light Reading Library will become a cultural trendy brand for Gen-Z. This seems to be a big ambition, but I see it more like a good start.

□ What technical solution has Light Reading Library found to deal with the price-breaking and piracy? What are your experiences in member operations?

■ Light Reading Library Member is operated on a mini-program that we independently developed on Wechat. We have used the one-to-one code technology that could provide a one-stop solution to all matters about member service and easily give members more benefits and rights.

We have currently realized several functions. First, member points and points mall. Every product (books and merchandise) in Light Reading Library is equipped with a QR code. No matter where the reader buys it, he can get points benefits by scanning the code and enter the membership system. After that, he can redeem points from goods of different values in the points mall of the member mini-program. Secondly, there is a "Nearby Bookstore" function in the mini-program that could give a list of nearby bookstores we cooperated to sell books of Light Reading Library. Readers could directly navigate to these bookstores via the WeChat positioning function. Last but not least, we have also launched an activity that can earn points by checking in at the bookstore to attract more readers to consume in offline bookstores. In addition, the member point code can avoid piracy. If a member buys a new book from any unofficial cooperative channel, there is no point card attached to the book or the point code has been collected, then it is a pirated book.

□ How does Light Reading Library achieve low price and good quality in terms of cost control? How to find good content that is suitable for Light Reading Library while guaranteeing the feel and texture of the book? Please share your experience in this regard.

■ Product competition relies on scientific and systematic pricing strategies, and cost is the key to determine the price of books. Compared with other books,



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the Light Reading Library focuses on "affordable" and "small format". So we have to "calculate carefully" in every link before books reach to the hands of readers, including content copyright, paper selection, printing technology, publicity and distribution. It is not easy to strictly control costs and give benefits to readers on the basis of ensuring quality.

Let's start with the physical texture of the books. All books in the Light Reading Library use the 32K slender format like Japanese shinshoban (means paperback pocket edition), 70g correst grain wood-free paper and the average weight of each book does not exceed 250g. The paper is soft with a gentle color, moderate font size and spacing to meet readers' eye protection needs. Readers will find that it is not only thin and short, but also very soft. If you hold it for a while, you may feel a little warmth and psychological comfort.

In addition, to strengthen a lightweight reading brand, you not only need a form to support it, but also ensure the content is lightweight enough to withstand the test of the market. Therefore, our biggest challenge is how to find enough and high-quality light content. "Write a thin book" means explaining the subject matter clearly in concise language, so that readers can easily pick the fruits of knowledge and enjoy the ease of reading. This also requires careful planning. The consumption environment is changing towards "lightweight". People want to live a better "relaxing" life, and books must also follow this trend. Therefore, we proposed "reading should also be relaxing". Furthermore, we must also conform to readers' "fragmented" and "fast" reading habits. This will be a further test of ability of the author and the editor.

□ This year marks the 10th anniversary of the Unread. Please talk about how Unread differentiates itself from the Light Reading, and what unique experiences you have in segmenting the target readership and building the brand? What are your expectations for the future of Unread?

■ Light Reading Library is a completely independent brand, which is parallel to Unread. The sub-categories matrix of Unread was born at the same time as UnRead. Because you need to weigh whether to make the book or not, and limit yourself in the direction first. Facts have proved that the path planning of these product directions has highlighted the integrity of the UnRead brand.

As a brand that has just turned ten years old, my biggest expectation for the future is, of course, there will be another ten years, and more ten years. Although there are many factors that are not subject to our subjective will. For readers of Unread, they will also "update and replace". If we only do things like "carving a boat to find a sword", we will get further and further away from young readers. Therefore, foreseeing the reading trends for three, five, or even longer years in advance is the biggest challenge for "Unread Books, Unexplored Journeys".