

**There Once Was a Profession Called Magazine Editing:
Exploring the Brave New World**

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Introduction

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The advent of digital platforms, which began in earnest around the turn of the millennium, has had a profound effect on the craft of magazine editing and the role of the magazine editor. The changes have been dramatic, disruptive in the extreme, and hard for both magazine editorial staffs and their supervising publication managements to come to terms with. The result, for more than the last decade, has been something of an existential crisis in the magazine editing profession. The demands of the new digital realities have called into question magazine editorial duties and staffing structures that once were regarded as *best practices* and *received wisdom*. After achieving a high state of refinement over the last half of the twentieth century, established editorial practices have found themselves challenged. It was as if a state of complacency, if not bewilderment, had set in across much of the magazine landscape. Turmoil has been the order of the day.

The heart of the matter is easy to identify: while many of the traditionally essential skills that define the magazine editorial craft—story conceptualization, shaping and improving story ideas, contributor handling, line and copy editing, re-reporting, fact checking, title/deck/caption writing, proofreading—remain germane, new technologies and platforms (e.g. social media) are clearly transforming the profession. A new cast of mind is being called for, in many cases demanding not only new skill sets but also the mastery of new relationships, new roles and, perhaps most importantly, a re-invention of what might be called the editorial identity of magazine staffers.

It is apparent that there is no magazine industry-wide blueprint, no agreed-upon solution, to deal with these challenges. Individual publications, as well as individual magazine firms, are all trying to plot what they believe to be the best courses of action. However, it remains very much a trial-and-error process, driven by a great deal of

experimentation. And as with any experiment, one can learn as much from failure as one can from success.

In the two essays that follow, the subject is addressed from two entirely different perspectives. One, based on a survey of a number of prominent magazine enterprises, describes how different companies have addressed issues involving staffing and skill sets. The second explores how some magazines are using the disruption not just to redefine the core competencies of the editorial worker but also to consider the implications of the changing essential nature of a magazine as a brand. And while acknowledging that they are no doubt dealing with a moving target, they each tell an important part of what might best be characterized as “the story so far.”

Elizabeth Hendrickson explores how *staff roles and structures* at major magazine publishing firms have been disrupted. The key focus of the essay is thumbnail descriptions, as well as the underlying rationales, of the varied solutions each enterprise has devised to take possible advantage of staff centralization and restructuring. The principal aspect that many companies are experimenting with is the transformation of the working (and reporting) relationships between members of the editorial and business staffs. Given the difficulty of coming to terms with the new work flows, collaborative imperatives and positional office-status issues—as well as the predictable human resistance to change, particularly when longstanding and somewhat cherished ways of doing things are called into question—the efforts to date show both promise and unintended consequences.

Drawing largely on the business-to-business magazine world for examples, Abe Peck takes on a substantive and essential issue: the examination a whole new set of premises underscoring the editorial mission. The essence of the approach is the evolving concept of a *content brand circle*. It is a complete redefinition of the goal of the magazine editorial craft, which can perhaps best be understood as a linked network of end products of value to a range of potential audiences that go far beyond simply the print or on-line magazine itself. The accompanying clarion call is “editor as entrepreneur,” and the approach has already yielded a measure of success.

Further, both essays attempt to not only explore the nature of this ongoing transformation of the editorial side of the magazine profession but also to suggest ways in which professors teaching in magazine programs must, in an effort to prepared our students for the profession, reflect this ongoing disruption in our magazine editing curricula.

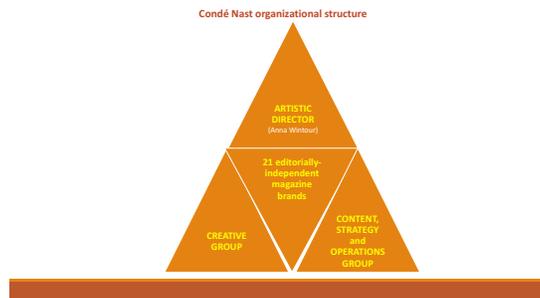
Visionaries, Voice and Reason: New Editorial Structures

Elizabeth Hendrickson

In the last year, there have been significant changes within the magazine industry, from a structural standpoint to an institutional standpoint. Some of the most established magazine brands and publishing organizations have experienced restructuring in order to enhance collaboration between brands that are similar and to manage content more efficiently. These brands have reorganized their magazine titles into distinct groups that share some form of editorial, creative and digital leadership in order to decrease production costs. To illustrate these industry changes, five case studies will be analyzed: Condé Nast, Hearst, Meredith Corporation, Rodale, and Time, Inc.¹ By understanding how select media companies organize their respective systems, we can more accurately refine our approach to teaching courses in magazine editing and production.

At Condé Nast, the editorial brands and their staffers have remained intact. However, the creative departments, research departments and copy editors are all grouped together. So while the magazine editorial units are left alone, the rest of the magazine staff is affected.

Fig. 1



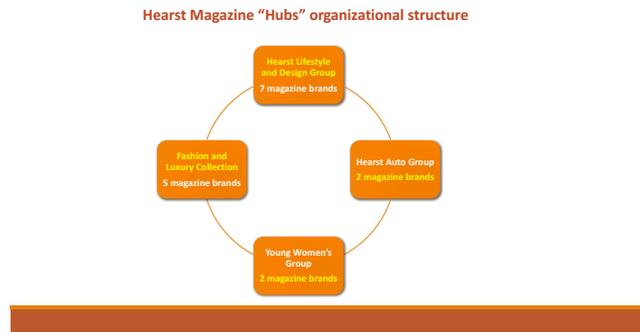
The twenty-one editorially independent magazine brands are in the middle of the organizational structure. Wintour oversees them all as artistic director. A creative group, headed by Raul Martinez, combines all art, design and photo editors, and a content, strategy and operations group, headed by Christiane Mack, combines all research and copy editors.

¹ Note: The research for this essay was completed before Meredith acquired Time, Inc. in late 2017. In March 21, 2018, Meredith announced plans to lay off 1,200 staffers from Time, Inc. titles during the next 10 months. The company also stated it is considering the sale of *Fortune*, *Money*, *Sports Illustrated*, and *Time* brands. In addition, Hearst Communications acquired Rodale magazines in October 2017. See Todd Spangler, "Meredith Laying Off 1,200, Will Explore Sale of Time, SI, Fortune and Money Brands," *Variety*, March 21, 2018. <https://variety.com/2018/biz/news/meredith-layoffs-1200-time-inc-magazine-sale-time-si-fortune-money-1202732892/> and Jeffrey A. Trachtenberg, "Hearst Agrees to Acquire Rodale Inc., Publisher of Men's Health and Runner's World," *The Wall Street Journal*, October 18, 2017. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/hearst-agrees-to-acquire-rodale-inc-publisher-of-mens-health-and-runners-world-1508361381>

This new organizational structure is working in terms of their audience. *Allure*, *Teen Vogue* and *W*. Magazine have all experienced notable audience growth.

Hearst Magazine brands have implemented an organizational structure with four hubs: Hearst Lifestyle and Design Group, Hearst Auto Group, Young Women's Group, Fashion and Luxury Collection.

Fig. 2



Each hub has one director who also serves as the editor-in-chief of one of the magazines within the hub. The staff has been pared down in order to prevent redundancy with daily tasks. Since the reorganization the past year, their audience has grown, notably at *Town & Country*, *Elle Decor* and *Marie Claire*.

Meredith Corporation has not altered their structure significantly. Jon Werther, the President of the Meredith National Media Group, now has oversight of the magazine brands. The titles have not experienced significant change in audience growth or audience depletion.

Rodale also has not altered their structure significantly. They now have one editorial director, Bill Strickland, who oversees all editorial teams. Below him are the editors-in-chief as well as the head of digital. Rodale titles have not experienced any notable growth or depletion either.

Time Inc. has implemented a structure of brand groups composed of a news group, entertainment and style group, sports group and lifestyle group, which is its largest group. Chief content officer Alan Murray oversees the company's four brand groups, and each group has its own editorial director who also serves as editor-in-chief at a title.

Fig. 3.



Across the board, the workflow reorganization and structural shifts of the magazine industry represent an enormous change in the routines of the research and copy editors, photo editors and design editors. These editors have an increased workload and must adapt to thinking across brands.

As educators, we must continue to emphasize the importance of strong editing skills because those skills endure. A discussion that examines the changing roles and responsibilities of today's magazine journalists should be integrated into the classroom. If we, as educators, are not aware of the latest industry shifts, we should use tools such as Magazine Media 360, because analyzing how these numbers reflect and relate to institutional changes gives educators a better understanding of the industry's evolving symbiosis. And we should encourage students to inform us of what they discover. It's our responsibility to inspire feelings of promise and opportunity.

Navigating the Content Brand Circle

Abe Peck

In addition to traditional line or even story editing, it is essential for today's editor to prioritize and manage content in an increasingly diverse array of formats. The media model has changed tremendously since most of today's professionals entered the field. As audiences evolve to be increasingly interactive, the need to understand the nature and manifestations of these evolutions is tantamount to moving forward as an industry. An important component to implementing, altering and exchanging formats revolves around the content brand circle. This idea is illustrated in a case study on distributing content, courtesy of Marnette Falley, the director of DVM360, a digital-first group of brands covering the veterinary space (see <http://dvm360.com>).

Finally, discourse on staffing in a multiplatform environment, along with alternatives to reductionist measures of outcomes, will serve to conclude important consideration.

Traditionally, magazine professionals have pointed to a “three-legged stool” concept, with the three legs of the stool representing editorial, advertising and circulation. Recently I realized this concept as an exercise with a group of top students in China. Arranged three to a circle, the students could quickly appreciate the importance of each leg, a component of the publishing triad. Without editorial, the publication becomes an advertorial property. By removing advertising, the central revenue stream is lost. Without circulation, a publication is demoted to a diary. The survival of this model of explanation thus far has been predicated on a division editing and business operations. Today this is no longer as true.

New concepts have evolved to replace each leg of the stool. In the model as one sees it today, content stands in for editorial. Advertising has been subsumed by marketing, and thanks to digital media, circulation is best articulated as reach or audience development. These shifts only represent a small portion of changes to publishing overall. What was once a circle of three has easily grown into an eight-student circle. What was once a simple stool is now an octopus with the tentacles and intelligence to open jars, escape enclosure and disappear down drains. In avoidance of predators, they wriggle, contort, camouflage and disguise themselves in a cloud of ink.

In this way, publishing, admittedly another antiquated term, has come to resemble an unrestrained and unpredictable mollusk. Audiences may not care about new platforms. The revenues gained in the struggle to adapt and evolve too often cannot be justified by the cost of creation and distribution. Often the acts of setting up new platforms and producing on them prove to be beyond the capacity of staff. Possibly worst of all, even when these efforts are extolled and ends are met, a bright new medium can turn out to simply be a fashionable trend, a blip on the radar.

The monopoly on content held by formal, professional publishers and writers has long ago come to an end. The power to create, curate and distribute content is increasingly shared with blogs, social media and other iterations of “every person is a publisher” media.

The presence of these entities has become ubiquitous, and consequently, the struggle is greater than ever for high-quality journalism to pierce through the competition to reach both consumers and business interests alike.

One way to approach this struggle is by incorporating work into an effective brand circle. For a good example, one can look to Midwest Current, a cross-platform brand circle created in 2007 by graduate students at the Medill School at Northwestern University to serve those interested in travel in that region. The brand incorporated a conventional print magazine and website in addition to special issues, a trip-planner tool and a mobile weather alert. They looked to expand a social media presence, create brand-centered events and even create an alliance with a travel provider.

Learning to work with new, interaction-oriented audiences means transgressing on old rules. Toni Nevitt, an audience consultant and veteran magazine executive, proclaimed at an industry conference, “Audience is the product; content is the bait on the hooks.” Meanwhile, Don Pazour, a CEO who creates magazines within Access Intelligence, said, “Audience is kind, content is queen.”¹

Today at Access Intelligence, more than fifty percent of revenue comes from events. While comments like these may have elicited accusations of heresy only a few years ago, these statements represent the reality of today’s industry. Creating a consistent, trustworthy brand is critical to engage with a modern audience.

One can think approach brand by breaking it down into three main concepts: audience, format and time. One must identify who the audience is, what kind of format is best to reach them and then acknowledge the time base. A common pitfall occurs when companies try to do this in reverse. As Laura Ramos of Xerox said in *B2B magazine*, “... sites focus inwardly on telling the company’s story and promoting its products and capabilities. By and large, the site ignores the customer’s motivations for visiting the site.” [I don’t have a date for this and the magazine has folded] Companies must fine-tune their practices to be sensitive to the desires and needs of the client. Once that is understood, they need to develop an interactive product to both serve and lead the audience.

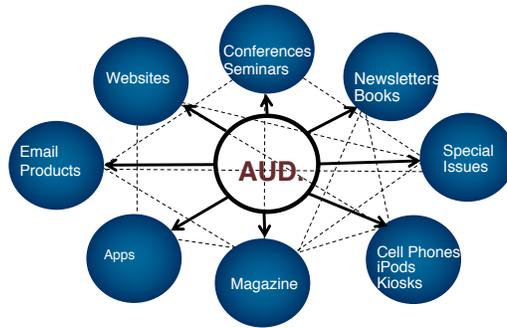
The first step is to understand the DITLOC or “Day in the Life of a Customer.” Restauranteurs who spend all day serving up food will want to read their content before the day gets started. White-collar workers may access information during lunchtime or their commute. Even the best content can underperform if it is not served up at the right time.

Developing a content strategy is the next step. Good content should allow its users to do their jobs better and allow them to share their problems and successes. Developing a system of feedback lets content creators know what they can do better to serve and inspires ideas for where to move next. Additionally, this process allows one to generate data to make strategic and informed adaptations.

With all of these new mediums, platforms and content strategies, there is more need to prioritize and delegate responsibilities and commitments.

Fig. 4. (Courtesy Don Brown, International Magazine Publishing]

Positioning / Prioritizing Platforms

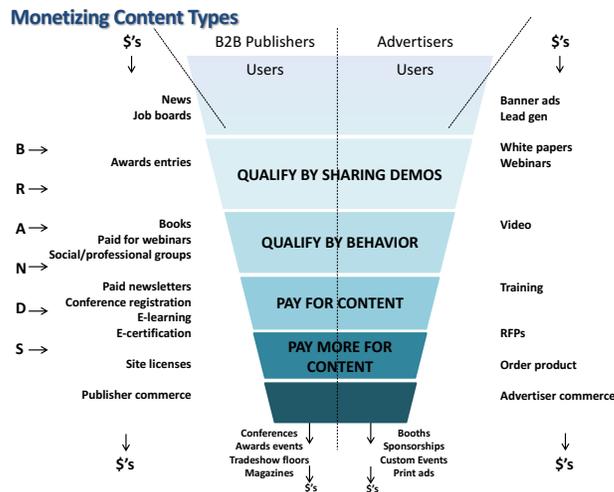


This starts at the editor’s desk. We have to teach the next generation of editors to identify jobs they should outsource and delegate so they can focus on strategic planning. With many new kinds of content, being able to identify them and separate them not only benefits those in publishing, but also those who consume it. By being able to pinpoint the formats of content the audience is most receptive to, then new content will be tailored to better fit their needs.

Prioritizing also means prioritizing platforms. Although there are more shiny new ways to release content than ever before, it is important to remain strategic and pick the strongest formats that appeal most to the intended audience. Who is in the middle of the brand circle, and what tools serve them best?

As an editorial strategist, the goal is to drive the audience towards more lucrative content.

Fig.5. (Courtesy Don Pazour, CEO, Access Intelligence)



At Access Intelligence 60 percent of revenue is in events. The central question is, if events are lucrative, how can other platforms guide customers to events? Figure out what kind of events the clients are receptive to.

To illustrate this point, this company has two magazines, *Defense Times* and *Operating Room* managers. For the aviation publication *Defense Times*, clients like these (predominantly male) would be most receptive to a bar-like atmosphere. The best tactic would be to stay out of their way, maybe selecting a few individuals to engage. Meanwhile, for *Operating Room Managers*, there is an annual summer conference of all women. At one of these conferences, Don Pazour recounted to the author, Access Intelligence representatives noticed avid consumption of little candies, to the point where they actually sent someone to purchase baggies for the candy. These women are hardly ever offered anything, so they wanted baggies to put the melting candy into. Both these situations are under the umbrella of events, but one can see how differently clients respond to any particular “event.” These differences, no matter how small, can be used to maximize the effectiveness of an event.

Brand circles also change, constantly. Airbnb, known best for its digital services, started a print publication to showcase cities their services were located in. The Chinese messaging app WeChat has extended to include myriad features like City Services, a Heat Map and News Feed. These are examples of expanding brand circles. But brand circles can also contract. *Computerworld*, once a big fat magazine full of computer products, shuttered its U.S. print version in 2014 and moved exclusively to digital. With a consumer base of techies, it might make sense to move to the cloud. Yet one should beware of adopting the latest platform on a whim. While it might be tempting to grab onto the newest shiny object, one must seriously consider if the platform fits within the needs of the client. Does it belong with the platforms already there? Does it contribute something of substance?

Moving on, thinking about DITLOC (day in the life of the customer), one should next figure out which platform leads. One must pick a central platform for the other platforms to network around. Should it be an app or a webpage? Using DITLOC and revenue possibilities to figure out where the daily entry point is for consumers, helps one understand what the primary platform should be. For farmers, their day starts super early at four, five, or six in the morning. They really want to know two things: the weather and prices. What is the best way to deliver that? They usually find that information out through television, but is that the best way to do it? Is there a better way to feed that information to them? That is what a content strategist must think about.

Another example is Source Media; they mostly produce banking magazines. Thinking about which platform first, Source Media does web first, and it makes sense looking at their clientele. (CEO Doug Manoni, to the author, 2016) Finance and banking are so incredibly fast-pace these days that the print magazine can become an archive of pre-published material in some cases.

Of course, understanding what the DITLOC of your clients also determines what the day in the life of your company should look like. The resulting workflow will also help one make decisions. Should there be a universal copy desk? Should everything be put in digital? Is there a platform that needs to go away? Especially with regard to digital media that can be interacted with and consumed at any hour of the day, one should see if there are usages.

One example of good cross-publishing involved what Advanstar Publishing (now UBM) did around its big Central Veterinary conference. A conference presentation discussed whether to treat animals with severe conditions, which might be expensive, ineffective and even traumatizing to the animal, or whether they should be euthanized. A veterinarian discussed how to guide clients through the emotional and complicated decision. The content was then repurposed into cover story in the company's journal-like *Veterinary Medicine* magazine with pointers to exclusive multimedia elements online. Advisory board experts working for the magazine offered their positions on the issue, which took the story in a new direction—whether cats with behavior issues should be allowed to live outside rather than be euthanized. Readers then offered their own stories, including comments on the content team's blogs. These kinds of interactions build communities and let consumers feel like they belong in the brand. Finally, links appeared on Twitter and Facebook, inviting even more users to get involved on the topic and with the brand. In this case, the story ended at Twitter, but sometimes Twitter trends on Twitter might dictate content to be produced elsewhere.²

Finally, after all of the content and platforms have been strategized and planned, one needs to think about how to staff their enterprise. Considering which activities actually have value over old status quo practices that are familiar but do not contribute as much is crucial. Eliminate commodity activities. What things can be consolidated together? Which can be automated? Staffing is thinking about how to devote time in meaningful ways to the parts of a company that give back the most to itself and to audiences.

The editor is both a content engineer and a content poet. He or she guides the vision, and should be engaged in deciding the persona of the brand. A persona might be cool, family-oriented, practical, sage, or some other emotion that sparks a favorable feeling across the audience. An editor also must figure out a way to define operational targets for success. Doing that means fostering a culture at a company to achieve those targets. Older staff have a repository of wisdom to use, and newbies have a comfort and proficiency in newer platforms that might be alienating to other staff. Casting good staff in roles where they can shine and emulate the overall persona is essential to cultivating a steady brand.

Finally, the concluding note is on metrics. Metrics can be extremely helpful, but the power they wield can also cause trouble if misused. Metrics are central to determining who gets paid and how much, and they are what allow one to serve and lead their audience. What are meaningful metrics? One can do it by how read or found a piece of content is. At Penton Media (now Informa), they post them in the lunchroom, which can be an attaboy or a Wall of Shame. Metrics can be measured through purchases made and business interactions, or they can be measured through social interactions like friends, followers, retweets, mentions

and shares. Metrics can be measured through revenue, obviously. Average revenue per user is a very useful metric.

A note of caution on metrics. Metrics are not the end authority, and it is important to respect the power of editorial. Simply measuring things through “clicks” means the most superficial topics may reign supreme. Respect editorial, and reward on the basis of enterprise, thought leadership and degree of difficulty. Metrics should not dominate the needs to try new things; branch out and make choices for the brand that ultimately help customers and make them more able people.

¹ “Engaged Communities: The B2B Media Business of the Future,” Medill School, Northwestern University, January 11, 2013.

² This example courtesy of Marnette Falley, dvm360 content director.