

How Average Are You?

BY TOM KLEMENS

The recent *MSC* reader survey showed interesting trends in the information gathering process that may reflect your reading habits, too.

LET ME BEGIN BY thanking all of the *MSC* readers who responded to the survey we sent out on August 26. Your responses provided validation for what we offer in the magazine, and some interesting insights. We appreciate your comments and suggestions and will incorporate many of your ideas in coming months.

Three significant firsts distinguished this reader survey. It was the first comprehensive reader survey that *MSC* has done since 2007. It also was the first large survey for which *MSC* has used email and an online, rather than printed, questionnaire. Even just a few years ago that may not have been appropriate. But a full decade into the 21st century it's clear that email has become a valid and effective mainstream communication medium. Finally, it's the first time *MSC* has polled its subscribers on their awareness and use of *MSC*'s online offerings. And therein lay perhaps the most interesting results.

First, the details. When asked about magazine reading preferences, 90.4% of respondents said they prefer to read a printed version. On the other hand, 6.7% prefer to read articles online. Where do you fit in?

Maybe you would be among the 2.9% who chose "other." Many said they like to read the articles in print but to store them in digital format (or retrieve them from a digital archive). Others said their preference depends on how the information is likely to be used, and how accessible and convenient one medium is over another at any given time. ("I read *MSC* on airplanes and at home," one reader wrote, after admonishing us to never eliminate the print version.)

We also asked if readers had accessed *MSC*'s digital edition. Although only about a third of the respondents have, many said they will try it now that it has been brought to their attention.

While accessing the digital edition of *MSC* is no replacement for holding a hard copy in your hands, it does have some clear advantages, as many of you pointed out.

- Each new issue of *MSC* becomes available online on the first weekday of the month. You can get an early look at what soon will be arriving in your mailbox, and perhaps find

an answer you've been seeking sooner rather than later.

- The digital edition (and PDF archives) provide a very convenient way to refer your colleagues to items of interest, or to share or archive the article file.

Speaking of *MSC*'s archives, more than 42% of survey respondents said they have downloaded items from the online archives. But there's a twist you should know about here, too. Until earlier this summer, those archives only went back to 1996, even though *MSC* debuted in 1961. Recently all the earlier issues were scanned and now can be accessed through the Archives section at www.modernsteel.com. Almost as good as their digital accessibility is the fact that they are now included when searching the site for a word or phrase.

For me, the most surprising results from the reader survey had to do with *MSC*'s industry news coverage. Although 80% of respondents said the news section of the magazine is either very useful or useful, only 15.6% said they were aware that a new "Steel In The News" item is posted each weekday on the *MSC* website.

We began posting daily in February 2010, and more recently modified the *MSC* website so visitors no longer have to scroll down to check the daily news entry. But as the survey results point out, as well as many of the comments that accompanied them, Steel In The News has remained a well-kept secret.

Several respondents asked, "Isn't the in-print news section just the same as what's online?" The short answer is no. Many of the news items that appear on the website also are printed in the magazine, but frequently in much different form. *MSC*'s daily web news posts are short and almost always include links to additional information, as well as photos and/or videos. The print versions, on the other hand, usually feature more detailed and comprehensive information within the articles themselves.

Two other things make Steel In The News a resource you should keep in mind. First, the website is a great place for late-breaking news. Some time-sensitive things arrive too late to be useful in the next available printed issue, but in plenty of time to be posted on the web.

Additionally, each Friday we post a new installment in the *MSC* series of "Steel Shots." These photos show steel in various aspects of our lives as captured by our contributing web editors as well as others. A gallery of Steel Shots going back to February 2010 is available at www.modernsteel.com/photos.

These are just a few of the survey results and online resources available through *MSC* and www.modernsteel.com. We hope you'll explore the *MSC* website and discover the depth of resources awaiting you there. In the meantime, thank you for your continued interest in *Modern Steel Construction*. **MSC**



Thomas L. Klemens, P.E., is senior editor of MSC and has been watching media and reading habits evolve since the days of black and white television.

Have an opinion you'd like to share in "Topping Out"? Send your feedback to Tom Klemens, senior editor, at klemens@modernsteel.com.