Case Studies in Transition: Multiplatform Publishing in Three
Western Canadian Magazines

by

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Abstract

The media landscape in Canada has changed rapidly over the last 20 years with the rise of the Internet and digital platforms. This thesis explores how magazine publishers in Western Canada have adapted, adjusted to or accommodated the new digital reality. It uses case studies of three different magazines, *Alberta Oil*, a national business magazine on the energy sector, *Avenue*, an urban city magazine, and *Western Living*, a regional lifestyle magazine, to discover multiplatform publishing strategy. How are these publishers approaching, adapting to, or repositioning themselves for the digital reality? How are they dealing with transition and change? What elements of multiplatform strategy have been successful for them? Lessons learned include use of social platforms, content native to digital platforms, alternative revenue streams, measurement and use of analytics data, and corporate culture that is innovation-friendly.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction

In the face of various pressures and competition, the Canadian magazine industry is a vibrant contribution to Canadian culture. Despite challenges like the rise of the digital era that has turned the traditional publishing model of editorial, circulation and advertising on its head, Canadian magazines survive.

The Canadian magazine industry is like a mirror of the country's values, interests, cultures, trades and professions, with a diverse range of titles ranging from general interest magazines such as *Maclean's*, to special interest publications such as *The Malahat Review* and *Celtic Life*, to service journalism and business-to-business publications such as *Wings* (Magazines Canada "Members"). Canadian magazines occupy many cultural, consumer and business niches. Indeed, there are so many Canadian magazines that it is difficult to arrive at an exact number. As of 2015, Canadian magazine database CARDOnline listed 1,681 magazines in the country including 683 business publications, 782 consumer magazines, 126 ethnic publications and 90 farm magazines. In 2014 Magazines Canada, the industry's national trade association, counted a total of 2,053 titles, including 1,308 consumer magazines and 745 business magazines (Raponi Hart). Canadian magazines are published in over 30 languages ranging from Farsi and Inuktitut to Ojicree and Tagalog (CARDOnline).

The magazine industry, like newspapers and book publishing, has been profoundly disrupted by the advent of new technology. Despite a vibrant population of titles in the country, magazines in Canada have faced a multitude of challenges with the rise of the Internet. Traditionally, magazines operated via a relatively stable publishing model of editorial, circulation and advertising, often referred to as a "three-legged stool" (Daly 12, Rhoades 5). Editorial

content attracted readers, and advertisers paid to be included in the pages of magazines in order to reach those readers. Advertising provided the bulk of magazines' revenue and advertising rates were set according to circulation numbers and demographics. The Internet disrupted that, bringing with it circulation decline and a consequent drop in advertising revenue and paid subscriptions.

Circulation decline

According to long-term circulation figures tracked by the Alliance for Audited Media (AAM), magazines in Canada have been experiencing circulation declines for the past decade. *Chatelaine* and *Reader's Digest* – two of Canada's most recognizable and best-selling magazines – experienced declines in circulation between 2004 and 2014. *Reader's Digest's* English edition had a total average paid circulation (a combination of subscriptions and single copy sales) of nearly a million in 2004. Between 2005 and 2014, the general interest magazine's paid circulation dropped approximately 60 per cent, from 926,461 in 2004 to 361,831 in 2014 (Alliance for Audited Media). *Chatelaine*, a Canadian women's consumer magazine, also dropped in circulation from 672,060 in 2004 to 489,496 in 2014. These numbers highlight a decline that has been going on for a number of years.

Figure 1.1 Total average paid circulation from AAM showing Canadian general interest magazine Reader's Digest's circulation from 2005 to 2014.

Figure 1.2 Total average paid circulation from AAM for Chatelaine, a women's consumer magazine owned by Rogers, between 2004 and 2014.

What happened to these two magazines could be representative of a trend that happened to magazines in Canada over the last 10 years: a slow decline in circulation that some experts blame on the rise of digital technology and an increasing disinterest in paper. Readership has begun to shift from print to digital. People are increasingly reading magazines on their tablets and mobile phones, instead of paper, but haven't given up print entirely (O'Shea, Jackson). Circulation decline had an impact on subscription and advertising revenue. As more and more readers migrated away from print to the Internet, advertisers followed, resulting in falling ad revenue.

And of course, let's not forget the global financial crisis in 2008, which crippled advertising revenues for magazine industries around the world (Kaye 7). "This loss of income accelerated many changes that would have taken longer to occur, such as the decline of print newspapers and magazines, and decisions to produce online-only editions" (Ibid.,).

The global financial crisis hit Canadian magazines. Declining advertising revenue meant there were fewer magazine launches and a number shut down. In 2009, for example, 17 Canadian magazines folded, up 15 from the previous year. That year, only 10 consumer magazines were brave enough to launch, down from 51 the previous year (Magazines Canada "Consumer Magazine Fact Book" 8). Among the magazines shuttered was the Toronto Star's English-language *Desi Life*, which was aimed at Toronto's South Asian community. "The magazine is not immune to the effects of this terrible recession around us, it did not get the level of advertising support the company was looking for" (Masthead "Torstar folds Desi Life"). *Wedding Essentials for Same-Sex*

Couples, run by Brandon and Christine Jones, was among the Canadian magazines that folded in 2009, citing the recession among other issues (Masthead “Gay wedding”).

Gardening Life and *Wish*, both St. Joseph Media publications, were suspended in 2008 and approximately 40 staffers were let go (Masthead “St. Joseph”).

The global financial crisis has triggered such a dramatic decline in advertising markets that prudent media companies around the world are evaluating their portfolios and making tough decisions about those brands least able to withstand the downturn (Ibid.,).

Ad revenues had been dropping since 2007, to an estimated \$485 million in 2014, from a high of \$732 million in 2007, according to a report by ZenithOptimedia Canada released in 2014 (Powell “Readership stable”). This would have impacted total operating revenues, making the years following the global recession tight for magazine publishers. Total operating revenues fell from \$2.28 billion in 2007 to \$2.0 billion in 2013 according to Statistics Canada (“Periodical Publishing 2007,” “Periodical Publishing 2011”). One Rogers publishing executive remarked that the economic downturn had harsh effects on magazine industry ad sales, saying “the drop in advertising spending has been even steeper than even we and other media had anticipated” (Masthead “More layoffs”).

The advent of digital channels also impacted the presentation and presence of magazines in Canada. No longer were magazines simply paper and ink, glossy packages of thought, analysis and photos. The rise of the Internet also brought with it a number of opportunities for magazines to expand their brands to digital properties and to new

audiences on digital platforms. It allowed them to explore new revenue models, brought with it an immediacy, and spared the expense of paper, printing and distribution.

Opportunity: online audiences

Canadian magazine readership may have been dropping in print, but it has begun to gain new audiences online. Digital readership has been growing incrementally online over the last number of years. For example, according to Toronto-based Print Measurement Bureau (PMB), of 100 titles tracked in a spring 2014 study, readership remained consistent at 1.03 million, but digital readership was on the rise. “Magazine websites generated an incremental audience of 20 % across 30 magazine titles... up 4 % over last year” (Powell “Consumer mags”) “We’re in the middle of a transition in the way people consume magazines,” Steve Maich, senior vice-president and general manager of publishing at Rogers Media, told *Marketing* magazine (Ibid.,).

That trend has continued into 2015. Digital readership rose from 1,850,000 in 2013 to 2,909,000 in 2014, according to the Fall 2014 report from PMB, a jump of 57 per cent (Magazines Canada “Number”). In 2015, spring data from PMB showed that digital magazine readership grew 67 per cent over fall 2014 data (Magazines Canada “Canadians”).

Indeed, with the shift in readership, magazines have begun to build digital presences and focus their attention on driving traffic and building audiences.

Publishers no longer talk about magazine ‘circulation.’ Today, publishers seek to develop audiences for their content on whatever delivery platform readers choose – the Internet, their phone, their print magazines (Jamison 17).

Opportunity: new revenue

Another digital opportunity magazine publishers sought to develop was that of new revenue models. Niche content is often in high demand by certain groups and constituencies. This is what magazines excel at – niche content targeted to niche audiences – which is attractive to advertisers. “Hard to find niche material has high value to specific groups and they are willing to pay for it” (Kaye 101).

As a recent IBISWorld report notes, the Canadian publishing sector is shifting away from print-only revenue models to print-and-digital revenue models, “as a result of evolving media consumption and digital-only publications” (Ulama 10). The report, “Magazine and Periodical Publishing in Canada,” suggests that as more of the Canadian magazine audience shifts to digital consumption of magazines, advertisers will follow to offer more targeted advertising and publishers will follow suit.

Growth in digital revenue will offset declines in subscription sales, with industry revenue forecast to rise at an annualized 0.5% rate to \$2.1 billion in the five years to 2019 (Ulama 5).

New revenue streams for magazine publishers include sponsorships, native advertising, programmatic advertising, e-commerce, partnerships, and micropayments (Kaye 53). Programmatic advertising, “the automated sale of individual ad impressions to targeted groups of consumers chosen by advertisers for demographic or behavioural characteristics,” (Senor 113), is poised to take off in the US in 2016. According to *eMarketer*, 45 per cent of the digital display advertising in the US at the end of 2014 was programmatic, amounting to more than US \$10 billion (“US Programmatic Ad Spend”).

“We expect spending to increase another 47.9% next year and to double this year’s total by 2016, when it will reach \$20.41 billion, or 63.0% of US digital display ad spending” (Ibid.).

New revenue models also include events and advertising services (Picard 490, Karadeglija 14, Tomas 14, Senor 53), but also online subscriptions and online advertising (Brock 224). These revenue sources complement print advertising, and allow publishers to make money off their digital activities, from selling event tickets, to selling content via micropayments, selling sponsored content, or advertising with video.

Digital advertising spending has only increased over the past years. Not by the great leaps and bounds that print advertising once commanded, but incrementally, as more advertisers realize the value of digital advertising and more magazines offer it. As of 2015, digital ad spend hasn’t replaced the lost print dollars, but it does seem to be growing. Revenue generated from digital activities was once labelled “digital pennies” by former NBC executive Jeff Zucker in 2008. “It represented the challenge faced by companies built around content distribution and advertising; the revenues generated from accelerating Internet usage, especially mobile, has been far less lucrative than analog” (Farber). In 2013, Zucker updated that term to digital quarters.

According to the *Global Entertainment and Media Outlook 2015-2019*, by PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC), digital consumer magazine advertising will account for 37 per cent of total global advertising revenue by 2019, “as tablet penetration drives the usage of digital magazines and makes magazines more attractive”.

Micropayments may be one of several solutions to the revenue problem. As outlined at the recent FIPP World Congress 2015 in Toronto, one Dutch app called Blendle looks promising. Launched in 2014, Blendle is a platform that allows users to pay for stories from a variety of outlets, and charges anywhere from \$0.22 to \$1.01 US for a story (Fillous). Blendle was created with the idea to “put all newspapers and magazines in the country behind one (quite sexy) paywall” and to get young people under 35 to pay for journalism again and make it an easy process (Klöpping). Publishers get a portion of the revenue, typically around 70 per cent (Price). A year later, and the Blendle app and website has taken off in Europe, with 400,000 users in the Netherlands alone, after a €3 million investment from European digital giant Axel Springer and *The New York Times*. *Der Spiegel*, *The Economist*, and *The Wall Street Journal* and *The Washington Post* have signed on (Price).

The Blendle model would be similar to what Kaye and Quinn were talking about when they said:

One potential, and partial solution to that problem would be to create a system under which online users would make a payment to a single operator, which would give them... a wide range of online news sources (Kaye 40).

In Canada, magazine publishers have tried a number of different delivery and online subscription models, such as Rogers’ Texture by Next Issue (formerly Next Issue), which offers Canadian and American audiences unlimited access to digital magazines for a monthly fee. Magazine publishers also sell subscriptions and single issues through delivery platforms such as Zinio and Issu (Zinio).

However, how best to monetize and attain revenue in the digital space is a highly-debated issue. Publishers around the world discuss, debate and experiment with different models.

Some choose to sell content to generate revenue while others give it away, relying instead on advertising or sponsorships. Some bundle tablet editions with print and others sell digital-only subscriptions. Some choose to include advertising in applications and others provide opportunities for upselling within the content instead (Tomas 306).

Opportunity: immediacy

Yet another opportunity for magazine publishers afforded by the digital era is the bypassing of traditional monthly or quarterly deadlines. By having web presences and social media feeds, magazine publishers can engage with their audiences in real time. The immediacy of feedback, and the ability to post stories to platforms instantaneously would have been unheard of prior to the Internet. But the Internet and digital technology have been part of the landscape for the past 20 years, and letters to the editor now come in 140 characters. This is an opportunity because it allows publishers to overcome their monthly deadlines. But it also means expectations for rolling, continuous content, as the Internet is hungrier than a monthly magazine.

Opportunity: spare print expenses

Yet another opportunity for magazine publishers who incorporate digital platforms into their publishing strategy is that doing so spares the expense of production, distribution and delivery. Publishing an e-edition is as easy as a click of a button. Whether they use a platform like Zinio and offer flip-books or create PDF

replicas, digital distribution methods spare the expense of paper, ink and physical distribution costs. Producing digital content may save magazine publishers the cost of postage, too. In one case, “they estimate that e-delivery cuts 50 per cent off the \$1.10 to \$1.50 per issue cost of regular delivery” (Posnock).

Chapman points out that producing digital content and digital magazines aren’t zero-cost, however. Delivery platforms such as Zinio or Issu or any number of new platforms charge fees. “You’ll either have to pay a service provider, such as Texterity or Zinio, to convert your PDF files to flip-book format, or you’ll have to have a staff member on hand capable of creating it” (Chapman). Indeed, producing magazines in hard copy are expensive to print and distribute, however, as Dornan points out, “readers are not yet ready for a purely electronic presentation of content” (Dornan 72). So, print editions stay part of the overall publishing strategy for most Canadian publishers.

Given the rapidity of the shift in landscape, the pressures and challenges, magazine publishers have begun to invest in complete multi-platform publishing strategies that would cover the digital expansion of their brands and also all of the existing print operations. It would bring everything together into a complete package, with goals and purposes. Digital publishing strategies are imperative for the survival of magazines (McGowan).

A multi-platform strategy helps a magazine publisher take advantage of the digital opportunities the new digital reality presents. A multi-platform strategy is the summary of everything publishers plan to do and hope to achieve for their magazine(s)

using myriad elements to promote, market, and monetize the magazine brand across platforms. Strategy guides publishers' actions online, but also measure whether and how they're succeeding. Common elements of proactive approaches publishers take include: defining success for themselves, identifying metrics that reflect their mission, making sure staff understands how engagement fuels financial survival, backing up digital initiatives with training and staying flexible (Batsell 142).

An outline of this thesis

This study examines three magazines in Western Canada as they attempt to transition from exclusively print publications in a changed media environment. Using these as case studies, the thesis inquires into whether the experience of these magazines might inform other magazines facing the same challenges. This study offers observations and illustrations of three magazines pivoting to the digital environment. The case studies are: *Western Living*, a regional lifestyle magazine based in Vancouver; *Avenue*, an urban city magazine based in Calgary; and *Alberta Oil*, a national business magazine focusing on the energy sector based in Edmonton. This thesis works with evidence and testimony supplied by key figures at each magazine. The core concern of this thesis is with the viability of magazines. There is a lot of discussion about how magazines may adapt, particularly in light of native advertising. A key question is often to what extent economic imperatives of multiplatform publishing might compromise the integrity of editorial enterprise. That may be a common question, but that's not what this thesis delves into.

Rather, it is important to study multi-platform strategy as the literature on the topic is lacking. In recent years, only a few academic studies have begun to delve into multi-platform strategy: earlier studies by Goyanes & Dürrenberg have focused on strategy as it relates to newspaper publishing, while Champion focused on magazine experimentation with digital. Only Doyle and Schlesinger have really begun to make a dent into multi-platform strategy for media, as part of a three-year Economic & Social Research Council-funded project at the University of Glasgow.

Magazine publishers are moving away from their monthly or quarterly rhythm to a 24/7 publishing cycle, and the way forward presents multiple hurdles.

The road to this rosy digital future is not only bumpy and unpaved, it also contains a series of unmarked curves which, if not navigated with aplomb by magazine industry executives, will result in a massive loss of enterprise and industry value (Guenther 328).

This study asks: how are magazines changing to adapt or reposition themselves to the challenges listed above?

Research questions

What are these magazines doing to accommodate, take advantage of, or reposition themselves in this new digital environment, and how are they doing so? What are strategies of leading magazines to secure their future and accommodate this new reality?

What are practices for multi-platform publishing strategy?

What works for these magazines and why? What lessons could be learned?

Having now provided an overview of the challenges and opportunities facing the Canadian magazine industry and a description of the research questions, Chapter Two will outline the purposes of this study and methods of data collection. Chapters Three, Four and Five are case studies of *Alberta Oil*, *Avenue* and *Western Living*, respectively. These chapters will explore the various magazines' multi-platform strategy and practices. In the concluding chapter, observations are summarized and discussed and thoughts on how magazines can make the transition from print to digital are presented.

Chapter Two: Purposes and Methods

This chapter describes how the research for this thesis was conducted and what purposes it will serve. It outlines the research method and recruitment process, and provides some background information about the magazines selected for study. It goes on to explain the design of the semi-structured interviews.

Case studies

Case studies are a useful tool for studying cultural change. However, as outlined in the first chapter, change in journalism culture and the magazine industry in particular, is happening at a rapid and dramatic pace (Franklin 255, Napoli 55) and trying to survey the state of journalism in a comprehensive manner is akin to “writing on water” (Beckett 3). Case studies were chosen because they provide illustrative examples of specific practices.

The case study method was also chosen because it fit the purposes of this study. According to Gerring, case studies are “the intensive study of a single case where the purpose of that study is – at least in part – to shed light on a larger class of cases” (20). Case studies are recognized as a qualitative research design that explores entities or individuals, with a purpose of arriving at descriptions “or implications for other, or larger, social systems” (Jensen 249).

In this exploratory study, the unit of analysis is the magazine itself. Three magazines in Western Canada were recruited to participate, to shed light on how different magazines are approaching the digital reality and creating or using multi-platform publishing strategies. Academic research using multiple case studies is

common, and observations can be constructed from a small number of cases (Gerring 66). As Yin outlines, case studies can be descriptive, exploratory, or journalistic, answering questions about “how” and “why (16). In these specific instances, using multiple case design yields distinct advantages as evidence is considered more compelling (Ibid., 44). It is expected that though different, each of the cases will have some multi-platform strategy practices in common.

Method of inquiry

The researcher aimed to gain a deeper understanding of multi-platform publishing strategy. A suitable method for carrying out this type of research, where practices are highlighted and perspectives about life are analysed, is the qualitative interview.

The researcher chose qualitative semi-structured interviews as the primary method of inquiry within the case studies as “interviewing is a valuable method that may be used to gather a large amount of useful, interesting, relevant and/or important information” (Brennan 26). Semi-structured interviews have been defined as a ‘one-to-one’ method of data collection, or as a “conversation with a purpose,” (Hennink 109), or a kind of “guided conversation,” (Rubin 4, Holstein 85). Kvale defines a semi-structured interview as an interview “with the purpose of obtaining descriptions of the life world of the interviewee in order to interpret the meaning of the described phenomena” (Kvale 3). The author notes that semi-structured interviews allow for more leeway in dialogue and follow up questions (Ibid.,).

This research method gains insight into the research from the perspectives of the participants themselves. Interviewing as a research method is primarily used to identify how people make decisions, the context surrounding their lives, the motivation for behaviour, and feelings, emotions, beliefs and perceptions (Hennink 110). This research method is based in conversation (Kvale 301), with the emphasis on researchers asking questions and listening, and respondents answering (Rubin 3). That said, the researcher also chose semi-structured interviews as most of her interviewees were journalists, publishers, and editors and would be comfortable with that type of method of inquiry.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with all participants, in this case with magazine publishers, editors and web editors, and offered greater flexibility than structured interviews as they allowed for follow up questions and segues. With the goal of describing how magazines pivoted to the digital reality, this researcher hoped to establish “common patterns or themes between respondents,” (Warren 85).

A central part of the semi-structured interviews revolved around questions to address key research questions. Interviews were staged with the goal of producing descriptions, knowledge of situations or circumstances and the researcher interpreted the meaning (Hennink 113). Questions were designed to accumulate information about multi-platform publishing strategy and to “collect core information to answer the research question” (Ibid.).

Data collection was divided into three interviews, for three different positions at each magazine, each set of interview questions focusing on a different part of the multi-

platform publishing strategy. Analysis of the interviews helped describe whether adaption or repositioning did occur.

Justification

Academic research into journalism is worthwhile “if it contributes to better practice,” and is not so narrow as to be irrelevant to the real world (Harcup 30). Phillips acknowledges that academic researchers look at the industry from above, without taking into consideration the daily struggles, challenges and complexities of those in the industry (Phillips 1).

This researcher aims to balance the considerations mentioned above, by observing from 30,000 feet while also zooming in closely to look at specific magazine publishing companies, and taking into consideration the context within magazine publishers operate in Canada today. This thesis aims to be useful for magazine publishers across Canada, by offering informed observations and illustrations of transitions for three titles in Western Canada.

The goal of this thesis is to understand how publishers are approaching, adapting to or repositioning themselves in this digital age, how they are dealing with transition and change, how they go about choosing elements of strategy over others and what these choices have done for them. In considering the challenges facing magazine publishers, the aim is to arrive at lessons learned and a clear illustration of strategies.

Prior to recruitment, the study was approved by the Carleton University Research Ethics Board (project #102871) as minimal risk. Recruitment for the study took place over the summer and fall months of 2015 in Alberta and Ontario, via email and

phone. Three magazines were recruited for this study. The first was *Alberta Oil* magazine, a business-to-business magazine published by Venture Publishing in Edmonton, that focuses on providing “insight into the events, trends and developments” of the province’s energy sector (Alberta Oil Media Kit 2). The second was *Avenue*, a city lifestyle publication published by Red Point Media Group in Calgary, that focuses on food, style, home décor and issues relevant to city living (Avenue Media Kit 2). The third magazine recruited for this study was *Western Living* magazine, a magazine published by Yellow Pages Group in Vancouver, that focuses on living in Western Canada and covers lifestyle, food, home décor and travel.

These specific magazines were recruited out of 68 current magazines in Alberta (Alberta Magazines “Magazine Members”) and 43 magazines in British Columbia (MagsBC “Our Members”). Originally, the study was going to focus on Albertan magazines as its case studies, but that was too narrow and the range was expanded to Western Canada, to include *Western Living* magazine. The researcher wanted a sampling of magazines from Western Canada who were confronting the digital reality, who would be willing to participate in the study, and had robust multi-platform strategies. Indeed, *Alberta Oil* and *Avenue* were lauded for their recent tablet app and website respectively, winning awards for them at the 2015 Alberta Magazine Publishers Association Awards. Each of these magazines has a multi-platform presence on the Internet, and is attempting to adapt to the digital environment. So, what lessons can we learn from them?

The interview guide addressed several themes essential to the research question. Publishers were asked about their specific magazine, its history, as well as how digital publishing impacted or affected the magazine, and its multi-platform strategy. Publishers described multi-platform publishing strategy they implemented and how they saw their magazine positioned online. Further, they were asked about their vision for the future of the magazine, or of any expansion or future plans. Editors were interviewed about their audience(s), platforms and content. Web editors were interviewed about measurement, analytics, content delivery and platforms.

Through the questions posed to the publishers, the researcher sought to understand how their existing print publication had suffered, rode out or sailed through the “convergence years” (Kolodzy 198), (a period of tumultuous change when various forms of media including text, audio, video, and photos were combined on digital platforms), how they transitioned to the digital era, what practices they had in place, and whether and how they were prepared to embrace innovation into the future. Through the questions posed to the editors, the researcher sought to understand how their audiences had expanded, grown or changed in composition with the advent of digital technology, and how the magazine content had changed with it. Through the questions posed to the web editors, the researcher sought to understand the grittier, daily elements of the strategy, how websites, content, social media were measured, how it all came together, and what results they’d seen.

What was their strategy, how did it work, and how did these magazines define success for themselves?

The next chapter will look at *Alberta Oil*, Venture Publishing's business magazine that focuses on energy sector issues and news. The magazine's multiplatform publishing strategy will be described.

Chapter Three: Alberta Oil

This chapter will introduce *Alberta Oil* magazine and its publishing strategy. It will look at the magazine's digital presence and practices.

Introduction

Alberta Oil is a national business magazine focused on energy. Venture Publishing Inc., an independent publishing company based in Edmonton, Alberta, publishes the magazine monthly. Its circulation is 17,000, with 14,600 copies mailed directly to energy executives, and 2,300 copies distributed through newsstands and at events across Canada (Alberta Oil Media Kit 2015 4). The magazine focuses on issues relevant to the energy industry and its leaders, touching on technological, financial, legal and regulatory matters (Venture Publishing "Advertise with Venture"). Its target audience are decision makers, industry insiders and policy makers in the oil and gas industry.

The magazine's regular departments include "*Crude Report*," "*Observer*," "*Juniors*" and a variety of features each issue. Each issue is between 64 and 120 pages (Kelly).

Headquartered in a character building in downtown Edmonton, Venture Publishing has five employees specific to *Alberta Oil* in sales, circulation, production, administration and finance, though management staff work on many of Venture's magazines. There are three on the *Alberta Oil* editorial team. Fifty per cent of the magazine's content is produced in house, and 50 per cent by freelancers. Approximately 35 freelancers work on the magazines to varying degrees. The magazine shares

production, circulation, sales and the art department with *Alberta Venture* and other Venture Publishing magazines.

Publisher Ruth Kelly, and Jim Kerr, director of digital initiatives, agreed to be interviewed for this study. Ruth Kelly, who founded Venture Publishing in 1997 and launched award-winning business magazine *Alberta Venture* that same year, has over 30 years of experience in publishing, and has a forward-looking view when it comes to multi-platform strategy. Kerr leads the digital department but also works with *Alberta Oil's* editorial staff to develop multiplatform content and programs, that “complement the magazine’s print content in a way that increases engagement across our digital properties.”

That includes giving my input during editorial meetings, providing feedback/insight to the editorial teams in the form of analytics and other online statistics, posting to and monitoring our social media channels and coordinating/promoting our weekly e-newsletters (Kerr).

Alberta Oil was named Magazine of the Year in 2010 and 2012 at the Kenneth R. Wilson Awards, which recognizes the best in business writing in Canada (Alberta Oil “Alberta Oil”). In 2015, *Alberta Oil* won gold in the “digital presence” category at the Alberta Magazine Publishers Association awards, for their 10th anniversary tablet edition.

History

Calgary Media Group's Mike Dodd and Verna Lidstone launched *Alberta Oil* as a quarterly in December 2004 (Masthead "Alberta Publisher"). In 2006, Calgary Media Group merged with SkinnyFish Design to form SkinnyFish Media, and that company published *Alberta Oil* until 2008.

But SkinnyFish Media was not a publishing company, says Venture Publishing CEO Ruth Kelly.

"They were an ad agency who thought like everyone else energy was a great topic to make lots of money on and quickly discovered how wrong they could be" (Kelly).

SkinnyFish Media had spent a lot of money on the publication and were struggling, she said, "so they came to me and asked me if I was interested in buying it." Kelly realized, after speaking with energy executives, that there were no publications targeting the senior levels of the energy industry in Alberta, nothing to help those people understand issues in the diverse, changing industry. She saw a niche to be filled. So Kelly agreed to buy *Alberta Oil*. "Being in the business of publishing business magazines in this province and not owning an energy magazine always seemed like a gap in our portfolio of products" (Kelly).

In June 2008, Kelly's Venture Publishing bought *Alberta Oil*, "to expand its editorial breadth, its frequency and its reach," (Alberta Venture "Venture Publishing"), but also to complement Venture's existing stable of business publications including

Figure 3.1 *Alberta Oil*, circa 2004.

Alberta Venture, *unlimited* magazine and a number of custom publications like *Open Mind* for the Merit Contractors Association, *Tracks & Treads* for Finning Canada, and *Pure Energy* for Syncrude. After the sale, *Alberta Oil* went from printing four times a year to six starting with the October/November 2008 issue (Ibid.), and a year after that, it became a monthly. *Alberta Oil* targeted “c-suites,” the high-level positions in the energy industry including senior executives and directors.

Digital Presence

Alberta Oil's vision is to be an authority, an amalgam of thought and analysis on issues that matter for energy sector executives in Alberta and around the world, which informs and guides their multiplatform strategy. Their multiplatform strategy defines what they do and what they do not do, and clarifies their target market and value to their audience (Küng 94). Through the strategy, *Alberta Oil* uses a variety of delivery methods to inform its audience about issues and topics that are relevant to it, be it policy, government, technology or techniques.

Kelly's forays into digital platforms had a purpose behind them from the beginning. “You’re not doing it to be the latest or coolest” (Kelly). The idea behind a multiplatform strategy was to find ways to increase profit for the company overall, driving sufficient revenue to make sense of the investment in digital activities. The goal of *Alberta Oil's* strategy is to drive more traffic through their various platforms and digital activity, to their website, because sales metrics are based on audience numbers:

advertising rates are based on cost per thousand. The goal of the strategy is also to raise brand awareness, engagement, audience loyalty and retention.

Today, *Alberta Oil's* multiplatform strategy involves several major platforms including print, web, mobile and social. They've also expanded to an e-newsletter, called "AO Insider" that focuses on trends, news, profiles and developments that occur in the energy sector (Alberta Oil "AO Insider"), and a digital edition of the print magazine, available via subscription through Zinio, a multiplatform distribution service. Their web properties – the website, social media platforms, e-newsletter, e-blasts – are tied closely with their print magazine. The publication is on these platforms specifically because that's where it has determined its audience is, and chose the platforms specifically because of the constituencies on them.

Each of the social platforms *Alberta Oil* is on has a specific purpose, and was chosen by matching their assets with their audience. For example, *Alberta Oil's* LinkedIn group is focused on business professionals in the energy industry in Alberta. It is a unique approach the magazine takes to serve its audience. The group operates as a forum for its audience for discussion, networking and keeping up to date with the *Alberta Oil* brand and events. By comparison, *Alberta Oil's* Twitter account is used for pushing content out to the audience on that platform, promoting the magazine's content and events, and engaging with individuals. "LinkedIn creates more dialogue on the business side, Twitter drives more traffic to our website" (Kelly). *Alberta Oil* uses social platforms Facebook and Twitter for promotion and to boost website traffic. The two social media platforms drive traffic to the website equally.

Alberta Oil uses its website not only as a hub for content and its digital edition, but for advertising purposes. Web display advertising is sold on the website, including the top leaderboard, a big box, skyscraper (the banner and web ads on the top and sides of webpages), floating units that follow readers around the site, and interstitials (ads shown between pages). These ads are typically combinations of “static/animated images, text and/or video,” (IAB Canada 5). Advertising adheres to IAB Digital advertising guidelines for in-page and in-app ads, to help make the ad experience seamless across devices.

Prior to the magazine’s 2008 purchase by Venture Publishing, *Alberta Oil* had an online presence at albertaoilmagazine.com. The early website had an “About Us” page, and pages for “Advertise,” “Subscribe,” “AONews,” as well as a readers’ forum, a careers listing page and contact information. The website also offered a smattering of features lifted directly from the print magazine (“Alberta Oil magazine”). This changed after the purchase, as Venture Publishing was fully involved in developing digital assets and relaunching *Alberta Oil*. “We built them in parallel, recognizing that they are, in this current publishing environment, just inextricably involved” (Kelly).

By 2009, the *Alberta Oil* website had a search function, a store locator, a calendar of events, a list of feature articles, charts, web exclusives including audio that accompanied features, surveys, sharing buttons, registration for a newsletter, an online store where audience members could subscribe to the magazine or order back issues, and archives that dated back to 2004 (“Alberta Oil magazine”).

Much of the content for the print magazine is posted online, under an expanded list of categories including “Tech,” “Economics + Finance,” “People,” “Regulation + Policy,” “Upstream,” “Midstream,” “Downstream,” “Services,” “Video” and “Audio.” The website allows *Alberta Oil* to cover a broader range of topics than their print magazine, under the energy industry umbrella, including refining and processing, transportation, storage and marketing, as well as exploration, drilling and production, among other things.

Alberta Oil content online is supplemented with video and audio, and exclusive web-only content. The magazine staff actively promote content on the website, through social media, and update it frequently, as part of their strategy. One example of online content unique to *Alberta Oil*’s digital platforms is its podcast. *Alberta Oil*’s website hosts a monthly podcast called “EnergyInk,” which features interviews and panel discussions “with key subjects on important issues,” (Alberta Oil “EnergyInk”). The podcast was introduced and launched in February 2015 by Jim Kerr, director of digital initiatives, before he delegated responsibility to the editors of *Alberta Oil*.

Alberta Oil’s digital edition, which is hosted on Zinio and linked to on the *Alberta Oil* website, is also sold. A subscription for 12 digital issues is \$47.95 or \$5.95 an issue through Zinio. The digital issues work on iPhone, iPad, Android, RIM, Windows and Windows 8 phone operating systems (Zinio).

Alberta Oil also holds four signature events each year, which brings in additional revenue for the brand. There are two awards events and two professional development programs. The magazine has three annual themed issues, which coincide with big

events. These include the Alberta Oil 200 Luncheon, formerly the 100 Luncheon, ranking the top performing oil and gas firms (Alberta Oil “The 200”). The C-Suite Energy Executive Awards highlights achievements of energy executives and celebrates them at a gala awards dinner each year (Alberta Oil “C-Suite Energy”). The third event the magazine presents in partnership with sponsors is called The Energy Breakfast Series, which aims to offer insight into issues facing energy service companies (Alberta Oil “The Energy Services”). These events bring in revenue and brand recognition for the magazine.

This multi-platform approach allows *Alberta Oil* to go a step beyond its print product and not be constrained by page counts. “For us, technology has actually added to our capacity, not subtracted, to report on things,” Kelly said. “We can now respond quickly and online, plus we still have our traditional role, which is thought analysis, not just what happened but how it happened and why it happened” (Kelly).

For example, in mid-June 2015, *Alberta Oil* went to the Global Petroleum Show in Calgary. Staff live-blogged while at the event, captured audio, shot photos, tweeted, and did interviews for additional web content.

While on site, then Editor Max Fawcett (who has since moved to another publication) interviewed Bill Boyd, the minister responsible for energy and resources in

Saskatchewan. He quickly turned the interview around and sent audio to Jim Kerr, Venture's associate director of digital initiatives in Edmonton, who posted the material as a podcast to the *Alberta Oil* website. "I trimmed it up, made it nice, put it on the website and blasted it out to social media," (Kerr).

The magazine's audience tends to be focused on the niche, Kerr says. Through their analysis, they discovered *Alberta Oil* had two geographically distinct audiences, one in Canada and one outside Canada, with different information needs. The magazine's international audience comes to *Alberta Oil's* website for investment, employment or supply opportunities. The print readers are looking for insight on the energy sector in Canada.

The Venn diagram which would show the overlap – that overlap would be relatively small between our print readership and our website audience because

Alberta Oil at #GPS15: A conversation with Bill Boyd

Saskatchewan's energy minister on why oil and gas companies should be taking a hard look at his province

BY MAX FAWCETT

June 12, 2015

Like 16 people like this.

SHARE

As the kids say, **shots fired**. Wednesday morning, during the Energy Leaders Breakfast at the Hyatt in Calgary, Saskatchewan Minister of Energy Bill Boyd sent a message to Alberta's new NDP government in pitching his province's credentials as an investment-friendly jurisdiction. "We have a stable oil royalty regime in Saskatchewan," Boyd said, "and we think that's very important." That's why *Alberta Oil* editor Max Fawcett tracked Boyd down at the Global Petroleum Show in order to follow up on those remarks and ask him about the prospect of a new federal government, the Saskatchewan advantage and how his own government feels about a price on carbon.

Figure 3.2. The EnergyInk Podcast.

our website audience for Alberta Oil... about 54 per cent of them will come from outside of Canada, and our print audience is almost 100 per cent inside Canada, (Kelly).

Alberta Oil's subscription readership is largely senior management professionals in the energy industry in Canada. Approximately 62 per cent of readers identified as such, according to a 2009 in-house subscriber survey, though those identifying as middle management and independent contractors made up an additional 28 per cent of the audience surveyed (Alberta Oil Media Kit 2015 4). The survey also broke down readers by industry – 43 per cent worked in oil and gas, an additional 36 per cent worked in professional, consulting or energy services, and 68 per cent of those readers worked at companies with more than \$10 million in revenue each year.

According to a 2013 website survey, 87 per cent of their audience came to albertaoilmagazine.com on a desktop computer, whereas only seven per cent visited the site via tablet and six per cent via mobile. Those percentages could be considered low, given recent data from FIPP that showed that 33.4 per cent of global web traffic comes from mobile devices (FIPP “Mobile”). A 2015 ComScore report stated 51 per cent of Canadian Internet traffic was on mobile devices (Oliviera). *Alberta Oil's* mobile numbers diverge from what recent data would suggest, though Kerr knows why.

Our mobile traffic doesn't seem to be as high as the industry says it is across the board. That could be, for Alberta Oil, that people checking the website aren't on their phones all the time. The c-suite people might be in their offices, so that's another thing to consider (Kerr).

This suggests that *Alberta Oil's* strategy reaches its targeted audience, the corporate executives in the energy industry, who are older and don't use their phones as primary web browsing devices and may be more office-bound.

Search engines drive the largest amount of traffic to the *Alberta Oil* website, according to their analytics. Sixty per cent of the traffic to albertaoilmagazine.com comes from search engines. Social media sites Facebook and Twitter also drive traffic to the site, and through the analytics programs, Kerr is able to watch traffic ebb and flow throughout the day.

From about 9:30 – 10 a.m. in the morning, it starts to go up and stays pretty constant to the end of the day. And then there are little blips for the rest of the evening. We try to model the posting around that, but generally, it's the workday, that's where you're pretty safe posting something (Kerr).

Lessons Learned

Alberta Oil's multiplatform strategy aids the magazine in reaching its goal.

Alberta Oil's multiplatform strategy - to drive traffic to the website, to sell content and advertising - works for them. The magazine makes additional revenue via the additional revenue streams their digital properties bring, including sponsored content, (also known as native advertising), advertorials, eblasts, enewsletters, video, podcasts, in stream ads, and sponsorships. *Alberta Oil* also sells banner ads, interstitials, site skins, and geo-targeting for their website, and banner ads and sponsorships for their enewsletter and eblasts respectively (Alberta Oil Media Kit 2015 9). Geo-targeting is a process of

delivering different content and ads based on an individual's location. *Alberta Oil* sells geo-targeting as part of its premium online advertising units.

Content

Having diverse web for *Alberta Oil*. Having good content is important to *Alberta Oil*, both for their print edition and their online platforms. *Albertaoilmagazine.com* has news, event information, features carried over from the print edition, as well as blogs, expanded interviews, data, videos, podcasts and an archive of content from earlier issues. "It's important to have content that is directed as your audience. Not just writing up a random press release, it has to be something they want" (Kerr). *Alberta Oil* posts content including audio and video to its online platforms, but are careful to use each platform in an appropriate manner. "We need to continue to recognize that the digital environment is its own medium with its own content and audience expectations" (Kelly). These differ, from platform to platform. For example, a photo might be appropriate for Facebook, but 140 characters fits better on Twitter. All of *Alberta Oil's* content – whether it is a story from the print edition repackaged for the website, or an article for LinkedIn – is maximized with SEO, to help search engines find it faster.

SEO is important for web content, according to Adam Gaumont. In his 2009 dissertation, Gaumont, then a student at Simon Fraser's master of publishing program, argued that "search-result success centres on the quality and quantity of keywords and links, as well as good site architecture and reputation" (19). He argued that publishers should strive to create keyword-rich text, "since accurate out-bound link text helps

one's own search-engine credibility, can lead to reciprocation, and is simply a best practice in the industry" (Gaumont 23).

Alberta Oil's website allows the publication to expand what it does in print, online. "The landscape of our website is unending. We can put up as much content as we want, whereas with our print we're constrained by page count" (Kelly) Having a presence on multiple platforms allows *Alberta Oil* to provide content to their audience not found in their print edition, including content with interactive capabilities, like photo galleries, maps, polls and video.

Kerr says there is a lot that goes into *Alberta Oil's* multiple platforms, "because so much of it isn't simply replicating the magazine online" (Kerr). Content online must have extra value, and with that comes additional work, "even in terms of... always reminding yourself what can we do online for this? It's a gradual shift to the thinking that these things (websites) are not companions, they are as part of the job as everything else" (Kerr). Creating, curating, and producing extra content exclusively for their digital platforms does contribute to staff workload, but Kerr adds a caveat: "it does add more work, but the online drives the business, and as we go, it's going to get more important and (become) more the driver of revenue" (Kerr).

Social media

Using social media platforms is an important part of magazine publishers' strategy. They "provide means for engaging with customers and potential customers outside the settings of markets and exchange" (Picard 837). They also provide media the

capability for social interaction with their audiences, something less frequent or rapid prior to the rise of the Internet. Alberta Oil uses social media platforms because it drives traffic to their website, it engages their audience, and increases brand loyalty.

Social media is a big part of *Alberta Oil's* multiplatform strategy. It allows the publication to promote its content, engage with its audience(s) and drive traffic to their website. It wasn't always high on their radar, Kelly says. "Social media, in 2008, was not a platform for us," she says. "We use a lot more social media nowadays, to capture and engage audience and drive them to our website."

By incorporating social media into their multiplatform strategy, *Alberta Oil* reaches particular audiences on each social platform, increasing the number of eyeballs that are exposed to and engage with their content. As Lepage notes, every action a company takes on social media should be part of a larger strategy. "That means every Tweet, reply, like and comment should all be guided by a plan and driving towards pre-determined goals" (Lepage).

Measurement

A significant part of *Alberta Oil's* strategy is to experiment. One of the immediate benefits of having an online presence is that they can test and measure with immediate results. "Once you figure out the asset works, you should utilize that until the next time you start testing again" (Kelly). *Alberta Oil* keeps on top of its analytics to see who its audience is, what it likes and share, and what resonates. Measurement helps inform the magazine's editorial and advertising decisions and multiplatform publishing strategy.

In particular, *Alberta Oil* uses Google Analytics, Twitter and WordPress analytics, and between all three “that’s a good measure of how we’re doing online” (Kerr). Google Analytics is a tool that allows publishers to track, measure and analyze their website traffic (Google Analytics). It allows publishers to track which device audiences are using to access websites, the number of audience members viewing a page, and the average time spent reading the page (Ibid, Raphael 30). The tool has gained in popularity in recent years because of its simplicity, accessibility and cost. Google Analytics generates reports to help publishers see who visits their websites and track the performance of marketing campaigns (Clifton).

Multiple revenue sources

In an age where advertising revenue has dropped along with single-copy sales and paid subscriptions, a larger diversity of revenue sources is considered an essential part of magazine publishers’ strategy (Guenther 327, Tomas 303). As Tomas points out, magazines look to additional revenue streams to make ends meet, to rely less on unpredictable advertising sales (Ibid.,). In 2012, Hearst President David Carey told *The Economist*: “you need five or six revenue streams to make the business really successful (Anonymous 74). Picard echoes this, asserting that magazines are relying on alternative revenue streams and becoming less dependent on any one form of revenue. “Multiple revenue streams from readers and advertisers, from events and e-commerce, from foundations and sponsors, and from related commercial services such as Web hosting and advertising services are all contributing income” (Picard 495).

Gallagher, Auger and BarNir found evidence that four revenue streams worked for magazines online, including the sale of advertising on web sites, subscriptions for content, as well as “the ability to use the online presence to subscribe to print publications, and the firm’s syndication of content to other online services” (Gallagher 21). The results revealed the magazines’ online presence increased sales of print publications. The results also found that the magazines studied realized positive benefits from selling advertising online and offering subscriptions.

Alberta Oil uses multiple digital revenue streams to aid its print advertising revenue. Sometimes Kelly creates products that will enable her to monetize more efficiently into the future. Take, for example, the award-winning 10th Anniversary Tablet Edition. The special edition offered insight into the biggest stories that shaped Alberta’s energy industry over a decade, and was created to show clients that the company could create tablet editions.

We put a lot of effort into creating rich media there, to having active, engaging infographics, etcetera, not because we could make money on it, and we didn't. But because I thought it's worthwhile having an example that we can now take out and sell, not even for our advertisers and *Alberta Oil*, but I'm using that to sell tablet edition creation to our custom publishing clients (Kelly).

Conclusion

Alberta Oil has been successful in transitioning and repositioning itself to digital platforms. They have adapted to the digital reality by creating and implementing a strategy, but also by being open to what the digital realm offers and benefitting from digital revenue streams. *Alberta Oil's* multiplatform strategy has served them well. It

allows them to be nimble, to adapt to whatever the digital future brings. It allows them to be ambidextrous and “efficient in delivering on present market demands and adaptive to change” (Järventie-Thesleff 125).

For *Alberta Oil*, monetization is a measure of the strategy’s success. “Is it a worthwhile activity? Will it bear revenue? Will it bring monetary value back that represents the effort you put into it? Have we maximized the monetization opportunities in each one of our digital assets?” (Kelly). While Kelly declined to provide specific data on revenue from online sources, *Alberta Oil* has adopted several additional digital-based revenue streams and finds value in them.

One important part of Venture Publishing’s overall strategy is keeping staff on top of technology and how it changes. Their skill sets have grown over the years, Kerr says. “The space is changing constantly, the skills required to be good are changing constantly, and it doesn’t take much to keep up with them” (Kerr). Staff continually innovate and learn from their successes and failures equally. The award-winning tablet edition, for example, was successful yet didn’t bring in revenue to offset costs of its creation. Venture Publishing may not have made immediate profit off the venture, but used it as an example of what their team can produce, and now have the ability to create tablet editions for their custom publishing clients.

So, we now have five clients who have bought into creating tablet editions of their products at a fairly worthwhile price that re-coops all of the investment I would have put into our initial product because they saw what we could do (Kelly)

Experimenting with a tablet edition couldn't have been an easy decision.

Experimenting with digital activities, platforms and content is risky, as the current digital reality has also brought with it uncertainty. Planning multi-platform strategy is difficult.

Trying to figure out which things are going to be sustainable, what is not just the flavour of the day, but what is actually going to have worthwhile, long-term value, is extremely difficult.

And, you fail frequently.

You need to accept that. You're going to put some effort into things that just fail. But I think ... at some point you have to pull the trigger and say, "I'm just going on. We're just going to do it. (Kelly).

Alberta Oil's multiplatform publishing strategy is supported by strong leadership

– Ruth Kelly – who inspires, guides and supports her staff. Strong leadership is a key element noted by scholar Lucy Küng in successful digital innovators including *The Guardian*, *The New York Times*, *Quartz*, *BuzzFeed* and *Vice* (Küng 85). Smart, compelling leadership, according to Küng, motivates and supports staff in the transition to digital and sees a way forward. These leaders view digital as an opportunity (Ibid.).

The future of *Alberta Oil's* multiplatform strategy is about “ensuring that you understand that there is no one piece left behind, that you're wrapping everything together into a single holistic organism” (Kelly). This may include yet another platform – radio – but that is on the backburner until the economy turns around.

The next chapter will look at *Avenue* magazine, published by Red Point Media Group in Calgary.

Chapter 4: Avenue

This chapter will introduce *Avenue* magazine and its publishing strategy. It will look at the magazine's online practices.

Introduction

Avenue, a Calgary-based city magazine “aims to highlight the best of lifestyle topics,” says editor-in-chief Käthe Lemon. “We cover food, home décor, fashion, entertainment and art, personalities in the city, what’s going on, events” (Lemon). The magazine’s mandate is to cover the best of life in the urban environment, information they believe their audience needs to navigate a changing and growing Calgary. They reflect the essence of a young, cosmopolitan, affluent, urban and upwardly-mobile crowd.

Each issue, 35,000 bound copies of the print magazine are distributed throughout the city, including 2,200 in hotels, 6,100 inserted in *The Globe and Mail*, and 24,300 in newsstands, while 1,200 are mailed out to subscribers. The magazine has a print readership of 171,500, while readership of their digital edition is approximately 2,000 (Avenue Calgary Media Kit 2015).

Headquartered in a brick building in Calgary’s Ramsay district, *Avenue* has 11 staff members on its art and editorial teams, and shares sales, marketing, distribution and production staff with the rest of RedPoint Media and Marketing Solutions. There are seven members of the editorial team and one intern.

Fifty per cent of the magazine’s content is written in-house, while freelancers produce the other 50 per cent. That ratio changes when it comes to online content, with

approximately 80 per cent of the web content created in-house and 20 per cent freelanced out. The magazine counts approximately 25 freelance writers, content specialists, columnists, photographers and illustrators in its stable of talent. The magazine's issues range in page count throughout the year, from 100 to 225 pages (Molyneux). The November issue of *Avenue* tends to be one of the biggest of the year but March, April, May, August and September issues are also heftier in size. The largest issue of *Avenue* was the November 2014 issue, which hit the streets of Calgary at 270 pages (RedPoint Media Group Inc.). The January, February and July issues have smaller page counts, generally.

For this study, *Avenue* will refer to the Calgary edition of the magazine, not its sister publication *Avenue Edmonton*. For this study, Editor-in-Chief Käthe Lemon and Web Editor Jaelyn Molyneux agreed to be interviewed over the summer of 2015.

History

Avenue debuted in Calgary in December 1994, an urban lifestyle magazine that graced the stands in coffee houses, shops and newsstands across the city. At the time, the new magazine had a lofty goal: "to become Calgary's definitive city magazine" (Fortney 4). Publisher Dan Bowman of Avenue Publications and editor Valerie Fortney led the glossy magazine, named for the "bustling thoroughfares where people come together" (Ibid.). In her inaugural editor's message, Fortney asked her readership to think of the magazine "as you would one of your more interesting friends: full of energy, into everything and impossible to pigeonhole" (Fortney 4). The first issue was a

kaleidoscope of features: one on skateboarder culture, another on Calgary's One Yellow Rabbit Performance Theatre, a profile on Calgary lithographer John Snow, movie listings, short film reviews, a front of book department containing short briefs on people, places and trends called "Intersections," and a guide to events in the city that month. *Avenue* was published 10 times that year.

The first issue had an orange cover, explained Anders Knudsen, the magazine's original art director and now director of digital and marketing solutions, and was unique in Calgary in that it didn't look like anything else. "The publisher was willing to take risks, so I could try whatever I wanted and give freelancers a lot of creative freedom too. We tried different photography styles, different illustration styles – it was an experiment" (Williams "Avenue is 20").

Figure 4.1 Avenue's first cover, 1994.

After a couple of years, according to Knudsen, *Avenue* staff made a decision to feature people on the cover of the magazine, "city personalities," and started focusing more on style, more on that aspirational, inspirational feel (Ibid.). This is when *Avenue* turned a corner, and the magazine became a bigger presence in a bigger city.

In 2003, Dan Bowman merged Avenue Media Group with Donald Graves' Calgary Publishing Ltd., to form RedPoint Media Group (BusinessEdge). The company published

10 magazines under the RedPoint umbrella, including *Avenue*, *Calgary*, *City Palate*, *Mountain Life* and *Prelude*. Today, RedPoint Media & Marketing Solutions is still based in Calgary, but the magazine publisher has expanded to include marketing and creative services, building on the company's years of storytelling. Currently, the company has approximately 20 custom publications as well, including *Calgary Polo Style*, *Spur*, *Prelude*, and *Fuel* magazines (Randle).

Over the years, *Avenue Calgary* has undergone facelifts and redesigns. In 2009, for example, *Avenue* was redesigned to focus on four sections including Life, Style, City, and Features. At the time, Lemon told Masthead that past issues had eight sections, "a format that sometimes made story selection and placement difficult" (Masthead). "There were too many little bitty sections. None of them really got going."

Today, *Avenue* focuses strongly on those four content pillars of life, style, city and features, the latter being a catchall for issues-related stories and other features on the city. In the September 2015 issue of *Avenue*, freelance journalist Suzy Thompson followed up the one of the best known features the magazine publishes annually in August rating neighbourhoods, with "The Next Great Neighbourhoods." There was also "Knowing Michael Green," a profile by award-winning freelance writer and author Marcello Di Cintio, focusing on the co-founder of One Yellow Rabbit Performance theatre, who was killed in a multi-vehicle accident in February 2015 (CBC News).

Digital Presence

Avenue's multiplatform strategy evolved over years of testing and experimenting with various platforms and content formats. "There was a time we were on Foursquare, on YouTube," Molyneux says. "We were everywhere. We did things like iPad apps." At one point, the magazine had an in-house web development team to create custom pages for features and custom videos.

In 2010, there was even an *Avenue* web video series in partnership with Calgary-based Kelly Brothers Productions, called "*Avenue* Live with Dave Kelly." The web show featured host Dave Kelly, a former co-host of Citytv Calgary's Breakfast Television, and guests including musicians, actors, and celebrities. It was filmed live at the historic Garry Theatre at the Ironwood in Calgary (RedPoint Media Group "*Avenue Magazine Presents*"). However, Molyneux noted that their YouTube videos didn't give *Avenue* the return they had wanted, adding that it didn't work out. It was more cost effective to simply write a story or show a photo. "We strategically cut back on that kind of stuff because the most important thing is that the content is good and that you can access it," she explained. "We tried it... and we just don't get the return on investment."

The *Avenue* multiplatform publishing strategy evolved from there, focusing on giving its audience what it wanted: good content on the four core topics. The goal of the strategy was to build and engage audiences in print and online. "We choose not to stretch ourselves into all of the various platforms. We pick. It's better to do a few really well, so we've narrowed it down to a couple that work for us" (Molyneux).

Today, the *Avenue* brand extends from print, to a website that is responsive and has exclusive web content, a digital edition, an app, enewsletters and eblasts, five social media platforms, an online store and events. Editors do a lot of brand outreach, going to events in person, doing appearances and interviews on other media in Calgary.

What digital allows us to do is typically a whole lot of things we wouldn't be able to do without it. What we're primarily doing in our digital spheres are stories we could never do anything with before" (Lemon).

Between 2013 and 2014, *Avenue's* website was redesigned. The redesign involved switching to a new CMS, and also strengthening the four core topics, of city, life, food and style. *Avenue* Calgary's website plays host to print content, web exclusive content, links to the digital edition, an store where they sell magazine-related merchandise. "(The) website for a magazine as a business is not just about communicating that you exist as a company, it's about actually facilitating interactions with your readers" (Lemon).

Print content on the website gets posted with few changes, but both it and web-exclusive content are optimized with SEO. Molyneux says they aim to post 90 pieces of web content every month. Content that is popular gets a lot of attention and is shared widely is specific to their goals. "Anything that is local, new, timely... really does well" (Molyneux).

The magazine has two audiences, one a little bit older that skews a little more male for their print editions, and the second skews more female and younger for their digital platforms. Geographically, the print and digital audiences are primarily located in Calgary and secondarily throughout the province, though their digital reach is

international. *Avenue's* online audience is mostly women, approximately 70 per cent female, and between the ages of 25-35. They're young, urban and stylish, conscious of trends and also of things going on in their city.

Having an online presence provides *Avenue* with the opportunity to be more timely than their print schedules allow. For the print edition, lead times between planning and eventual publication can stretch over months. The December issue is usually worked on over the summer. "We have a six-month publishing schedule," says Lemon, "So you can imagine when someone sends us a press release about something is happening in two months... it's too late." Maintaining their website and social media feeds means *Avenue* online has a much faster reaction time. "Especially when you look at mediums like Twitter and Instagram, you can be instantaneous... it's really changed what we're able to do and who we're able to reach" (Lemon).

For the last 20 years, *Avenue* engaged Calgarians through its glossy print pages. With its multiplatform strategy, the magazine has expanded across social media platforms to take that conversation one step further, and engage and build new audiences. Social media platforms allow the magazine to raise brand awareness and facilitate conversations around its stories, which "deepens our connection to the city" (Molyneux). And, to their audience. Their young, plugged-in audience inhabits social media and uses it regularly to inform their lives.

Avenue uses Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Pinterest for those purposes. Instagram and Pinterest, are specifically photo-centric social media platforms. Though,

Avenue's Twitter and Facebook also get updated with photos – *Avenue* staff tries to include a photo in every tweet or post.

Avenue's Twitter is used to drive traffic to the website, and success is measured by page views and engagement. "You can see in Google Analytics how many page views come from Twitter," Molyneux says. *Avenue* also uses the platform for research, monitoring it for information on local events and people, and as a community builder, the web editor reveals.

Beyond page views, we measure the success of Twitter based on engagement rates. I'm always looking at the engagement rates of individual Tweets and then as a collective total over the period of a week or a month. The goal is to keep increasing total engagement on our social media platforms (Molyneux).

Avenue's Instagram account is used for the purposes of brand recognition. While they don't post to the Instagram account overly frequently, Molyneux says that when they do, they try to offer useful information to their Instagram audience. "As a city magazine, we also try to use Instagram as a way to show that we are connected with the city and are out and about. We look at it as a more 'on the ground' platform for reporting and not necessarily a space to showcase our photography." *Avenue* measures success of Instagram posts by engagement rates, she says, adding, "It has our highest engagement per post. It is also the platform where our follower numbers are growing the quickest."

Avenue also has a Pinterest account, where it posts photographs of food from Calgary restaurants, photos of interest for wedding planners and brides, and photos of what's happening in the city (Olafson). "We have a Pinterest page and we dabble in it,

but we don't spend much time on Pinterest. We measure its success by the page views it generates, which is not very much," Molyneux says. As of September 2015, *Avenue's* Pinterest account had 22 boards, over 1,000 pins also known as visual bookmarks, and 987 followers. *Avenue's* collection of boards included Best Things to Eat, Best Restaurants, Weddings in Calgary, Street Style, Calgary Neighbourhoods, and Top 40 Under 40 (*Avenue Calgary "Pinterest"*). *Avenue* keeps their Pinterest account because it's a social media platform that is easy to maintain, and doesn't cost them anything. Molyneux says they could delete it with little impact on their audience – but staff use Pinterest boards for inspiration.

I use it to share posts from other publications that would be good models for us or that we can riff on. And our art team uses it to create inspiration boards for photo shoots or design concepts they are interested in (Molyneux).

Building community around the brand is important for *Avenue*, as one of the goals of the multiplatform strategy was to create dialogue about the stories the magazine was covering. In order to build audience on social media, magazines have to be active on those platforms. Magazines need to keep engagement high in order to maintain existing audience and build new (Sorokina). When engagement is high, brands often notice a solid group of social followers who share, favourite and interact with the brand and its content regularly. These are known as "brand ambassadors" (Ibid.), or "influencers" (Chandy 77), and these individuals are important.

Avenue's Instagram account, as of September 2015, had over 9,000 followers.

This audience is about the same size as their Facebook followers, larger than their Pinterest following, but significantly smaller than their 51,000 followers on Twitter.

However, *Avenue's* Facebook followers are their most engaged social media audience, as Facebook is one of the biggest drivers of website traffic for the magazine. *Avenue* audience members are more likely to come to the magazine's website through Facebook, rather than Twitter (Ibid.). Molyneux says they get about 30 per cent of their traffic from social media, and 25 per cent of their overall traffic is from Facebook. This would suggest that there are a large number of individuals on the platform who are loyal to the brand.

Our success comes from having other people pick it up and share it with their networks. So, we need a solid core of our own followers, for sure. They need to be loyal and dedicated and they are. And then they just plant seeds and it just...spreads (Molyneux).

One of the other platforms *Avenue* uses, as part of its multiplatform publishing strategy, is events. *Avenue* hosts gala events each year, like the Top 40 Under 40, an annual magazine feature celebrating some of the top performing young people in the city and corresponding event that toasts their achievements. Top 40 candidates are Calgarians who excel in their careers and are passionate about volunteering or helping their city out (*Avenue Calgary "Top 40"*). This event allows *Avenue* staff to interact with Calgarians on an individual level, to raise brand awareness and recognition and to engage their audience in person, but it also brings in revenue from ticket sales and advertising sales, and sponsorships.

Lessons Learned

It has become essential for magazine publishers to know more about an audience than ever before. Measurement via analytics programs allows magazines to track their audience's traffic to websites and engagement on social media.

Measurement metrics, however, are all over the map, and depend frequently on the magazine's strategy goals and what they want to achieve. Magazines Canada developed a set of guidelines in 2015 for publishers, with standardized metrics to measure and track. These included the number of unique readers each issue, number of sessions per issue, total amount of time spent, average number of sessions per reader per issue, and total time spent per reader per issue.

For *Avenue*, measurement allows staff not only to track the magazine's audiences, but learn about them, their likes and dislikes, and curate content accordingly. They use several different types of analytics tools to do this, including freebies like Google Analytics and Twitter Analytics, but they are so interested in their audience, they go a step further. *Avenue* also uses ComScore to measure their audience. "It can tell you the average income of people, it's better than Google," Molyneux says.

Avenue also uses Rival IQ, a social media analysis tool that can track metrics. Rival IQ consolidates social media metrics on a dashboard, and allows companies to research and compare their metrics including growth in audience and levels of engagement (Rival IQ). Between the multiple analytics tools, *Avenue* has a powerful practice in measurement that it uses to achieve its goals and inform strategy.

Social Media

Social media helps *Avenue* reach their multiplatform strategy goal of building and engaging audience. They use social media platforms in a way that doesn't stretch resources beyond staff capabilities, but also strategically, in that they selectively picked which platforms to be on, versus being on all of them. Each of *Avenue's* social platforms – Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest, and LinkedIn – is used in specific ways. One would post photos to Twitter with a 140-character tweet promoting an event or a magazine story, or a piece of content, but Instagram would be used for a more “on the ground,” and “behind the scenes” purpose (Molyneux).

Social media helps *Avenue* communicate better and faster with their audiences, builds relationships and creates dialogue between the magazine brand and the people who are loyal to it. It's convenient and cost effective, as most social media platforms are free to register for. Through social media platforms, magazine brands like *Avenue* can get feedback directly from their audiences, instead of waiting for letters to the editor to come in. Social media promotes content, engages audiences, and can even be used as a marketplace. Social media is also helpful in that it strengthens brand loyalty and thus the marketing relationships. “Through these interactions – or conversations – you can build significant credibility among your target niche and be seen as the go-to expert” (Bowen 9).

Multiple revenue streams

Avenue uses its digital presence to bring in additional streams of revenue. In addition to print advertising, it sells advertising on its website, including leaderboard and big boxes, companion ads and site skins, which stretches a static image across the site's background (Avenue Media Kit 2015). They sell advertising in their thrice-weekly "Weekender," "Style," and "Food & Drink" newsletters and "Insider" eblasts.

Social media is also built into some of *Avenue's* sales campaigns. *Avenue* offers its advertisers opportunities to engage with the magazine's audience via social platforms, by earmarking posts for sponsorship. According to their media kit, *Avenue* offers sponsored Facebook posts and Twitter posts to their advertisers, with deadlines a week in advance. Having multiple revenue streams allows magazines to gain extra income that isn't reliant on print advertising. The greater the page views the website gets; the more *Avenue* is able to sell (Molyneux). Higher page views allow *Avenue* to compete with bigger publications, like national magazines with larger audiences.

Conclusion

Avenue has experimented with platforms, content formats and social media. They have showed a determination to build on what worked and to leave what didn't behind. They have adapted to the digital reality by being where their audience is online. However, adapting to or accommodating the digital reality has been a challenge. It not only has disrupted traditional publishing models, but also introduced new revenue streams, types of content and ways of interacting with audiences. *Avenue* is well

positioned to meet future challenges in magazine publishing, and online, as it uses several powerful tools and practices. Its knowledge of its audience via its analytics tools and 20 years of serving them, allows the magazine to serve its audience with content that it needs, wants, and likes. After almost a decade of experimentation to see what worked on various platforms, *Avenue* chose the platforms it lives on today, strategically, because they worked.

We've been experimenting with web things since we seriously launched a website in the early 2000s. Our approach now is to iterate as much as we can, study what worked or didn't, use that information to adapt, repeat or not do that one thing again (Molyneux)

This approach is akin to Brown and Groves' framework for news organizations in *The Lean Newsroom*, which encourages media to understand their own corporate culture, understand and develop strategy and evaluate success based on audience feedback and engagement (Groves). Part of the process is gathering feedback, measuring and iterating, building on that to direct future growth (Silverman). "The key is to gather all of the data and discuss it as a team. Work to understand the story the data is telling you" (Ibid.).

One of the continuing challenges *Avenue* staff face is how to manage their workflow and strategy when the landscape has shifted so rapidly over the last 20 years. It is an ongoing process "To figure out how to change our workflow and how to change our storytelling and how to change our understanding of who the audience is, to fit within what has been an ever-evolving media landscape" (Lemon).

The next chapter will look at *Western Living* magazine, a regional lifestyle magazine based out of Vancouver and its multiplatform publishing strategy.

Chapter 5: Western Living

This chapter will introduce *Western Living* magazine and its publishing strategy.

Introduction

Western Living magazine is a western lifestyle magazine that focuses on “people, places, homes, gardens, food and travel,” (Western Living “About Western Living”). It has a distribution of 143,770 to high-income households in Vancouver, Victoria, Calgary, Edmonton, Saskatoon, and Winnipeg. *Western Living* is published 10 times a year. “It targets urban dwellers and design professionals interested in topics such as home décor, renovation, food and travel” (Masthead “Western Living”). Regular departments include food, travel, design and home décor. “The print magazine has a total of 587,000 readers and a growing and increasingly engaged community” (Western Living “About Us”).

Western Living’s readership in 2015 skews predominately female between the ages of 35-55, says Publisher Tom Gierasimczuk. “Someone who is basically the head of their household in terms of decision making, but really appreciates the finer things of home décor and really appreciates the local things” (Gierasimczuk). “And, just really wants to take advantage of everything the region has to offer, both from a culinary, travel and a design perspective” (Ibid.). According to Editor Anicka Quin:

Western Living shares an office with *Vancouver* magazine, as they’re owned by the same company, with about 30 employees working between the two magazines. “We have four editors (including myself) and three art directors (though those three are shared with Vanmag – they design both magazines)” (Quin).

Editorial content is produced 50/50 in house and by a stable of freelancers, though some issues see more of one over the other. Most issues are about 100 pages in size, Quin says, though the largest was the September 2013 issue at 156 pages – the largest in 20 years.

The September 2015 edition was given a revamp, with new columns, features and photography. It mirrored reader interest in home and design, food, wine and travel. The revamp included a wider page – up to nine inches – and a new logo, from *Western Living*, to *WL* (Powell).

In the October 2015 issue of *Western Living*, features included two home profiles, one of a unique feature home designed by

Figure 5.2 *Western Living's* new logo, 2015.

Sturgess Architecture in Calgary, the other of a Vancouver space that became a design lab for the magazine's 2015 Architecture Designers of the Year and artisans, a profile of an interior designer, three features on food, two on travel, one of which focused on a neighbourhood in Paris, and another in Los Angeles.

For this study, Publisher Tom Gierasimczuk, Editor Anicka Quin, Associate Editor Stacey McLachlan, and staff writer Julia Dilworth agreed to be interviewed about *Western Living's* practices and platforms.

History

Western Living was “born atop Liz and Jack Bryan’s (wooden) kitchen table in 1971 – a reincarnation of the ancestral *Western Homes and Living*,” (Brook). By the early 1980s, the magazine was published 12 times a year by Bryan Publications Ltd., and distributed in Vancouver, Victoria, Edmonton and Calgary.

Andrew Scott was the editor of *Western Living* between 1981 – 1987 (Scott). Writing in 2009 on his website about *Western Living*, Scott said, “today, it is quite slender in size, but in the 1980s it was a big, fat money-maker. We regularly put out 200-page issues” (Ibid.). Scott recalls that *Western*

Figure 5.1 *Western Living*, 1983.

Living won Magazine of the Year at the Western Magazine Awards in 1985, 1986 and 1987, while he was editor (Ibid.,). During Scott’s time with the magazine, it increased circulation by 70,000 with the decision to distribute the magazine in Winnipeg, Regina and Saskatoon as well as Vancouver, Victoria, Calgary and Edmonton.

“*Western Living* has given readers a leg up on the road to good design,” wrote former editor Paula Brook in 2005.

Always a service magazine at heart, it was never better (if you ask me, and yes I was editor at the time) than in 1992 when we asked architects Mark Osburn and

Wayne Clarke, the “Cottage Kings,” to produce a blueprint insert of their small, easy-to-build, dream cottage.’ Thirteen years later, Sutherland reports, readers are still calling for reprints (Brook).

In the mid-1980s, *Western Living* was acquired by Comac Communications of Toronto (O’Grady 6). By then, the magazine was described by editor Malcolm Parry as “a superb publication, ad-fat, seven editions between Victoria and Winnipeg. It represents the kind of reassuring lifestyle – the key word is Living, not Western – and traditional values I think more and more people are looking for now in what I call the post-AIDS syndrome” (Boyd).

The magazine changed hands in the 1990s, from Comac Communications to Montreal-based Telemedia. In 2000, Telemedia divested itself of its publishing division, selling *Western Living* and 10 other titles to Transcontinental “for as much as \$200 million” though financial details were not released. At the time, Telemedia published 11 magazines in English and French, and owned 76 radio stations across Canada (“Telemedia’s consumer magazines sold”). The move allowed Telemedia “to focus on its radio broadcast,” (“Telemedia getting out of magazine publishing”).

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Transcontinental the second-largest publisher in Canada (Wyatt). “With the acquisition, Transcontinental expands its Canadian publishing business to 51 English and French magazines with an annual circulation of about 100 million copies” (Ibid.).

In June 2015, Yellow Pages, Canada’s directory company, bought *Western Living* magazine for \$900,000 from Transcontinental. “It’s all part of a push by the Montreal-based media company to strengthen its ties to the fast-growing western market, which, including B.C. and Alberta, accounts for some 30 per cent of its 250,000 clients” (O’Grady). The company wanted more content for its existing web properties, explained Julien Billot, Yellow Pages CEO. “We can feed a lot of content (from *Western Living* magazine and *Vancouver* magazine) into our media platforms” (Ibid.).

Previous research

Given *Western Living*’s track record in Western Canada and its 45-year history, the magazine has been the perfect case study for a variety of academic research. Simon Fraser University (SFU) Master of Publishing student Melanie Law wrote her 2007 master’s thesis on *Western Living*’s distribution practices. Law analyzed the magazine’s controlled circulation and argued that success in controlled circulation of *Western Living* came from a balance between editorial vision and advertising, and that “a controlled-circulation magazine can be editorially and financially sound without compromise on either side” (Law 43).

Western Living’s use of language in editorial content was analyzed by SFU student Lara Kordic, the same year. Kordic looked into how the magazine’s editorial

reflected “certain lifestyles and ideologies” to appeal to specific demographics, essentially how the magazine spoke to its audience (Kordic 67). “The longer a magazine is in business, the more time it has to establish an audience, and in turn, the better an editor can draw on his knowledge of that audience to present editorial content that will keep the audience interested issue after issue, year after year” (Ibid. 69).

Simon Fraser Master of Publishing student Annie Pei-Hsuan Chen in her thesis proposed that *Western Living* make changes to its online presence to respond to the changing digital environment, outlining an online edition model that “attracts an expanded audience, boosts online revenue, and makes the proposition sustainable” (Chen 47).

In 2011, Tamara Grominsky looked at how *Western Living* magazine, along with two other Canadian lifestyle magazines, were integrating social and web activities into their workflow. She argued that to successfully repurpose print content for online, magazine staff must “develop and deploy online marketing strategies to promote content,” and make the effort sustainable financially through additional revenue streams including advertising and partnerships (Grominsky 55).

In 2013, SFU student Kristine Sostar examined *Western Living’s* Designer of the Year awards, asserting that not only do the awards generate participation in culture, define and honour the design community, but they create a small economy around the event itself, while also sustaining readership, satisfying advertisers and positioning the magazine brand as an authority (Sostar 31).

In 2010, *Western Living* appointed Anicka Quin as editor-in-chief. Quin, a former intern at *Western Living* who'd written her SFU Masters thesis on how *Western Living* and *Vancouver* magazines embraced the Internet, had been with the magazine since 2002. She'd taken on a variety of roles over her time there, and rose to managing editor in 2007.

Digital Presence

The rise of the Internet impacted *Western Living*, says current publisher Tom Gierasimczuk, and not in a good way. "It kind of hit the magazine, broadsided it frankly," he said. "There wasn't a lot of investment put into the digital side of things, and that's a big reason why I was brought on just over a year ago, to help convert that properly." Gierasimczuk, who had been the editor in chief at Rogers-owned *Marketing* magazine, and the vice president of editorial and business development at Canada Wide Media, has experience in developing multiplatform strategies.

"For years, it's been an afterthought," Gierasimczuk said. "There hasn't been a digital publishing strategy. (It was) really just resting on its laurels of what it was, an amazing print brand."

While other Canadian magazines like *Shift* (Androich) embraced the Internet in the mid-1990s, *Western Living* didn't have a website for the general public until 2002 (Quin 27). Instead, it had a website aimed at advertisers, with circulation and advertising rates. That year, a basic website was launched with a price tag of \$5,000, that featured two or three articles each issue and contact information. The site,

westernlivingmagazine.com, “accomplishe(d) very little for the magazine,” Quin continued, suggesting the new redesigned site acted as a business card and little else (Ibid.). The 2002 *Western Living* site got 823 unique visitors a month (Quin 28). By 2010, *WesternLivingmagazine.com* had been updated, but the website didn’t offer much more than the print magazine. “Most of the content in the print edition is transferred online,” wrote Chen. “The online articles are exactly the same as those in print... the online edition... remains static after each update until the next print issue is published” (6).

These days, Gierasimczuk says their digital platforms are an important, integrated part of the brand. “It’s like asking why is your leg important to walking?” he said. While it may have been a latecomer to the digital sphere, Gierasimczuk said *Western Living* has been able to observe and learn from the mistakes other magazines have made, before it jumped into the digital realm no holds barred, hiring more staff, changing culture, and creating a ‘months to moments’ strategy, akin to what American media giant Hearst has done. “There’s nothing worse than having your feet in concrete, because you can’t run a story or can’t jump on a story because you’re a monthly magazine,” Gierasimczuk said. “I jettisoned those excuses years ago.”

Gierasimczuk’s vision for *Western Living* is ubiquity. He wants the brand to be synonymous with “living the good life in the West” (Gierasimczuk). This enables and informs their multiplatform strategy. Expanding the brand across multiple platforms helps maximize its reach but also its market for economic purposes. The purpose of *Western Living*’s multiplatform strategy is to increase reach by building audience, but also to make profit.

Western Living uses multiple platforms including a print magazine, a responsive website, five social media platforms, an e-newsletter and events to reach their goals. Gierasimczuk and Quin say they try to be in all spaces their audiences are. They are on Instagram, Pinterest, Google+, Twitter and Facebook.

What we've done is started down the path in terms of creating a new workflow, and frequency of getting out there and telling stories and covering the design, the homes décor industry, in a way that we haven't before. We used to be very much a monthly publication with a very limited online capacity and right now we're trying to own the authority and the access to really, really good people and good ideas and ... serving them up in a daily capacity (Gierasimczuk).

Part of Gierasimczuk's strategy for *Western Living* was setting up a workflow in the office that incorporated a daily newsroom, to feed three e-newsletters a week. *Western Living's* "The WL Daily," e-newsletters come via email to subscribers three times a week. Each newsletter features three to five tidbits of content in food, home design and travel. For example, a late October e-newsletter featured mouth-watering photos of food accompanying the "6 Vegetarian Dishes to Try Now That You're Cutting Back on Bacon," in step with the late October 2015 news from the World Health Organization that bacon, sausage and other smoked and processed meats are dangerous to health.

This created brand resonance with audience. The newsletters established *Western Living* as a more frequent media brand, more tactile, arriving in people's inboxes instead of arriving at their door every month. Doing so has created more traffic to their online platforms, Gierasimczuk said, and has built awareness of the brand with audience.

Western Living's website, westernliving.ca, which averages 100,000 unique visits a month, is a big part of its multiplatform strategy as it not only hosts their fresh content daily, but is linked to their digital edition and to their social media feeds. The website is responsive, which means that it works on all devices, adjusting to fit mobile devices or desktop monitors (Knight), but also provides a hub for all of their digital platforms. It is built off a custom Wordpress theme, into a CMS that allows them to be flexible in posting content. Their website menu includes "Homes & Design," "Food & Wine," "Travel," "Shopping," "Designers of the Year," and "Condo."

The content on their website is more conversational and friendly and broader in scope than in their print magazine, covering things they wouldn't necessarily cover in the print because of space restrictions (Quin). "There's a difference, but its meant to all feel like it's part of the same house, like it's part of the same brand," (Ibid.). Their website allows *Western Living* to expand their coverage online, as compared to the departments their print magazine covers, content pillars of style, travel, food and features.

One of the demands of multiplatform strategies is keeping up with vastly increased volume of content. In a 2015 article, Doyle questions the expanse of content in digital spaces, despite shrinking numbers of employees. The researcher stated that "practices of extensive recycling and re-use of content by media suppliers which, in many cases are integral to strategies of multi-platform expansion, are also a very major explanatory factor underlying the 'miracle of loaves and fishes' (62).

“We do a lot of listicles and photo galleries for online,” says Associate Editor Stacey McLachlan. McLachlan and staff writer Julia Dilworth also repurpose content from the print magazine, breaking up features into smaller pieces for the website. This process is called atomizing, a term brought into fashion by *Circa*, which “break(s) down a story into its core elements” (Gahran). Atomizing content is also a practice Hearst follows as part of its content strategy.

Being on multiple platforms may have increased the demand for content, but Dilworth and McLachlan also add value to that content, Dilworth says. They include links, photo galleries, subheads, to their online content. “We’re constantly refreshing the website with new content daily, and following things that our readers show interest in,” Dilworth said.

Western Living uses its social media platforms to engage its audiences. The magazine sees more engagement and conversation on Facebook, Pinterest, and Instagram, than Twitter, Quin says. This may occur because of the demographics on those social media platforms.

Western Living is also on Instagram. It’s perhaps here where *Western Living* sees the most engagement and conversation. On this visual-intensive social medium, *Western Living* has 6,461 followers, and of their 654 posts, all are big, beautiful photos similar to what they run in their print edition. Instagram has been really huge for *Western Living* says Dilworth. *Western Living’s* Instagram account has been growing in popularity by leaps and bounds, she says. One reason is because it is photo-based, and perfectly suited to the big, beautiful photos *Western Living* is known for. Instagram sees

more activity after the workday. Spikes in traffic occur when they post links to content, distribute their enewsletter, or post to Facebook (McLachlan)

We know, even in Instagram, things that do really well for us aren't so much behind the scenes, and more big beautiful photos. People want to see beautiful photos and we'll get triple, quadruple the amount of likes for that kind of thing than we would for a behind the scenes photo" (Quin).

Western Living's Pinterest is a blur of photos and colour. There are 47 boards dedicated to everything from dream kitchens and gorgeous living rooms, to modern recipes, entertaining, and wine and spirits (Western Living Pinterest). The page has 3,600 followers, and 3,500 pins.

Though they're both visual social media platforms, Instagram and Pinterest have somewhat different demographics. According to a 2015 Pew report detailing demographics of social media platforms, Instagram's audience is somewhat younger than Pinterest's. Fifty-three per cent of online adults who use Instagram are between the ages of 18-29. Pinterest has older demographics, with 31 per cent of users between the ages of 30-49, and 30 per cent of users between the ages of 50-64 (Duggan). That said, *Western Living* takes advantage of visual social media platforms like Pinterest and Instagram because it is a visual magazine and their audiences have come to expect those beautiful photos.

McLachlan defines success of the social strategies by the number of likes, shares, follows, etc., but also by the traffic each platform drives to their website. They know their strategy works because of the conversation and engagement it creates. The goal of social media strategy is to engage and interact with people, to create conversations and

open a dialogue. They reach that goal. Being engaged with the audience is important, because it allows the magazine's sales team to take that information to advertisers.

Western Living's digital publishing strategy works for them because they measure the uptake among their audiences. *Western Living's* social media engagement also proves to Gierasimczuk the validation that their brand and the content it produces and the conversation around all of it, matters.

Events is another platform *Western Living* uses to promote brand awareness and bring in revenue for the magazine. Quin says *Western Living* staff sponsor and host up to two events a month, which are a great brand extension. Events are design-focused engage the design community, but staff also participates in consumer-oriented events to engage their audiences. In early October, *Western Living* did an event in partnership with Canadian department store The Bay, where Quin gave a talk on trends for the fall season. "That's a nice branding thing for us, it gets the brand all over The Bay which has tons of traffic, and connects us with a nice audience" (Quin). It's one way of being in spaces their audience is, and giving audiences the chance to meet staff in person.

The *Western Living* website plays host to event coverage, something the staff never used to cover as their print schedule wouldn't let them. They'd have never gone to Diner en Blanc, a social trend where large groups of people dressed in white get together for outdoor dinners in public places in Vancouver, for the print edition, but Quin said they'd cover the event for their website.

Lessons Learned

Western Living's website, newsletter and social platforms are populated by content that has been recycled from their print magazine, but also has been created specifically for their digital properties. *Western Living* staff also cover events daily, turning their deadlines from months to moments. This increase in workload prompted *Western Living* to bring in Julia Dilworth, a former newspaper reporter and columnist, as a staff writer who manages the magazine's website and online platforms.

"We have tons of stuff, stuff that we're covering, and that comes up on a daily basis, that mightn't be a fit for a longer piece for the magazine," Dilworth says. They also atomize print features for online, pulling one feature into three articles, follow things their readers show interest in and flesh those stories out. A new area of content explosion for *Western Living* were the "staff picks" they'd post online. "We saw our staff picks were getting high numbers, like a favourite vacation destination, or best weekend getaway, or favourite fall home picks, and now we do a round up of those and those have been doing really well," Dilworth says. This practice has lead *Western Living* to an explosion of content for their digital platforms, with enough to keep the website and social mediums fresh daily, which has resulted in higher traffic numbers to their website and increased engagement.

Photos are a huge part of *Western Living's* content. Photo galleries do really well on *Western Living's* website, Dilworth says. They use specific social media platforms

Instagram and Pinterest to get more of their big, beautiful photos out, because they know their readers like to see them.

Social Media

Every Tweet, every Instagram photo, has a purpose. *Western Living* has a social media strategy with the goal of reaching audiences on platforms where they are, engaging with them, creating conversations, curating content, and measuring how well the outreach works. “We work in the social platforms that worked for us,” says Quin. “For us, that means heavy Facebook, Pinterest and Twitter and Instagram.” Social media works for *Western Living* because it helps them achieve their goal of brand awareness and facilitates conversation and engagement, which in turn is valuable information the sales team can use in their conversations with advertisers.

Measurement

Measurement is a key part of *Western Living*’s multi-platform strategy. Without it, they would be firing content into an abyss, with no feedback on how their content is received, what their audience likes or how many unique views they receive. *Western Living* uses a number of analytics tools to measure the success of their multi-platform strategies. They use Google Analytics to measure their website traffic, following metrics like visits and page views. Through their analytics, they’ve found out that most of their website traffic originates from British Columbia and is approximately 70 per cent female, comes in about 50/50 on mobile and desktop (McLachlan).

Western Living also uses their analytics tools to investigate how well their content does. When they notice a traffic spike, via Google Analytics, they can find the source of an article's traffic, to see where it came from geographically, whether it came from a tweet, a reddit, a pin, or some mention from an influential type in their social network.

From there you can see if it's from one popular referrer (like a lone reddit post) or from a bunch of different sources (shows that kind of story has great traction all over). If we do see spikes we definitely look for ways to replicate that success. We want to write articles that appeal to our audience, so if we see cooking videos get a spike, we know to put more energy and resources into developing more in future (Dilworth).

Tracking their social media metrics is a little trickier. "In terms of documenting what is successful on our social, we don't track for that, it's more just noticing what is working and what is not working," (McLachlan). Hootsuite is a social media dashboard that allows publishers to post content to more than one feed at a time, and also has analytics. *Western Living* uses the app to manage their social media and monitor its analytics. Twitter also has analytics, like Twitter Counter, that *Western Living* uses in conjunction with Hootsuite and Facebook analytics to keep track of how their social media platforms perform. "Those help with insight," Dilworth says.

Conclusion

Western Living has repositioned itself in reaction to the digital reality. A latecomer to the multiplatform publishing strategy game, it was forced to embrace changes quickly, but has done so successfully, and made a number of adjustments to

accommodate including bringing in new staff to support the changes. *Western Living* seems to be finding, continually, what works for them and it is expected they will do so in the future.

The magazine is well on its way to transforming from a legacy print magazine to a brand with authority in home style, travel, food and living in Western Canada on many platforms. As Gierasimczuk points out, “you can’t just be a magazine anymore. You have to be doing events, you have to be doing furniture lines, candles, database marketing, you have to be doing everything.” It is expected the brand will do so in the future, with the same attitude it jumped online with.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

In this chapter, I will draw conclusions about how magazine publishers have pivoted to meet the digital reality and illustrate some lessons learned. I will also identify limitations of the information learned and look at the implications for the Canadian magazine publishing industry. I will identify potential avenues for future research and identify what could be done on the basis of this research.

Conclusion

In 2015, there are media companies who are not identifying themselves as magazine publishers anymore. They're digital media companies, data and services companies, and technology companies. As the lines blur between print and digital, and magazine media brands look at their core strengths and realize that they're not simply paper and ink anymore, this mindset will expand beyond the likes of Hearst and Time Inc.

At the world magazine media association's largest magazine conference in the world, the FIPP World Congress 2015, digital consultant Peter Kreisky of Kreisky Media Consultancy outlined how 14 media companies around the world are adjusting to the digital reality. He suggested they all acknowledged that they weren't just magazine publishers anymore. They were multiplatform brands, digital content companies, media and technology companies. "Not a word about magazines" (Kreisky). This mindset doesn't just occur at media giants like Hearst, Time and Axel Springer SE, but to smaller publishing houses in Canada, too.

As *Alberta Oil* publisher Ruth Kelly puts it,

I don't care whether I produce my magazine on fibre paper or pixel paper, it's still a magazine, different than audio, or video, or anything else. It's the amalgam of thought and image in a different way. Long form media has its own strengths. And that's the biggest challenge, is getting past that, "well, you're print media." No, we're not. We're magazines, and that's not defined by the paper. (Kelly)

As the rise of the Internet has changed magazine publishing, it's clear that some companies have embraced change and innovation, and transformed along with it. As this study has illustrated, magazines in Western Canada are adapting to the digital reality by implementing multiplatform strategies that not only inform their editorial and sales decisions, but also connect with audiences in all spaces, and leave room for future innovation and change. They use practices like optimizing content for search engines and sell not only display advertising on websites, but also sponsored video, and programmatic advertising. They use analytics to dig deeper and social media to engage audiences. The three case studies, *Western Living*, *Alberta Oil* and *Avenue* may all use some of the same platforms, but purposes vary. For example, *Alberta Oil* uses Twitter for driving traffic to their website, but *Western Living* uses it for engaging and creating dialogue with their audience.

While all three magazines are different in terms of topic, audience, circulation and size, they have elements of strategy in common. Like Lucy Küng's digital innovators, each of the strategies have common elements that contribute to their success.

Observations

Readers once had to wait an entire 30 days before reading content from their favourite magazines. These days, being on multiple platforms allows magazines to overcome their monthly deadlines and become instantaneous publishers. This can be a boon for magazine publishers, as it allows them to connect with their audience quicker than the pre-Internet days. Magazine media giants such as Hearst have developed “months to moments” strategies, to meet audience demands and turn their magazine portfolios into 24-hour content factories.

Hearst, for example, launched something they call a global production content generator (GCG for short), to share content across their digital network, according to Melinda Lee, vice-president of digital content and audience development at Hearst Magazines International at the FIPP 2015 Congress. “We all agree, content is king, it’s a given now, but we started thinking of content in a different way. Content is king if it’s good, right? Crappy content?” Lee shook her head. “Not king.”

Given Hearst’s size, with its 431 websites, 70 brands, and a global audience of 333 million across 53 countries, the company has quite the demand for fresh, new content each day, several times a day (Lee). So, Hearst developed the GCG and employs thousands of content creators around the world (FIPP). The content hub’s purpose is to share trending content across platforms, and uses data to guide content creation. It runs 24/7, supplying content for Hearst websites, allowing the company to customize content based on trending topics. “Content trend data helps us determine the type of

content that performs well in different countries so we can syndicate across regions” (Alderman).

The Internet is a hungry platform. Audiences expect instant gratification and patience is thin. “The need for instant gratification is not new, but our expectation of ‘instant’ has become faster, and as a result, our patience is thinner,” one expert told the *Boston Globe* (Muther). Dangers of this for small magazines in Canada, who don’t have the scale that Hearst does, include resources like manpower. There are only so many hours in a day, and having one or two staff members generating content over 24 hours with the speed and quantity of *Buzzfeed*, on top of monthly deadlines is unreasonable.

Having a digital presence means overcoming monthly deadlines but also facing a demand for increasingly rapid content and engagement online, but smaller publishers can do it, too. Scaling this instantaneous content production idea down to fit a small magazine publisher does work. There are tools that could help – and are used by magazines in this study – from social media dashboard Hootsuite, which allows users to create a number of social posts and schedule when to post them on various platforms, to employing freelancers to blog and create content, to recycling print content, older content or evergreen content, to timing the trickle of content released over the span of a month.

Western Living, Avenue and *Alberta Oil* all engage with their audiences at different paces. While they all contribute content to their websites and digital platforms, they have their own ideas on when and how much to post. *Alberta Oil* posts content on a fairly regular basis over the span of a week, and as Kerr notes, posting content during

business hours will always reach the magazine's audience. *Avenue* posts content every day, up to 90 pieces of content a month. *Western Living* posts content every day, several times a day, and like *Avenue*, has a thrice-weekly newsletter.

Another observation is that maintaining a multiplatform publishing strategy involves a heavy workload. Staff at two of the magazines profiled suggested that the added responsibility of producing additional content for their websites left staff "feeling stretched" (Quin) sometimes, or added "more work" (Kerr) to their workloads, but neither seemed to be overwhelmed with the amount of content produced by each magazine for their websites. It should be noted that each of the magazines studied had additional staff whose job it is to create or work with online content, thus giving support to web editors and editorial staff. And, one of the magazines profiled said delivering digital content did not add to their workload, as their transition from a print-based publisher to a multiplatform brand was seamless.

This is a definite area for future research. Will Hearst's months to moments strategy turn magazines into content factories, as audience demands for content increase? Will magazines be able to keep up with the quality of their content, as demand for it increases and time to turn it around decreases?

Lessons Learned

Social media is for a common element of multiplatform publishing strategy. Each of the case studies in this thesis use social media as part of their multiplatform publishing strategy, to promote their brands, their content, and to engage with audiences on those platforms. As examined in earlier chapters, various social platforms

were used for various purposes. *Alberta Oil* uses LinkedIn to provide a forum for its audience to discuss issues relevant to their business and industry, while *Avenue* sees benefits like increased website traffic from a loyal following on Facebook, and *Western Living* takes advantage of the visual social platform Instagram to curate a large following.

Demographics for social platforms is also significant. While each of the magazines picked specific platforms to be on, there are commonalities. All three of the case studies are on Facebook and Twitter and find that website traffic comes from Facebook but use Twitter more to promote their content and brand. Both social platforms are used to engage with audience.

Strengths of social media platforms include timeliness and immediacy, generates followings, and increases website traffic. One of the major strengths of social media platforms is that every tweet, like and follow is measureable. Social media provides magazine publishers with audience insight because analytics tools measure interactions on those platforms. Social media has been shown to not only drive traffic, but also reward fans and tellingly, increase sales of single copies (Raphael).

Social media is essential to multiplatform strategy, but also depends on how magazine publishers use it. Generating brand awareness is great, but data needs to be linked to real world benefits, like return on investment. Data is a collection of numbers and metrics, without context. Thus, social media platforms are powerful means of connecting, but need purpose and goals to provide return. Each of the magazines

studied understands that social is one element of a strategy that propels them to an overarching goal.

Understanding Google Analytics can help editors prioritize and plan for future content and social media promotion... parsing a website's analytics can indicate who the most valuable visitors are, which audiences prefer certain content and which keywords are most popular" (Hilderman 49).

If they're not already, magazine publishers should be using various social media to interact and engage with audiences. Audiences are there. According to social media analytics firm We Are Social in 2014, Canada has 29,760,000 Internet users, and 19,000,000 active Facebook users (WeAreSocial 59). Those plugged into social media spend an average of two hours a day on social networks, with 85 per cent of social media users owning a Facebook account, 46 per cent owning a Twitter or 45 per cent a Google+ account (Ibid., 62). Globally, 3.0 billion people are active internet users, with two billion active social media accounts (Ibid., 6). Social media could be used for more than just engaging with a magazine's audience in the future, as Facebook is looking to share revenue with publishers (Spangler) The social media giant is also increasingly, a traffic generator. According to a recent *Fortune* article, Facebook has overtaken Google in referring traffic to media sites. "Social-media sources... accounted for about 43% of the traffic to the Parse.ly network of media sites, while Google accounted for just 38%" (Ingram).

Measurement is another common element of multiplatform publishing strategy. Analytics help magazine publishers develop a deeper understanding of their audiences, which in turn can inform editorial decisions and sales decisions. It can help magazines

understand how individuals interact and engage with their content. It can help journalists understand more about the audiences reading and consuming content (Napoli 201). Analytics can show whether audiences loved a particular piece of content, or made a social media post go viral.

And, increasingly, editors are paying attention to this data. In a 2015 study of 206 US editors, Tandoc found that editors use web analytics to monitor traffic but also to “inform content-related decisions,” and audience preferences (Tandoc 794). Another recent study by Lee et al. of three US newspapers found that clicks “plays an intricate and dynamic role in influencing whether and how online newsroom editors decide to feature certain news stories over others” (Lee 519). This suggests that editors are relying on analytics to track the popularity of content and respond to responsive audiences.

Editors at each of the magazines studied paid attention to their analytics, to track how content performed. *Western Living’s* McLachlan and Dilworth, for example, monitored analytics on a weekly basis. Time Inc.’s Lisa Brewer told *Folio*, “without analytics to judge our efforts, social media can feel very stunt-like. We rely on these metrics to prove the value of the various social media platforms from both a traffic-driving standpoint as well as a potential source of revenue” (Raphael).

Content is a key part of multiplatform publishing strategy. All three case studies published content in formats unique to the digital environment, whether it was a listicle, a podcast, a photo gallery or video, on top of repurposing print content for the web. Frequency and type depended on the magazine. *Avenue* published up to 90 pieces a month, *Alberta Oil* supplemented their content with audio or video, and *Western Living*

atomized theirs. The key when it comes to content, as part of a multiplatform publishing strategy is that it is good and is available to audiences wherever they want it. "More than ever, journalists need to understand the mindset of the person with whom they seek to communicate - or co-create- and how the resulting journalistic content and media fit into that person's life" (Malthouse 3). What works for *Alberta Oil*, for example, is a mix of strong content from the magazine, and strong added value that may include audio or video, and a strong social media push (Kerr).

Each of the magazines studied developed at least one additional revenue stream, often several, to complement their print advertising. No magazine relied solely on print advertising for revenue, instead, they invested in multiple revenue streams. The magazines in this study all used a variety of revenue streams, digital and alternative, to support print advertising revenue. And, they continue to look at diversifying revenue in ways that make sense for them.

Digital revenue streams that are working for publishers across Canada, and the world, include mobile advertising, which goes beyond squeezing website banner ads onto mobile screens to optimizing them for mobile platforms, and native advertising, which is sponsored content or advertorial by another name, to programmatic advertising, which uses programmatic software to position advertising in front of highly-targeted audiences and ad buying is done in a nano-second (Marshall "What is programmatic advertising?").

For others, diversified revenue streams include e-stores selling merchandise. Take Toronto's *Spacing* magazine for example, an urban magazine focused on city

issues, who had an e-store as part of the magazine's web presence since launching 10 years ago.

"We started selling buttons, subway station buttons, in 2004, and it became a major part of our revenue for a number of years," says Publisher Matthew Blackett. There is a button for every subway station in Toronto, and editors claimed they've sold over 500,000 (Warnica). The \$2.00 buttons became a run-away hit among Torontonians looking to show their civic pride. "It generated a lot of money for us, so that's one of the reasons *Spacing* is alive today, is because we were able to fund the magazine through merchandise sales through the first two or three years."

Spacing launched a pop-up shop in 2013 to test out the market, and it worked out well, Blackett said. A year later, they opened a retail store for *Spacing* merchandise and Toronto-specific goods. As a brand extension, it's worked for Blackett and the *Spacing* team. From a marketing perspective, having a giant logo on the side of a building that people drive by each day, there's more conversation happening around the *Spacing* brand because of that, he said. The store has benefitted the print magazine beyond providing an alternative revenue stream; it's had a positive influence on the print magazine. "We've seen our subscriptions go up this year and our newsstand sales, and that's almost entirely based on having a brick and mortar store. It's helped us, it's really helped us" (Blackett).

Each of the case studies profiled in this study uses alternative and digital revenue streams, instead of relying solely on print advertising. It's something they've had to do, as print revenue has been in decline for some time. *Alberta Oil* uses video advertising as

one of many revenue streams, while *Avenue* sells website display advertising and native advertising. They've all found digital revenue streams that work for them.

Another thing all of these magazines have in common is their event revenue stream. They each do events over the year that are synonymous with the brand, from *Alberta Oil's* The 200 to *Western Living's* Designers of the Year Awards, to *Avenue's* Top 40 Under 40. These are all awards events, that celebrate individuals in each of the magazines' topic area, and while they're great for brand recognition, they're also key revenue streams. Events are growing in importance for magazine publishers as a revenue stream, and can offset decline in print advertising, according to FIPP.

Some publisher's events drive as much as 20 per cent of total revenues, plus events diversify revenue sources, deepen connections with audiences and sponsors, help hike circulation, attract advertisers who might not advertise in the magazine's media, give magazines "face time" with their subscribers ... and have high growth potential" (Senor 169)

Embracing multiple revenue streams is another element of strategy that could be incorporated by Canadian magazines into their multiplatform strategies, if they haven't already. According to a recent IAB report, Canadians over 18 spend 23 per cent of their media time with mobile internet and 17 per cent with internet video (Young 11), but there's a gap as marketers haven't caught up, spending only eight per cent of their budgets on mobile and two per cent on internet video. The report suggests that forces at work include a lack of mobile website design are to blame for the underperforming revenue (Ibid.).

Culture change is important for magazine publishers looking to adapt to the digital reality smoothly. But to do so is really quite difficult. It involves changing

mindsets and adjusting workflows to accommodate. Transitioning from a print publishing plan, that revolves around monthly or quarterly deadlines, to a multiplatform strategy, where deadlines are immediate, is challenging.

For people in the print industry, it's pretty tough, because they're on a rhythm. They've had a rhythm for years, where there's a crescendo and the deadline, and after the deadline is met, you recover for a day or two and begin to build again (Wilpers).

The industry has witnessed dramatic change over the last 20 years. Magazine media management will need to adapt and iterate in order to keep up. Meeting digital head on means taking into consideration immediate deadlines, 24-hour content schedules and meetings all day to talk about creating content for multiple platforms.

"Leaders cannot simply mandate a new culture," according to Brown and Groves.

"Organizations must develop new routines that fit in the context of the existing culture and nudge members toward a culture that embraces innovation" (Groves).

Magazine publishers must have digital innovation-friendly culture. This starts from the beginning when everyone – the editorial team, the sales, production, distribution, and photographers – sits down to plan content. Bringing all of the staff, with different creative skills and mindsets, together, will curate better packages for multiplatform content than simply those who play with words. "The more minds you apply to a problem, the more interesting and unique solutions you're going to get" (Wilpers).

Silverman suggests in a timely report for the American Press Institute that it's essential to create new processes for meetings in magazine media workflows, "as a way to spark collaboration and reinforce new roles and practices." This allows organizations

to create nimbler teams who are able to pursue digital initiatives without obstacles or barriers, which are supported by training and can keep up with shifts in the landscape.

Culture change is such an important theme for magazines making the shift from print to digital, or for magazines succeeding at digital, that it became a theme at the 2015 FIPP World Congress, where 800 magazine media professionals from around the world came to Toronto in October to discuss it. At the congress, Michael Finnegan, the chief operating officer at Atlantic Media, US, shared how his company managed the transition from print to digital and are succeeding at digital. Corporate culture was key to the transformation of Atlantic Media from a print-based publisher to a digital player. “Our culture enables our strategy and tactics to change with the pace of modern media,” he said. “It was the culture and the operational structure that we had created to enable us to consistently tackle new challenges and adapt to new transformations or hurdles in the industry” (Finnegan).

Ten years ago, Atlantic Media was a small print company, with three business units, six brands, 38 employees, a print circulation of 500,000 and digital audience of 200,000. Over a decade, the company embraced the uncertainty of multiplatform publishing, tripled its sales team, actively rushed new products, and invested in digital ads and products (Finnegan). By 2015, Atlantic Media transformed into a digital content company with four business units, 22 brands and sub brands, and 665 employees, and a digital audience of almost 50 million. Over the last two years, Finnegan revealed, they increased revenue by 50 per cent.

It's a culture that allowed us to adapt and focus on building new and improved products and helped us avoid many of the pitfalls that legacy media companies have to face when they make this transformation (Finnegan).

Small shops are sometimes the nimblest, able to turn on a dime and adapt to changes because of their culture. *Spacing* magazine, for example, is a five-person organization, Blackett says. Their internal culture is about being fun and being open to ideas.

We're very open to new ideas, and we kind of have to be because there's only five of us. We take on extra responsibilities, that makes us more well-rounded employees and we also understand the business and what our readers and customers want because of that (Blackett).

Western Living magazine, *Alberta Oil* and *Avenue* magazines all have corporate cultures where innovation is embraced; platforms, revenue streams, content is experimented with, and staff are open to new ideas. Culture is an important part of multiplatform publishing strategy for *Alberta Oil*, for *Avenue* and for *Western Living*. Each of these magazines embodies a culture that is open to innovation and change, and positions them well to meet future changes. Individual magazine company culture has enabled these three case studies to transition to multiple platforms.

If you don't have staff that is empowered to do things differently than they've been doing before, then they'll never do it. It'll never happen because the risks are too high, they like their jobs, and if they're not rewarded for failing they won't try new things (Wilpers).

As outlined above, culture is an extremely important part of multiplatform publishing strategy that could apply more broadly across Canada. Publishers need to commit to changing out of the old rhythms and deadlines of print publishing, because the digital reality won't wait up. Understanding that committing to change, supporting

training of staff as they learn new applications, processes, workflow, is a journey and not something that will be doable quickly. “We have found in working with media companies around the world that the enemy of innovation is not a lack of ideas but a crippling, top-down, rigid, out-of-date corporate culture” (Senor 8). What works, Senor, Giner and Wilpers write in *Innovations in Magazine Media 2014-2016*, is encouraging and rewarding out-of-the-box thinking. “Commit to empowering your staff to think innovatively, to take risks without fear of failure or retribution” (Ibid. 9).

This researcher believes creating a multiplatform publishing strategy should start with some of the core elements of traditional magazine publishing. Knowing the magazine’s audience really well, whether by surveying them, or getting to know their online habits, this is important. Knowing an audience inside and out helps define other elements of multiplatform publishing strategy. Magazine publishers should also know their magazines inside and out: what are weaknesses and what are strengths? Then, commit to diving into digital. Magazine publishers should have a goal or purpose behind their strategy, and chart out how the strategy should lead to results. Why dive into digital if doing so will only add more workload for staff? Magazine publishers should define what they want their results to be. Do they want to attract more traffic to turn over to their sales department? Or, create a more loyal audience online by engaging with them? Somewhere along the way, magazine publishers should investigate additional revenue streams, to make financial sense of the additional work put into digital outputs. Investigate digital platforms, from social media to online editions and mobile apps, and go where the audience is. And then, measure all of the above.

Measure social media by metrics that matter, or metrics that are becoming standard across the industry. Measure website traffic with an analytics tool, to figure out who is coming to the magazine website, where they're coming from and what they want. Learn from these measurements and develop upon what works. Develop additional revenue streams, in a way that makes sense for the magazine. Perhaps events, sponsorships, partnerships, subscriptions or digital advertising like programmatic, native or video would work. And, invest in talent. No longer is a writer or editor good enough doing simply that one job. They must bring something else to the table: video editing, social or digital skills, a social media following, or perhaps just new ideas.

Why does this matter? What makes these case studies important is that their strategies, individually made to measure, carry them to their goals. And it is the strategy, the process, that makes it work, not simply picking and choosing a couple of elements to add onto a print-only publishing strategy.

Limitations of this research

Changes happen so quickly in the magazine industry these days. From page views and eyeballs to time spent, metrics have changed according to speakers at the FIPP Congress 2015. Ad blockers have become a real fear in Europe (though not yet fully realized in Canada) for magazine publishers. According to a Pagefair study on ad blocking in 2015, ad blocking penetration in Canada is at 20 per cent and cost publishers approximately \$22 billion globally (Pagefair). IAB Canada's *Canadian Media Usage*

Trends Study (CMUST) report states “ad blocking is responsible for less than 20 per cent of the display impression declines since 2013” (Young 9).

Limitations of this research include the fact that the topic of multiplatform publishing strategy is, like the industry, in a state of constant change. It is expected that by the time this study is published, some of it will already be out of date.

Limitations also pertain to case study findings, which cannot be generalized overmuch, as the sample is small – three magazines out of over 2,000 in Canada – and there’s no substantive way to establish that these findings are representative of a larger population. Indeed, as one expert suggested, there is no silver bullet (Kreisky, Ripp). What works for these magazines may not work for all magazines in Canada, as they all have different goals, audiences and strategies.

Future research

In 2012, Gillian Doyle and her colleagues at the University of Glasgow began a three-year major research project into multiplatform media. “Multiplatform media and the digital challenge: strategy, distribution and policy” has become a touchstone for this researcher while completing this study. But, beyond that project, there is scanty literature on multiplatform strategy.

Research into multiplatform publishing strategy has really only scratched the surface of an exciting time in media history. With the industry in a state of flux, more research is needed to provide answers, or direction, for magazine publishers. It may be a moving target, but it must be studied further. There are ethical questions that come up

when dealing with multiplatform strategy – if months are whittled down to moments, what time is left to decide whether posting something crosses an ethical line?

While this thesis noted that the selected case studies recycled, repurposed and atomized content they had previously created for their respective print editions, it did not detail exactly how and to what degree this was done. But, more research could be done. Specifically, with regards to workflow and satisfying the demand for increased content on multiple platforms. How would small publishing houses adapt with shrinking numbers of staff?

Individual magazines dive into digital with different purposes, different audiences and with different goals. It is essential then, that magazines in Canada who wish to reach success as described in these pages, take a look at themselves and the two groups they serve: their audience and their advertisers.

Shifting away from a print-first culture means examining all aspects of the organization. Going back to *The Lean Newsroom*, Groves said, "What you have to do, the hard thing about this is that you have to find your answer. And your answer (comes from) understanding who you are and what you're capable of doing" (Groves).

It's up to magazine publishers in Canada to start the process of change for themselves, to experiment and create cultures open to innovation, and processes and strategies to reach new goals. Managing that process is a challenge. "For leaders, it means setting priorities and creating a structure that enables those priorities to be executed. That may mean stopping some activities and initiatives, but it also means giving life and license to new processes, initiatives and structures" (Silverman).

As much as the case studies have transitioned and adjusted to meet the digital reality, they're all still experimenting and finding avenues and platforms that work for them. They're willing to walk away from practices that don't work. Transitioning to the digital space, to become a content provider, may be a long game because new technologies that don't exist currently may arise that prove to be useful tools for magazines in the future. Successful publishers, thus far, display a willingness to experiment and a culture that embraces change and innovation.

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