Magazines in the Age of Specialization

Chapter 9
The Story of *Cosmopolitan*

“The story of how a ’60s babe named Helen Gurley Brown (you’ve probably heard of her) transformed an antiquated general-interest mag called *Cosmopolitan* into the must-read for young, sexy single chicks is pretty damn amazing.”

—Jennifer Benjamin, 2008
The Social and Cultural Role of Magazines

- Created the first spaces to discuss important social issues in history
  - Public education, the abolition of slavery, women’s suffrage, literacy, and the Civil War
- Today, fewer than 90 U.S. magazines sell to more than 1 million readers.
- The other nearly 19,000 U.S. magazines struggle to find a niche.
Early History of Magazines

- Defoe’s *Review*, London, 1704
  - More political commentary
  - Looked like a newspaper
- *Gentleman’s Magazine*, 1731
  - First to use the term “magazine”
  - Published original works by Samuel Johnson and Alexander Pope
Colonial Magazines

- American colonies, early 1700s—no middle class, no widespread literacy
  - Magazines developed slowly.
- Early magazines documented early American life.
  - Concerns over taxation, state vs. federal power, etc.
- Ben Franklin in Philadelphia
  - *General Magazine*
    - Ruthlessly suppressed competition
    - Used privileged position as postmaster
- By 1776 about 100 magazines in colonies
National, Women’s, and Illustrated Magazines

- Nineteenth-century America
- Increases in literacy and public education, combined with better printing and postal technology, created a bigger magazine market.
  - *The Nation* (1865–present): Pioneered the national political magazine format
- Women’s magazines on the rise
  - *Godey’s Lady Book* (1830–1898)
    - Known for colorful fashion plates
    - Helped to educate lower- and middle-class women denied higher education
Modern American Magazines

- Postal Act of 1879 lowered postage rates.
  - Equal footing with newspapers delivered by mail
- By late 1800s, advertising revenues soared.
  - Captured customers’ attention and built national marketplace
- Magazine circulation flourished.
  - *Ladies’ Home Journal*
    - Early 1890s—had a circulation of 500,000, the highest in the country
    - 1903—first magazine to reach a circulation of 1 million
Muckrakers

- Teddy Roosevelt coins term in 1906.
- Early form of investigative reporting
- Journalists discouraged with newspapers sought out magazines where they could write in depth about broader issues.
- Not without personal risk to reporter
- Famous American muckrakers:
  - Ida Tarbell takes on Standard Oil
  - Lincoln Steffens takes on city hall
  - Upton Sinclair takes on meatpacking industry
General-Interest Magazines

- Popular after WWI from 1920s to 1950s
- Combined investigative journalism with broad national topics
- Rise of photojournalism plays a prominent role in general-interest magazines.
  - Gave magazines a visual advantage over radio
The General-Interest “Bigs”

- *Saturday Evening Post*
  - 300+ cover illustrations by Norman Rockwell
- *Reader’s Digest*
  - Applicability, lasting interest, constructiveness
- *Time*
  - Interpretive journalism using reporter search teams
  - Increasingly conservative as became more successful
- *Life*
  - Oversized pictorial weekly
  - Pass-along readership of more than 17 million
Challenges to General-Interest Magazines

“At $64,200 for a black-and-white [full] page ad, Life had the highest rate of any magazine, which probably accounts for its financial troubles. . . . If an advertiser also wants to be on television, he may not be able to afford the periodical.”

— John Tebbel, Historian, 1969
Table 9.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank/Publication</th>
<th>Circulation</th>
<th>Rank/Publication</th>
<th>Circulation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Reader's Digest</td>
<td>17,825,661</td>
<td>1 AARP The Magazine</td>
<td>24,204,313</td>
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<td>2 TV Guide</td>
<td>16,410,858</td>
<td>2 AARP Bulletin</td>
<td>23,587,607</td>
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<td>3 Woman's Day</td>
<td>8,191,731</td>
<td>3 Reader's Digest</td>
<td>9,684,759</td>
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<tr>
<td>4 Better Homes and Gardens</td>
<td>7,996,050</td>
<td>4 Better Homes and Gardens</td>
<td>7,681,722</td>
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<tr>
<td>5 Family Circle</td>
<td>7,889,587</td>
<td>5 National Geographic</td>
<td>5,051,999</td>
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<td>6 McCall's</td>
<td>7,516,960</td>
<td>6 Good Housekeeping</td>
<td>4,686,152</td>
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<tr>
<td>7 National Geographic</td>
<td>7,260,179</td>
<td>7 Family Circle</td>
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<td>8 Ladies' Home Journal</td>
<td>7,014,251</td>
<td>8 Woman's Day</td>
<td>3,924,195</td>
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<td>9 Playboy</td>
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<td>9 Ladies' Home Journal</td>
<td>3,918,472</td>
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<tr>
<td>10 Good Housekeeping</td>
<td>5,801,446</td>
<td>10 AAA Westways</td>
<td>3,764,966</td>
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Decline of General-Interest Magazines

- Advertising money shifts to TV.
  - *TV Guide* is born.

- Paper costs rise in early 1970s.
  - *Life, Look,* and *Saturday Evening Post* all fold by 1972.

- One notable exception to decline of mass market magazines

- *People,* 1974, is first successful magazine of its kind in decades.
  - Some charge that *People* is too specialized to be mass market with its focus on celebrities, music, and pop culture.
The Domination of Specialization

- Magazines grouped by two important facets
  - Advertiser type
    - Consumer (*Newsweek/ Maxim*)
    - Business or trade (*Advertising Age/ Progressive Grocer*)
    - Farm (*Daily Herd Management/ Dakota Farmer*)
  - Noncommercial category
    - Includes everything from activist newsletters to scholarly journals
    - Ad-free magazines like *Ms.*, *Cook’s Illustrated* also included
The Domination of Specialization (cont.)

- Magazines also broken down by target audience
- Men and women
  - E.g. *Playboy, Ladies’ Home Journal*
- Leisure, sports, and music
  - E.g., *Sports Illustrated, Rolling Stone, National Geographic*
- Age-group specific
  - E.g., *Highlights for Children, AARP The Magazine*
- Elite magazines aimed at cultural minorities
  - E.g., *The New Yorker, Harper’s*
- Minorities
  - E.g., *Essence, The Advocate, Latina*
Tabloids

- *National Enquirer* is founded in 1926 by Hearst.
- Struggled until it was purchased by Generoso Pope in 1952
  - Pope went with “gore formula” to sell papers
  - “I noticed how auto accidents drew crowds and I decided that if it was blood that interested people, I’d give it to them.”
- News Corp. launches *Star* in 1974.
- In early 1990s tabloid circulation numbers start to decrease, but popularity sustained.
Internet has become the place for magazines to either extend or maintain their reach when print becomes insufficient or too expensive.

- *Time* and *Entertainment Weekly* have popular online sites to increase vitality of brand.
- *FHM*, *Elle Girl* became online-only when print operations shuttered.

Some magazines online-only from the start

- Webzines
  - *Salon* (1995)
  - *Slate* (1996)
Magazine Structure

- Editorial
  - Content, writing quality, publication focus, and mission
- Production
  - Machines and paper
  - Layout and design
- Advertising and sales
  - Manage the income stream from ads
- Circulation and distribution
  - Either “paid” or “controlled”
Chains

- Hearst
- Condé Nast
- Advance Publications
- Time, Inc.
- PRIMEDIA
- Hachette Filipacchi
- Meredith
What Advance Publications Owns

Magazines
• American City Business Journals
• Condé Nast Publications, 27 magazines (see Table 9.2)
  – Cookie
  – Details
  – Elegant Bride
  – Golf Digest
  – Golf World
  – Men’s Vogue
• Fairchild Publications
  – Daily News Record (DNR)
  – Women’s Wear Daily
  – Footwear News (FN)
• Parade magazine
• Home Furnishings News
• Executive Technology
• Supermarket News
• Brand Marketing
• Salon News
• Vitals

Newspapers
• 19 Newspapers
  – The Birmingham News (Ala.)
  – Patriot-News (PA)
  – Express-Times (Easton, Pa.)
  – Jersey Journal (Jersey City, N.J.)
  – Oregonian (Portland)
  – Staten Island Advance (N.Y.)
  – Post-Standard (Syracuse, NY)
  – Times-Picayune (New Orleans)
  – Sun Newspapers (Ohio)
• Booth Newspapers of Michigan (8 local papers)

Books
• Fairchild Books

Cable Television
• Brighthouse Networks
• Cable Television Operations (with Time Warner)

Internet
• Advance.net
• CondéNet
  – Epicurious.com
  – Concierge.com
  – Reddit.com
• Advance Internet
  – NJ.com
  – MassLive.com
  – NOLA.com
  – BestLocalJobs.com
  – BestLocalAutos.com

News Services
• Religion News Service
• Newhouse News Service
Alternative Voices

- Many alternative magazines define themselves through politics.
  - Struggle to serve small but loyal contingent of readers
- Some alternative magazines have achieved mainstream success.
  - Early 1980s—William F. Buckley’s *National Review* had circulation of more than 100,000
- How can new and old magazines maintain cultural viability and commercial survival?