

SLIX

AN EDITORIAL
APPROACH TO
DESIGNING
BETTER
PUBLICATIONS

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DEGREES OF PREPARATION



AURAS DESIGN



For more than thirty years, AURAS Design has been creating magazines. In three decades technology has revolutionized the way we create magazines, and today it is changing the way we look at them. But one thing has stayed the same—delivering engaging content takes more than an elegant design or trendy typefaces. Even the best editorial can be lost without proper context.

Readers choose publications because they like the whole package. Every magazine is constantly renegotiating its value to every reader with each issue. While specific stories may generate interest, it is the way the publication is put together, the specific DNA of scope, organization, tone and execution that engages readers as an ongoing investment of their time.

SIX DEGREES OF PREPARATION, originally written as a series in *FPO Magazine*, is everything we have learned designing more than 100 magazines. While some of those publications only needed a new patina to make their editorial shine, many needed much more. That is where AURAS has been most helpful. A successful redesign for them required rethinking their editorial structure, reorganizing the content into packages that delivered to readers a strong value proposition—*if you liked this issue, you are going to love them all.*

Each “degree” examines a different approach to building a stronger magazine, and helping you see your own publication in new ways. Some of the ideas are tried and true, and some you may never have considered. Each section builds on the previous to suggest a process that can be used to improve your publication.

The goal of this book is to create a process that can be used to imagine, launch, and grow magazines by stimulating dialog among editorial, design and business arms of a publishing team, literally putting everyone “on the same page.”



Is a Book About Publication Design Still Relevant in a Multichannel World?

THE URGE TO CONVERT your print publication to a mobile app seems irresistible. For many publishers, the savings in printing and mailing alone can be enormously enticing. But an app—however cool—isn't a replacement for your print magazine. There are now just too many ways of reaching your readers to think they will be satisfied with a single product.

With all of the channels that need to be filled, there is no shortcut to the job of building your brand and creating compelling and memorable editorial—and that is what this book is all about.

The Six Degrees Still Matters

Making a digital app out of your print publication isn't a solution for making a better magazine; it is just another way of delivering your content—with advantages and disadvantages. And it isn't even the only new way, or even the best. *Six Degrees of Preparation* provides a systematic approach to building editorial and design elements that will strengthen your readers' appreciation of all your cross-platform content. The examination of your mission, scope, audience, branding, book structure, and story components are still important building blocks in your publishing strategy. Here's why:

- ▶ **More than ever, using the *Six Degrees* can help you find engaging exclusive content, stronger branding, and better design—it just isn't only about your print magazine anymore.**
- ▶ **Multiple platforms and social media subscriptions makes graphic identity and branded content more critical than ever before.**
- ▶ **Mobile devices makes grazing difficult. Instead of just reposting content, focus on branding and navigation to fit the platform.**
- ▶ **Additional multimedia assets and weblinks may seem like a good idea, but they distract readers and dilute your branding. A dedicated URL for your publication is great, so keep readers on the site.**
- ▶ **Your print product is still a major part of your content distribution. It should be the reference for developing other channel branding, content curation, and promotion.**

Your digital “strategy”—if you even have one—may include a mobile app, an online replica of your printed magazine, a dedicated website for your magazine, or all of the above, but if you are really aggressive, it might also include e-mail newsletters, e-pubs, podcasts, webinars, Facebook and Twitter comments, Instagram, Pinterest presentations, and YouTube or TikTok video. With so many places to distribute content, the qualities that make your print publication noteworthy could get lost in the translation.

Building a Practical Digital Strategy

Building a tablet app to replace your print publication is not a complete solution. It is uncertain if magazine apps will be a long-term solution or just a transitory attempt to shoehorn print publication templates into new technology.

Judging by the swift adoption of modern HTML5 features in newer content-driven websites, the modern

web standard is as much a game-changer in delivering content as PageMaker was 25 years ago. Websites can now use embedded fonts and sophisticated layout structures. They don't look like print magazines—and they don't work like them either—but they do look an awful lot like a tablet magazine. Evolving web design can now create magazine-like graphic sophistication. Alternate delivery channels for news, social interaction, voice, and video provide better ways of reaching your audience for some content. What is a good strategy for moving forward in this new publishing environment?

The one answer is that there isn't one answer, and no matter how aggressively companies promote their digital solutions, no one has developed a model that is a definitive use of current technologies to leverage content. Moreover, there's no way around the fact that more channels need more eyeballs, more expensive tools and skills, and a completely different way of creating and using content, which could be an overwhelming assignment for traditional editors and publishers.

1) Spend your money wisely. Maybe twenty percent of your readership will embrace a digital distribution of your publication. A recent survey by the Association of Magazine Publishing asked its members if they wanted a digital version of their publication only as a choice between print and digital. Only 24% said yes. And perhaps if that is the only choice, eventually they will get used to it. In the meantime, why pay a lot of money to do anything but create a replica when there are so many other possibilities to disseminate content and engage your audience?

Besides, it's easy to make a replica edition that will work on pretty much any device. You can easily make them into e-pubs that mimic the magazine, or just make a flipbook that will play on any computer or reader that can display web pages. You can easily host it on your website or offer your readership the ability to download it as an app. This inexpensive solution gets your content “out there” and satisfies the readership who just wants digital access to your book. It doesn't make use of all that digital publishing can offer, but in many ways it is the best ROI choice.

2) Print still matters. Even after nearly two decades of dire pronouncements that the end of print publications is imminent, they are still flourishing. According to magazine guru Samir Husni, there were over 200 pub start-ups in the last two years.

Your print publication still matters. It should still be seen as a flagship publication of record. For academic, institutional, and association publications, it is still

considered a valued part of a membership package. Maybe in the last decade the revenue potential of a trade or association publication has been lost, but its reputation as a point of authority and credibility for an organization is still an important asset. Assuming you are not going to abandon your magazine, what can you do to leverage the content created each issue, and how can the assets from archives and organizational resources be put to best use?

3) Add digital assets and platforms that matter.

Adding “extras” to a digital version of your magazine apparently isn’t a compelling reason to abandon the print experience, at least according to readers who vote with their downloads.

The temptation to add content that simply didn’t fit into the print edition might seem like a perfect use of extra material, but readers see it for what it usually is—dross that good editorial gate-keeping has already dismissed. Interactive graphics can also seem like a prime example of using a tablet’s inherent capabilities, but often the product is simply an animated rehash of a print graphic that works just as well.

Enhancing print elements using interactive graphics, slideshows, video, and reference links to outside sources are only worthwhile if they improve the value beyond the printed version either through extended depth of content or a greater ability to understand and manipulate the material. In almost all cases this isn’t material that should belong in a special “digital” edition of your publication. But there are plenty of places to add extra content.

4) Think multi-channel. Your digital strategy should be based on two important points: your print publication is no longer the single source of content and connection with your readership; and everything you “publish” should work together using the same graphics, branding and editorial standards. It’s clear that the key to a successful publishing strategy is the total impact of *all* channels working in synergy—think of them as a single product comprised of multiple, overlapping editorial packages.

Encouraging a readership to become engaged by viewing the same content on multiple platforms is increasingly redundant with wideband streaming and ubiquitous adoption of media apps. Yet maintaining a single publishing brand is a necessary strategy for maintaining a nimble relationship with your readers.

For many publications that have limited resources,

this approach is difficult. Applying the same editorial standards across channels can prove a challenge. Many organizations do not have a single editor or publisher for their print and digital products. Their web sites are not geared towards editorial, and have other business concerns that are independent of the publication.

Having a dedicated URL for your publishing brand is important, but it needs to have the resources to manage the content, audience response and technologies. Many organizations are satisfied to just repurpose content by reposting the magazine as simple web pages that abandon most of the character and branding of the print publication. But Wordpress themes plus site-builder add-ons such as Elementor provide the tools to build on top of the simple repurposing of print content into opportunities to enhance engagement.

And the clincher, is that your on-line presence is the nexus for directing your readership to influential social media apps. Your magazine might be the genesis of your branding, content curation, and structure, but using your site as a home base integrating with your Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, or TikTok channels can create more reader engagement for the content in each issue of your publication—and make it more influential.

In this world of many platforms it is even more critical to build a unified graphic identity, develop unique editorial concepts and create integrated branding. The sad reality for most associations, B2B publishers and institutions is that delivering engagement to their membership is handled haphazardly. It’s often relegated to interns or inexperienced staff, except it has become obvious that it requires attention from a dedicated moderator tasked with curating those spaces. That takes a person with seasoned communication skills.

Despite all the hype about building large followings through aggressive pandering, it really matters that the quality of the content, the branding of the material, and the excellence of its production makes a difference. Sloppy writing, lax copy editing, and insufficient moderating are a direct reflection of the amount of respect it has for its audience. Editorial curation is more important than ever. 📌

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MISSION STATEMENTS How do you get from idea to launch and increase the probability of success? Start with a plan.

ARCHETYPES Why should your magazine be more like other magazines, except when it shouldn't? The answer lies in two centuries and 100,000 titles.

BRANDING More than a logo, more than a title, the soul of your publication is in its organization, tone and memorability. It's what keeps readers coming back for more.

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DEGREE ONE:

MIS

Your favorite magazine was once just a **GLEAM** in someone's eye. Before there were stories and staff and advertisers, before there was a template and a nameplate, there was only an **IDEA** for a periodical that could be profitable.

Similar to restaurants or Broadway shows, a lot of the expense in starting a magazine is up front. Usually, the publication needs to be staffed, designed, produced and printed before you can convince a single subscriber to make a permanent commitment. A large launch, like Condé Nast's *Portfolio* in 2007, might cost as much as \$100 million over the first three years of publication. But people have launched successful magazines with less—a *lot* less.

How do you get from the idea to the launch? After all, a magazine is more

than just stories and pictures; more than fonts, images and printing; more than subscribers and advertisers. A magazine is a creative business based on an informed assumption: *If enough people like the content, they will buy the publication or at least provide a steady, well-defined demographic that advertisers will pay to reach.*

Like any publication, your start-up needs a business plan. Along with an ROI (Return-On-Investment) strategy, you need a creative rationale that will function as a blueprint for building the actual publication. That document is the Mission Statement.

Many people confuse a Mission Statement with a briefer, more promotional positioning statement found in media kits. A positioning statement often glibly presents a publication's relevance to advertisers, whereas the Mission Statement is actually a magazine's business plan. You wouldn't go to a bank trying to land a loan with a one-paragraph business plan, so why would you start a magazine without a Mission Statement? It provides, in equal measure, justification for the profitability of your magazine and a creative manifesto for content scope and audience growth on a continuing basis.



VISION: POSSIBLE

JASON CLARKE

Parts of a Mission

A Mission Statement should contain the seeds of everything that grows into the magazine you launch or defines your existing magazine. These **elements** define the publication:

- ▶ **Why there is opportunity for this title**
- ▶ **The size, availability and potential of your target audience**
- ▶ **The scope of the publication, and how editorial content will uniquely define the magazine**
- ▶ **A comparison of the competition**
- ▶ **Broad benchmarks for success and growth**

This may seem familiar to veteran journalists. It's as simple as Why, Who, What, Where and When.

Why This Magazine?

There are many reasons to publish a magazine, and not all of them have a bottom line based on economic profit. Some magazines raise the profile or credibility of an organization; others promote religious, social, political or promotional agendas. Whether or not you intend for your magazine to make money, it still costs money to publish. Justifying the expenditure to the sponsoring organization still requires evaluation of the opportunity cost—why this publication is the best use of the capital available for achieving the desired goals.

In fact, what *are* the goals? A good Mission Statement begins with why the publication should exist. Since this is an internal document, all reasons should be included. While it's perfectly acceptable to create a publication with the primary

goal of turning a profit with as little cost or effort needed, that reason would sound crass and manipulative used as a positioning statement in your Media Kit. But you *would* list it on the Mission Statement.

Usually, the reasons listed are more practical—need for ongoing promotion, or a demographic underserved by current publications. Sometimes, there's opportunity for a more focused publication in a broader niche, such as a luxury homes publication in a market where real estate publications already exist. So, the Mission Statement begins with a Statement of Opportunity.

For our fictional start-up magazine, the following gets at the heart of the opportunity: "Our publication intends to be the primary reference for 1 million gadgeteers who are avidly searching for credible and up-to-date information on cutting-edge

GADGETRY TODAY
GADGETRY MONTHLY
GADGET WORLD
★ GADGETEER !!

YOUR MISSION: WHY, WHO,

gadgetry, but can only find occasional general information on this subject in noodler publications.” Here is a recognized substantial sub-demographic of an already successful enthusiast niche that wants a narrower, more explicit focus on a field of interest.

“The growth of the gadget segment of the noodler community has been exponential since the release of Gadgetron 2.0 kits, attracting more and more noodlers to this area and bringing new enthusiasts into the fold,” explains why this opportunity is exploitable.

Finally, “Creators of ever-expanding gadget peripherals will join the current noodler advertising segment as interested participants in the new publication,” defines the economic feasibility of the magazine. These statements describe why the publication has a chance for success, and they become the basis for the other components of the Mission Statement.

Find Your Audience, or Imagine It

The rationale for large-circulation general-interest publications becomes increasingly dicey when other forms of mass communication promise larger, more immediate contact with audiences. Television did it, and the Internet and cell phones have followed suit. But much like national AM radio evolved into regional FM broadcasting in the '60s, the opportunity for publishing niche content to smaller audiences has grown tremendously.

Success for your publication begins with defining a universe for your content scope and then accurately estimating what percentage can be lured into your reader community. Some universes are small but can be almost totally converted—for example, an association that gives a magazine subscription as a membership benefit. Other universes are large, hard to define and produce fewer dedicated readers; examples include the consumer business

and shelter markets, which are notoriously fickle. Overestimating the number of converts is a common mistake and can have serious ramifications on cash flow and advertising support.

Another approach to finding your audience is to define a paragon reader, often the founder of the magazine. To a great extent, *Playboy* is an extension of who Hugh Hefner thought he was—or wanted to be—in 1950. Other magazines share similar beginnings. Certainly, there wouldn't have been a *Cook's Illustrated* or *Wizard* magazine without the conviction of their publishers that a large like-minded audience existed.

There's something almost romantic about the publisher-as-paradigm success story, but unless you're Donald Trump or Oprah Winfrey, don't expect investors to be impressed. Still, not every magazine needs to roll out to a million readers. With the Mission Statement approach, you've got an undeniable gut-check built into every decision.

Even with the best demographics, it's often a guess as to how many readers will love your magazine. The debate over what comes first, the wants of the reader or the scope of the magazine, can be an agonizing seesaw. And sometimes, readers don't even realize they want something until they see it. How can you process statistics for that?

What's in It for Me?

The editorial scope of your publication is the defining factor for your audience and your advertisers. The more explicit it is in the Mission Statement, the easier it will translate into an actual magazine. Breaking down the scope into major content areas and defining themes for feature content will help you gauge the depth of your magazine's concept. Imagining franchise content (think *SI* Swim-suit issue, the *Fortune* 100) and ancillary programs (books, conferences)—both of which are important ways to generate unique content—also helps build credibility for the editorial stamina of the

publication.

Getting back to our sample publication, now called *Gadgeteer*, the scope in the Mission Statement includes all things gadget-related: products, projects, tools, theory, processes, creativity, application, inventions, the gadget community, gadget celebrities and even gadget humor. If this sounds like an editorial lineup, it should. Beyond that, the publisher envisions ancillary projects, such as The *Gadgeteer* Conference, Greatest Gadgets of the Year, *Gadgeteer* Innovator Awards, Gadget Workbook Series and “Great Gadgets Hour” on the DiY Network. All of these possible franchise enrichments will provide editorial fodder for the magazine.

Mission Statements for magazines also should account for more than the printed edition. Developing a strategy for the website component of your new publication at this initial stage can provide a clear structure for growing the entire media enterprise. Imagine elements that work better in cyberspace: Forums, webinars, downloads, multimedia demonstrations, and links to other resources are effective additions of content not easily achieved in print.

Specific content targeting possible vertical markets for advertising can also go into the Mission Statement. In some publications, the primary advertisers are obvious—they make products or services that directly support the content. At the next level are advertisers interested in your readers because they fit into a desirable demographic, usually by income or age, but this group has little effect on scope.

Developing the editorial model at this stage will have important benefits as the book is realized. A detailed description of the content in the Mission Statement will have a direct relationship to each editorial element in the premier issue. It should be possible to vet every new editorial idea by comparing it against the scope described in your Mission Statement.

WHAT, WHERE & WHEN

Why Is This Magazine Different From All Other Magazines?

Package designers go to a supermarket and shoot pictures of the shelf display of products in the same category as their project. They're not doing research for creating something exclusive or wholly different; their goal is to create a package that is unique among other products yet also feels like it belongs among them.

Comparing a magazine to the competition works in a similar fashion. What works for one publication might also work for yours, but with a new, distinctive branding. Finding areas of content that are underrepresented, or handled in a shallow way, may provide actual editorial distinction between your title and others.

Examining the tone, or editorial voice, of the competition is also informative. In the '70s, Marvel Comics helped redefine superhero comics by contrasting its voice against that of the competition. In rival DC Comics' universe, the mythic, emotionally unconflicted exploits of Superman involved fighting clearly defined external evil in imaginary places like Metropolis.

In the Marvel universe, Spiderman lives in a recognizable New York, and his teen angst and inner demons are as potent as his super-powerful adversaries, whose own destructive paths are often the result of debilitating tragic flaws. This new approach to storytelling and character development defined the Marvel world and ended the domination of a decades-old franchise. Ultimately, DC Comics was forced to reappraise and relaunch *its* classic characters. For example, in the hands of Batman's next writer and artist, Frank Miller, the Masked Crusader became the morally conflicted and obsessed Dark Knight.

Finding a niche in a niche through editorial voice is one good reason for comparing your publication to your direct competitors. Widening the circle

to include other publications that overlap only somewhat in content will give you a perspective on the broader interests of your intended audience. Also, it may be a source of mutually beneficial editorial and business relationships.

Niche publications are always interested in reaching a broader audience, and more mainstream publications want the expert content that can come from narrowly focused titles. It wouldn't be surprising to find that niche magazine *Gadgeteer* provides content to *Noodler Monthly* in exchange for promotion and resources from the larger, more broadly-scoped magazine.

Mission...Possible?

Thomas Edison said, "Many of life's failures are people who did not realize how close they were to success when they gave up." Since publication growth is an ongoing process marked by subscriptions or ad pages or reader response, success for your publication must be benchmarked. Appropriate documentation, objective evaluation and timeline projections are important parts of every mission, including your magazine's.

Business plans often exploit the potential of a concept that captures the imagination and enthusiasm of its target market. The YouTubes, Facebooks and Googles of today are examples of the capacity for untested ideas to generate a firestorm of interest that far exceeds expectations during the growth phase of the product. As enticing as those stories may be, they are the exceptions.

Generating benchmarks that are relevant often starts with worst-case scenarios and minimum acceptable results. For publications, the chart usually shows how much outgo can be tolerated with the expected start-up costs and when the magazine will produce a profit.


The total revenue from all sources—subscriptions, advertising, special promotions, ancillary programs—should be figured into the numbers, but only

when a project is actually launched. It's just not kosher to anticipate funds from a project that doesn't exist.

The three-year plan is the classic magazine model. Expecting loss in year one, growth and modest profit in year two, and maturation and sustainability by year three allows plenty of time for evaluation, course correction and, if necessary, a soft landing. But, as noted at the top of this article, profit is not the best benchmark for every magazine, so it's critical to find the right indicators and analysis tools for your magazine.

Elaborate business plans for new publications often include elaborate budgeting and multiple achievement scenarios. While these are important, especially to satisfy external investors, they're overkill as part of a Mission Statement. With criteria for success, and a timetable for when that success may occur after launch, are included, it's easy to see how well the Mission Statement functions as a legitimate business plan.

For *Gadgeteer*, capturing 5% of its million-plus universe and securing a 20/80 ad-to-editorial ratio for its 96-page issues ensured that production costs, editorial development, and initial marketing lists and materials would be covered. By year three, at 40/60 ratios, 120 pages and a 75,000 circulation, it turned a nice profit, especially with the success of the first *Gadgeteer* Conference, which drew over 2,000 participants.

Now, the only thing to look out for is the launch of *Noodler's Gadget Monthly*, because nothing breeds imitation like success. But the publisher isn't too worried, because he already thought of that in the Mission Statement. 

DEGREE TWO: Archetypes

HOW READERS MAKE SENSE OF MAGAZINES

IF IT WALKS LIKE A DUCK...” IS MORE THAN COMMON SENSE, it’s the internal system that we all use to figure out what we experience. Human cognition is mostly about categorizing. It’s human nature to parse information by comparing and cataloging content into familiar categories. As dishwasher-dull as that sounds, it has surprising application to the improvement of your magazine.

At the bookstore, magazine racks are organized into broad groups of titles—women’s magazines, shelter publications, celebrity rags, many flavors of enthusiast publications—recognizable categories obvious with even a casual glance.

But the similarities are more than skin-deep. Collect a pile of pubs from a similar group and compare their content—it’s easy to see they share a common DNA that informs their design and editorial scope. Look at any enthusiast publications—they don’t even have to be about the same hobby—and similar story types abound. There are product reviews, how-to’s, expert advisors, optimization and skill enhancement stories, conference reports, community feedback and maybe even yearly award programs. It could be a magazine about cars, cats or cameras—the subject matter might be different but the editorial scope is similar. The same holds true for many magazine groupings. And for each of these magazine categories, there is a progenitor—a real historical title that became the standard-bearer that other, newer publications have been compelled to reference—an *archetype*.

The term archetype has its roots in the sixteenth century when it literally meant “the first mold.” Carl Jung borrowed the idea of archetypes and extended it into the psychological realm. In Jungian psychology, the term has a deeper context: “a

collectively inherited unconscious idea, pattern of thought, image, etc., universally present in individual psyches.” Both the original and the more recent meanings of the word are apropos to publishing. Our long exposure to magazines as cultural artifacts has burned many archetypal publication “types” into our collective unconscious. So, when we look at a new publication, we search for content that helps us categorize it. Many of these publications take their cues from seminal titles that originally defined the niche—that first mold.

Using Archetypes

Understanding the historical precedent is important for publication creators, but grasping the archetypal elements that have evolved is even more critical. It’s nice to know that *Time* is the historical progenitor of the newsweekly, but the generalized structure of rubric-oriented content punctuated by a longish feature article and augmented by regular columnists is the model that all newsweeklies follow.

It’s hard for publications to exist outside of this structure, no matter how idiosyncratic or unique the subject matter or structure. Sure, it is possible to create an original archetype, but usually it happens unexpectedly. After all, if you try, you are making a magazine that sets its goals against other archetypes and by extension, becomes a reflection of them, not a distinct new ideal. Perhaps the last real new archetype is the magalog, that almost-editorial form of publication that has the dual goal of selling a lifestyle and a company product. Who’d have thought after a century of separation between church and state, the bravest new world would be a marriage between them?

If your publication has an archetype, then it



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behooves you to know what editorial elements are considered standard parts. Here are some of the nuts and bolts:

SCOPE. The driving definition of the archetype is usually the scope of content. The broad categories are defined that way: business-to-business, association, enthusiast, news, men's, women's, fashion, shelter, teen, celebrity and a few others. But every publication within the archetype defines a slightly different scope that brands and distinguishes the title. *Hustler* is harder core than *Penthouse*, which is harder core than *Playboy*, although they all are players in the adult men's archetype. *Rolling Stone* goes for the 800-lb gorilla spot; *Vibe* specializes in rap, soul and R&B, while *Blender* shoots for a younger audience. The distinctions in scope are not monolithic but represent distinct business strategies.

MUST-HAVE ELEMENTS. Some things in each archetype are so critical to the genre that they need to be included. What's a men's magazine without the centerfold? Can a women's title avoid the Christmas issue? Every fashion magazine has to build a big fat September Fall Fashion issue to stay in the black. Cooking pubs have recipes and studio food shots, sports magazines have standings and acerbic columnists, and laddie titles need a busty C-list celebrity falling out of her bra on the cover. In fact, if you take the juvenile prurience out of a magazine like *Maxim*, is it even in the archetype anymore?

Several years ago, a publisher in Baltimore attempted to break into the laddie archetype with a magazine trying to do just that. *ADAM* was a short-lived failure (although it had a lot of other dysfunctional issues besides a flouted archetype). Without the tease and the T&A, was it *Esquire Junior* or *Redbook* for men? Even the editor wasn't sure, so what could they expect potential readers to think?

COVER TREATMENTS. It's no coincidence, when you peruse the racks at your local Barnes & Noble, that

titles within an archetype all have similar covers. There's Britney (or Lindsay) on the Cover of *OK, Us, Life&Style* and *People* (you know, the classy one). There's a reassuringly glamorous female star on the cover of *InStyle, Redbook, Self* and *Cosmo*. There's Oprah on *O*, and Rachel on *Rachel Ray Everyday*. There will be a car fronting *Car&Driver, Motor Trend, Automobile* and *Road&Track*, and most of them will be shot three-quarter head-on on a mountain road.

RELEVANCE. Changes in technology, cultural trends and new economic imperatives alter archetypes, making them less successful models. The popular wide-distribution general-interest magazine archetype has lost much of its value, and such titles as *LOOK, The Saturday Evening Post* or *Life* magazine have respectively long-disappeared, mutated into antiquated niche pubs or gamely hung on through brand power alone (as was the case of *Life*, which came back from the dead once but folded again in 2007).

Other titles in the niche are still publishing, but have seen decimated circulations and are scrambling to remain relevant. *TV Guide* and *Reader's Digest* have been drastically reimaged as they increasingly find their original concepts untenable in today's multimedia, Internet-accessible culture.

It's Not a Straightjacket, It's a Supermodel

Far from being a restraining factor that demands lock-step compliance, editors and designers should use the knowledge gained from understanding their archetype to define critical elements of their magazines that can be made more engaging. Simply mimicking an archetype is not enough; adding a unique variation to the in-common content helps define a publication's tone and creates a unique product. Here are some simple approaches for making improvements:

RENAME COMMON DEPARTMENTS. Many magazines print reader mail. If

your department is named "Letters" or "Letters to the Editor," you're missing an opportunity to brand your title. Rather than use generic titles shared across archetypes, try to find department titles that express the scope of your content defined by your own archetype.

SPIN THE ARCHETYPE'S

CONTENT. B-to-B publications often have new products sections, but finding a distinctive approach to these pages makes your content go the extra mile. Extending the category by adding user comments, rating functionality and utility, or providing category comparisons are all interesting extensions to the same old product press releases. The key idea here is *starting* with the archetype's expected content and then doing something interesting with it.

FIND FRANCHISE IDEAS. Often, being original isn't the same as being unique. Finding a better way to handle feature concepts that are common editorial fodder within an archetype can lead to distinctive annual content. For example, many publications have Ten Best Lists or contest results, but it's the specific way you pull off these generic ideas that create branded content and make your publication a must-read.

PLAN YOUR CALENDAR. Many archetypical elements are part of an annual cycle in the volume of a magazine. Common ideas like a Yearly Round-Up, a Conference Issue, an awards issue or a seasonal issue are part of various archetypes. A calendar planned to distribute these favorite features over the course of the year can help create anticipation for distinct issues instead of a diffuse expectation that the next issue will show up more or less on schedule. When *Stereophile* magazine publishes its list of Recommended Components in June—a classic yearly round-up story and awards story rolled together—it is always the best-selling issue of their year, and a premium asset that pulls in new subscribers and maintains the loyalty of existing readers.

BREAK OUTSIDE THE BOX. Extending the scope of your editorial and expanding your readership can demand moving beyond the limitations of a particular archetype. But it's still a useful reference point for a move into unknown territory.

Editorial creativity and risk-taking happen regardless of archetype. Some publications are based on “paragons”—publishers or editors whose own unique interest and perspective define a publication—while others are business propositions that calculate the competition's scope and the economic potential of adding new content to reach new readers. Even these approaches can benefit from using archetypes as a

baseline of content from which to grow.

Archetypes—as logical and intuitive as they seem—are actually just models that you use to help evaluate and strategize change for your publication. These aren't “rules,” only historical and cultural resonances, but they are powerful enough to make a difference. They're always evolving, as new creative editorial ideas started in one magazine become added to the “must-have” elements of an archetype, and get added to all of the titles in a category. It's rare for a franchise concept to avoid assimilation into an archetypal scope, given enough time. Still, while many have tried, no

one has ever come up with a version of the *Harper's* Index that didn't seem overly referential to the original instead of a standard component of an intellectual general-interest magazine.

Archetypes are just one way of thinking about your magazine from the perspective of readers, advertisers, distributors and your competition—and possible avenues for creating a more resonant version of your title.

Extending the Power of Archetypes

Using an archetype to better define a magazine to stimulate the expectations of readers is only the most obvious way of using them. Jumping off into demographic, regional or cultural variations—or boldly leaping into content areas that are normally associated with other archetypes—are only a few approaches to create unique publications that are self-defining even as they reflect and respect the original archetype.

But the real fun starts when you telegraph reader response to a publication by giving them an archetype that creates a positive initial impression. There are a few approaches to using this technique.

CREATE A HYBRID. Just as new combinations of flora or fauna can be bred that combine the strengths of their disparate forebears, magazines that share archetypes but have different editorial scope can be blended shrewdly to create a new magazine whose scope combines the virtues of both predecessors. *Saveur* magazine is a great example of tweaking traditional genres. A hybrid of two enthusiast archetypes—the travel magazine and the cooking magazine—this award-winning title combines archetypal elements from both into a successful model that leverages advertising, demographic and content synergies.

NEW MAGAZINES COME FROM CROSS-BREEDING. Clever cross-pollination of titles—especially those that share very similar and desirable demographics—can eventually create new archetypes. Doing it in reverse and trying to trace the roots of trendy new magazine types is also a fun game to play. (Of course, the bottom example is just a guess.)



From its tagline, “Savor a World of Authentic Cuisine,” to the name of its grazing section, “FARE” (can you think of another word that resonates with both food and travel?), *Saveur* combines elements of cooking magazines—recipes, food shots, product comparisons and kitchen tips—with the travel publication’s first-person travelogues, scenic photography, destination features and travel data. It reminds readers that its mission is to combine the two archetypes into something fresh.

BORROW CREDIBILITY. Readers identify your magazine as one they want by recognizing the general archetype behind the publication. But archetypes can also be used to influence the perception of your magazine, to add authority or cachet by association. “Borrowing” the look and feel of a consumer newsstand publication encourages readers (and advertisers) to appreciate your association, B-to-B or other controlled-circulation title as if it actually *were* that archetype. And the beauty thing is that readers don’t even realize they’re responding that way. Stimulating their stored reservoir of publication models is a subtle and effective approach to adding more credibility to your title.

CREATE ACCESSIBILITY. A spoonful of sugar may help the medicine go down, but tackling cultural and demographic niches takes a lot more effort. Because the natural cognitive process wants to categorize content, a snap decision—for me/not for me—is made. An archetype is a whole collection of these ideas whose total defines the optimal demographic group. These ideas signal that the publication is meant for them, and readers are tremendously more open to absorbing the content—even *after* they realize that their initial impressions were wrong.

Thomas Nelson Publishers has a real handle on this idea. It has



produced best-selling versions of the New Testament by packaging the Bible in the guise of a Teen magazine for girls called *Revolve*; one for boys called *Refuel* that looks like a gamer magazine, and a hip-hop “urban” bible called *Real*, where—as their own promotion says—“King James meets Queen Latifa.” There is a kid’s version called *Magnify*. Each of these publications, which are dubbed “biblezines,” uses an archetype that is meant to appeal to the intended audience. One look at the covers and their archetypal mimicry demonstrates how effective the concept has been, and why the original version in 2002, *Revolve*, has spawned numerous variations and inspired titles from other publishers.

This is potent management of perception, and it might have a backlash from readers who ultimately realize that, in effect, they have been deliberately misled. Attempting this strategy requires that one really “gets”

WHO AM I? Thomas Nelson Publishing has had incredible success with *Revolve*, a re-imagining of the New Testament as a Teen magazine archetype. So much so, in fact, they’ve also released the same text in the format of (going counter-clockwise from top) a gamer magazine, an urban culture title, and a *Nickelodeon*-like kids book. And—I kid you not—they have even published *Epic Battles of the Old Testament*.

the original archetype. Readers who “see a wolf in sheep’s clothing” become even more reticent to accept the editorial. If the exercise is not pulled off with panache, the ultimate insult to credibility—lameness—is the result. Maintaining the posture of the

archetype throughout the interior is a prodigious feat, but readers familiar with it are sensitive to nuances that signal authenticity.

Two hundred years of magazine history still resonate in today’s publications, some of which have uninterrupted existence since the early-nineteenth century. Modern titles, for all their high-tech production, cross-platform branding and focus-group management, still appear on newsstands organized into their archetypal categories. Readers respond to visual cues and editorial motifs that are based on a lifetime of magazine exposure. As they scan the shelves for content aimed at their interests, they give individual titles only a quick glance. Attracting attention is more than a matter of compelling cover lines or dramatic images; it also demands digging into a reader’s “database” of expectation and mining for gold. 



A U R A S REDESIGN G U I D E

THERE'S AN AXIOM IN THE PUBLISHING WORLD THAT magazines ought to rethink their design and issue map at least every five years. Given the effort it takes to get a typical issue of a magazine out the door, the extra burden of simultaneously rethinking the publication is almost, well, unthinkable.

Yet, complacency damages the effectiveness of a publication. Readers and advertisers notice, and in the worst way: not by being angry or demanding, but by becoming disinterested. That's really a double whammy. Not only are you delivering a product whose value is compromised, you're sending the message that you've lost interest, too.

Of course, publishers, editors and designers realize this. It's just that most often no one has budgeted the time or money to deal with the problem. This is the real obstacle: Treating a magazine design as a finished product that never needs review is the wrong model for effective growth.

Anticipate Redesign A Better Approach

Most organizations recognize the value of ongoing research and development, and everyone knows that regular maintenance is critical for valuable assets of all kinds, from homes to cars to clients. Even so, few organizations have strategies in place for maintaining the vitality and development of one of their main assets—their publication.

For many publishers, redesign is a daunting task—it rears its ugly head at ill-timed moments and demands attention—whether it results from an upper management edict or a disturbing renewals report. It's possible to eliminate most of the anxiety and a lot of the stress that comes with a magazine makeover if you proactively plan the redesign into your work life.

When redesign is an element of ongoing work, it's integrated into everyone's duties instead of treated like an extracurricular activity that requires overtime and squeezed time frames. Ideas developed through a process of group evaluation are usually more satisfying and effective. Finally, factoring in redesign as part of a long-term budget reduces the sticker shock of finding an excellent vendor to tackle the actual redesign. The side benefit of this approach is that, since the project is built into future plans, every issue leading up to the redesign is an opportunity to evaluate what aspects of the book might be changed.

An Ongoing Redesign Strategy

Integrating redesign into your workflow demands making time for evaluation, budgeting funds that eventually will be spent on a new template, and deciding who will do the work. Whether it's done in-house or contracted to a designer or studio, the period of redesign will demand extra attention from everybody.

KEEP YOUR EYE ON THE MISSION.

Every publication has goals for its readership, its bottom line and its scope. By categorizing your mission goals and

demonstrating how they are represented in your issue map, you create an outline that can also be a work plan for growth (see “Mission: Possible,” degree one).

Your mission goals could have changed, or they could be underrepresented in your magazine. This simple way of showing the application of your mission makes it easy to spot what's missing, or what's off-point and can be improved.

MAKE TIME TO CRITIQUE. Every issue is an opportunity for change, but that happens only when there's time for reflection. Although it seems the end of one issue collides with the start of the next, finding even an hour to group review the printed issue is an important part of moving forward. The review should be comparative—look at the current issue against the last and against the proposed content of the next issue. Magazines are all about theme and variation. The most effective content is derived from clear, rich themes that have ample depth for interesting variation.

GET EVERYONE INVOLVED. Empower your staff and leverage your readership by creating multiple channels for feedback on your magazine. The most critical aspect of a redesign—on the house side—is buy-in from upper management and staff. These people need to feel they are involved in the process and an important resource for advice. Reader participation is useful, too. Encourage suggestions or follow-up comments through your e-mail or website, or conduct informal sampling by phone or at industry events that your readers attend.

When discussing the title, try to avoid nitpicking or overly detailed deconstruction of particular articles; focus instead on broad content areas, overall satisfaction and outside-the-box suggestions. You can even use your publication or its companion website to launch a design initiative, engage your readership with possible directions of change, and encourage feedback with a reward of some kind.

SET SCOPE FOR THE REDESIGN.

Everyone has an opinion about the extent of work that needs to go into a particular redesign. While some people won't feel a need for any change at all, others will lobby for a relaunch. Somewhere in between lies the true scope of the redesign. Determining the extent of a redesign effort is the most critical decision that should be made internally. A redesign can be cosmetic, structural or fundamental; usually, it has some elements of each type. Dividing the redesign proportionally among these three levels goes a long way to defining the scope of the project.

SET A CONCRETE TIME LINE. Setting an issue date to launch the redesign helps the process become “real.” Plan backward from that issue and set interim deadlines. Keeping the active part of the redesign under six months is a reasonable goal. If it's too long, the sense of urgency may dissipate, and there will be a corresponding loss of enthusiasm for the project. The better prepared you've become through constant consideration of redesign issues, the shorter the actual redesign effort can be.

Integrating redesign into your publishing culture is the best way to keep all your titles relevant. Magazines by nature have a dynamic relationship with readers. Each issue is yet another opportunity for the title to excite them. When the time comes for a major renovation of your magazine, it should be an extension of the ongoing dialog, not a brand-new conversation.

Get Help

Are You In or Out?

Critical in the redesign decision is whether it will be performed by the regular art director or farmed out to a consulting designer or studio. Opinions go both ways, but there is no definitive choice; it depends largely on the abilities of the in-house staff and the extent of the redesign scope.

Even when a redesign is performed

in-house, it's hardly "free." The principal redesign team needs time to accomplish the task without the exigencies of the regular production schedule. It really is unfair to expand the duties of the regular art director by adding the redesign on top of the regular workflow—no matter how eager he or she may be to do the job. Finding people to step in and handle ongoing design and production for a few issues might be necessary in order to achieve a redesign with merit.

No one is more familiar with the content and workflow than the AD of the magazine. And successful implementation of the redesign is more likely when the person doing the redesign is going to handle the issue-by-issue chores, too.

But going outside has advantages. Redesign and ongoing layout are two different skill sets, and while some art directors are good at redesigns, many lack experience. In-house ADs can find it difficult to be creative at reimagining a title they are so close to. Even if they're given *carte blanche* to rethink the magazine extensively, they might not have the political clout to execute something dramatically different.

A consultant brings experience from multiple projects and a fresh eye to the publication. Thus, magazine staff can focus on critical evaluation and direction.

In fact, there's no reason to be monolithic about this process. Regular staff can handle a great deal of the process, and outside consultants can provide whatever level of involvement the publication desires. It's all a matter of defining their role before you start looking for them.

Choosing a Firm

Finding a design consultant often seems like a crapshoot—there's not necessarily a correlation between fees and quality—and every redesign has its own unique difficulties. But there are some things you should do to make the selection process successful in finding the right fit for your publication:

REQUEST CURRENT BEFORE-AND-AFTER SAMPLES. Nothing will be more indicative of your results than reviewing recent work from a firm. Examples that demonstrate treatments of editorial similar to that of your issue structure and art budget are extremely useful and simple to spot. It's easy to be dazzled by really nice design—and that's important, since you should be impressed with the work—but there needs to be a practical connection to your project.

HAVE A CONVERSATION WITH YOUR PEERS. Naturally, a studio will only present its success stories, but there's much to learn from references, and more often than not they'll be happy to talk with you. Ask about the working relationship; how the firm reacted to critiques and addressed problems; how well the firm guided them through the process; and what parts of the process were most enlightening. After all, a specialized publication firm *should* bring experience to the job that exceeds the expectations of the client.

BE CLEAR ABOUT YOUR DIGITAL STRATEGY. Creating a digital app version of your magazine requires a different skill set and a radically different design to work impressively. A true digital app takes almost as much work as the original print design. But, if all you want is a digital flip-book edition that can be read on a computer or tablet, that takes relatively little alteration from the print design. Be sure to ask for the costs associated with creating specific types of digital products.

DON'T ASK FOR SPEC WORK. Besides it being contrary to AIGA Ethical Guidelines, you simply won't get relevant product when you request sample design work. Without the studio really understanding your needs, their spec work will be no more relevant than samples from other projects.


That doesn't mean you can't ask for a critique of your publication, or an opinion on the direction of the redesign. Just view it more as a

demonstration of how thoughtful and articulate your interaction with the firm principals will be than as a defining element of your choice of studio based on their uninformed recommendations.

PUT YOUR CARDS ON THE TABLE.

Nothing works better when negotiating a fee than being upfront about your budget and your timetable. Redesign fees are always flexible; it doesn't matter what size the firm or who their other clients have been. There are lots of extenuating reasons for design firms to take your job—at your budget. You'll never know if they will unless you ask, so don't take a high fee at face value. Finalize your search by choosing your preferred firms on the basis of their work, and see if you can find a way to make a deal.

GET A CONTRACT. When you finally agree on terms, make sure your contract explicitly details the scope of the job responsibilities, the deliverables, and the time line and fee disbursement.

Your legal department may be inclined to add the usual disclaimers about liability, confidentiality, ownership and compliance with federal and state law. None of this will bother a professional firm, but they will take exception to the project being referred as a "work for hire" and will reserve the right to retain ownership of materials rejected by you during the redesign process. These demands will have no effect on your redesign, so unless your organization has a fixation on rights-control, there's no reason to make this detail a deal-breaker. 

SIX DEGREES of PREPARATION

The process of starting a new publication, or redesigning an existing one, benefits from anything that might improve the probability of success. Over the six installments of this series, we'll take a practical and philosophical look at what makes magazines work. Together, these six segments will comprise a blueprint for magazine success.

MISSION STATEMENTS

How do you get from idea to launch and increase the probability of success? Start with a plan.

ARCHETYPES Why should your magazine be more like other magazines, except when it shouldn't? The answer lies in two centuries and 100,000 titles.

BRANDING More than a logo, more than a title, the soul of your publication is in its organization, tone and memorability. It's what keeps readers coming back for more.

SCOPE What, exactly, should your magazine be about? And how does it validate the mission and create a path for growth and prosperity? In many cases, it's not what you put in—it's what you leave out.

ISSUE MAPPING AND NAVIGATION What's on each page and why are key to making readers appreciate what makes your title unique and worth reading.

COMMUNITY, PRODUCTS AND REFERENCE (C/P/R) These are the DNA of every successful enthusiast, B-to-B and association publication. Harnessing the power of C/P/R can jump-start or revive your magazine.

DEGREE THREE: Brand MORE THAN SKIN

IS A BRAND JUST A LOGO STUCK ONTO A PRODUCT? In the original meaning of the word—a fiery torch that indelibly marks an object—the brand was an objective declaration of ownership, but it evolved into a subjective summation of the values practiced by the owner. A brand has become a symbol of the choices made by the makers of a product. Your brand is more than simply a nameplate stuck onto the top of a magazine cover, but a declaration of the choices made in the editorial and business scope of your title. Your brand is the mark of the complex construction that comprises all the qualities that make your magazine unique.

Four Layers of Branding

Magazines are sophisticated information delivery mechanisms with a long history. Branding is like turbocharging their ability to help readers “get it.” There are four ways in which magazines imprint themselves onto their readers: graphic identity, issue packaging, franchise content and editorial voice. Each of these contributes elements of memorability, anticipation and delight that are essential to rampant magazine addiction. Each part also affects the others, so that a well-branded publication works on all levels simultaneously.

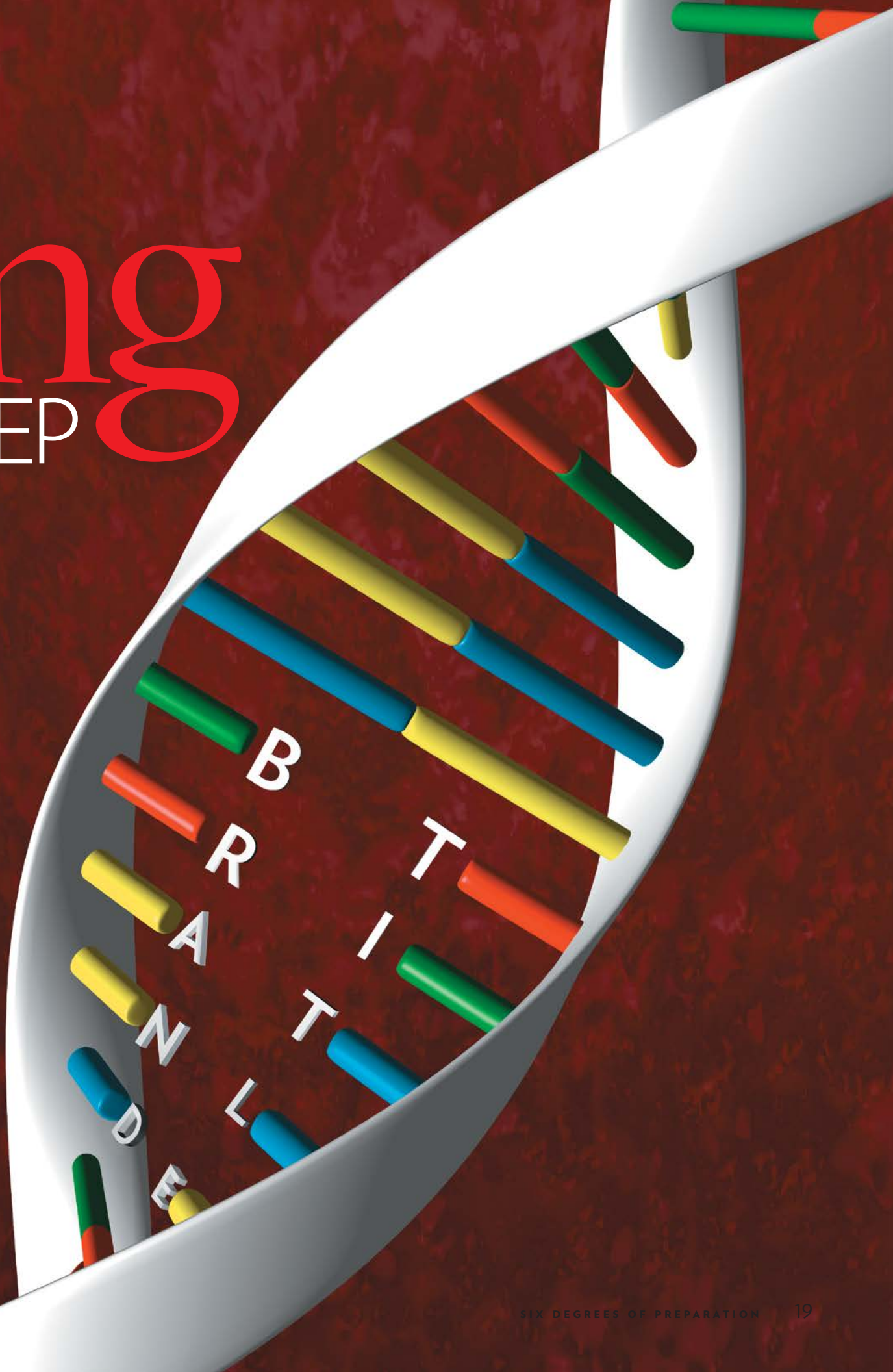
The first two chapters examined how a magazine's mission dictates the content

and structure, and the way aligning (or imitating) the relevant publishing archetype makes it easier for readers to understand the scope of a publication. It's a logical progression to apply these ideas while adding distinctive editorial tone and visual elements to the mix.

Graphic Elements

The actual graphic elements in a publication can be simple, but they need to be distinctive and consistent. Some visual ideas are as simple as large margins and lots of white space, while more complex designs use modular grids, theme and variation in color and position, and

ing
DEEP



sophisticated application of a variety of typographic elements based on a few savvy font family choices.

If anything, the tendency to overdesign is more detrimental to branding than relying on a simpler set of elements and applying them consistently. The most difficult aspect of extremely complex templates is their inability to stay fresh and exciting for the designers of each issue; the design template can become a straightjacket instead of a creative guide.

Establishing a set of design motifs that can be used as theme and variation is at the heart of a successful magazine design. Simple elements become dramatic branding motifs when applied deliberately. Think about magazines with strong visual

identities: *Time's* red border. *National Geographic's* yellow one; or even *Highlights Magazine's* classic trapezium are iconic branding motifs based on simple elements. *National Geo's* whole identity is built around an open bordered yellow rectangle.

Additional graphic branding elements are similar to many corporate identity programs. The cover nameplate is like a logo; typographic consistency and standard placement of elements in all applications are the same concerns addressed in magazine style sheets and modular grids. Choosing a color palette to use in your publication echoes the "colortyping" used by many corporate identity programs to differentiate divisions or regional entities.

Each element of an identity program has the possibility of being extended by creative choices that apply to the overall design. For example, using classic typographic techniques—such as small caps, flourishes, size-

specific fonts for even color, and a limited choice of mostly serif fonts—gives a distinctive look to a publication. Choosing to use edgy or eccentric handmade headline type lends a specific tone to a magazine,

as does the use of illustration or photography to accompany openings. *The New York Times Magazine* is an interesting example of a decidedly text-heavy publication that uses consistently engaging

illustration in its opening spreads while allowing nearly text-only succeeding pages in many stories. Of course, the *Times* magazine can afford illustrators and photographers who can contribute striking content, but the *Times'* approach is not a compromise; rather, it's built into the nature of the content.

Packaging Makes the Product Make Sense

Even a great design and a strong mark won't be enough if there's no associated messaging that carries the brand. Tide's distinctive burst alone isn't enough; it's the message of strength, rejuvenation, cleanliness, freshness and value that's *associated* with the brand name. Apple means innovation, eccentricity and style. Jell-O is associated with fun, convenience, family and (oddly enough) healthiness.

Magazines need to carry their brand by helping readers associate strong messaging with the identity. To some degree, it begins with the choice of title, but that isn't always a prerequisite. Many titles are built around a name or topic that lacks specificity to the scope of the book. For every *GOOD* magazine, there are several *Lear's*. Who could guess that *Blender* is a music magazine?

Then again, it only takes a second to "get" what *Blender* is. The scope of the content, the tone of the book and the identification with its audience are readily apparent from the cover images, the tagline, the cover lines and the structure of the book revealed in the TOC.

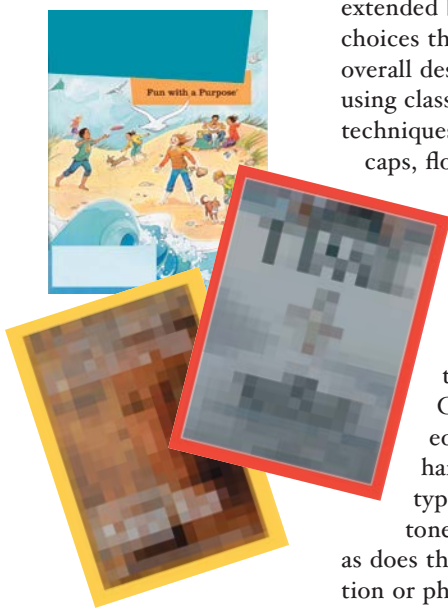
These packaging elements

that reveal the bones of the template are also crucial branding elements. They associate content with unique structure and an editorial voice. A story in *Blender* could appear in *Rolling Stone*, *VIBE* or even *PASTE*, but its tone and positioning brand it for *Blender*. While individual departments may have generic content that shares scope with other titles in an archetype, distinctive branding of the department and the content package that contains it binds the content to the magazine in the mind of the reader.

Franchise Content Builds Character

It's one thing to brand generic content, but another thing altogether to create unique ideas that can be used as definitive content firmly associated with your publication. This content—called franchise content because it belongs to the magazine and is promoted as uniquely available only in the magazine—is one of the hallmarks of periodical publications. Just as a business franchise takes a unique concept, applies distinctive branding and then grows through the application of the elements in expanding geographical locations, franchise content is a magazine equivalent of Quiznos; and when it takes off, it's the equivalent of Starbucks (well, up until last year, anyway).

Great magazines have franchise content that transcends their own publication. You may never read *Sports Illustrated*, but you're probably aware of its Swimsuit Issue, and who's on the cover. Similarly,



GUESS THE TITLE. It's not hard because these simple, graphic borders pack a big branding punch.

you may never read *People Magazine*, but you may still be aware of who it thinks is “The Sexiest Man Alive” each year.

Franchise content extends beyond annual features to elements included as part of the standard magazine template. The first issue of *Playboy* in December 1954 featured Marilyn Monroe on the cover, but the full-length nude portrait against a red silk background was a full-page bleed, not the famous “centerfold” and—without permission—Marilyn was named “Miss Sweetheart” for December. It would be another few years before these famous elements were actually a part of the *Playboy* template—and the archetype for the modern “Men’s” magazine. Yet, today, imagining *Playboy* without its franchise content—the “Playmate of the Month,” the centerfold, “*Playboy* Interview,” “The Unabashed Dictionary,” and all of the other famous elements—is impossible. Combined with one of the world’s most recognized nameplates and an iconic logo, the content *concepts* work to create an indelible idea of the magazine—even if you’ve never held one in your hands. And to think the magazine was almost called *Stag Party*.

Building franchise content isn’t a formula, however, and some of the most famous proprietary content ideas evolved out of necessity or dumb luck. Even the most successful franchise concept of all time, the *Sports Illustrated* Swimsuit Issue, began as a mere five-page photo shoot in 1964 as a way to fill pages in an

otherwise sports-shy issue in March. Creating dedicated content sometimes smacks of contrivance, imitation or desperation, but when it connects with an audience, a great content idea can exist even without a dedicated publication.

The fashion critic Richard Blackwell released “Blackwell’s List of Ten Worst-Dressed Women” starting in 1960 up until his death in 2008 and despite a host of imitators, the snarky list got heavy media coverage when he released it each January. Even without a dedicated publication, compelling franchise content can have a life of its own.

It’s Not Just What You Say, It’s How You Say It

One thing that made Blackwell’s List successful is the tone of the comments. The list is a conglomeration of poetic techniques, from alliteration (Martha Stewart: “dull, dowdy and devastatingly dreary” and “fabulous fashion independents”) to free verse (Cher: “A million beads/And one overexposed derriere”) and pun (Queen Elizabeth: “Was she the palace Christmas tree, or just a royal clown?”). Often, he simply quipped: Martha Stewart “Dresses like the centerfold for *Farmer’s Almanac*.” Other times, he combined forms: Dixie Chicks “...look like a trio of truck stop fashion tragedies/trapped in a typhoon.”

Many believed the list was mean-spirited. However, Blackwell has shown letters from many celebrities, including Dolly Parton, Mariah Carey and

BRIEFCASE

Show Me the Bunny

Hefner came up with the idea of a rabbit because of its “humorous sexual connotation” and its “frisky and playful” image. The tuxedo was added for sophistication. In addition, he chose a rabbit as a means of tweaking his nose at *Esquire* and *The New Yorker*, which used men as symbols. The rabbit logo was designed by Art Paul, who was hired freelance to design the logo but stayed on to become the art director of the magazine for the next 30 years. According to Paul, “If I had any idea how important that little rabbit was going to be, I probably would have redrawn him a dozen times to make certain I was doing him justice. As it was, I did one drawing and that was it. I probably spent all of half an hour on it.”



BRIEFCASE

Cussing Kissin'

How explicit language and images are treated in a publication is an editorial policy that affects the tone of the magazine. Some magazines won't use certain words at all and leave a dash instead, whereas some use the first letter and provide helpful dashes so the reader can figure it out (thanks for the help!)

Even when such language is used, publications have rules. Some will use obscenities in direct quotes, or in fiction printed in the publication (as *The New Yorker* does), while others allow the tone of an article's writer to remain intact, even if the writing is laced with profane invectives (as *Esquire* often will). And finally, there are publications that have no compunction about using the most colorful adjectives as part of the editorial tone of the magazine in heads, decks and blurbs in every issue.

The use of profanity and slang is a deliberate choice to engage a readership through inclusive argot or an edgy tone that presents a sense of complicity—it shows you're part of the "cool" crowd.

But what happens when something comes along that challenges the standards of your magazine? The *Biblical Archaeology Review* had exactly that problem when it wanted to publish a rare find—oil lamps found in Ashkelon that just happened to have images of randy Ashkelonians doing the nasty. *BAR* editor Hershel Shanks solved the problem by letting the readers vote on whether images of the lamps should be shown in the pages of the magazine. The readers responded overwhelmingly in favor of publication, but to make sure that any offended readers could be placated, the oil lamp images were printed apart from the text on a page backed by an ad, so it could be torn from the issue without disturbing the article.



country singer Tanya Tucker, expressing their thanks for being selected. While one could conclude that the list is rude, historically, the fashion maven selects only the most buzzworthy celebrities—generally pop culture icons who capitalize on their flamboyant appearance—for inclusion. The impact of this humorously derisive yet not-exactly-mean tone started a kind of humor that has since become widespread, and is the current *modus operandi* of programs as disparate as *The Daily Show* with Jon Stewart and TMZ.

Choosing the tone of your publication is an editorial prerogative that should reverberate in the design of the book. Slang, argot and dialect have visual and typographic equivalents, so a clear intent for the editorial approach is reflected in how the designer chooses color, layout and fonts.


When *Time* was redesigned in 2007 it was clear that matching the editorial tone to the design was one of the highest priorities, as well as respectfully acknowledging the visual legacy of previous designs. *Time* is a highly formatted editorial package in which the ability for readers to make a quick scan and then move toward a more in-depth read as interest warrants is the primary motif. Issue to issue, repeated formats familiarize readers with patterns they eventually learn to parse effortlessly, and

begin to enjoy.

The templated visual language places heavy demands on editors and writers to write to space, use short punchy heads, make declarative summary blurbs and captions, and subvert personal style to the needs of the magazine's tone. Few publications can demand such rigid application of editorial content into a template. Yet, in the case of the weekly news magazine, *Time* is betting that reader familiarity with the book's structure and tone will be the key to keeping the print publication attractive to its current subscribers and younger, less-print-oriented readers.

Branding Evolves

Building a magazine brand takes patience and trial and error, and is often influenced by the talents and eccentricities of the people who publish, edit and design the issues. But every publication can benefit from an identity audit to evaluate how intently these four branding approaches are working in a publication.

While it may seem obvious that a redesign addresses the graphic elements of an identity, a thorough revamping of a publication also demands a close look at how successfully the template defines scope. How feature stories create unique content and content presentations. And finally, how consistent editorial tone captures the attention of the readers. 

HOW TO REDESIGN A MAGAZINE IN 6 WEEKS (NOT RECOMMENDED)

Here's how Pentagram partner Luke Heyman redesigned *Vibe* magazine. It might have been short but his ideas are sweet.

STEP 1. PANIC

STEP 2. DISGUISE PANIC BY DISTRACTION.

Ask lots of questions:

- ▶ Why are you redesigning?
- ▶ Why now?
- ▶ What's wrong with what you have?
- ▶ What do you want to retain?
- ▶ Are you changing the editorial content or the structure?
- ▶ What do you want your readers to see: evolution or revolution?
- ▶ What does your audience think: Have you done any reader surveys or focus groups?
- ▶ Why isn't your art director doing the redesign?
- ▶ What does the editor/publisher/owner (anyone with power) think? Can we talk to them?
- ▶ What's the competition doing?

Try and listen to some of the answers.

STEP 3. STILL IN A PANIC YOU LOOK TO STEAL OTHER PEOPLE'S IDEAS.

- ▶ You buy all the competitors' magazines.
- ▶ You educate yourself about the content. In *Vibe's* case, watch lots of music videos.
- ▶ You buy related magazines and foreign magazines. (Showing foreign magazines makes you look cosmopolitan and sophisticated. They can be expensive, but charge back to the client as research.)
- ▶ You Google images from related industries—in this case, music, fashion.
- ▶ You look through the back issues for cool stuff that's been thrown away by mistake. (*Vibe* was originally designed by Gary Koepke, who produced a simple, bold and timeless design. We stole some of that.)

STEP 3.5. PUT ALL THE REFERENCES AND RESEARCH ON THE WALL. ORGANIZE IT.

For *Vibe* we showed three groups:

1. tough, urban, gangsta, ghetto
2. affluent, soft, feminine
3. early '90s retro day-glo—a trend in sneaker and fashion design

Force them to talk about what they like and don't like...*listen*.

STEP 4. SET UP GRIDS. DO NOT REINVENT THE WHEEL. CHOOSE TYPEFACES. DO NOT REINVENT THE WHEEL.

Make sure one is a grown-up text face—one that's quite "boring" (i.e., readable and non-trendy). If they have any long stories that should be read, you'll need that. The display fonts can have more character but the text face shouldn't be too distinctive: It'll get tired very quickly. For this project, we re-embraced *Vibe Gothic*, which was drawn for the magazine years ago. It had been crowded out by a lot of other fonts. In fact, we cut the font families down to just *Vibe Gothic* and *Leitura*—a large serif family with some sexy display weights.

STEP 5. FIGURE OUT THE SECTION, DEPARTMENT NAMING AND HIERARCHY.

The editors will probably want to do this but you might need to help them along. Design ways of labeling the pages clearly—the navigation. Use these elements and others as ways of "branding" the page. The editorial must separate from the ads and the magazine must have its own identity.

For *Vibe* we came up with two graphic ideas:

1. The broken word rubric. This was a direct lift from some of the early issues. It was used for a few months and then discarded. We loved it and lovingly restored it. It's something inappropriate for almost every other project we work on so we jumped at this opportunity to do something so "irrational."

2. The five bar device. This very flexible graphic was designed (or programmed) to evolve.

STEP 5.5. MEANWHILE, TALK TO MORE PEOPLE, including the folks actually doing the job day-in and day-out.

MORE QUESTIONS: What are their favored magazines? They'll often say *Vanity Fair* and *GQ*. At this point, gently remind them that they have 8% of the budget of *Vanity Fair* and *GQ* and 12% of the staff. Bring down their expectation level.

STEP 6. DESIGN SAMPLE COVERS, key department pages and a couple of feature spreads for two or three different directions. RAPID PROTOTYPE.

The idea is to get a sense of look and feel. Kerning captions at this point is not useful.

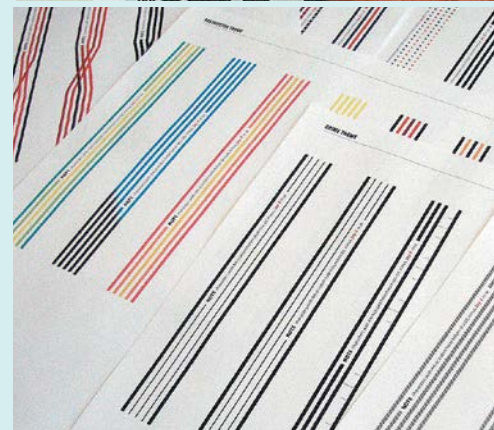
When you show single pages, show them next to ads. Show them next to their current ads—realistic ads. Not just beautiful ads. Show. Discuss. Listen. *Make them choose one direction.*

STEP 7. REFINE TYPE AND GRIDS. KEEP TRACK OF WORD COUNTS.

If you hand over pages with 20% fewer words on them there's probably going to be a problem. Take care of folios, end slugs and all the other details. Establish the basic color palette and hopefully you'll be able to standardize some formats. Captions, etc. should be the same throughout the book.

STEP 8. NOW QUICKLY APPLY THE SYSTEM TO EVERY PAGE.

Most pages come naturally—the solution is obvious and you'll probably know it when you see it. There are always a few that need working through.



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DEGREE FOUR:



WHAT'S IN, WHAT'S OUT AND WHY

IT SHOULD BE THE MOST OBVIOUS PART OF A MAGAZINE PREMISE: WHAT'S IT ALL ABOUT?

But here's the complication—magazines not only need to be about something, they need to appeal to someone. Scope is the sum of all the editorial decisions you make to attract and appeal to all your audiences—readers, advertisers and investors.

Scope comes from the Italian *skopo*, meaning aim, and the word *skopos*, which means target. So, in the most basic sense of the word, scope is not only a declaration of your intended content, but an evaluation of how well your magazine meets its own definition. You get to build the target and then you choose how to shoot at it—and to complicate matters—you get to constantly move the target.

The parts of your scope are relatively simple. Your magazine is defined by its mission, and the degree to which you broaden your focus extends your scope. But the more inclusive your content, the less you can rely on your readership to be intrigued with the entire magazine, and the more difficult it becomes to create a distinctive niche. Finally, practical considerations of archetype, advertising, page count and production specifics affect scope. You have to actually produce the magazine you promise.

One way to think about this is to chart editorial in three dimensions: defining the breadth of your content, the degree of depth in your stories and the relationship between content and time. Some magazines may have a huge breadth but a small time frame (think newsweeklies), while others may have incredible depth but extremely narrow breadth, such as an academic journal. Mapping your content can sharpen your perspective and highlight problems in your scope. You

may not be able to create the editorial depth you want in the time or money you have to produce each issue, or you may have so much breadth that it can't fit into your page count. Keeping an eye on your “value proposition”—the amount of engaging content you offer readers in exchange for their money and time—should be a constant benchmark for editorial structure.

Finding the Right Scope

There are no “rules” about how content is created for a magazine; sometimes the only true defining factor is the interests of the publisher or editor—and when their publications are synonymous with their eccentricities, the results can be successful because of them. Many of these eponymous pubs, like *O—The Oprah Magazine*, or *Martha Stewart Living* benefit from the enthusiasm and credibility of their founders despite the fact that they aren't in traditional masthead positions. Marvin Shanken molded *Cigar Aficionado* and *Wine Spectator* into luxury vehicles that reflected his own interests, and found an enthusiastic audience. No one would question the fact that Henry Luce's political and moral obsessions drove *Time's* coverage in the first two decades of its existence, and Hugh Hefner's *Playboy* remains a testimony to his own world view.

Discounting the paragon publisher effect, you can create a scope based on logical elaborations on your goals for the magazine. Here's where we start making use of ideas that have been described in earlier parts of the series. As you'll see, there are five elements that can be considered when determining the best scope for your publication.

Fairways+Greens

Back when I came to the magazine nearly seven years ago, Vic Williams and I just wanted to build a publication that people would read. In fact, that was our informal tagline for a long time: The Magazine Golfers Read. Vic was busting his hump to put out a magazine that only covered Reno-Tahoe and Northern California, and he was writing about the same courses and same stuff over and over again. So together we began to branch out until *Fairways+Greens* covered the entire West Coast, even with an occasional Hawaii section and quite a bit from Western Canada. It was painful at times, and there are still readers who don't realize we're not just a Northern California publication—but we figure that's a battle any magazine has to fight when they expand and evolve.

We decided to do things a bit differently than the typical golf publication, and in the process try to fill the void between the national magazines and the local magazines. (There's a great regional travel magazine out here on the West coast called *Sunset*, and it's always been a model of sorts for the direction we want to head in terms of market share.) So we limit the amount of instruction coverage we do because there are national mags that do it much better than we ever could. Same with equipment reviews—we only write about things we've personally tested because we believe our readers want (and trust) our opinion.

And we have very little coverage on private golf unless there is a real estate or resort component to the property. Pretty much, we wanted to cover West Coast golf that is accessible to the masses. Thus, our tagline has morphed into We Know Golf Travel. And Golf Travelers Know Us. Our reader surveys show that folks put a lot of stock in what we print (81% say destinations or products seen in the magazine make them want to learn more about the destination or product) and 97% of readership regularly include golf when they travel.

We always want to do something more creative on the cover or write about something that nobody else has thought about. We're not always successful, but we like to think we bring a different perspective to golf. It all goes back to a mission statement I learned from a friend during my newspaper days: "Publications should inform, entertain and inspire their readers." And we hope we're doing at least a little of each with every issue. —DARIN BUNCH, CO-PUBLISHER



1 Be Mission Forward

In the first part of this series, we described the mission statement of your magazine as similar to a business plan. Your scope is your editorial plan of action for your magazine, and the choices you make should be directly derived from your mission.

The mission statement also has practical business goals attached to it that don't translate directly to editorial, but there still needs to be accommodation for those goals. If your trade publication plan identifies a dozen vertical markets that

need to be addressed to facilitate ad sales, an editorial structure has to be created to support that mission element.

It could be an editorial package that addresses these elements in individual departments, or a series of special sections that cover the gamut one market segment each issue. Even provision for advertorial concepts are part of your editorial scope.

2 Respect the Archetype

Even the most iconoclastic publisher still has to pay attention to where the magazine will sit on a newsstand, and if it's a new title, both readers and advertisers want to know what "kind" of publication it will be. More than that, identifying the archetype serves as a starting point for what the magazine is and *isn't*; a reference that new readers can use to understand why the magazine should matter to them, and ultimately why they should prefer it to competitors in the niche.

There are editorial

motifs that are expected in certain archetypes. Cooking magazines will have recipes, seasonal menus, a focus on food and menu types, and technique and provision information. Referencing the archetype doesn't mean following it so much as deciding how your scope differs and why. As much as *O* is Oprah's baby, it still fits solidly in the middle of the Woman's Magazine archetype.

3 Go from Broad to Narrow

Here's another visualization technique that might make sense too. Most people know what Venn diagrams are, and maybe even their cousins, Euler and Johnston diagrams. These can be handy ways for scoping your scope. In this instance, a large circle represents the entire mission of your magazine. Inside this shape should fit broad editorial elements that make up your book, and within *those*, individual department or story components that will actually appear each issue. Some of those components might overlap two of the larger components, and in fact, the more they do, the more interesting they can be.

Almost everything stays within the largest circle—it's your mission—but perhaps the next area of exploration might be content areas that only *partially* intersect with the mission. These are the dangerous but seductive editorial elements that broaden your scope but dilute your audience focus. There are always corollary factors—reader demographics, advertiser vertical markets and content

synergies—that are compelling enough to warrant an expeditionary foray outside the Venn circle of your mission. Look how successful the *Sports Illustrated* swimsuit edition became—definitely out of scope!

④ Find a Unique Approach

No matter how unique your magazine may seem, there will be content that is similar to content in other publications. There is always some form of competition, even if it isn't always another magazine. Covering similar editorial ground as other sources is a natural result of being part of an archetype, but how you handle the material makes all the difference. *Wired* magazine has a letters department and a new products department, but they are called, respectively, Rants 'n Raves and Fetish. These approaches reflect both the mission elements of the publication—and a sense of what their readers would find engaging.

Developing franchise content—stuff not found in any other publication—is also a function of scope. Creating unique department concepts and building feature stories with enough depth to become annual tentpole issues help a publication grow a personality reflected in both editorial choices and tone.

⑤ Build a Reader Paradigm

Lacking the driving force of a publisher determined to proof content against his or her own idiosyncratic interests, one way to begin to refine your scope is

to construct a reader paradigm by defining the perfect reader and then using interviews and reader demographic information to confirm, revise or extend your “perfect reader” profile.

Imagining your typical reader helps develop a sense of corollary interests that your real audience might have and the possibility for expanding your scope to accommodate them or add to your business opportunities. The same is true for refining your scope to eliminate editorial that might appear opportunistic or at odds with your core values.

Your “perfect” subscriber doesn't have to be real, of course. Someone half male and half female is not the same thing as having a 50-50 gender split in your subscription base.

You could start by building a Frankenstein's monster out of all the particulars in a reader that is on your wish list, without regard to actual demographics (start-ups might not have anything in the way of a subscriber base), in an attempt to establish the explicit parameters of your scope and then try to find your reader universe through list building from other publications that have overlapping demographics.

Knowing most of your readers are independent entrepreneurs, or that they also have children, are valuable pieces of data that might seem irrelevant to your scope. Yet, if you know your audience shares a similar

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Widescreen Review



Once upon a time in the last century, a video buff named Gary Reber was looking for high-quality sources for his expensive front-projection system—which in those days, with a CRT boardroom-quality monitor, video switcher and scaler, cost upwards of 40 grand. At the time, the best consumer source was Laserdiscs, 12-inch silver platters that output analog NTSC signals.

Laserdiscs were expensive, so Reber wondered, if he had a magazine that reviewed Laserdiscs, would studios send him free review copies?


Turns out, they would. That's how *Widescreen Review* started 17 years ago. It's still being published and has a circulation of around 20,000.

From the beginning, *WR* was Reber's baby, and he filled the pages with stuff that interested him. High-end equipment reviews, industry news and gossip, and technical education were (and are still) part of the mix, along with those Laserdisc reviews, which were as much concerned with audio and video quality as the movie content.

Today, *Widescreen Review's* scope is still relevant, because Reber's quest to achieve movie theater sound and picture at home is even more achievable with HDTVs and the latest processors. And those Laserdiscs? Long gone, but Blu-Ray discs now offer image and sound quality that in some cases can surpass a theater's. And when they are replaced by streaming from the cloud, Reber will probably still be there, and so will his readers—even if they are reading *WR* on an iPad.

interest, lifestyle or affiliation, there might be opportunities to incorporate content that could further solidify your subscription base. At the very least, there is evidence to show advertisers of an off-scope product, or if you share your lists, the potential for more sales.

Scope is a tool for growth and a check against losing sight of the core content

that attracted your audience in the first place. The ability of magazines to constantly change and yet somehow stay true to themselves is a delicate balancing act revolving around the twin needs of staying valuable to your original audience while building a loyal following of new readers attracted to your publication for new reasons. 

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DEGREE FIVE: ISSUE MAPPING AND

Tell Your Readers Where to Go

The natives have become notoriously restless. Even people who *like* to read magazines have become ambivalent about buying an issue, let alone subscribing to a magazine. Your publication has to appeal to the tyro as well as to the loyal fan. And what do first-time readers of your magazine want to know?

First-time readers are enticed into cracking open the book by compelling interest. Cover blurbs and provocative imagery will get them inside, but what keeps them there and keeps them coming back? For many readers, it is the structure of the magazine and the accessibility of the content. So, when a newcomer is thumbing casually through your current

issue looking for that cover story, you have to grab the opportunity to wow them with what you've got.

In Degree Four we reviewed how the scope of the magazine plays an important part in keeping interest high. The scope of the publication is revealed in the **issue map**, and the organization of the editorial

NAVIGATION



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FOB: PRODUCT REVIEW

AD

AD

LETTERS

GRAZING

GRAZING

AD

FOB: MAKEOVER

AD

LAND

FEATURE

FEATURE

BOB: GARDENS

MARKETPLACE

FOB: POWER 101

AD

BOB: TRAVEL

BOB: TRAVEL

MARKETPLACE

MARKETPLACE

MARKETPLACE

MARKETPLACE

BRIEFCASE



A Fast Example

In *Fast Company*, there's a monthly editorial package called FAST TALK. It's a business-people profile section that reports the advice of significant individuals involved in a common field of work. The section consists of six or so short bios, large-format location portraits and brief quotes on the relevant theme. In fact, most of the non-feature pages are made up of format-oriented sections. NOW is a monthly calendar, NEXT is a grazing section, and a series of short columns all receive uniform treatment. Like many magazines, *Fast Company* has moved its features to the end of the book, instead of placing them in the traditional "well" at the center. This structure provides advertisers a more seductive set of positions that are all in the "front of the book." It is significant too, to realize that the ratio of features to department pages in *Fast Company* is about one-to-one. Their editorial approach values the departments and features equally.

The structure of this magazine is a deliberate approach to fulfilling their mission of bringing engaging business reporting to their audience by presenting personal insight and practical resources.

construction is revealed in the navigation design. The navigation design imparts branding to the publication, alerts readers to the archetype of the publication and also reveals the key tenets of its mission. As we reach this fifth of the six degrees, it is clear how all of the previous elements come into play as an issue's template is laid out and visually executed.

Order, Order

The Table of Contents is a schematic road map of the layout of the book. If your publication has a flat or inexpressive structure, then so does your TOC. The most basic structure for listing departments and features gives readers very little information about the scope or the mission of a magazine—mostly all it does is assure the reader that it *is* a magazine; these are the minimal tropes of the publication genre. But a book with a more sophisticated issue map has a Contents page that can be so much more informative.

THE ISSUE MAP is more than a template for a typical issue; it's a content game plan that breaks a complex enterprise into manageable chunks and provides a process for evaluation and change.

At the simplest level, the issue map defines the **structure** of the publication—the way features, departments and advertising are distributed through the book. Not just their order, but what percentage of the book each part occupies.

THE MAGAZINE'S STRUCTURE is further defined by subdivisions of content.

Departments might be divided into columnists, commentators and process advice. Their relative length and design can be fixed to a certain word count or a particular layout.

Features, the number and length, can define the magazine. There may be many short stories of equal length; or a couple of elaborate, well-developed features; or a longer main feature followed by shorter stories.

All of these choices influence the design—branding and navigation elements, art and typography considerations—that is identified with the look of your magazine. And it all starts with structure.

Fresh Perspective

Imagine your publication reorganized in a way that makes its value more obvious to readers. You probably have some excellent content but perhaps it's never been organized in any revealing way. Conduct an exercise that involves taking a step back from your publication and reevaluating your issue map.

BREAK OUT THE SCISSORS. The exercise consists of breaking down all the individual elements of your magazine: features, departments and advertising—literally cutting your pages up—and then shuffling them around. Similarities in subject matter or editorial structure, or even the look of a page, may suggest organization that will produce packages of content with a

BRIEFCASE

cohesive editorial thrust. This kind of exercise can foster incredible creative brainstorming among your staff—the people who know the publication best.

There are different approaches to building variety and rhythm in the publication. Valid ways of organizing your publication may be based on:
▶ your mission statement
▶ editorial construction
▶ demographic groups
▶ categorical segmentation
▶ advertising priorities
▶ archetypal elements.

For example, if your magazine is based on a mission that is easily broken down into several critical elements, then those parts can become basis for packages that define the structure of your book.

A second example is packages of similar editorial construct. Many magazines have a front “grazing” section of short items and news bits. The content of the section may cover a wide scope, but is distinctive in its editorial approach and design, and that defines the section.

Your content may immediately suggest groupings, or you can try to fit your content into defined packages that group content. This approach might lead to ideas for departments or recurring features that weren't obvious before.

Developing each section required building new departments and evaluating the value of each new content idea. The “value proposition” for each story—the justification for its inclusion as an asset to the publication—was evaluated both on editorial validity based on the mission, and a clear demographic rationale to encourage adults. And, of course, an advertiser's interest in the topic.

Navigation, Branding and Attitude

Now your TOC becomes more informative because your groupings help readers understand the scope, tone and direction of the magazine. It also reinforces the branding—those attributes, such as a recognizable editorial voice and visual elements and ornamentation, that make your magazine unique and readily identifiable to its readers.

Scouting On Point

Scouting magazine is a publication of the Boy Scouts of America, and, unlike its better-known sister (brother?) publication Boys' Life, it is sent to more than one million adult leaders of Scout troops. The last major redesign was more than a decade ago, and the magazine had lost sight of its audience and its mission. The book was light on departments and heavy on short features, which, although interesting, tended to be off-mission in helping leaders to lead better. A redesign had the goal of updating the cosmetics, but soon evolved into a complete restructuring of the content.

The new Scouting has three department packages: a grazing section called Trailhead; Roundtable, a community resource section; and Outdoors, a best-practices package geared toward camping, hiking and travel.

Developing each section required building new departments and evaluating the value of each new content idea. The “value proposition” for each story—the justification for its inclusion as an asset to the publication—was evaluated both on editorial validity based on the mission, and a clear demographic rationale to encourage adults. And, of course, an advertiser's interest in the topic.

The new tagline “Lead, Inspire, Explore” roughly equates to each package, and serves as a gut check for developing the feature well.



BRIEFCASE



Ancestry Has Good DNA

Ancestry.com's institutional publication, *Ancestry* magazine, needed a thorough tuneup if plans to increase its distribution twenty-fold was to be successful. The publication—an enthusiast magazine for people who enjoy tracing their family genealogy—had good content, but a shallow issue map. Consisting

of loosely defined departments and features, and nonexistent typographic and ornamental navigation, the redesign was an opportunity to create a new issue map that would help readers get the most from the content. The result of editorial brainstorming was an epiphany about reader interests.

Categorizing then-current departments and thinking about why the hobby fascinated readers, the editors realized that there were three broad categories of interest: understanding the past to put their family history in context; the techniques and case studies of searching for past relatives; and making a record of current family history to pass along as a legacy.

These three areas became three content packages in the new book—Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow. The navigation is simple, each section is identified by a small rubric in the upper left corner, and each department title surprints the rubric in a light tint. That simple typographic design holds together the entire magazine.

Looking at the issue map, it becomes obvious that creating content packages makes branding through theme and variation more easily accomplished and more obvious to the reader.

A side effect of the new structure for the book was a burst of editorial creativity in developing new department ideas and sharpening the focus of retained topics.

EDITORIAL BRANDING consists of two elements: franchise language and tone. Clearly, the generic title of “Departments” does little to describe the unique scope of your publication. The content in each section, and the way the sections and individual departments are titled, reflect the editorial tone of the publication by using argot, branded naming conventions or distinctive department concepts. The accompanying Briefcases provide great examples of department packages organized to create distinctive branding that reflect the scope and mission.

MARRY EDITORIAL TO DESIGN BRANDING. The tone of the publication is affected by visual and navigation design decisions, because those choices can dictate editorial copy. For instance:

- ▶ The way standard magazine elements such as decks, headlines, subheads, captions, jump lines, blurbs and story addenda are approached typographically establish a consistent visual style and editorial tone. If heads are supposed to be short and decks long, if captions start with a two word in-line title, these elements need to be written that way consistently.
- ▶ Distinctive typographic motifs, such as an eclectic smash of font families for two-word department titles may be a strong visual motif, but they won't work without clever editorial naming conventions.

Creating even more of these unique-to-your-magazine design+typographic+editorial elements can begin with finding new approaches to conventional departments



3000 Years Later, It's Still a Small World

7 things you'll find in a cemetery—aside from the obvious

Arrivals and departures.
Check tombstones for dates and locations of birth and death.

Married names and maiden identities.
Look for names like, "the wife of John Doe."

The communication.

The Obituary board is developed as a complete record of communicating with graves on-site for general interest in 1991. Unlike its predecessors, the Obit board also includes a complete and a condensed report (the obituary, for example) to help readers understand the report. Instead, the Obit board is printed with letters and short messages so a reader can simply post his or her message.

The end.

The first names added to find in 1991 (the names contain that they make the spirit more themselves by tracing their lineages). The Obit board, however, shows the right to the board. Today, the Obit board features just the date, letters and message inclusive making it more—and easier—to speak with the dead.

Source: The magazine 7 September 2011, page 100.

such as Editor's Message or Letters. *Wired* gives standard departments a *Wired* spin through titling and design. It isn't Letters, it's Rants. The funny title reflects the editorial tone, but it's the whole structure of the department—with a larger initial lead-in, some images to enliven the mix, graphic sidebars and a playfulness in editorial responses—that makes a branded distinctive treatment out of the same department found in many publications.

DESIGN AND NAVIGATION ELEMENTS further define packages of content and reinforce the visual branding of your magazine.

A creative and organized issue map facilitates applying navigation ornament and branding. In most cases, the clearer the construction, the simpler the design needs to be. Using a few simple motifs—like a combination of fonts, distinctive rules, a limited color palette or simple geometrics—is all you need to create the theme and variation that connect all the elements in a section. Rejiggering common elements a bit for another section helps each package maintain a distinctive look while still retaining an overall design integrity.

A Magazine Is a Volume, Not an Issue

Once the magazine has had a “makeover” of its issue map and template, there is still another task that caps the process—applying the same ideas to the editorial calendar.

Think about it: Magazines are really abstract constructs



BRAND, NOT BLAND The letters page in *Wired* is called Rants, and has come to incorporate more than just reader letters, but also demographic charts (some maybe a bit tongue-in-cheek) and editorial commentary on reader response. Extending for three pages, the section builds community and encourages even more comments—becoming a distinctive element in the magazine's mix.

that are physically recreated each issue. The template, issue map and editorial scope are the DNA, reengineered each time the title is published. The family resemblance is more than a side effect of efficient workflow, it's the way publications engage and retain readers.

To keep tantalizing the audience, the issue map needs to accommodate surprise and variation. Too strict a template, too similar the look each issue, the less readers remain engaged. If a reader survey finds that, although generally well received, your audience can't remember in what issue they saw a particular story, then more needs to be done to make each issue memorable.

THE FEATURE WELL is the obvious place for producing memorable content.

► Creating packages of editorial tied around a central theme is an effective approach to both increasing reader interest and franchise


branding. ► Conventional stories can also benefit from being categorized as a scope-defined story type, with a formatted editorial approach, distinctive sidebars and design approaches that appear each time the story-category runs. Review the features in your publication, and you'll realize that many share similar story types. An enthusiast publication like *Macworld* is going to have New Product Reviews, How-to's, Category Overviews and New Technology features continually. ► Annual tent-pole features are another aspect of the issue map—extending the idea past the template and into the yearly calendar. These stories become building blocks in your feature well that enhance readers'—and advertisers'—ability to appreciate your magazine.

A STRONG ISSUE MAP is a mold that deserves to be broken—sometimes. Allowing for the possibility of new

material in the department packages, or “special reports” or other franchise content that gets a one-time-only design in the feature well will keep your publication fresh and readers anticipating the next issue.

Your issue map is also a key to growth. When your departments are comfortably ensconced in branded packages, it is easy to add new ones or dump departments that aren't working. It's possible that some departments become so popular that they are worth spinning off as features or splitting into two departments with narrower scope. In the feature well, newly-developed feature concepts don't have to be cast in stone, but they can be branded as if they have the potential to become perennial concept types.

There's a final side effect of a tight issue map—the magazine actually becomes easier to produce. It's useful to have strong examples of style and structure from previous iterations for guiding writers when assigning stories. Department packages become less about reinventing the layouts every issue and more about finding appropriate art and expanding the value of sidebars, graphics and illustration.

Growing in new directions; figuring out better ways of making the book content more obvious to your readers; and avoiding confusing or overly ornamental navigation that is more a distraction than a guide is much easier when you start building your pub with a good map. 

SIX DEGREES of PREPARATION

The process of starting a new publication, or redesigning an existing one, benefits from anything that might improve the probability of success. Over the six installments of this series, we'll take a practical and philosophical look at what makes magazines work. Together, these six segments will comprise a blueprint for magazine success.

MISSION STATEMENTS

How do you get from idea to launch and increase the probability of success? Start with a plan.

ARCHETYPES Why should your magazine be more like other magazines, except when it shouldn't? The answer lies in two centuries and 100,000 titles.

BRANDING More than a logo, more than a title, the soul of your publication is in its organization, tone and memorability. It's what keeps readers coming back for more.

SCOPE What, exactly, should your magazine be about? And how does it validate the mission and create a path for growth and prosperity? In many cases, it's not what you put in—it's what you leave out.

ISSUE MAPPING AND

NAVIGATION What's on each page and why are key to making readers appreciate what makes your title unique and worth reading.

COMMUNITY, PRODUCTS AND REFERENCE (C/P/R)

These are the DNA of every successful enthusiast, B-to-B and association publication. Harnessing the power of C/P/R can jump-start or revive your magazine



DEGREE SIX:

REVIVE YOUR PUBLICATION WITH C/P/R

The six degrees of preparation build upon one another: the first degree of crafting a useful mission statement provides the foundation for finding archetypes that work to reinforce reader expectations; branding builds reader recognition on top of the archetype; a well-defined scope clarifies the content mix to reinforce the branding, and tuning the issue map makes the scope more obvious to readers.

Even after all of that, the question of what, exactly, makes your magazine—*any* magazine—a satisfying experience hasn't been addressed. How do you craft the content of each issue to engage your readers so that they eagerly anticipate reading the *next* issue? How do you keep them hooked?



The answer is both more obvious and more complicated. Like the air we breathe, we sometimes forget that the very nature of periodical publications is critical to the experience. Readers continue to love magazines because they are both static and progressive. An issue is a fixed, timely product but the magazine moves through time, forming a relationship to the community of readers.

TIMELINESS To say that a publication is timely doesn't mean that it is necessarily up-to-the-minute; it just means that it isn't timeless—and *that is the point*. Think about how you interact with magazines. When you see an issue, you almost always want to know not just what it is, but *when* it is—the current issue or from sometime past. And there is a huge market in old magazines precisely because they exist frozen in the moment they were produced. Old issues of *Life*, or *Playboy*, or even *Stereo Review* fascinate us precisely because we're

looking at a snapshot of the past. You rarely consider a novel or a film interesting because of the way it accidentally captured the period of time when it was created; in fact, most people try to ignore that quality.

Regardless of how often websites are updated, their amorphous structure and accumulation of content fails to impress viewers with that same sense of “timeliness.” Visitors hardly ever know the context of “when” something on a website was created. Google doesn't even look for results based on timeliness.

This may seem like the most obvious thing in the world, but every issue of your magazine is a new opportunity to engage your readers. Magazines are dynamic products that can respond to readers, cultural trends, and new editorial direction as soon as the next publishing cycle, so change is always happening, because an issue of a magazine is always produced in the now, for the now.

RELATIONSHIPS There's another aspect of the magazine experience that is important—the audience of readers becomes a community bound together by self-interest. Because the magazine swims in the sea of time, each issue is another opportunity to deliver content fine-tuned to reader needs and changing circumstances, and interacting with readers—your relationship with them—is part of the process. Letters, emails, focus groups, speaking engagements at conferences and cultural events are shared opportunities where the readers shape the publication. Books are published, films are released, but magazines grow one issue at a time into volumes. Between issues, creative staff has the opportunity to steer the publication and keep its compass true.

And yet, really, how many publishing operations think about these “obvious” things? What does your publication do to enhance its currency, relevance and authority? How do you enhance its connection to your reader community?

It's tough to even approach those questions while struggling to get each issue to the printer. Usually, creating a new editorial line-up and issue map is part of a complete redesign project that most publications only undertake every five years, on average. Freed from the usual scramble to get the current issue out the door, how do you evaluate your current content and find inspiration to develop and implement new concepts?

Go full circle back to Degree One. The mission statement we originally developed is divided into three areas: who the magazine is for, what the scope of the content is, and how the magazine delivers unique content. Now let's call these three areas **COMMUNITY, PRODUCT AND REFERENCE**, or C/P/R.

The simple mnemonic can help you focus on changes that improve the timeliness of your editorial mix and enhance the connection with your readership. It can be an easy way to test your line-up and see if you need to adjust or augment your content. The best part is that, while this approach can make a redesign much more effective, it can be used to improve your magazine each and every issue.

Love Me Like Argot

THE BEST WAY TO UNDERSTAND THE POWER OF ARGOT IS WITH...A JOKE

Manny goes downtown to his favorite Jewish deli on East Houston to buy food for a big party, and instead of the old brownstone storefront with familiar neon sign, he finds a gleaming granite entryway. Inside, the ancient maple counters have been replaced with stainless steel and marble.

Behind the counter, his regular waiter has changed from his usual apron and paper hat into a bright white chef's jacket with his name embroidered above the front pocket.

“Oy,” thinks Manny, “the place has gone fancy-schmancy. But I'm here, so I might as well order.”

He tells the counterman, “I'm having a big party. Can I get

10 pounds chopped liver?” The counterman replies with a hint of disdain, “Well, I'm afraid we no longer have chopped liver, but we *do* have a wonderful chicken-liver *pâté* with fresh-cracked pepper and a hint of sherry. How about that?”

Manny thinks it over and figures that *pâté* and chopped liver are pretty much the same, so why not?

“Fine,” says Manny, “I'd also like three dozen blintzes.” Again, with a slight wrinkling of the nose, the counterman says, “We don't have *blintzes*, but we do have some delicious *crêpes* filled with Neufchâtel and covered with a sweet cherry puree.”

Manny sighs, and with a shrug, says, “Okay, the

crêpes then. Last, I need six pounds of *novy*,” and, getting the drift, waits for the response.

“Sorry—no *novy*, but I can offer a delicate Scottish salmon slowly cold-smoked over Alder embers.”

Now a little peeved, Manny gives in completely. “Great,” he says, “that's it.”

The counterman tallies the order. “So that's ten pounds of our fine liver *pâté*, three dozen *crêpes*, and six pounds of Scottish smoked salmon. When may we deliver this?”

Manny tells him, “The party is Saturday.”

“WHAT!” the indignant counterman huffs, “You want I should *schlepp* on *Shabbos*?”

C/P/R Is What Your Magazine Is All About

Performing C/P/R can reveal where your publication needs help. It is not only useful for determining the right mix of content, but it can also be a stimulus to thinking about the structure of your magazine and even the tone of the editorial voice. Looking at each category, it is hard *not* to start testing your content against these ideas.

COMMUNITY Your readership (and your potential readership) is literally defined by your scope; change your scope and expand or contract your core readers. When you imagine the common self-interests of your audience, you can see that they share a world-view that can be exploited for content and context.

Communities of enthusiasts **SHARE AN ESOTERIC LANGUAGE**. Words specific to a hobby, culture or trade—often called *argot*—are like litmus tests of your authenticity. The more fluent and current your use of language in your editorial voice, the more “cred” readers give your magazine. The more esoteric the audience, the more argot used in copy (without explanation) convince readers that you are “one of them.” *Wine Enthusiast* isn’t going to explain what a “flight” is, or how “degrees brix” matters, and they certainly won’t stop to explain how wine can have “legs.” They revel in tasting descriptors such as grassy, tannic, yeasty, oily, oaky, smoky, mineral, and dumb, which all sound pretty disgusting to outsiders. But then, teetotalers don’t even care what *terroir* is.

Readers who are also oenophiles—wine lovers—are even now testing the credibility of this article by the accuracy of this example—they can’t help it.

Your readers also **SHARE COMMON ENVIRONMENTS**, so references to these places stimulate camaraderie. Whether it’s a workspace like a MacPro running InDesign (or Quark!) in a design studio, or the feel of the felt or the tension around the flop, turn and river at a Texas Hold ’Em table in a (lose the *Las*) Vegas casino, describing common environments excites and charms your readers.

Getting the details right is critical, and even a small slip-up is pounced upon by your most ardent readers, many of whom have a collusive *schadenfreude*-like interest in your magazine, and want to “help.” Chuck Lorre, creator of the TV show “Big Bang Theory” hired “a certified science nerd” to make sure all the references to exotic theories, written formula and collegial references were accurate—and another geek to vet asides about video games, Star Trek (TOS) and comic books. He told a Comic-Con audience that “our viewers go all squishy when they hear a reference to something really obscure.”

The more enthusiastic your audience, the more they love to **SHARE COMMON EXPERIENCES**—even if they aren’t *really*-real. It’s no wonder that, amid all the hardcore pictorials in *Penthouse* during its Guccione-led heyday, the most popular part of the magazine was the Penthouse Forum—reader’s letters graphically describing far-fetched sexual adventures that the writers “never believed would happen to them.” Even without *that* kind of passion, readers are passionate about hearing shop talk and war stories, and it can be an important component or sidebar to almost any kind of feature story.

Readers **SHARE A PROFESSIONAL PASSION** for your scope and their own obsession makes great feature fodder. The nature of the community matters to your readers. They are interested in history, current events and speculation about the future. The want to explore important ideas and controversial issues with depth and breadth. They are interested in peers and they want to develop deeper understanding in their field of interest, in many cases far beyond what an “unbeliever” can stomach.

Finally—and really a summation of all the others—your readers *love* that they **SHARE EXCLUSIVITY**, and enjoy being part of a group privy to inside information and insight. Developing “franchise content” that has authority and cachet and that has a wider promotional or cultural impact beyond your readership makes your readers feel special. When your exclusive content is picked up by more

mainstream media your readership is empowered. *Biblical Archaeology Review*, an enthusiast publication with 120,000 subscribers, grabbed headlines in *The New York Times*, *Newsweek*, and all major networks’ news shows when it published a story about the discovery of an ossuary that has the inscription “James, brother of Jesus” scrawled on its side. The resulting media storm not only generated new subscribers but enhanced renewals. During *BAR*’s three-year crusade in the ’90s to coerce archaeologists to publish their research on the Dead Sea Scrolls, circulation doubled.

A community and its micro-culture is constantly morphing. New technologies, economics and demographics alter the playing (or working) field. A magazine’s continuing success is largely based on being on the leading edge of these changes, not only delivering content that reflects their readers self-interest, but actively influencing it. *Vogue* doesn’t just report on fashion, it uses its pages and its clout to set the style agenda.

PRODUCT If Community is the “who,” then products are the “what, why and how” of your scope. Obviously, the Product category is about tools, consumables and their efficacy; but it also deals with the art and science of your entire editorial scope.

Pretty much any enthusiast (hobby) magazine devotes a lot of its editorial to products. *Sound&Vision* dedicates most of its content to Product in one form or another. So does *Macworld*. Much of their space covers **ACTUAL PRODUCTS** in the forms of specific reviews and category overviews. Readers expect evaluations that are comprehensive; they’re interested not only in specifications, features and quality, but they also want to know how innovative the product is within the spectrum of similar ones both current and historical, and what its end value might be—in productivity, quality and monetary cost.

But Product is more than products. *Quilter’s Newsletter*—like many craft magazines—devotes much of its space to **TECHNIQUE** in the form of project how-to’s and enriching reader skill sets.



BRIEFCASE



Enthusiasts want to know about more than new products; they want to know about new ideas and practices. Equine enthusiast publications don't spend much space describing horses, they focus on improving the reader



Quilter's Newsletter

The redesign of this enthusiast title was guided by C/P/R. Front- and back-of-book grazing sections were created, each dedicated respectively to community and product. New departments were added dealing with new product categories, and new columnists presented fresh views to the community.

Like many hobbyist titles, the product aspect of the magazine is paramount (although *Quilter's Newsletter* defines its mission as community-forward). An important mission in *QN* is quilting projects (how-to's) which were grouped into a branded section. Special attention was paid to improving the utility and comprehension of the step-by-steps. The feature well was refocused with fewer articles but better balance among community, product and franchise stories.

Even the tagline considered C/P/R. The new tagline, "ART•CRAFT•COMMUNITY" reflects the magazine's mission—divided into the three magic elements.



experience of riding them.

A community of engaged readers wants to know more than their tools and how to use them, they want to know **HOW THINGS WORK**. Readers of *Road&Track* will probably never design or build a car. In fact, many of them will never even drive many of the high-end vehicles profiled in the pages, but they *do* want to understand how cars are developed, designed, produced and marketed. They want to understand the underlying technologies in engines, tires, braking systems and materials. Their pursuit of personal **EXPERTISE** is perhaps the single most critical factor in expanding the value of your magazine content.

Clearly, timeliness is a crucial element in the Product category. There's always new stuff; sometimes innovations create new product categories that can radically change fundamental assumptions in a hobby or industry. Who would have predicted that carbon fiber technology would have affected so many hobbies?—from skiing, fishing, golfing,

and camping, to products as diverse as knives, hi-fi speakers and aircraft. No one believed that the iPod was a game-changer when it was introduced in 2001; some people openly ridiculed the product. So, a magazine's long-term credibility is based on getting it right *first*.

Readers' self-interest is exploited when you earn their trust in your credibility. Trust in the reviewers and their opinions is important, but all through your book, readers need to believe you have the clout to deliver *superior* insight because of your technical knowledge, insider connectivity and rampant advocacy for their causes.

REFERENCE How do you deliver on the premise that you know a hell of a lot more than your readers do, but in a good way? Simply, your audience grades your magazine on the **INCISIVENESS AND EXCLUSIVITY OF CONTENT**, and values expertise delivered from primary sources and expert aggregation. In other words, they want material from people with impeccable credentials, experts they trust and admire. And they want that content edited by someone who knows what's good and excises what's not.

Have you ever looked at the news section of a cheap trade or association publication and it was immediately obvious that you were reading repurposed press releases without even the benefit of a quick copy edit? Or scanned a New Product section and realized that it was all advertising copy supplied by the manufacturers—probably for a fee. Readers aren't fooled by this kind of filler, and while they might even value the information, the publication loses authority because of its disregard for the intelligence of its readership.

Reference material gives readers what they want and what they don't even realize they want. Delivering expert content by identifying their **HEROES AND MASTERS, GENIUSES AND INNOVATORS** and getting exclusive—or at least extensive—access to their stories, opinions and perspective.

Building trust through expertise needs more than profiles and

commentators, it also demands editorial courage. Readers want **EXPERT PERSPECTIVE**. Rating products, reviewing events and pondering the past, chewing over contemporary issues and prognosticating the future inevitably results in exclusive content that can be exuberant and controversial. You need to challenge yourself to exceed readers' expectations.

Ultimately, reference material is all about setting the agenda for your readers and compelling them to follow. **LEADERSHIP** demands a clear position on important issues and building initiatives that are clearly branded to your magazine's mission, and nothing is more about timeliness than that. Your editorial imperative is to own the content. You want to make the news—not just cover it.

Recognizing C/P/R

C/P/R is easiest to understand using enthusiast, trade or association magazines as examples. These are great archetypes because their scope is clearly defined. Cooking magazines are about food and its preparation, music magazines are about performers and their work...you get the idea. Trades are all about their market segments and every association pub's mission is to serve their members' common interests.

These titles also have a well-defined, highly qualified readership. It is easy to see who the readers are, or where to go get them. Moreover, these readers already see themselves as part of a community of professionals or artists or enthusiasts—a community that should see your publication as a vital element of their lifestyle. Your job is to insinuate your magazine into their brains.

C/P/R is especially suited for evaluating common aspects of most trade and enthusiast publications. Their readership forms a **COMMUNITY** of interest, and like most communities they are interested in forming commercial and social relationships and participating in conferences, associations and events that celebrate their niche. The **PRODUCT** focus forms the centerpiece of scope in most trade and enthusiast publications and the myriad ways it is dissected, analyzed, and celebrated is the heart of the magazine.


Lastly, the **REFERENCE** quality of these publications promote exclusive content that delivers credibility, authority and value—and makes the magazine a “must-read.”

The Beat Goes On

The balance of content among the three parts of C/P/R helps readers understand the personality and priorities of your publication, and can define the editorial “voice.” But rather than let the balance be a matter of chance, a proactive editorial decision can be helpful. An even balance isn't necessarily the goal; in fact, a heavy emphasis on one category might be a strategic choice in competing with another magazine in your niche. Compare your competition's content to your own using C/P/R and you might find a direction that sets your magazine apart, and ahead, of other titles.

Remember, this isn't some no-brainer method of building a magazine. It isn't definitive. It's a tool that allows you to take an objective approach to your editorial line-up, shake it up and see what happens.

C/P/R is the final complement to the other five degrees of preparation. From the initial mission and business plan of your title, to the practical genre affiliation of its archetype, the scope you build and the issue map that is ultimately created, each can be “proofed” with C/P/R.

If you agree that these categories are not just convenient distinctions, but are valid component DNA that make up a great magazine, then applying them to your publication will only make it a richer experience for your readers. Isn't that the point? 

THE 9 STEP C/P/R PROGRAM

Applying these ideas of Community, Product and Reference to your

C/P/R isn't a manifesto, it's the foundation of a technical exercise that makes you more aware of how your magazine currently works and suggests direction to improve the editorial mix. If most of the C/P/R concept makes editorial sense, it is time to apply the ideas. Use the Cover and TOC from an issue and place each cutline or piece of content under the appropriate C, P or R heading; if some ideas fall into more than one category, that's not a problem. If you can't figure out what category it belongs under, you need to question the focus or relevance of the content. After you are done with the list, ask yourself some hard questions about the results:

1) HAVE YOU COVERED ALL THREE EQUALLY WELL OR IS THERE AN EMPHASIS OR LACK IN ONE AREA?

The style and personality of your publication should be a deliberate decision about how the three categories are balanced. A workbook-style magazine might have very little Community content, and some association publications might have very little Product content—instead choosing to focus on their community of members.

The choice of coverlines might be

another good test of C/P/R. Using the same process as with your TOC, see how each category is featured on the cover. While your entire book may have a deliberately lopsided distribution, it might be worth considering a more balanced combination for the cover. It's also a good way to evaluate up-front grazing sections. Since these are often a melange of content from the entire scope of the publication, the balance there is important too.

2) IS THE CONTENT IN THE REFERENCE COLUMN REALLY EXCLUSIVE, OR CAN THE INFORMATION BE FOUND OTHER PLACES?

This includes commentary from recognized experts in the field of interest; critical reviews of media, conferences, exhibitions or legislation; and franchise content such as a Person of the Year, or a Top 100 listing.

Capturing talent that will enhance your exclusive content can also improve your branding. When you bring in expert writers or primary sources to contribute regular content, their credibility rubs off on your magazine in two ways: their inherent expertise and your savvy in getting them.

Franchise content has another inherently exclusive component. It is often aggregated material created by forming a panel or roundtable or

using focus groups or surveys. The resulting opinions, reviews or listings have the power of the primary sources enhancing the authority of the content. The *Fortune* 500 is simply a listing of companies by revenue, but its analysis and expert commentary have always augmented the package and turned a concept into a brand.

It's not a bad idea to imitate other magazines' franchise ideas, but creating your distinctive authority through specific category or evaluation criteria is enough to make the imitated idea your original. After all, what's the *Inc.* 500, but the *Fortune* 500 for small businesses, and *Forbes* has practically built their magazine around franchise lists.

3) HOW DIFFERENT IS THE EDITORIAL RHYTHM OF THE STORIES IN EACH CATEGORY?

If all your departments tend to be essay-length prose pieces, and your features just long stories, perhaps it is time to take a step back and consider more variation in the conceptual underpinning of each story type. The sidebar "Categorize Your Content," left, shows some examples of story concepts that might fit in each category. What makes them interesting is that each concept demands a unique editorial structure that will result in a more varied book and increased opportunities for interesting design.

4) DO THE FEATURES REPRESENT A BALANCE OF THE CATEGORIES?

While there's nothing wrong with a single issue having a preponderance of features in one category, a quick check of the editorial calendar might show that there is a systemic imbalance throughout the year. Adding a short Community feature in a Product-heavy editorial well can provide a nice variation for readers.

Franchise content stories can also be built around C/P/R categories.

Categorize your content with C/P/R

Organize an issue of your magazine under these three heads, trying to fit each specific story against a story concept, or meme. Here are some examples of common story types for enthusiast, B-to-B and association publications that might match your editorial, but there are many more memes that can be exploited for original editorial content.

COMMUNITY

- Conferences and Events
- Master Profiles/Interviews
- Forum/Feedback
- Prognostication
- Historical Events & Visionaries
- Q & A/Roundtables
- Reader Tips & Tricks
- Vertical Markets

PRODUCT

- Reviews
- Utilization
- Category Overviews
- How-To's
- Pro Tips & Tricks
- Critical Issues
- Step-by-Steps

REFERENCE

- Media (Book Reviews, etc.)
- Shows/Exhibitions
- Industry/Enthusiast
- Essays from Leaders/Experts
- Contests & Lists
- Expert Analysis
- Year-End Wrap-Ups

TO REV UP YOUR MAGAZINE publication may surprise you.

A Product franchise story could be Year's Best New Products, or Editor's Choice. Community franchise concepts like Life Achievement Awards or Annual Conference Report that profile people at work and play builds community rapport. The Reference category has perhaps the most possibilities since they are often overlapped ideas with the other categories. The previously mentioned Best Products concept is both a Product and a Reference story. Developing an Our Greatest Moments historical piece is both a Reference and a Community concept. Interview series are by nature Reference pieces because the interview is an exclusive event shaped by your publication.

5) LOOKING AT EACH FEATURE, IS IT POSSIBLE THAT A SIDEBAR OR FOLLOW-UP STORY COULD EXTEND THE FEATURE INTO ANOTHER CATEGORY?

Because the categories are just hooks for hanging ideas, there is no reason to become parochial about application. Just the opposite, in fact, can improve your features. A story on circular saws in *Workbench* makes sense in the Product category, but wouldn't the story be enriched if there were a sidebar with user comments or experiences, or maybe a feature wish-list culled from reader responses to augment the Community angle? A branded *Workbench* Top 10 list of products would be an extension into exclusive Reference material. Used this way, C/P/R can be a quick-start idea generator for expanding a story package and making it more valuable for your readers.

6) WOULD ITEMS WITHIN A CATEGORY BE EFFECTIVE IN A LARGER THEMED EDITORIAL PACKAGE?

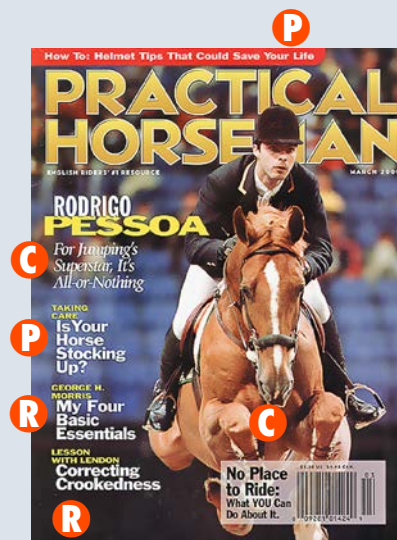
Grouping departments into thematic sections is an effective way to organize your magazine, and building themed sections around one of the categories is a good start to forming more cohesive editorial packages. Thinking harder about packaging your content is a side-effect of using

C/P/R, so even if it ends up that creating a package of content around each category is specious, they can still be a check for including or excluding content in whatever packaging theme is most effective.

7) CAN YOU AMP UP THE CATEGORY? The reverse idea of the previous entry: use C/P/R to push the editorial concepts further. What element of a Community piece can be expanded to make it an even more effective Community piece? A profile of an individual might feature a large quote used consistently as a call-out, or a list of *vitae*. A short Q&A could augment the essay portion of the profile.

Product stories are rich with opportunities for expanding reader value. Grading systems, overview charts, pro and con or feature lists, a Short Take abstract and Editor's Pick are just a few elements that can be added to a product review that improves the reader's take-away. Here's the more essential idea: these specific ideas, when applied institutionally, add to the Reference quality of a story and also enhance the branding tied to your publication. It is a win-win-win situation for your magazine.

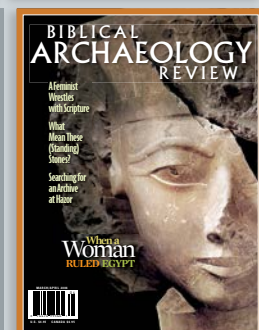
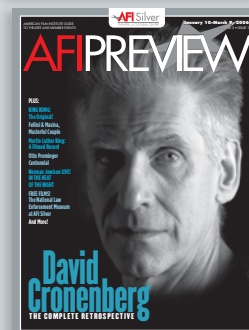
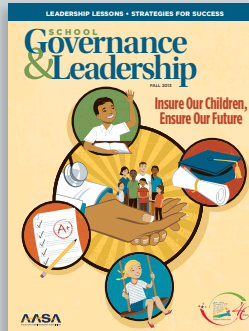
8) CAN YOU INCREASE THE "TIMELINESS?" What can be done to increase the sense readers have that the issue in their hands exists at this particular point in time, and that the content presents an editorial viewpoint that is on the leading-edge of information? C/P/R performs as a check here too. Innovative ideas, new products, important players changing the game—*all* of these are reflections of a time and place. Are you promoting these elements to exploit their "timeliness," and even more critically, are you really delivering the goods? It isn't necessarily about content being "news," but rather is the perspective on these people and ideas important in the moment? Perspective is all about discerning patterns, aggregating content into comprehensive groups and using



COVER SPREAD Parse your coverlines and see how well they span the C/P/R gamut. This cover promotes each area but emphasizes its reference-quality franchise content—experts like George Morris and Lendon Gray.

expertise to make sense of it all. Readers don't necessarily want news, they want someone to tell them what it means.

9) WHAT'S MISSING? C/P/R can be a great guide for thinking up new editorial elements, departments and franchise concepts. Conceiving new editorial ideas is easier when approached prototypically, starting with the template and testing to see if enough practical story ideas can be generated to give the new department "legs." You could start with the idea of adding a new Community department, then decide that you want the editorial to be short takes collected from social networking sites. Each issue could contain collected ideas around a similar topic, perhaps stimulated by queries on your own networking outlets and discussion groups. Now, are there enough valuable comments to make the idea work for a number of issues? Is the effort of getting the content worth the time and money? Can you create distinctive editorial and design branding? Starting with a simple category extension, you have added valuable content and created another opportunity to excite your readership.



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