

AEJMC Student Magazine Contest 2009

Judges' Comments

Articles—Places

Judge: Scott Stuckey, managing editor of *National Geographic Traveler*

First Place

“A Gateway to Our Past and a Lesson for Our Future,” for *Hadassah Magazine*

Why it won: This piece had its shortcomings. It needed more quotes and more fresh observations. What it did have—which most of its competition did not—was a point, a purpose for being written. The writer toured Auschwitz, the Nazi concentration camp turned historic site near Krakow, Poland, “... to experience firsthand the site of the largest, most organized genocide of all time... to step into the events of our past and learn about our history in a way that a school textbook could never teach us.” The piece concluded with a payoff, a resolution to the quest set up early in the article: “Traveling to Auschwitz really motivated me to get more involved with human rights causes, especially in the area of anti-genocide movements.” I.e., the writer explored a place with a goal in mind and was transformed by the experience. The descriptions of the death camps were engaging with some details I hadn’t heard of and some sense of movement through the place so that I, the reader, felt like I was experiencing the tour as well. There’s a temptation when writing a piece like this to default to exposition, piling on the factoids like a Wikipedia entry. But what holds readers is narrative. Give us some of the factoids from the mouths of tour guides, off of plaques on the wall, even out of a pamphlet in front of a gas chamber. That imparts a sense of experience along with the information. The writer did that.

Second Place

“Hostel Horror Stories,” for *Student Traveler Magazine*

Why it won: The title pretty much says it. How can you pass this by? Readers love juicy stories, particularly of others’ misfortunes, particularly those packaged as object lessons so that you, the voyeur, can avoid the same fate. The piece had screaming women, Christian fanatics, unbearable stench—and plenty of direct quotes, which lent it authority. It could’ve used more examples. Instead, the piece shifted into service mode, offering useful advice on booking and staying in hostels around the world. That should’ve been set off in a sidebar, leaving more room in the main piece for the fun, gross-out material. Still, a solid package.

Third Place

“Trading franks for Doug’s: Reinventing a Chicago Classic,” for *The New Yorker*

Why it won: This piece had something you almost never see in this competition: dialog. Not just the stray quotation, but actual conversation, like you would read in a

novel. Dialog, in this case taking place between folks waiting in line for a hot dog restaurant to open, more than any other device, creates a cinematic scene. Coupled with narrative description, dialog puts you there, listening to people, experiencing the place as the writer did. This alone makes the piece a prize winner.

Honorable Mention

“Letter from George West: My First Time,” for *Texas Monthly*

Why it won: Student gets caught speeding—at over 100 mph—through small town in Texas, is arrested and thrown in jail, where he spends an uncomfortable 26 hours before he’s released on bail. Nothing really horrible happens, but man, it really sucked. The writer takes us with him into jail, describing the experience in painstaking detail. We certainly get a sense of place, which makes the piece worth an honorable mention.

General strengths of entries: I’m happy to see that the entries this year seem genuinely to have been targeted to specific publications, rather than being written generically. Furthermore, in some cases the entrants seemed to have actually read the target magazines—so they could adjust their approach accordingly. Maybe some even read the writers’ guidelines. Anything is possible.

General weaknesses of entries: I see the same mistakes in student writing that we often see in professional writing. Number one mistake: lack of a point or theme. “I went someplace and wrote up my trip” is not a theme. Yes, go. Take notes, encounter people, have experiences, but then marshal that material into the service of a theme. The third place winner, the article about the Chicago restaurant that so effectively used dialog, lacked a theme, a problem reflected in the awkward title of the piece. The author didn’t quite know what the article was trying to do; nor did the reader. It lacked a setup paragraph or sentence, that is, the “nut,” that typically follows an opening anecdote. Strategically placed and carefully couched, the nut graph enables the reader to make sense of all that follows. Without it, we’re left with the open vein effect—a gush of words spilling at our feet that we’re not quite sure what to do with. That was true here. We had a portrait of a hot dog restaurant, but no sense of why we should care. This is not just cosmetic. Having a nut graph helps the writer write, because he has a premise to build support for.

Another common shortcoming is a lack of reporting. The article on the jailhouse stint that won the honorable mention probably won’t make it into *Texas Monthly*, because the reporting didn’t extend beyond the writer’s narrow experience. Put the experience into some context. I dunno. Do small towns in Texas, as a rule, depend on speed traps to fund their municipal budgets? Do out-of-towners get heftier fines than locals? That sort of thing could’ve turned this into a strong piece of journalism rather than just a reminiscence.

Finally, a word about quotations. Articles must have them, but they must be used judiciously, to add color, pacing, authority, in the context of a well-structured article that also contains narrative and exposition. Transcribing a set of recordings and stitching the quotes together with transitions doesn't make for a strong article.

Articles—People

Judge: Dick Stolley, senior editorial adviser at Time Inc. and founding editor of *People*

First Place

“Deconstructing Barry,” for *Ryerson Review of Journalism*

Why it won: This is a highly professional, beautifully reported and written profile of the artist who drew the *New Yorker* cover of Barack and Michelle Obama fist-bumping that caused such an uproar in this country and around the world, for that matter. The author skillfully describes Barry Blitt's upbringing, his artistic education and career, his shock at the furor his cover ignited and how he responded to it, and how this incident fits so neatly into Blitt's fascinating combination of naiveté and arrogance. The author inserts herself into the story with a judicious use of the personal pronoun, but it is never intrusive, which is so often the case with first person treatment, and it actually helps bring out his subject's personality. A real plus is that the article is accompanied by stunning examples of Blitt's drawings.

Second Place

“The Wellington Wild Child,” for the *Palm Beach Post*

Why it won: This is long, harrowing account of the misadventures of the teenage son of a wealthy and savagely dysfunctional Florida family. The father gambles; the mother drinks. Their son, Nick, is a gay drug-abuser, with a year and a half in rehab already and quite real prospects of needing another session there. The reporting is intimate, as if the author was inside that palatial mansion alongside Nick. The writing is vivid, to the point of sometimes sounding like fiction. The result is that the reader can not help but ache for poor, sad Nick who speaks almost longingly of driving his Lexus “past the polo fields and stables” into the countryside—and never coming back. This is the haunting story of a “wild child” indeed.

Third Place

“In the Sex Trade,” *Ms. Magazine*

Why it won: This is the depressing biography of an ageing Jamaican prostitute, whose ability to live by her wits and her body is coming to an end, and her vision of her future is murky at best. Trained as a nurse, Karen abandoned medicine for the more lucrative “sex trade,” and for years made a good living working the beaches and brazenly propositioning accessible men. But the life had its penalties. She bore three children whom her mother took care of. And she dreamed someday of marrying one of her tourist johns. That finally happened, but her Norwegian husband “buckled under”

the stigma of an ex-whore wife, and he fled to Scandinavia. So far Karen has resisted his appeals that she join him. “I’m getting old, I’m getting tired,” she says. “I just want to stay home.” The story is told in simple, straightforward fashion; the author neither condones nor approves of the choices Karen has made. And yet one human being’s sympathy for another shines through these shattering words.

Honorable Mention

“Living in the Past,” for *Smithsonian* magazine

Why it won: A lively account of a former business executive who dresses in 18th century garb and delights Boston tourists with his demonstration of ancient printing techniques.

Honorable Mention

“The Secret Life of Anjali Patel,” for *Chicago* magazine

Why it won: A fascinating and pseudonymous description of how a South Asian high school student constructs an edifice of lies about her life outside her home to prevent her disapproving parents from knowing about her love affair with a white, Christian classmate.

General comments: This year’s entries were encouraging, with more good stories and fewer weak ones. The good stories were well reported, simply written, in a few cases up to date in their references to the present economic turmoil, courageous in their willingness to tackle such difficult subjects as atrocities in the Congo and Zimbabwe, tempered in their affection for their subjects (almost no wet kisses), accompanied in a few cases by excellent sidebars, and perhaps as a result of the Obama phenomenon, generous in the number of portrayals of coverage-worthy African-Americans. The weak stories tended to be too long, absent crucial facts (lazy reporting), colorless (the subjects turned out to be boring), based on subjects’ opinions rather than their lives, missing any drama (bad choice of subjects) and bereft of the kind of reporting and writing that requires us to become interested in the people that the author presumably (but puzzlingly) is presenting to us.

Articles—Investigation and Analysis

Judge: Ken Collier, editor of Reader’s Digest’s *Family Handyman*

First Place

“One Powerful Union Tactic,” for *Ryerson Review of Journalism*

Why it won: Excellent topic choice, with both political significance and an exciting story. Plenty of detail and excellent quotes, without drowning reader in minutiae. Strong narrative, with clear beginning, middle and end, and pacing that kept this reader in suspense. Using significant numbers was an effective device for breaking the article

into sections. Writing was economical, varied and friendly. I found myself gripped by the story.

The article would have been improved by additional analysis of how this local struggle fits in larger perspective. Has this approach been used elsewhere? Even if Quebecor was unwilling to comment, what was the reaction of other unions, management? Etc.

Second Place

“Maria-in-the-Woods,” *Midwest Living*

Why it won: The interweaving of place history and family history is effectively done and makes both more compelling. Pertinent, interesting details of regional history are combined with revealing anecdotes of current local life. Excellent use of scene changing to underline metaphors. [Love the coffin stuff!] Colorful writing all the way.

The article would have been improved by editing out unnecessary personal and family details to keep focus squarely on the interplay of local and family history.

Third Place

“Hot Topic,” for *Ryerson Review of Journalism*

Why it won: Solid reporting, but with a sly twist. Plenty of telling detail, with pithy summing-ups. E.g. “some people...wanted to shoot the messengers.” “Open mikes attract bigots. Everywhere.” “...suddenly looking at little Herouxville.” “...covered the public forums the way small-town dailies report five-alarm fires.” Lively writing.

Article would have been improved with a tighter focus. Is it about “reasonable accommodation” and a flare-up of xenophobia, or is it about the media fanning emotional political issues with misleading or exaggerated stories? Would have been better to choose one of these and run with it rather than combining them.

Honorable Mention

“Need Cash? Of Course you do!” for *Vox Magazine*

Why it won: Solid reporting, with good quotes. Background research supports the reporting, and both are put into context of an emerging trend and political issue. A little how-to advice finishes the article off. A well-crafted package. I love the surprising fact that these businesses outnumber MacDs and Starbucks.

Would have been improved by analysis of political side. Why are these businesses banned in all adjacent states? If “access to credit” is so important to make prohibition unwarranted, what do consumers do in other states? And of course the larger issues of government protection vs. free, even if dumb, choice.

General strengths of entries:

- Research and reporting
- Clear, grammatical writing
- Organization
- Passion for subject comes through

General weaknesses of entries:

- Irrelevant or simply excessive detail
- Lack of larger context: what does this mean?
- Not sticking to single topic or story

Articles—Service and Information

Judge: John Rockhold, managing editor of *Mother Earth News*

First Place

“Don’t Sweat It,” for *Women’s Health*

Why it won: A clear, thoughtful, inspiring and engaging explanation of a sensitive topic that’s under-reported, especially for the target magazine’s audience. The firsthand perspective from the writer complements the article, rather than overshadows it—as can be the case for many articles written by an author who has experience with the subject matter.

The writer does an excellent job of engaging with the reader and casually but effectively explaining a sensitive and technical medical issue. One example of how the writer does this is the use of questions for the subheads, which creates a comfortable, conversation-like experience with the reader.

Good, balanced discussion of the options for treatments, including alternative therapies. There could have been slightly more on the potential side effects of a couple of the treatments, but overall this discussion was clear and informative without being so lengthy as to detract from the article.

I’m sure this article would inspire readers, whether they themselves might have this condition, they have a friend who might have this condition, or they have a different condition they have discretely dealt with rather than have treated.

Second Place

“A Gift from the Heart: Leaving an Ethical Road Map,” for *Reform Judaism Magazine, Jewish News of Greater Phoenix* or *AARP The Magazine*

Why it won: An engaging article on a unique aspect of a topic that relates to everyone. The writer gives the reader insight into this Jewish tradition, but also shows the reader how ethical wills can be helpful, even empowering, to everyone. The writer effectively weaves together a significant number of quotes and anecdotal stories that give the reader unique and personal insight into the relevance of the subject matter.

Third Place

“Your Morning After Survival Guide,” for *Drake Magazine*

Why it won: Engaging formatting, highly useful content—perhaps this article should be distributed student orientation packages ... But seriously, this article is chock-full of

practical information for the magazine's target audience. Making it all the more attractive for busy college students (especially those dealing with the issues discussed in the article), the text is chunked into an eye-friendly, easy-to-scan format. The writing is fun and lively. The intros for each section engage and relate to the reader without wasting time in getting to the solutions.

Honorable Mention

“Exhale Stress, Inhale Success,” for *Jayplay*

Why it won: This is an educational, engaging take on a unique solution for a common problem for the magazine's target audience. Through local, real-world examples, the writer presents meditation as a useful solution to an audience that would've unlikely thought of it otherwise. The resources and references complement the succinct introduction to the topic, so the article is a win-win for readers of all types: those who want an intro to the topic, and those who want to learn much more.

Honorable Mention

“Credit Counts,” for *Vox*

Why it won: Excellent job of relating the college student perspective on an important issue for that audience. Loaded with real-world perspective that helps any reader, whether they've had credit trouble or not, understand the importance of the issue. Underscores both the short-term and long-term importance of this topic to the magazine's target audience.

Great “by the numbers” sidebar at the end. This type of sidebar is all the more effective and important to accompany long articles such as this.

General strengths of entries:

The cream of the crop definitely rose to the top for these entries: The best of the best clearly stood out from the rest of the entries. There were a handful more good articles, making the final choices a challenge. But there also were a significant number of entries that were far behind that pack.

I probably used the word “engaging” 10 times in describing the winners. But there's a good reason for that: The best articles were effective, through both the writing and the design in most cases, at capturing and maintaining the reader's attention.

Related to that, the best entries had a variety of ways to relate the content/message of the articles to the target audience. And they did so in a fun, informative and compelling ways—without slipping too far into dumbed-down language.

The best of the best had quotes and insight from experts and people with firsthand experience in the subject matter.

General weaknesses of entries:

Too many articles with long-winded, narrative introductions. Too many writers think this is an engaging approach, but in today's information stream, it's not. Magazines do

not have a captive audience. The content that will actually be read is the content that conveys reader benefit front and center.

Too often too many articles cross the fine line between an engaging voice and email-like slang. It's important for articles to have style and voice that relates to the audience, but it's also important to maintain the appropriate tone for the context.

Articles—Features

Judge: Mike Sager, writer for *Esquire* and author of *Scary Monsters and Super Freaks* and *Revenge of the Donut Boys*.

First Place

“No Refuge,” for *New Internationalist*

Why it won: Well written and reported, vivid, eye-opening—a swim in the deep waters of the human condition.

Second Place

“The Long Goodbye,” for *Ryerson Review of Journalism*

Why it won: By far the entry from the best writer in the bunch...only a bit overwritten. Throttle back a little. Don't try too hard. A writer with a bright future.

Third Place

“Pissed Off,” for *Ryerson Review of Journalism*

Why it won: Nicely written; the writer did an excellent job of finding bright and colorful characters in a story that could have easily been boring in someone else's hands. This piece suffers just a bit from being less “heavy” in comparison to others in the contest; it also suffers a bit from having the feel of a term paper, though the subject is well covered.

Honorable Mention

“Linked,” for *Orange and Blue Magazine*

Why it won: Great topic, deep material, good idea for a story. The writing is on the edge between very good and very bad... there is some of each. I take that as a good sign. Very good can't be reached by everyone; you must learn to be your own best editor. This writer needs to 1) read out loud to his/herself as he/she writes, 2) read more great fiction and non fiction, 3) write, write, write... writing is like playing an instrument. You get better and more fluid the more you do it.... a lifelong pursuit.

General strengths of entries: All in all, a great field of entries. Whomever has been arguing lately that long-form journalism is dead need only look to our colleges and universities, and to this contest in particular. Great work by all involved, from teachers to editors to our young writers themselves.

Articles—First Person

Judge: Alison Gwinn, executive editor, *O the Oprah Magazine*

First Place

“Like Mother, Like Daughter, ” *Harper’s*

Why it won: The writer does a beautiful job of weaving her own personal story—and the story of her mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother—into a compelling piece about teenage pregnancy and how the mores surrounding it have changed over the last 60 years. Her family is a case study in the phenomenon: Her great-grandmother had her first child out of wedlock around 1930. Her grandmother got pregnant in 1939, at age 17, and was kicked out of her Nebraska high school. Her mother got pregnant as a 16-year-old high school cheerleader—and the baby she had was the author herself. She became the first of four generations in her family to make it to her 20th birthday without having had a child. That makes her unusual; citing statistics from various studies, the writer points out that about 75 percent of pregnant teens had mothers who also got pregnant as teenagers. She goes on to paint a vivid portrait of the different challenges that faced each generation in her own family, without either seeming judgmental or romanticizing the situation. She particularly focuses on her mother, with whom she feels real similarities, despite their different circumstances. It is difficult to take an intimate personal story and make it feel universal and relevant to a range of readers. This writer succeeds.

Second Place

"Once We Were Boat People," *Atlantic*

Why it won: The writer uses a recent Thanksgiving dinner with her extended Vietnamese family as a jumping-off point to explore the family’s arduous but fascinating history. Realizing that she has never really known the stories behind the people sitting around her at the Thanksgiving table—who seem to dwell only in the present and never look back—the writer starts asking questions. The answers she receives lead her on a journey of discovery about her family’s amazing 1978 voyage as refugees aboard a Taiwanese freighter. The writer’s grandfather, grandmother, and their six children had no idea that they would spend 10 months as “boat people,” that their final destination would be a small town in the U.S., or that they would be featured in an article in *Newsweek* magazine. It was “a lifetime ago,” says the writer, who nonetheless beautifully reconstructs the family’s saga—including their first Thanksgiving dinner in Madison, Wisconsin, where they eat a strange meat called turkey and a sweet orange thing called pumpkin pie and glance around at the odd-looking blue-eyed, yellow-haired Americans. Rich with detail, and lovingly told, this is a story whose humanity resonates in every sentence.

Third Place

“Senegalese Sisterhood,” for *O The Oprah Magazine*

Why it won: In this intriguing, surprising piece, the writer takes readers on a journey into a bustling outdoor marketplace in Dakar, Senegal, in search of a binbin, a string of bright beads that local women wear slung around their hips underneath their clothes as a symbol of femininity and sexuality. After a six-week visit to the Muslim country, she wants to take binbins to her girlfriends back home in the U.S. as souvenirs. Using a combination of pantomime and rough Wolof phrases, the writer embarks on her quest, which turns into an up-close look at the local street life as well as a fascinating coming-of-age saga in which she is introduced to the mysterious, sensual ways of a different culture and ultimately accepted into the fold. A charming, insightful, sophisticated piece.

General strengths of the entries:

The best entries felt both deeply personal and also universal in their truths, whether the writer was talking about fitting in, or discovering oneself, or facing some kind of personal hardship.

General weaknesses of the entries:

Too many of the writers talked about something that had happened to them that felt overly narrow and unimportant—they weren't able to add much insight or broaden their experiences in a way that made me care. If the writing wasn't strong enough, or the narrative compelling enough, it was hard to feel moved by those pieces.

Specialized Business Press Article

Judge: Sally Roberts, senior editor at *Crain's Business Insurance*

First Place

“Maquiladoras' Uphill Battle,” for *Latin Trade* magazine

Why it won: I was beginning to lose hope of a really engaging, well-written article in this year's competition until I read “Maquiladoras' Uphill Battle.” It's a story about the challenges facing Mexico's border manufacturing jobs called “maquiladoras.” It does a well-balanced job of mixing background information (lots of facts and figures) about the border jobs with first-hand accounts of actual workers there and other experts. My only issue with it is that it's long. It's engaging enough to keep the reader interested, but I think breaking it up into a few sidebars would make a bigger impact. Overall, though, it's a well-written informative piece.

Second Place

“Where David Waits,” for *International Trade Forum*

Why it won: “Where David Waits” is a first-hand-account of an unemployed man from Zimbabwe who is doing his best to support his family by traveling for days to sell

his wares in the streets of South Africa. David's story is engaging and rememberable and a good example of the hardships many residents of Zimbabwe are facing today. The writer does a good job of incorporating statistics about Zimbabwe into David's story.

Third Place

“Fowl Play,” for *Poultry*

Why it won: “Fowl Play” is a feature article on Arizona's Hickman's Eggs, a one-time small town family farm that has grown over the years into Arizona's only commercial egg producer, producing more than 12 tons of eggs each day. As a feature, the article does a nice job of detailing the history of the family farm and how it has grown over the last 65 years. It's the appropriate length and does incorporate outside comment about the farm at the end of the article, which I think was key.

General strengths of entries: There were seven entries in the specialized business press article category in this year's contest and there was a clear delineation between the articles. I tend to focus on how engaging the articles are when choosing winners, and the first two winners in this year's contest were far superior in that area than any of the others. I love when I can read a well-written article about a subject matter I don't know much about and come away with new knowledge. Also, one of the issues I've had with the articles in the past is that many relied on just one source. I was pleased to see a number of the articles (not all though) incorporating several different sources, which of course offers more balance.

General weaknesses of entries: In addition to some one-sourced articles, I found a number of the entries to be—for lack of a better word—boring. It is up to the reporter/author to bring to life the subject matter he/she is writing about. But after reading a number of the entries, I wondered exactly why the person or subject matter being profiled, was being written about. The care factor was just not there for me. I will say, however, that compared to last year's entries that has some big grammatical deficiencies, this year's batch was better written.

Online Magazine

Judge: Nick Fauchald, editor-in-chief of tastingtable.com, an online food magazine, and a former editor at *Food & Wine*.

First Place

Vox (voxmagazine.com)

Why it won:

- This site is a great all-in-one hub for University of Missouri students, with a wealth of extras (interactive features, calendars, listings, reviews, polls, etc.) to supplement a large body of content.

- The homepage—and the rest of the site, for that matter—is easy to navigate and clearly took some cues from top news sites, though a search function would be nice.
- I like the story add-ons (charts, photos, etc.), but a few more multimedia/interactive touches would add to the reading experience.

Second Place

***Drake Magazine* (drakemagazine.com/)**

Why it won:

- The quality of photography is very high, with a consistent, professional aesthetic.
- I love the layout of the homepage, from its large, splashy slideshow to its easy-to-navigate sections. I only wish that there were more multimedia and interactive features inside of the stories, and options for sharing these pieces (e.g. print, email, digg, facebook, delicious, etc).

Third Place

***CyBurr* (theburr.com)**

Why it won:

- The homepage is strong, with a large, compelling anchor image and simple, easy-to-navigate well (though it's almost too minimalist; links to other recent stories would make it look more dynamic).
- The multimedia stories are a great example of how video and slideshows can be used to tell a magazine-worthy story.

Honorable Mention

***Ball Bearings Online* (ballbearingsonline.com)**

Why it won:

- A very noble and highly visual approach to an online magazine, with almost entirely multimedia content. Navigation was a little bit tricky, however.

Single Issue of an Ongoing Magazine—Design

Judge: Bob Gray, design consultant for aarp.org and former design editor at *National Geographic*

First Place

Think

Why It Won: Great use of strong imagery along with a solid design brings *Think* up from last year's second place to the winner's spot. The results show the design team was thinking on many levels to meet the challenge of creating a controlled underlying structure that allowed them to orchestrate weighty and sobering stories in a surprising and visually engaging way.

Highlights:

- Use of provocative imagery with typographic design in a supporting role.
- Use of color-coding for organization of departments. Nicely sets them apart from the features.
- Controlled typography. Good, readable text type, but needed a little more attention to widows and character/word spacing when using justified setting.
- Effective use of the 7 5/8-inch x10-inch trim size especially with images.
- Use of infographics, sidebars, timelines as additional entry points throughout the magazine.

Cover: Strong conceptual image immediately conveys the issue of feeding the world by showing measurability and availability. The seriousness of the logo design and the cover subject are at the same time contrasted and reinforced by the photographic style.

Second Place**Drake**

Why It Won: Deft integration of engaging photography with creative typographic treatments kept me turning the pages. This magazine consistently makes the top three so I congratulate not only the students, but the program directors as well. The design is consistently well organized with good margin space, column widths and solid typesetting. The photography is well-played on the pages and the use of periodic design devices create a pleasing visual structure.

Cover: Unfortunately the weakest component of this issue, though still following enough rules to stay solid. I wish the concept (which is good) had been further explored.

Front and Back of the Book: Strong, yet underplayed graphics help readers know where they are throughout the magazine. The controlled design allows for breakouts on departments without sacrificing consistency. Again, the conceptual photography and design solutions on are excellent.

Highlights:

- Concept, photography, design, white space, and color choice of “In Transition” feature. Beautiful!
- Contents page
- Design and photography in Spare Change department

Third Place**Vox**

Why It Won: From cover to cover, the design of the special “Election 08” issue skillfully delivered local coverage of 2008 election. Nice, solid, underlying design structure provided for strong visual hierarchy. The design team paid particular attention to entry points—mostly infographics—so every page had something to pull readers in.

Cover: Photo of blue and red stadium seating immediately set the “politics as sports competition” tone and the typographic design of button graphic for cover lines reinforced that concept.

Front and Back of the Book: The entire issue was built around election coverage as a sporting event. The results showed strong design/editorial collaboration. Graphics are minimal yet effective. The minimum space given to announcement content in the back is just right.

Highlights:

- “All the President’s People” feature delightfully illustrates political extremes.
- Design of “McCain, Obama get graphic” nicely captures the trend to visually “glorify” candidates.

Honorable Mention

Health E

Why: This magazine tackled an array of health issues with strong, straightforward and informative images and graphics. The visual organization around Environments, Elements, and Experiences is easy to follow yet graphically understated. The design is open, and contains many entry points for the browser. Two suggestions for future issues: 1. Avoid hard to read type/background treatments (pages 32-34). 2. Make secondary display type (decks and callouts) consistent.

Honorable Mention

The Planet

Why: Strong, simple and spare graphic treatments to support stories about how we can all be “greener” nicely reflect the mission of this magazine. Good visual pacing and effective use of white space are also employed. This magazine looks and feels like what it’s about. Two suggestions for future issues: 1. Increase the size and leading of the text type. 2. Pay closer attention to all word and character spacing.

General Strengths of Entries

- Good attention to production details for all entries.
- Most covers are well conceived and executed despite interior success or shortcomings.
- Again, this year, the photography is strong across all entries and in most cases played well on pages.
- Most entries showed better editorial organization than in the past.

General Weaknesses of Entries

Most entries, except the winners, could have been so much better with just a *little more attention* given to quality typesetting. There was more than one occasion where type was literally unreadable. And while the quality of photography is overall strong, the photo editing could be stronger. The weaker entries showed a tendency to rely on overdone graphic gimmickry.

Single Issue of an Ongoing Magazine—Editorial

Judge: Ashley Deahl, acting editor-in-chief and managing editor of *Phoenix Magazine*

First Place

Ryerson Review of Journalism

Why it won: The cover grabbed my right away. It felt almost like an *Esquire* model—very modern, edgy and fun—something a reader would pick up even if he/she weren't interested in journalism. The clean but sassy design carried itself throughout the issue as well, and it was married well with thought-provoking photography, perfect feature-openers, great use of typography and a real sense of how to break up copy. A tad copy-heavy at times, but the content was interesting enough to keep the reader moving and wanting more. I truly loved every feature.

Second Place

THINK

Why it won: From the onset of the *National Geographic*-esque cover, I was hooked. In addition to this clean, colorful design, the content show such a maturity and relevance that most national publications still aren't getting. It teaches the reader without preaching, and it allows them to continue the debate after reading the features. Great use of sidebars, graphics and white space. It was fun, funky and informative.

Third Place

Drake Magazine

Why it won: This is exactly what a university magazine should be—fun, sexy, provocative and educational all at once. I love the use of bright colors, the thought-provoking feature on teen transsexuals, the fun spread on saving money, and the clean design. They pack a lot into this publication without making it look messy. A fun read, and something you could read over and over again and still pick up on new things.

Honorable Mention

Health E

Why it won: This title does a thorough job of capturing one of the most pertinent topics of our time, and it does it in a way that's appealing to both readers in the healthcare industry and on the outside.

Single Issue of an Ongoing Magazine—General Excellence

Judges: Will Palmer, managing editor, Mary Turner, deputy editor, and Ryan Krogh, associate editor of *Outside*

First Place

Think

Why It Won: We felt that this magazine had the best, most surprising, and most informative content, and was executed with real skill. There were others with better

design, and there were others with more ambitious long features, but this one best put its pieces together into a complete, enjoyable, and edifying read. It managed to take on important subjects without being overly earnest.

Second Place

Burnt Orange

Why It Won: This publication announces its intention on the cover and sticks with its mission very well. Writing and editing were excellent (though we deducted points for the lack of distinction between departments and features). Design was fun, the variety of stories kept us reading, and the reporting was strong.

Third Place

The Planet

Why It Won: This one had some of the best features, and some real editorial intelligence. What it lacked was a sense of vigor and a breadth of subjects. It might have been the winner if it were a bit less earnest and had tried harder to surprise. Still, the writers and editors put together some pieces that could easily run in a major magazine. Some of us loved the simplicity of the design, others found it uninteresting.

Honorable Mention

Panorama

Why It Won: This magazine clearly had the best design, by far. Where it fell down, for us, was in the unclear organization and the lack of navigational cues, especially the lack of deks. This very well might have been an intentional, experimental strategy, and in a sense it was interesting in this way; but it was hard to flip through and have a sense of what the creators wanted to achieve. The stories were well written, but not as good as those in our top three.

Honorable Mention

Orange & Blue

Why It Won: Again, a clear concept, carried through faithfully—the breadth of subjects tackled through the lens of "skin" was impressive. At the same time, this weirdly limited the content in a way that made us feel a little disappointed; some of the stories just seemed comparatively weak. Overall it was definitely a strong contender for more than one of us—the design was quite good, the writing and reporting generally solid.

General strengths: The sheer editorial energy found in these entries was astounding. At a time when the print medium seems to be diminishing in stature, these magazines were a refreshing reminder of what can be accomplished on paper by creative people when they really put themselves into the process. They should all be proud: There were no great disappointments in the whole batch.

General weaknesses: Design tended to be less impressive overall; some felt really uninspired, some felt like they tried too hard, and font choices in general seemed somewhat messy given the technology available and the successful models to be found on the newsstand.

Start-Up Magazine Project—Team

Judge: Roger Tremblay, executive search consultant specializing in marketing communications for Allen Austin Global Executive Search / Advanced Leadership Communication in Dallas.

First Place *Empty Nest*

Why it won: First, let me admit to the obvious bias that this magazine is aimed at me since I am indeed an empty nester with three grown children scattered all over the country. That being said, I kept looking for reasons NOT to like this and couldn't come up with any. The market segment is growing rapidly as all the aging baby boomers are moving into this demographic segment and I think this editorial concept truly serves a currently unfulfilled need. In fact, I read all the features and came away with a feeling of wanting more.

I thought the cover design and execution were excellent. The business plan was well thought out, especially the market research and the analysis of the competition. The compensation figures were a little on the low side, even in today's economic environment but I guess you can always find people who will labor for love.

I liked the ancillary products a lot because I think this could be a lucrative income stream. I would have liked to have seen more info on emptynest.com because I think it has great potential for multi-media platform ad sales.

But most of all, it passes the 15-second test for advertisers in that it doesn't take much to explain what it is and for potential readers who should understand what to expect when they pick it up.

Overall, an outstanding effort.

Second Place *Symmetry*

Why it won: The first time I heard about the concept for REAL SIMPLE, I thought it was one of the dumbest ideas I ever heard. Why would advertisers put their message in an editorial environment that tells you how to do with less? Shows how smart I am. I think this magazine would strike a resounding chord with busy working mothers who are looking to balance their hectic lives. And I agree with the competitive analysis that the magazines currently aimed at this demographic segment are falling short of really serving the needs of younger women.

I like the design and overall layout because it is upbeat and different; a little busy and cluttered at times but that can be tweaked. The feature ideas, although not new, seem to have a fresh approach. I really liked “Love & Loathe.” The business plan needs a little more fleshing out but the numbers seem to be in line.

I was surprised to see no online component. You can’t start a new magazine today without it and a lot of women are so time-crunched that sitting down with a magazine for an extended period of time is a real luxury.

Finally, I ran this by my 31-year old daughter who is a working mother with two small children and she thought it would be something she would read. And as I have learned many times over the years, she’s a lot smarter than I am.

Third Place **Hype**

Why it won: Maybe I’m dreaming but I’d like to think there are still a lot of teenagers out there with traditional Christian values who are put off by a media industry that espouses the morality of Sodom and Gomorrah. I’m not wild about the name because it doesn’t immediately connect with newsstand buyers and would be tricky to explain to advertisers, but then again, I’m old and perhaps hopelessly out of touch since our children are now adults.

I’d also like to think that there are teenagers who actually like to read and then have intelligent conversations with their peers that exceed 140 characters. But all the research I see doesn’t agree.

Nonetheless, I think this is a well-executed idea. The business plan needs more financial detail but I think the web strategy is right on. And there are a lot of advertisers who would like to have their messages in this environment. I thought the cover design was good but the image was scary. It doesn’t connect well with the editorial purpose.

If features were written by young people who had the same “voice” as the target audience, this could be a very successful magazine because it’s a content-driven idea.

Honorable Mention **Blackboard Jungle**

Why it won: Everyone I talk to with school age children is concerned with the editorial features and ideas in this magazine. I think the general feeling among young parents in this country today is that the education system has gone to hell in a hand basket, so editorially, this magazine is dead on.

Having said that, I think the business plan needs more work, especially the financial analysis. I didn’t like the cover and I think the black & white editorial approach, while adding a serious tone, just doesn’t provide the necessary graphic appeal.

This got an Honorable Mention primarily on the strength of its concept.

General strengths of entries:

A lot of really good editorial and design executions and sound editing decisions.

Also, a very good understanding of the magazine start-up process. Whoever is teaching, obviously understands the business.

General weaknesses of entries:

I have the same two criticisms almost every year. Too many ideas based on what “I might want to read” and not enough understanding of how much money it really takes to do something like this.

First person editorial research tends to produce magazine ideas that are way too narrow to be successful. Most of the salaries and the cost of doing business are far below the market reality. If ever there was an industry where “You get what you pay for,” it’s magazine publishing. There’s a reason most new magazines fail; they are underfinanced and staffed by amateurs. That’s not meant to be snarky, it’s just reality.

Start-Up Magazine Project—Individual

Judge: Gina Hamadey, travel editor, *Every Day With Rachel Ray*

First Place

Budget Photography

Why it won: I agree with Susan that the concept fills a need, and in fact I think the swathe of potential readers might be larger than she thinks, what with the popularity of photosharing sites like flickr.com and picassa.com. More and more people are making digital photography a hobby, and I think she could cater even more specifically to those parents, college kids, and other potential readers. I appreciated the clear organization of the magazine, with its easy-to-navigate slugs. Many of the story ideas were strong and compelling. I also think it’s a really smart business model to use amateur photography in the magazine, which would presumably be free or inexpensive. (Photo shoots are where magazines hemorrhage money.) The possibilities for this magazine are exciting. I’m impressed!

Second Place

Vintage

Why it won: The overall feel is fresh and lively, with clever design ideas and fun columns. The concept plays into both the DIY trend—with a heavier lifestyle component than *DIY* magazine—and the green movement, which makes the magazine feel timely. I think she did a great job of tackling all angles of “vintage,” going beyond clothing and home décor to music and pictures. I could see a magazine like this being offered in indie shops around the country, and developing a cult following.

Third Place

Owner

Why it won: For me, this magazine had the coolest look. Callie did a great job with the design. It has an awesome logo, for one, and each story outdoes the next in terms

of innovative photography and graphics. The concept feels unique and timely, sort of taking Fast Company to the street level. I love the neighborhood, community feel of it. I did find the stories themselves a bit disjointed. I found myself wondering how a product page fit in, or what movie night has to do with a small business. It also seemed unnecessarily long. Once she streamlines the story and column topics, though, I could definitely see this as a viable idea.

Honorable Mention

Smart Hearts

Why it won: Health is an increasingly popular topic, and it's smart to add food and travel to it as well. Fear-driven coverlines always sell (THE SECRET KILLER IN YOUR PANTRY!), and this magazine could have those in spades. The organization of the book was simple and clear, and Bill Clinton was a great choice for a feature profile. I really could see this in a doctor's office.

Honorable Mention

Skin

Why it won: I loved the unapologetic edginess. It combines *Cosmo* and *Playboy* with *Art Forum*, and added a literary twist—very ambitious! It's not quite gelling together yet, I felt, but in general I really liked the idea and found myself rooting for it!

General strengths of entries:

- Unique concepts
- Complete and thorough business plans
- Enthusiasm

General weaknesses of entries:

My main complaint is that the stories themselves often seemed like afterthoughts. It's fine if you use Greek text, but the coverlines, heds, decks and captions should be real and thoughtful. I should want to read more. This is a rule of thumb: When pitching a new column idea, I give at least six topic examples for future months, so the editor can see it has legs. The columns in these magazines should have that permanent feel—you could imagine another iteration for next month, one you'd want to read. If I'm being asked to sink a bunch of money into a magazine launch, it is great to get a sense for the design, and of course you have to crunch the numbers. But what I'd really want to see is a product that I want to read. Going along with this, most of the covers had only one coverline, which is a big mistake for newsstand sales. And even the best magazine prototypes lacked the right packaging on the page—those sidebars, charts, treatments that make magazines so much fun to read, and differentiate them from newspapers or books. *New York* magazine has some of the best-packaged stories out there, for an example.

Overall, great job to everyone!