

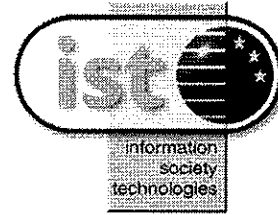
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**Strategies of inclusion in three
web-based magazines:
For 'Women', for 'The advanced'
and for 'The home user'**

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**STRATEGIES OF INCLUSION IN THREE
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FOR 'WOMEN', FOR 'THE ADVANCED'
AND FOR 'THE HOME USER'**

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SIGIS Trondheim working paper no 1

**SIGIS: Strategies of Inclusion: Gender in the
Information Society**

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1. Rationale for choosing the case

Magazines on the web raise two sets of inclusion issues. On the one hand, such magazines may represent a motivation to use the Internet more or in a more advanced way. In this respect, they are in themselves a strategy of inclusion in the information society. On the other hand, the magazines need users. Thus, they need strategies of inclusion that provide such users/readers. The idea behind this case is to pursue the latter issue by analysing inclusion strategies used by a women's magazine that is primarily web-based, but which also have begun to issue a paper version. To explore the eventual particularities of these inclusion strategies, we have done a comparison with inclusion strategies applied by two computer magazines also with web sites. One of these computer magazines aims at "ordinary" users, the other tries to reach a more knowledgeable professional segment. In this way, we compare one approach that we assume is consciously developed to reach female readers (inclusion of women in particular) with approaches that cater either for a general audience (everyone, including women) or for a specialist, presumably very male-dominated audience (women are of course allowed, too).

2. Introduction and 'thumbnail sketch' of the case

Femme is a commercial web magazine for women, recently established. HjemmePC and PCPro are two computer magazines that initially was paper based, but they have now established web versions. HjemmePC and PCPro share editorial staff and have a coordinated profile that implies to explore different segments of the market for computer magazines. HjemmePC is directed at the ordinary home user, while PCPro tries to reach more advanced users of computers.

The establishment of web magazines follows the breakthrough of the Internet as a household technology in Norway. Recent surveys suggest that around $\frac{3}{4}$ of Norwegian households have access to the Internet. Women trail men in access, but the difference is diminishing. Only among the elderly, 67 and upward, is access uncommon (Berg et al. 2002:8). This means that in principle, there is a large market for web services. Even if the previous optimism about e-commerce and other aspects of the so-called dot economy has been reduced, there is an underlying expectation that commercial net activities have a great future.

Web magazines may be expected to have a dual role in this picture. On the one hand, they are clearly a part of the commercial enterprise that is unfolding on the Internet. On the other hand, like many other offerings, they also represent a motivation to use the Internet. Femme may be interpreted as an inclusion mechanism for women into the information society if it motivates more women to become Internet users and/or make them into more active and competent users of the Net. This means that the strategy Femme utilises in order to get and keep users/readers is important as an inclusion effort.

In theory at least, the two computer magazines play a similar role. However, we expect them to approach women in a different fashion or maybe not at all. While Femme is a magazine designed for female readers, HjemmePC and PCPro are not. They are made for readers interested in computer-related information, which is a group of readers traditionally believed to be male. As it turned out, HjemmePC claimed also to have many female readers and tried to reach out to all computer-interested, non-specialist people. Thus, at the outset, we thought that by comparing these three magazines, we would be able to contrast inclusion strategies aimed at women, at men and at "everybody".

In addition, we thought that this selection of magazines would give very interesting opportunities to study different approaches to the gender and ICT relationship. An analysis of computer magazines could also be seen as particularly relevant in this respect.

3. Method

We did six interviews for this case study. We talked to the people who were responsible for editorial content, the web editors plus one from the firm Firstmover, who was engaged to provide the technical solutions for the Femme website:

Lill-Kristin Syvertsen (LKS) editor of Femme, 27 years old, with earlier experience from magazines like Playboy and Mann.

Roland Rabben (RR), chief executive officer for the web firm Firstmover, 28 years old, educated as accountant and self-taught with ICT.

Håvard Holmedal (HH), responsible editor for both Hjemmepc and PcPro, he was close to 40 and self-taught in computing as well as everything else.

Ketil Enstad (KE), editor of PcPro, 30 years old with a master in literature.

May-Lise Skramstad, editor of Hjemmepc, 25 years old, with a bachelor in journalism from London.

Camilla Lahart (CL), web editor of both Hjemmepc and PcPro, 27 years old, with a bachelor in journalism, marketing and advertising from USA.

The case study is thus based on a combination of interviews and content analysis of the web sites. The interviews took place at the publishers' offices. This allowed additional observations of working conditions, office layout and staff, and some impressions of the organisation of work. In PCPro and HjemmePC, it was striking that there were 50/50 of male/female staff. Femme employed only women, while there were only male employees at the web firm Firstmover. As indicated above, the informants had quite varied background, e.g., the editor of Femme had a past in Playboy, while the editor of PCPro held an MA in literature.

The questions posed in the interviews focused on how the editors and designers imagined their users, and by what means they tried to reach them. One general interview guide was worked out, and then adjustments were made to fit each person interviewed. The interviews were basically unstructured and open-ended, but the guide was meant as a reminder to secure that the relevant topics were covered. One part of every interview was made in front of a PC, and the informants were asked to go online and comment on the actual site; its editorial visual profile as well as services and links.

The interview with Roland Rabben turned out to be very helpful. He was shown all three web sites, and his comments gave an example of how "an inside qualified reader" interpreted the different sites according to target groups in general, and then specifically gender and target groups. He was second in the line of interviews, and he gave several 'clues', as well as linguistic 'terms' to describe and talk about a web site. This turned out to be useful for the further interviewing.

When presenting the project the interviewer tried not to say much about gender, as we were afraid this would constrict or narrow the dialogues. Along the way the informants were also reminded to differentiate their 'gendered' users and to give examples not only about male or female users, but also about possible subgroups of these categories. As the interviewer in such a project does not signal what she/he think is correct, there is an obvious risk that the informant guesses what we are after, and then wants to show that she/he contains the appropriate view or knowledge. In some of the interviews in this case we suspect that the informants gave more bombastic responses to questions about gender differences than they would have done under other circumstances, as consciousness about gender differences maybe were understood positively, as exactly consciousness, or even knowledge.

Based on the interview material, the case study shows how designers and editors imagine (configure) their users. In the analysis, we will try to demonstrate how these configurations get materialized at

the web sites. Are certain things done to attract men or women? And if so, what understanding of gender was behind the design? The interviews have also been used as keys to a content analysis, to understand how the web sites have been constructed out from underlying ideas of inclusion towards various groups of women and men.

As will be apparent from the analysis, our concept of inclusion came to interact in a quite interesting way with the marketing language of our informants. Clearly, to any commercial enterprise inclusion of customers/clients/users is a deadly serious business. Thus, they had no problem in recognising the immediate importance of our inquiry. However, we have needed to exercise some care in order not just to import the points of view of our informants. In particular, we have struggled with the marketing language and its superficial similarity with our concepts concerning inclusion to avoid that this case study ended as an exercise in market analysis.

4. Femme: A Commercial Idea of a Women's Web Magazine

The idea and concept of Femme came from two students at an institute for business studies. Both of them had experience from working with printed magazines, and the creation of Norway's first web magazine for women was primarily a commercial project. The web site was launched in June 2000, and the first printed issue came 18 months later – as the need for income was increasing.¹

So how did the process of working out the concept of a women's web magazine move on? The actors behind Femme had visions of a magazine that would involve a certain type of women, and the first premise was that the women should be likely to use the net. The producers wanted to recruit women that were already experienced users of the Internet, as well as women who were beginners on the web.

To give Femme a suitable identity, the producers decided that it was crucial to get the right "branding", and they chose a female stand-up comedian, Anne-Kat Hærland. This woman is known for her particular sense of humour, she is chubby and likes to present herself as "one of the boys". In a bit more intellectual way than the Spicegirls, she represents a sort of grown-up girl power. The producers of Femme pinpointed this woman as perfect to brand Femme. Femme wanted to portray women that were "different than the rest" and claimed to have a conscious attitude towards for example "skinny models", as well as the "typical housewife".

¹ In November 2002 Femme is in serious financial crisis, and in risk of running bankrupt (Dagens Næringsliv 29.06 2002). I have not succeeded in getting view hits from Femme, and at this point it seems more impossible than ever.

When asked about Femme's profile and what kind of target group they imagined, the editor of Femme gave the following outline:

"We are not for every woman between 10 and 80 years old, to put it that way. Our users are mainly between 20/25 to 35 years old. Our target group changes when we see whom we actually meet. For example, we know that to a large extent our readers come from the largest cities. Either they are full time employed or students, close to 50-50, and 53% are single (he-he), which is more than the average, which is 40%. Most of them have higher education, and they earn 200-350 000 NKR a year. The question for us is whether we should try to meet exactly these people, more or fewer".

Targeting proper groups of customers is an important process for media in general, but here the editor of Femme points to something that is special for electronic media. An extra aspect of web-based magazines is that one has a possibility to do experiments with less cost than with printed magazines. This fact opens up for the application of a tactics where one sees whom one actually meet "out there" – a kind of interactive inclusion exercise. It was clear from all interviews that user surveys was an important part of defining target groups. An idea of a target group consists of images and expectations of a certain group of users. The strategies used to recruit specific users are their "inclusion strategies".

The editor described the distinctive character of Femme like this:

"Femme's trademark is that it has it's own voice. It should not be very neutral; there should be humour, personality and subjectivity in our journalistic style. This is something that has been developed gradually. Actually we experienced a turn when Gry started here. First it meant that with her we became a purely female editorial staff, and secondly she had different experiences than Svein, the man who quit. He was very much a 'newspaper-man', news oriented. But Gry she has a master in literature, about 'love in the literature', he-he. So she was the one who started the section Miss Femme. Miss Femme is really characteristic for the girls we think we communicate with. Not that all of them necessarily has a bad love life, but ... but that they do have a sense of humour, a lot of guts, and really make it on their own."

Many web magazines are by-products of printed magazines, and as such copies the traditional magazines and their design of women: as interested in fashion, beauty, family and food-recipes, celebrities and maybe career. Even if Femme is not a by-product but a web magazine from the outset, they still define themselves as an extension of a traditional printed woman's magazine. It is these magazines that represent the standard of what a woman's magazine is. They are so-to-speak the defining power of the product, the point of departure for recognition of the genre.

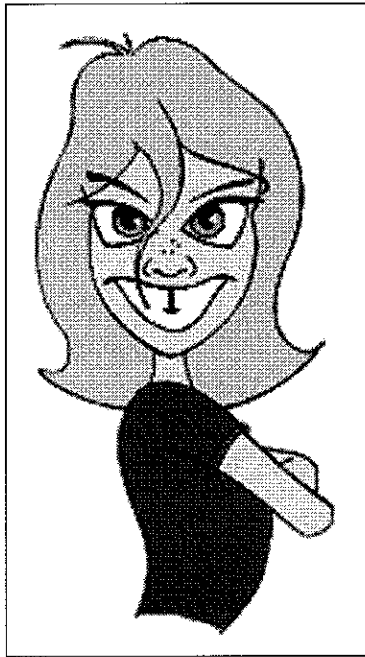


Figure 1. Miss Femme

“We looked abroad to other web magazines for women, to see what they do. In Norway there is only us really. And then we thought about what we enjoy ourselves, what we ourselves prefer. We did look at the American woman.dot and Cosmopolitan. We decided that we wanted their categories, with women on the cover, and we have gradually decided to also use men on the cover. A lot of things are picked straight from Cosmo, the division of material. It goes without saying that you cannot start a wide-reaching magazine without things like fashion and beauty. But then we also wanted to stand out from the rest, for example we do have stuff about cars for women.”

The decision to use men on the cover was one of the adjustments made after some time, as the designers and editors got a clearer idea of whom they actually were communicating with. The editor related this decision to the fact that Norwegian women were different than American women, and that certain things had to be adapted to a Norwegian context.

Femme does also have a section about “Cars and MC’s”. This is presented by the editor as contributing to their image as a magazine for the modern woman, a magazine that wants to portray and emphasise women as decision-makers – also in relation to cars. The information given so far provides an image of a female reader of a certain type. The “value neutral” variables say a certain age, marital status, place of residence, income, education, etc. When one, as the editor, combines these variables into composite of adjectives like “young, single and urban”, one gets a much more elaborated picture, one that is ascribed with cultural values. This leads to another point; that young, single and

urban women are a group that is seen as likely to use the web. Therefore, they seem to be the logical target group for the first Norwegian web magazine.

But how do you reach this group? What kind of instruments do you use to include “young, single and urban” women as readers and users of a web site? Clearly, content is of major importance, but design of a web site raises other issues as well. To explore these aspects, Roland Rabben at Firstmover provided very important points of view:

“The editorial line is to a certain extent reflected in the technological solutions, but still the rules are pretty much the same: it does not matter if you publish for men or women. The most important issue regardless of target group is that a web site should look clean and well organised. For Femme it was important to create interactivity for the users. It is about building a community of users, who can generate their own content, and who can keep up the traffic only by giving from themselves. When you have a new branded good, it is important to produce loyal users, and you can do that by giving them services that they think either are exciting or useful. This is different from a (printed) magazine, there is a much stronger sense of community connected to Femme: you can visit every day, meet friends and acquaintances there, talk to them. So that is a certain strategy, that Femme uses technology to make themselves bigger.”

In the interview, he went on to compare Femme to magazines that are both in print and on web, and explained that Femme had a much “bigger” site. Even if technical solutions of most web magazines are pretty much the same, Femme is more advanced technically than most others – because of their need to build communities and thereby cultivate loyal users.

To follow up on the process of matching a certain editorial content and technical solutions to a specific (gendered) target group, Rabben was asked if it was Femme that came with suggestions according to ‘a so and so’ target group, or if it was his firm that suggested technical solutions or services. The question was asked to explore which actors who actually suggested strategies to recruit this and that group:

“Often the customers (producers) wish to build a branded good, and certain services. But they do not know much about it themselves. So it is up to us to suggest services, applications that can build ... that can give substance to their idea ... that gives possibilities to earn money, possibilities for traffic. [...] The user interface is important. Femme was for example built in such a way that it should be easy to understand, to use, to read. Big headings, easy to see the links. It should also give a visual impression, so we use many pictures – we worked a lot with those things in the beginning. So that it should be in taste for the target group.”

The people behind the concept of Femme as well as Rabben, who was responsible for technical solutions, meant that beginners as well as more experienced web users were included in Femmes target group. The editorial staff explained that they tried to be open-minded about the level of competence and skills of their eventual users, but that they wanted to give priority to userfriendliness. The idea was to educate their users gradually.

However, it is interesting and slightly surprising to note the rather vague distinction between technological solutions and editorial content. Even the one responsible for technological set-up comes up with reference to content when asked to define how he will design a web site for either men or women. It seems that “design” is a word used to cover the mix of technology and content.

The technical and design-like solutions (see Figure 2 for an example), Rabben commented upon in the following way:

“Here you have feminine colours, pink and violet. We try to balance it with some blue, so that the result altogether does not end up very feminine. The logo is a contrast in all this; it is feminine, but playful, with jumping letters. But there are many visual cues that make women feel comfortable with the design: colours, photos, words – that means, the text really.”

Colours, photos and words become important instruments of inclusion. This seems to be built on a kind of deconstruction of female taste. Femme utilises expertise that is supposed to know essential female preferences:

“The navigation must be at one place. Not at the top, because you never know how many sections or choices to put in the navigation. So it is much easier to put it downwards – in the left column. You cannot do anything with the width, but the length is free. The classified advertisements are at the top, at the right column, and also in the middle. You can see big advertisements in the middle, which has changed a lot; it is something you just have to relate to. We try to cut up the text with advertisements and photos, so that it does not look like long lists.”

Not all these are gender-specific measures. Rather, there are structural features of web sites that are constructed from a combination of reasoning around ease of use and flexibility of design. Users – be they female or male – should not be frustrated, but so should not web designers either.



Figure 2. Femme cover page

However, let us return to the issue of content. During our interview, the editor of Femme, Syvertsen, comments on their web site, sitting in front of the screen. She tells us what belongs on a women's web site:

But as already mentioned, the publishers of *Femme* wanted to create something beside what obviously “belongs”. Syvertsen, the editor, returned to this point when we looked at the column Cars and MCs. When she was confronted with the fact that they did not have many visitors at the section Cars and MCs, she responded:

“No, we don’t. But we think we are doing the right thing (no: har rett). We do want to educate, to do some upbringing. We believe that something will come out of this”.

The last quote clearly demonstrates that it is important to the publishers of *Femme* to challenge the link between men and male interests and women and female interests. By including the section on Cars and MCs they try to demonstrate that they challenge traditional perceptions of gender.

Similarly, Miss *Femme* was presented as the manifestation of the earlier mentioned “specific voice”. Miss *Femme* is written by one of the newly hired female employees, and she was the one who turned the staff into a purely female one. The way the editor of *Femme* put it though, it seems like she feels like being a bit humoristic about the fact that the staff is purely female: “We have become a very estrogenic staff!”

She goes on to tell that she has always worked in male-dominated environments (for instance *Playboy*), as if she feels a need to underline that she is not the type of woman that have to be surrounded by other women only. But when asked specifically about it, she tells that there was a change when the editorial staff became all female, and she sums up this change as generally positive:

“I do notice that it influences what we produce. And that it works in a positive way in relation to our users. We know what the users like; we think about it from our own point of view, what would we like to read? Things just work in a different way, and I think it is great.”

Here, we see the so-called I-methodology of design clearly spelt out. The main basis of inclusion efforts is introspection. I am a woman, thus I know what women want.

Many reports and commentaries in *Femme* magazine suggest exactly that communication works genderwise, and they contain female voices that support the perspective “If men could talk ...”.² And there is some resemblance between Miss *Femme* and Bridget Jones ...

Femme is designed to communicate to a group of women defined as having a certain age, education and income. In addition, they should have extra time to spend on the Internet, reading web pages and magazines. The strategies used to recruit these women are quite traditional, based on layout, a user-friendly interface and suitable textual content.

² Gratch, Alon: *If men could talk*. This is a book in the genre of American self-help literature.

However, as indicated by Rabben, the challenge is not to recruit women but to socialise them into becoming frequent visitors to the web page. Since resources do not allow frequent change of content, one has to offer something different. It is with respect to this challenge that the interactive services Femme Forum, Femme Club and Femme Flirt have been included. The forum offers users a possibility to communicate with each other and get acquainted, and this may of course be quite time consuming. The club offers membership and different test products that readers may receive in the mail. Without any advertising this club got 6 000 members, which the Femme publishers estimated as high.

Nevertheless, we should not be surprised that the most traffic generating interactive service was Femme Flirt. This service had 70 % male users, a fact that the publishers appreciated. They explained that when you have a public place filled with women, it would obviously attract men, and vice versa. The fact that they got many male users was also attractive to advertisers, since Femme and its adverts reached an additional segment of consumers in this way. According to the publishers, it is important that the users spend time on the web site, and this fact requires that one can offer more than reading matter.

When we look at the marketing strategy of Femme and the way the magazine's web site has been shaped to be attractive to its main target group, there are few surprises. We are not astonished to learn that the magazine is targeting the "young, single and urban" women, since there are obvious reasons to believe that they would be more interested in a web-based magazine than most other women. We are not really shocked either by the choice of content or layout.

However, the really interesting feature is the interactive services and the emphasis on them to socialise women to become frequent visitors. A reader of a web magazine where content gets updated once in a while, does not need to be a regular user of the Internet. A consumer of interactive services is put in a different position. She (or he) does not have to visit the web site often, but there is a temptation to do so. This means that through the interactive services, Femme contributes more clearly to get women included in the information society, since they are encouraged in this manner to enter the Internet frequently. And frequent visits create more skilled and more confident female users.

5. HjemmePC and PCPro – gendered computer magazines?

The two other web magazines focus on computers. They are not meant to be men's magazines, but they could easily be imagined as such. The magazines have a common responsible editor (HH) and a common web editor (CL). Additionally, they have separate editors on content, where HjemmePC has a woman (MLS) and PCPro a man

(KE). The magazines were both launched in September 2001, and in October 2002 they respectively have total page view hits each month for 100740 and 49400. The amount of visitors on the web sites correlates with number of printed issues; Hjemmepc is printed in about 30 000 copies, while PCPro has the half amount of copies.³

As pointed out earlier, the technical functions and the layout of web sites could to some extent be seen as standardized. The technical functions and different sections of the web sites of all the three magazines in this case study are in fact not very different. But while PCPro has a content focusing on technical details, the newest applications and entertainment, HjemmePC is more educational and oriented towards utility in their approach.

HjemmePC and PCPro have the same publisher, even the same journalists and the same designers, but separate editors on content. PcPro has 12 % female readers, and HjemmePC has 24 % female readers. PcPro's readers are imagined as highly skilled by the publishers, while HjemmePC is designed for 'the average home user'.

HjemmePC as well as PCPro began as printed magazines, and this make them different from Femme. The reason the editors gave for making websites was that they judged it "a necessity" to have a web presence. The responsible editor of both (HH) even called the web sites "simply only an extra expense – but necessary". This does not suggest a great level of ambition for the web page.

Regarding female readers, the editors underlined that the magazine as well as the web site of HjemmePC were for 'all', while PCPro's outlets were for 'the more advanced'- regardless of gender. When one takes a closer look at the particular magazine, one sees that gender is an important dimension in the construction of target groups and the construction of the idea of 'advanced'.

The responsible editor of both computer magazines (HH) relates the gender issue to commercial aspects:

"There are miles between teaching someone - like in school - and to get someone to actually buy a magazine. We have seen some international actors who try to appear as a bit friendly, safe and nice for mother and child to sit in front of the PC – this is not a setting that actually exists. And for sure: they do not buy magazines. To imagine that one should make a PC-magazine only for women sounds extremely difficult. One would only sell like 20-30 % of the amount. One approaches things in a computer-like manner; it is a somewhat masculine thing as a whole. The rules of behaviour and the system of computing are masculine, where you get one thing out at the time, that is in a way the point of departure for the male brain itself."

³ This information is given from the magazines' common web editor, Camilla Lahart 08.10 2002.

When the gender and ICT relationship is constructed in such a clear-cut manner, there is little room left for manoeuvres. The dichotomous understanding is spelled out in a rather dramatic fashion. On the one hand, mother and child, on the other, the restricted male brain. Correcting for the impact of polemic instincts, it is nevertheless quite clear that these magazines are not particularly concerned with recruiting female readers. However, one might be slightly surprised by the lack of reflection that women are becoming more frequent users of computers and increasingly expresses an enthusiasm for computing.

5.1 HjemmePC – A Computer magazine For All?

When the editor of HjemmePC is asked to describe their primary user, she provides quite an elaborated image, and her reader can almost be visualized at the inner eye: "He is a man, married, about 35 years old with an average or high salary. He has got children who would like to read the sections on computer games. He is impulsive and likes to have new equipment, to keep up with the Joneses."

When asked to differentiate the user group, she explained that HjemmePC actually had a very wide range of readers, and that the number of readers per magazine was extraordinary high:

"It is not a magazine that is circulated, like e.g. PC World, so if several people read the magazine, then it must be the wife, the children, the in-laws. This means that we have a very wide user group."

The primary reader is made of flesh and blood – and gender. In line with her own reasoning, the editor continues to say that at first they directed their attention towards the average home user. However, through their user surveys, they discovered that most of their readers actually did their use of computers at work. And she reasoned that people who have got access to Internet at work are "men in their thirties, right?"

So while the primary target group at the outset seemed to be male home users, the primary target group still consists of men, but maybe not located at home. The editor describes a process where the web magazine has to undergo a change to match their users. This change also signifies a difference between the printed and the electronic version of the magazine:

"HjemmePC has got a somewhat cosy image that we are now moving away from. A bit unconsciously at first, away from the family magazine. The wrapping must become more technical, more futuristic."

As suggested in the name "HjemmePC", the magazine focuses on the family as a relevant unit. The man is defined as the primary reader, while women and children *together* make up a second category. Women and children are seen as "extra readers", or "added value".

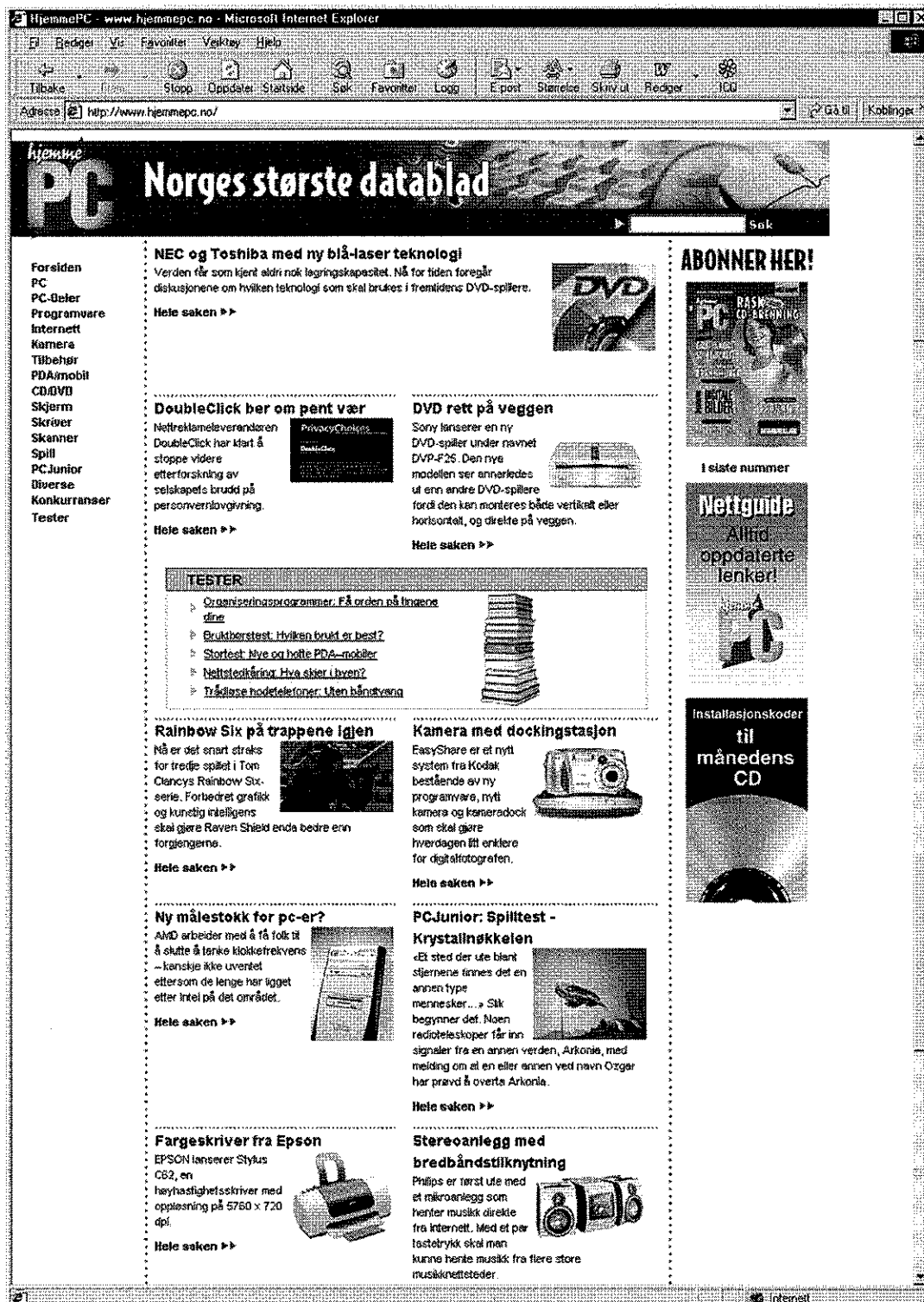


Figure 3. Front page of HjemmePC's web site.

Compared to Femme, HjemmePC appears to be less clear about its strategy of including readers, in particular the potential users of their web site. They have targeted a particular group of men as their primary group, assuming that they have identified the ones that need the kind of narrative information about computers provided in the printed version of

the magazine. There seems to be little interest in the web site, which is considered a necessary evil. The layout and the content are ok, but there seems to be no added value compared to the printed version. Nor is the user of the web site given any reason to become a frequent visitor. There are no interactive services or anything similar that might induce regular visits.

5.2 PCPro - A Computer magazine for the advanced (male) user

The editor of both HjemmePC and PcPro (HH) explains why they decided to introduce PCPro by the following argument:

“PcPro was thought as a place where the readers from HjemmePC could continue, when they had passed the level of beginners. But then, beginners hardly exist any more, so the magazines are getting more similar, we have elevated both. But it is very important not to change too much, a magazine is like a friend.”

So if one supposes that both the primary and the secondary reader of HjemmePC develops in the same speed and manner, one should assume that it is possible that the percent share of male and female readers is the same with HjemmePC and PCPro. But as mentioned earlier, it is 24% and 12%, respectively. One of the things the editors think differently about with regard to the two magazines, is secondary readers. No such is identified or talked about in relation to PCPro.

On the contrary, the editor of PcPro (KE) has a clear and explicitly gendered target group: “Our target group is men between 18-35, men with high competence, those interested in new equipment – and that doesn’t have much else to spend money on.” In this manner, men are defined as primary users for both magazines. But HjemmePC explicitly defined a unit of second users, and as shown, these were defined in relational terms as “wives, children and in-laws”.

The man who reads PCPro, “who doesn’t have much else to spend money on” is most likely single, and no breadwinner. As the responsible editor of both magazines (HH) was asked specifically to differentiate the target group of PCPro, to give examples of different segments of users, he got wary that he might say something about gender, and at the end he added:

“I am not concerned with demographic variables like people’s age, sex or social status, but rather with ‘a certain personality’”.

When Holmedal specifies this “certain personality”, he put it in concrete terms as “one who likes too keep up with the newest technological development, one that wants to know what is happening, and one who is an active user.”

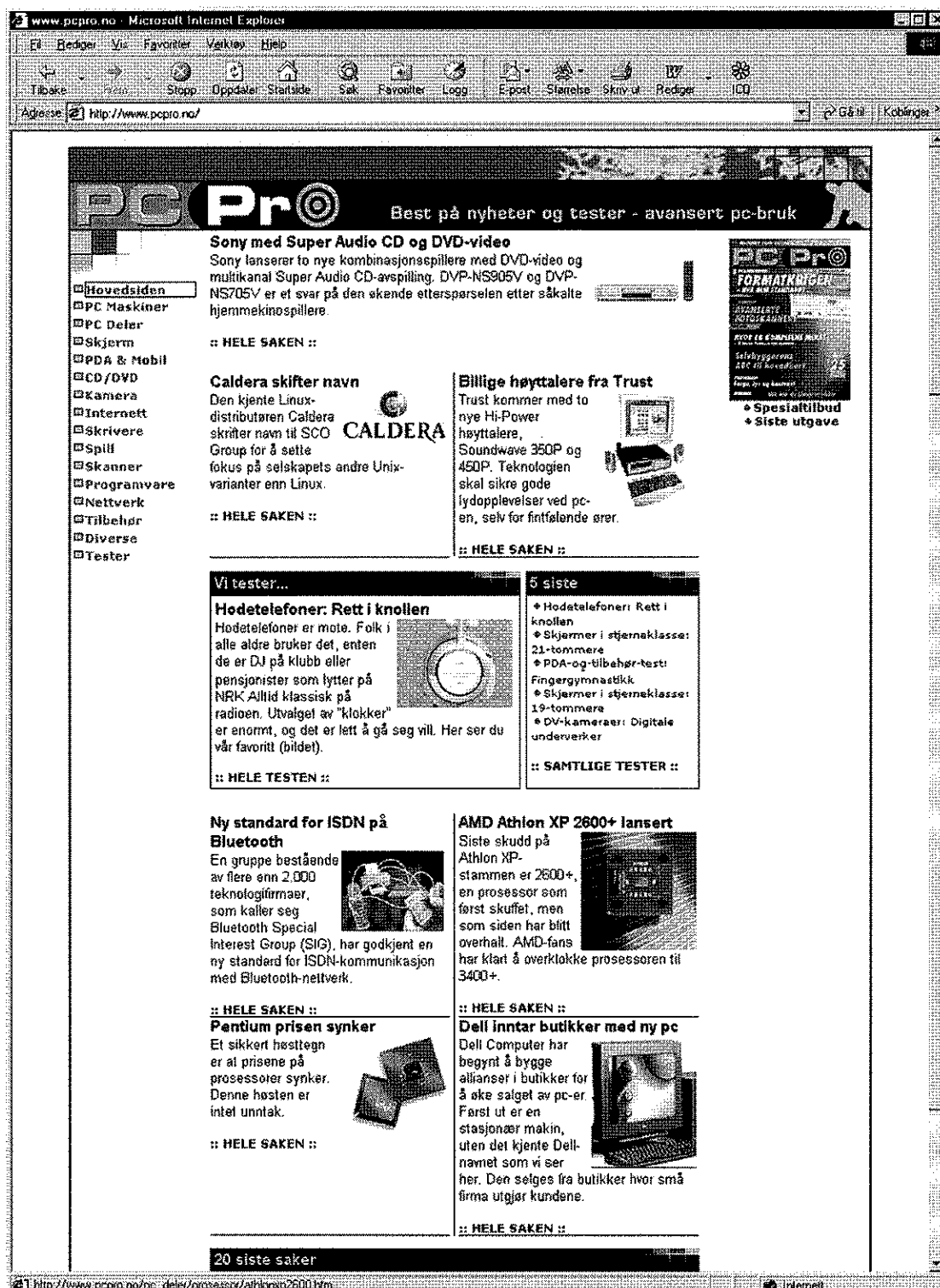


Figure 4. Front page of PCPro's web site.

To some extent, this is reflected in the front page found on the web. Where HjemmePC is producing educational stories about the technology, PCPro is concerned with test results and more specialised information, including what we may recognise as a news service. The web page invites its reader to go straight at the information needed, no

nonsense. Again, we see no interactive services or anything else but bits of information that may be consumed quickly. Readers are supposed to be instrumental, thus, there are few visible efforts to socialise them.

6. Constructing gender and ICT

Arguably, this case study is showing that web-based magazines are designed for user groups that already are configured in traditional printed media. Both HjemmePC and PCPro are obvious examples of this. Also Femme follows a similar pattern, although the editor wants to give it a twist. The main content is taken from the perceived standard of the genre of women's magazines. However, there is an important addition with the interactive services. In fact, they may be a defining feature of what it may mean to be a web magazine, with interesting consequences for the performance of inclusion.

We started this case study from an assumption that the three magazines had different objects of their inclusion strategies. Femme wanted to reach women, HjemmePC the ordinary computer user, regardless of gender, and PCPro aimed at the knowledgeable young person, probably male. This has been confirmed, with the slight exception that Femme does not reach for women in general, but rather the "young, urban and single". What are the implications of this for the way they construct the gender and ICT relationship?

Of course, only Femme is explicitly stating that they wanted to design a product for a gender-specific group – young, single urban females. PCPro and HjemmePC do instead present their product as designed either for ordinary users or for the particularly interested reader. Does that mean that their product is gender blind or gender neutral? HjemmePC has for example with their policy 'for all' twice as many female readers as PCPro. On the other hand, Femme has just found that as much as 30 % of their MUD's users are male. So the issue is by no means clear-cut.

Femme expects their female readers to be ordinarily competent users of the Internet, but no more. The fact that such a web-based magazine exists does not enrol more women as users of the net; they are already there. Femme also insists that women are interested in cars and mc, which signifies a little gender-bending – but only a little. In fact, Femme moves within a quite traditional discursive terrain. The editor follows the basic rules of content of women's magazines and thus the quite traditional construction of female tastes and activities. The ironic twist that sometimes is added, does not really change this. The selection of their target group also allows Femme more or less to sidestep the issue of gender and ICT. They conserve a rather traditional femininity, fashionably postmodernised with some irony,

while basic ICT skills are taken for granted. Femme offers no critique, neither of gender nor of ICT. They adapt to the world as it is.

HjemmePC and PCPro are more careful. A brief excerpt from one of the interviews shows this very clearly:

KH: But if we talk of different types of men, not just “men”, how would you describe the different types of men that read PCPro?

KE: “Well, you have some that are product focussed, and some who wants to know how things work. You can divide them into two groups; those who like to buy, and those who like to repair”.

To some extent, we may observe a political correct view of gender, mainly by avoiding any direct reference to gender whatsoever. Still, when gender is talked about, there is a clear tendency to static descriptions. “Men are like this and women like that”. In the end, this produces a gendered image of ICT. For example, the editor of PCPro (KE) argues in the following way: “All the time we think of how we can get women to read the magazine, but it is hard no matter what we do. The interest in technology is simply missing. We can state as a fact that on subjects like science and informatics there are nearly only men”. The responsible editor for both magazines (HH), puts it in a more careful way: “When it comes to the name, PCPro, you should think “professional, that is someone a bit interested in programming as well”.

HH is more explicit in his reference to gender when he talks about knowledge as related to credibility:

“Credibility is something we need to take with us out on the web, because there are a lot of non-serious people out there. It’s really about knowledge, and to be street-wise about computers – you need to have credibility. Credibility is a ‘boy-thing’; it’s the same as with music. I do not employ people that can’t tell that they like a certain type of music, or a certain type of movies. Because it tells something about a certain way to organise knowledge. You cannot remember that many bands and years of publication if you are not able to organise knowledge. It’s the same thing with fashion as well, I guess ...”

So, in the final instance, the computer magazines have inscribed an image of ICT as a masculine field in a rather basic manner. If we return to the content of Femme, it is probably similar. They do have a section on cars and mcs, but they do not have a section on computers or ICT. It is difficult not to conclude that ICT is not of interest to women, at least not to read about. In this way, Femme confirms indirectly the message taken from HjemmePC and PCPro.

So how do the magazines configure their readers’ reading? HH emphasised that one of the goals of PCPro was to entertain the reader. Arguably, he is using an extended concept of entertainment, given the kind of content we find there (see Figure 4). It seems like the PcPro reader is entertained by information about new technology, gadgets

and accessories. This is somewhat different for the reader of HjemmePC, who may to be entertained through education, possibly also by reading about entertainment.

The users of HjemmePC is occasionally "going to school", as announced at the magazine's front page: "Learn animation", Guide to your first DV-film, build your own PC, now with video-guide on the PC" (HjemmePC 2002/1), or "Introduction to DV-cameras", " Stepwise introduction: solve your own PC-problems", "how to order your holiday at Internet" (2002/2). In the first issue in 1996/4 the front page have the following headlines: "Childrensafte computers", "Excel-school", "Make your own homepage" and Windows 98-school begins now!"

The female readers of Femme is entertained as well, and probably better, if one considers the options on the front page (see Figure 2). However, while the readers of HjemmePC and PCPro are provided with knowledge they might use to get even better included in the information society, Femme's readers do not have to bother with this. The only thing Femme offers in this respect, is the interactive services and their ability to seduce women to become frequent users of the Internet. This is of course something, but perhaps not a great deal?

7. Summarising inclusion strategies

As pointed out by Roland Rabben (RR), who worked out the web design and the technical solutions for Femme, it makes a difference whether a web magazine is dependent on keeping up traffic or not (see p.3). All three magazines in this case are commercial, and as such interested in keeping up traffic more than just giving relevant information to a specific group. But while HjemmePC and PCPro get their main incomes from their printed magazines – Femme is primarily web based.

This clearly has implications for the inclusion strategies applied. Normally, the first step is to recruit users, the next step is to keep users. The computer magazines mainly recruit their users through their printed magazines. The web sites of the computer magazines are as a result more based on giving information, to work as teasers for the printed versions. They are not particularly focused on interactive services and "community building".

Here, Femme did something different from HjemmePC and PCPro. They emphasised the importance of 'community building', and offered MUDs that allowed their users 'to generate their own content'. This is very much in line with what the responsible editor of HjemmePC and PCPro suggests as particularly important or typical for women: "She join groups, communicates and makes friends, while he is interested to know about new equipment and the latest applications." There is certainly nothing exceptional about offering interactive services at a web page, but it is obvious that the producers of Femme,

HjemmePC and PCPro are inclined (when asked) to connect these services to specific female characteristics.

Femme is conscious about the interactive and communicative aspects of ICT, but at the same time it takes traditional media as its point of departure. The consequences in terms of which life spheres and topics they define as relevant to a female target group are clear and not very radical in terms of gender politics. And they sort of make the technological options and the gender characteristics come together. In colours, photos, visual cues – and content, everything that together constitutes the overall design: the script behind Femme is gendered. Of course, so are HjemmePC and PCPro as well.

It is a commonplace in discussions about gender and ICT to claim that women are oriented towards utility, while men want to have fun. Considering the magazines studied here, it is tempting to draw the opposite conclusion – reading Femme, girls just want to have fun. You really need to be an enthusiast to have fun while reading PCPro, but then again – that is their prime audience. In relation to ICT, there is little gender-bending going on, in any of the magazines.

Returning to the issue of inclusion, there are some slightly different lessons to learn. Clearly, Femme represents a strategy of inclusion of women also in relation to ICT with respect to an active use of the Internet. Through the interactive services, the magazine offers an effort to socialise women (and some men as well) to become frequent consumers of Internet services. Femme offers a virtual place to visit and to stay for a while, but demanding of its visitors that they have time to spend.

It is difficult to see that HjemmePC and PCPro offer any inclusion strategy for women. Their inclusion strategy for men is subtler, but it should definitely be noticed. The computer magazines do not present men with a place to visit or a way to be socialised as an Internet user. Rather, they invite men to acquire pieces of knowledge and information that may be useful in their relationship to ICT. This is also a socialisation strategy, but with a different emphasis. The male readers are socialised to be enthusiastic about new technology and persuaded to use it. It is not just about inclusion to the Internet, but to a much wider culture of ICT.

Thus, at the end, it is tempting to draw a quite pessimistic conclusion from this case study. What we observe are gendered inclusion strategies with very different potentials. Femme socialises its readers to become skilled users of Internet services, where the skills are very much related to communication and the ability to interpret utterances made in writing. HjemmePC and PCPro socialise its readers to become skilled users of a wide variety of ICT gadgets, albeit with a singular focus on technical features. In this way, it may look as if men get the better deal. However, we need to be a little careful or we might end up making a very traditional ranking of the importance of different

skills. So maybe we should contend by concluding that men and women get included in the information society in very different ways, at least if we are using these sorts of web-based magazines as the basis of our conclusions.