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# **The Role of Printed Media in Today's Technological Society**

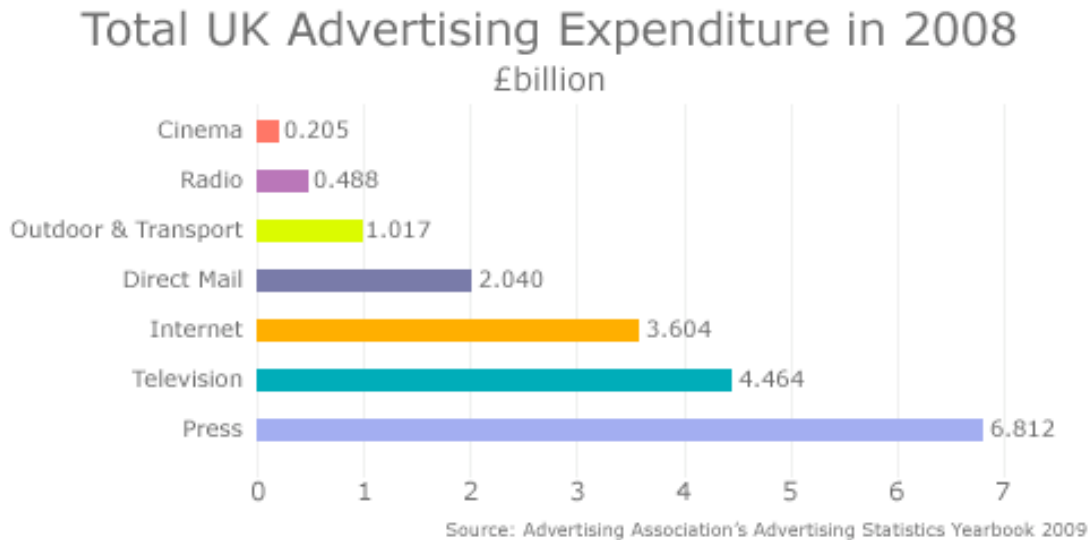
*A comparison of printed and online magazines*

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## 1.0 Introduction

Print media, specifically the Magazine, has an incredible impact on today's society; 36.6% of the £18.6 billion spent on advertising in the UK in 2008 was printed – the highest of all mediums (Advertising Association, 2009) .



Magazines have developed into an important mechanism for communicating information, gauging and reflecting public opinion and allowing for public discourse. With the development and popularity of the Internet, many published magazines have made a move towards digitising their publications. This has affected print media through all genres; prompting publishers to question how effective their hard copy publications are, when compared with their Internet counterparts. The question of "which is 'better'; a printed or online magazine?" is such a subjective one. Interesting conclusions can be drawn from looking closely at the difference in profitability and readership figures alongside public opinions. The conclusions drawn in this research are relevant to the publishing industry as well as beneficial for the study of new media.

### **1.1 Aim**

The aim of this report is to establish the role of printed media in today's society by comparing printed and online magazines.

### **1.2 Objectives**

This report makes a comparison between the two types of magazine, print and online and explores the differing methods of online publication. In order to understand and take a relevant stance on the role of printed media in today's society, the perspectives of both publishers and readers are considered. Bearing these perspectives in mind, an examination into the effectiveness of printed and online magazines in today's society is outlined below. This report compares and contrasts how the roles of a printed and an online magazine differ, and analyses to what extent using them together could increase their overall success.

### **1.3 Rationale**

The rapid modernisation of media delivery methods is reflected in the vast array of publications that are making a move towards digitisation of their content. When creating and distributing a publication, it is essential to consider the implications that the World Wide Web will have. "Information technology and business are becoming inextricably interwoven," claims Bill Gates (1999), and, according to Rupert Murdoch, the Internet has been the most fundamental change during his lifetime, not only being "the biggest thing since Gutenberg... it's the biggest thing since the invention of writing." (Woopidoo, 2009)

Many are under the impression that the online revolution over the past two decades has caused less demand for printed magazines, however, it is interesting to note that publishers are still printing and selling hard copy magazines, suggesting an element of profitability still remains. Publishers must consider the implications for use of both mediums, and how this could affect their readership.

#### **1.4 Methods**

Academic journals and books have been studied to gain a foundation of knowledge on research that has already been carried out in the fields of new media, publishing and technology. Quotes from prominent members of the computing and media industries have been applied to further development of the themes within the literature review. Two interviews with prominent members of the publishing industry feature below. Firstly, an interview with Matthew Arnold, director and part owner of Mantra Magazines (one of the most circulated local community magazines in the UK) establishes the reasons behind why printed magazines are necessary, and secondly, an interview with Trevor Klein, BBC producer of Slink (an online magazine aimed at teens) has provided an insightful look at the online publishing industry of today. Statistics from credible institutions have been used to back up claims, generate argument and reveal anomalies in consumer trends.

## 1.5 Difficulties

Academic reports that compare the readership of printed and online magazines are difficult to obtain because much research in this field has been carried out commercially. As such, the statistics are not readily available for use. Previous research that has obtained such information, in journals for example, has been cited (as well as their original sources) where the original source has not been seen.

Comparison of statistics is problematic because readership numbers are measured differently for both mediums and over different time scales. For a website, using the number of unique hits per day instead of the total number of page impressions will give different results. Similar discrepancies can be found when trying to obtain data for a printed magazine; a decision must be made whether to use the circulation figure of a monthly publication, number of subscribers, or single copy sales figures. For the purpose of this report, the average number of daily online magazine hits will be compared with the printed magazine monthly circulation figures. These figures have been chosen as they are the most illustrative and accurate for readership comparison. However, they will unfortunately not take into account those individuals who have both bought a hard copy *and* viewed the magazine online.

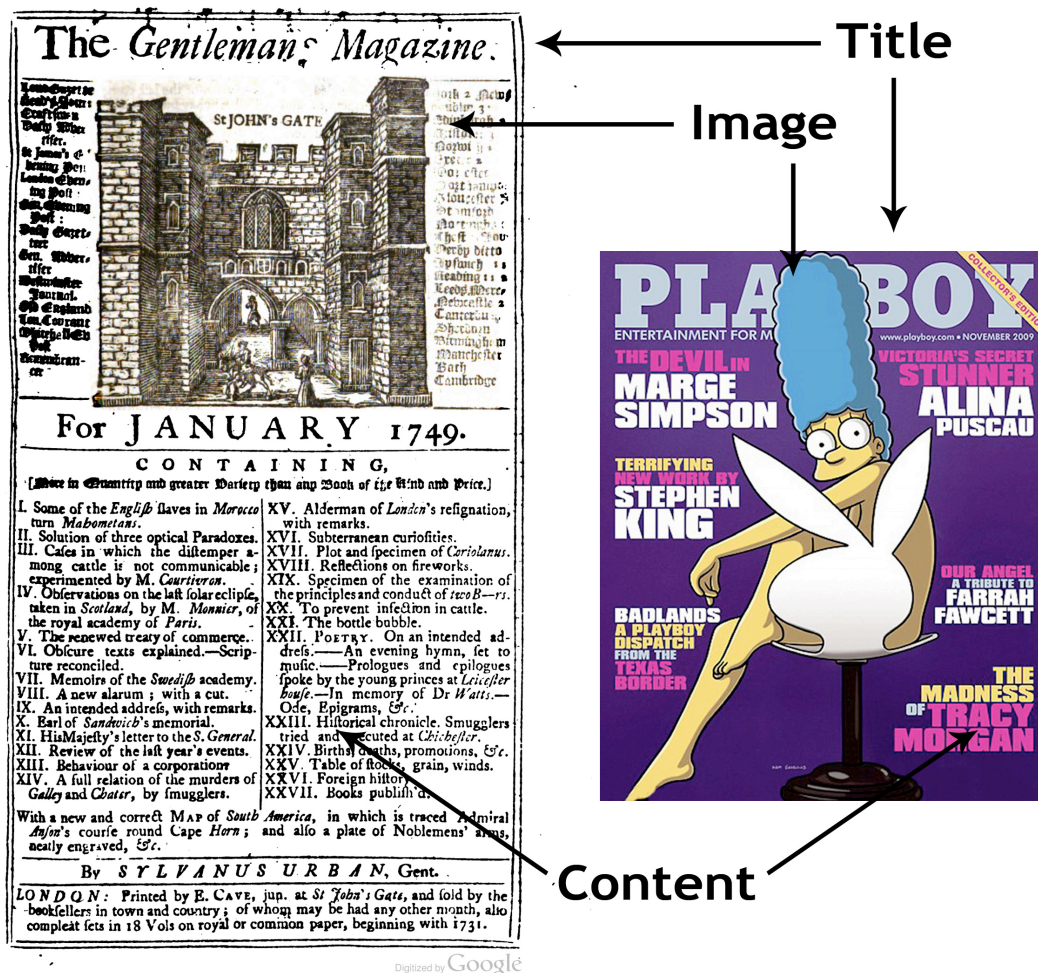
It is important to clarify what an 'online magazine' is, because anything posted online can be regarded as published material. For ease of understanding, and for the purposes of this report, online publishing will be considered in the same way as printed publishing – i.e. content designed for readers, with consideration given to design, editing, audience and distribution.

Finally, when trying to ascertain the industry stance on this topic, separating fact from subjective opinion will be difficult to distinguish. People's position and motives behind their views are taken into consideration when drawing conclusions.

## 2.0 The Magazine Industry

### 2.1 Literature Review

The first general-interest printed 'magazine', in the sense of the word as it is used today, is widely accredited to Edward Cave, who published 'The Gentleman's Magazine' in 1731 (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2009). Like publications of today, the magazine contained news, commentaries, and general content the editor believed would be of interest to the consumer. Apart from advances in printing and distribution technology, it must be noted that throughout a period of over 200 years, the format of magazines had essentially stayed the same.

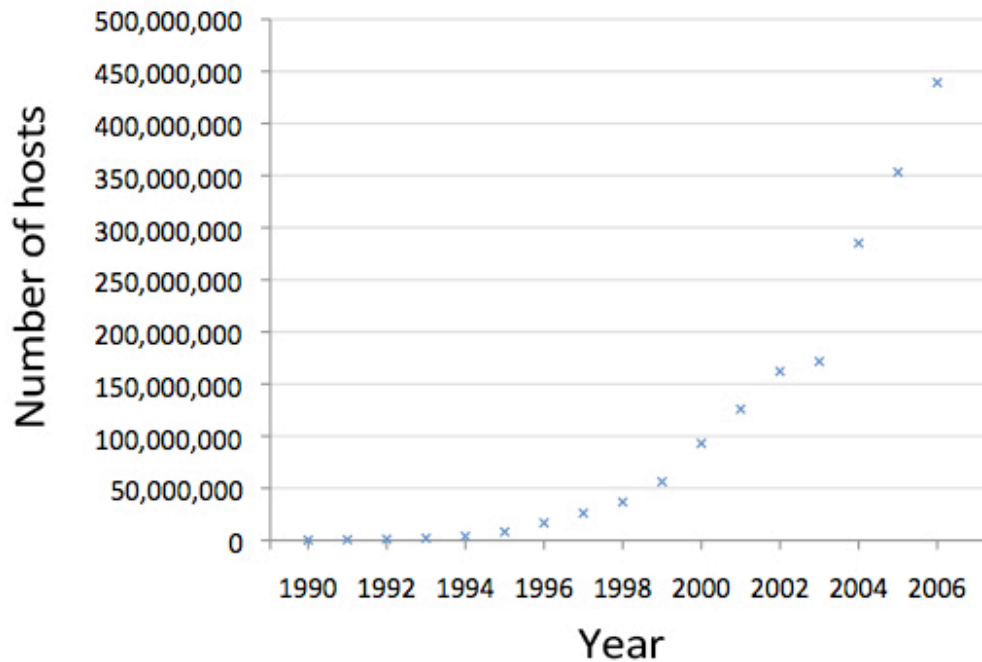


The Gentleman's Magazine, Jan 1749 and Playboy Magazine, Nov 2009

(Nichols, 2008) (Playboy, 2009)

As of the mid 1990's, the size and availability of the Internet increased dramatically. This created a window of opportunity for publishers to reach their audience in new and exciting ways.

## Internet Growth from 1990 to 2006



(Zakon, 2006)

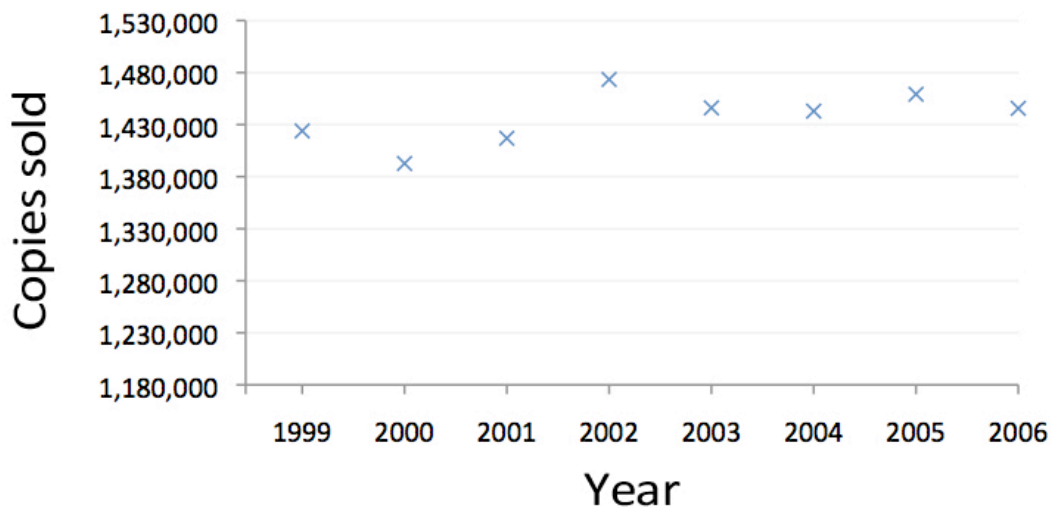
To understand the viewpoint of a publisher who solely prints magazines, the opinion of Matthew Arnold, Director of Mantra Magazines (“a family run independent business publishing three local community magazines”) has been examined (See Appendix: Interview 1). Matthew’s publishing choice embraces the idea that people will prefer to read a printed magazine “when they want to get away from work or the PC.”

While Mr Arnold reveals that “in time, and with the speed at which technology is moving, there will be a need for [Mantra Magazines] to have some kind of web presence and product,” it is interesting to note that he feels this presence is not necessary yet.



The general trend seen in published articles on print media maintain that the medium is 'dying a slow death' (Newstex, 2009). While this may be true for newspapers (Schoenback et al., 2005), the magazine statistics tell a different story.

### Average yearly circulation for the 200 best selling magazines in the USA



(BPA and ABC, 2009)

This table shines a different and potentially optimistic light over the magazine industry and sparks interest for further investigation, although, this report will not delve into a comparison between magazine and newspaper sales.

The Sun newspaper creatively provides a refreshing video summary of the key features of printed media. It parodies Apple's iPhone advertisement and acts as a strong argument for print.

The UK's best handheld for 40 years:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fVMnmTFxAjA>

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YJ1QwExp0\\_g](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YJ1QwExp0_g)

They have shown a true understanding of their audience and their tendencies to use the Internet, in order to entice them back to use print media. It uses the perceived advantages of mobile Internet to highlight the advantages of print media.

## **2.2 Analysis**

The new-found freedom of the Internet has opened up a world of interaction for readers. However, with continued growth comes increased competition within the online community, as well as against hard-copy publications. Not only does the Internet provide a contemporary method of channelling content to readers, it also allows for diversification of the type of content with which readers can engage. Rowe et al (2000, quoted in Rowe 2006) notes how governments across the globe (in the United Kingdom and Australia, for example) recognise this potential by the provision of their services and initiation of petitions over the Internet.

For Mr Arnold, the nature of his (local) magazines dictate that entering the online world is unnecessary at the moment. Now, the content of Mr Arnold's magazines is directly relevant to three post codes within West Sussex. By expanding to the Internet, he could have the potential to reach 700,000 more people in the county, and millions more across the country and world. However, in going online, trying to appeal to a larger audience, he risks alienating his current base. For small publications, a trade off between diversification of methods and changing content would need to be carefully considered.

### **3.0 Review of Publishing Technology**

The methods through which content can be offered to readers are vast. Printed publications follow the general process of compiling information, printing, and then distributing through shops or subscription. Utilising the web for dissemination of content offers use of different techniques to reach the user.

#### **3.1 Portable Document Format**

If moving from print to online, perhaps the simplest way is to publish the designs in Portable Document Format (PDF) from the print version (optimised for web) for download. The suitability of this method is questionable. Whilst being online, and as such having no distribution cost (aside from hosting fees), it lacks the functionality of many web pages, or online magazines. Essentially, being neither an 'online magazine' nor a 'printed magazine', this publication is in a dangerously grey area in an attempt to be a 'best of both worlds' solution.

#### **3.2 Flash**

A more elaborate alternative to this method is a Flash based version, like Magwerk for example (<http://www.magwerk.com/mag.php?magazine=encore&language=en>). They offer the users an experience similar to that of print, with "no more papercuts" (Magwerk, 2009), simulating the page turn and the look and feel of a traditional magazine, with the benefits of hyperlinks, sound and animation. Despite this method being more engaging, it is memory intensive, requires more hosting space, and is not search engine friendly.

#### **3.3 Website**

For publications with no desire to publish any printed material, the idea of a blog or website-based magazine is appealing and appropriate. An advantage of being online only is the relative ease of production for publishers, and ease of use for publishers and readers. Readers are able to subscribe to the site using RSS feeds or regular email notifications. They can easily search and choose from a selection of content, and with mobile Internet becoming more and more commonplace, the option to view data anywhere is appealing. The actual readership

figures of a printed magazine, in comparison to its online counterpart, vary across all genres. For example, FHM.com averages 92,570 unique users a day and their monthly magazine circulates an average of 235,027 copies (ABC, 2009).

Name of Magazine	Online: Average number of unique daily hits	Printed: Monthly circulation (copies sold)	Estimated number of days until online content has had as many readers as printed material*
Cosmopolitan	20,247	441,663	22
FHM	92,570	235,027	3
Hello	66,922	397,634	4
Men's Health	25,957	250,247	10
Music week	3,215	5,962	2
People Management	3,165	132,168	42
What Car?	60,189	87,220	2
You and Your Wedding	19,246	58,046	4
Zoo	50,333	111,012	3

\*Speculated figure - assuming no reader returns to the site within this time  
(ABC, 2009)

'Lloyd's List', one of the UK's oldest and longest running publications, has benefited from making the move to publish content online and utilised the mushrooming Twitter culture to their advantage. While its daily magazine circulates an average of 6,422 copies (ABC, 2009), their website attracts an average of 9,341 unique viewers a day.

### **3.4 Personalised Publishing**

Time Magazine experimented with personalised publishing - tailored printing of a magazine with a selection of content based on readers' preference and location. This innovative concept aimed to inject an element of the web's custom functionality back into the print industry. Trevor Klein, producer of BBC's teenage girls online magazine 'Slink', (See Appendix: Interview 2) suggests this may be the way of the future. He believes that the speed of updates online, ensuring that content is relevant, is crucial in media publishing of today and the future. "The site is built around opportunities for comments, collaboration and interactivity... As we're part of the BBC, something that is core to our site is being non-commercial and being a public service, so online is the best way for us to deliver this." If print media is to succeed, it must take the appealing elements of its online counterpart, and apply them.

Pepsi Max and CBS have tried to take this notion when advertising within American magazine 'Entertainment Weekly', by embedding a video into a paper magazine (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/8255729.stm>). However, this extremely costly gimmick swings things too far perhaps by nullifying the advantages of print - the reader is unable to roll the magazine up and put it in their pocket, and the visual impact of high quality imagery is reduced. People buy magazines because they want to get away from invasive, interactive content and merging the two forms could alienate traditional magazine audiences.

#### 4.0 Analysis

From a publisher's point of view, a magazine that uses both printed and online components is ideal for reaching as many readers as possible (Matthew Arnold, Director of Mantra Magazines). Digitising a printed magazine does make for a different type of work, but that work pays off in the long run. Having an online publication to supplement a printed one is an investment. Fewer graphic designers are needed and the content is more accessible to readers. This also benefits advertisers, as it is easier and more cost-effective to advertise online. They are able to reach more consumers and feature their products in different ways. Instead of being limited to print advertisements, they can have a whole array of advertising, such as videos, songs and interactive media that engages the consumer and creates more opportunity to sell more product, as consumers can buy online.

From a consumer point of view, being able to pick up one's favourite magazine physically is ideal for readability, and the visual impact of a double-paged glossy image cannot be replicated. However, if it were online, the articles would not be limited to text and pictures, and readers could engage with the content differently.

Consumers who are environmentally conscientious will be more inclined to support a publication that has less of a negative effect on the environment, which is why The Ecologist printed its last edition on the 19<sup>th</sup> June 2009 (The Ecologist, 2009). Now they offer the majority of their content for free on their website (<http://www.theecologist.org/>). The decision was based on being able to reach a 'truly global audience'. If subscribed to the website, users receive a weekly 'investigation' article, a monthly 'printable newsletter' and are invited to view any page or article from any of the past printed issues. This is an interesting feature – highly convenient in theory, however accessing, navigating and reading the archived magazines is somewhat impractical, particularly for less or newly computer literate readers. Such audience members may even resort to printing it out themselves, defeating the point of an online

archive. One can only justify archiving magazines this way is if the interface is extremely user friendly. Moreover, the notion of 'collecting one's favourite periodical' is completely dismissed in the digital world.

newest first

page 1 of 10 | next >

year: 1999 | 1998 | 1997 | 1996 | 1995 | 1994 | 1993 | 1992 | 1991 | 1990 | 1980s | 1970s

Vol 29 No 8 - December 1999

Vol 29 No 7 - November 1999

Vol 29 No 6 - October 1999

Vol 29 No 5 - August / September 1999

Vol 29 No 4 - July 1999

Vol 29 No 2 - March / April 1999

Vol 29 No 1 - January / February 1999

Vol 28 No 6 - November / December 1998

WORLD

Rethinking Basic Assumptions

How to Escape the Global Economy

Campaigns & News

(The Ecologist, 2009)

It is noteworthy that some publishers utilise the wide scope of the Internet to access a larger consumer base, while not completely changing their publishing method. This fact alone, shows that there is value in maintaining a hard copy of a publication.

By studying the online version of popular 'lads mag', Zoo (<http://www.zootoday.com/>), These merits can be evaluated. The overwhelming message to "Buy the magazine, now," echoed by scantily-clad women through video, and 'tasters' as to what you can find in the print version, indicate its supplementary nature. The online content compliments that of the printed version by acting as an extension, whilst the printed magazine remains the focus. This cross-platform integration creates a symbiotic relationship that is beneficial for both parties; one augments the other's popularity and attracts more readers and advertisers, thus increasing profit.

From examining the most popular Internet magazines, common features that are unavailable for their printed counterparts can be identified. The categorising of articles enables easy browsing, as well as signposting the reader to similar topics they may be interested in. The quizzes, videos and games help entertain and engage the reader, while opinion polls, and comments sections encourage interactivity and ownership. Finally, being online allows for news to be kept up to date and is easily shared.

However, readers enjoy the feel of printed media (Pfau, 2007). There is no substitute to picking up and flicking through a magazine. According to Karl L. Smart et al. (2001), consumer preference towards reading online or in print depends on several factors, such as a person's computer literacy or what the task is. They conclude, rather vaguely, that people will prefer to use whichever medium is most suited for the purpose. For magazines, 'informative entertainment' is generally the purpose and people can dip in and out of this very easily online. The availability of this pursuit online may also support the case for online publications.



Unfortunately, Time Magazine's custom printed magazine, 'Mine', was neither executed nor received well (Mickey, 2009) (Choire, 2009). Essentially, confining custom content to a printed magazine is contradictory. This backs up BBC Slink Producer Trevor Klein's prediction that magazines will either die or go 'very, very niche.' It is the ease of use, freedom of choice and customisation which attracts magazine readers to the internet.

## **5.0 Proposed Methodology**

When creating a publication in today's technological society, it is necessary to understand the nature of the market. Fierce competition requires considerable thought into which is the best medium for distribution that will maximise reaching the target audience and be profitable. The following methodology outlines specific strategies based on the findings of this report.

The content for an 'online magazine' need not be created in a format similar to that of a printed one. It can simply be unformatted text in the form of a blog, or be a well produced video interview. It need not be compiled into a monthly structure. Articles can be posted daily hourly or even instantly, creating a different experience each time the user logs on.

Charging for magazines only works if they are within a niche market. As there are so many publications vying for attention, the added hurdle of consumer expense is unnecessary. The most successful magazines in the UK generate revenue solely through advertisements.

For a digital arts magazine for example, a combination of a strong printed magazine with supplementary online content will work to its best advantage. Using the online, global stage will aid popularity if implemented correctly – benefiting the publisher. The online content should also help the reader, with resources and extensions from tutorials.

## **6.0 Summary**

In summation, several conclusions can be drawn. Firstly, and most importantly, the term 'online magazine' is vague when describing the majority of published material on the Internet. This report has outlined several types of online content, such as PDFs, Flash Applications, Blogs, Websites and RSS feeds – all of which publishers use to communicate.

This report shows that in comparing the readership figures of online media against printed magazines, the overwhelming majority lies online. When assessing the advantages and disadvantages between them, a printed magazine's only lifeline is its portability. With the increasing popularity of e-readers and mobile Internet, its existence, although stable at the moment, is becoming increasingly threatened.

Even with the rising popularity and availability of the Internet, the printed magazine is holding strong. There is still a place for them in today's society. Local area, fashion, and gossip magazines for example show few signs of change. They recognise and utilise the advantages of an Internet presence as a tool to enhance their printed content. Graphic design magazines in particular show how a combination of assets online and printed work to the benefit of the user.

Whether the printed magazine will eventually be forced to submit to the seemingly limitless possibilities of publishing online is yet to be seen. But what one can be sure of is that the consumer and the technology available to them that holds the key to the future of print media.

## 7.0 Appendix

### Interview 1

Email Interview with Matthew Arnold, Director of Mantra Magazines

#### ***What is Mantra Magazines?***

Mantra Magazines is a family run independent business publishing three local community magazines.

#### ***What is your official position at Mantra Magazines?***

I am a director and 50% owner of the company. We are a small business and therefore I perform a number of roles. My main role was initially as Graphic Designer, creating and laying out the magazine pages and designing adverts for paying customers.

The company has expanded many times and my role seems to be moving more towards the planning and production of the magazines, and with the management of the company. I still lay the magazines out, but have an assistant designing/creating adverts on a daily basis, whilst I focus on the finances and planning.

#### ***How many of you are on the Mantra Magazines team?***

There are 5 employees working on the magazine.

- Myself: Graphic Design, Financial and Operational Manager
- My business partner: Accounts, Admin and Sales Manager
- 1 full time Sales / Customer supervisor
- 1 part time Sales / Customer supervisor
- 1 full time Graphic Design assistant / trainee

#### ***What are the biggest costs your team incur?***

Our Biggest costs are as follows:

- Salaries – 40%
- Printing – 30%
- Distribution – 15%
- Admin / Misc – 15%

#### ***How do you recoup these costs?***

These costs are covered by our advertisers.

***What is your monthly circulation?***

52,000 in total, which is made up of...

- RH10 Uncovered = 21,000
- RH19 Uncovered = 17,000
- RH6 Uncovered = 14,000

***Why did Mantra Magazines decide to be a printed magazine only?***

Why indeed? Not sure, it just started out as a fun/hobby community magazine and directory. Then with time it turned into a workable business proposition.

***Do you feel Mantra Magazines are disadvantaged in any way being solely printed?***

Not at the moment, as I believe our product is simple and easy to pick up. I think it is for people to browse over when they want to get away from work or the PC.

In time, and with the speed at which technology is moving, there will be a need for us to have some kind of web presence and product. The main hurdle to overcome is to turn this into a workable revenue line for the business. I am currently looking to a number of angles to try to accommodate this in the future. I don't simply want to put a PDF copy of the magazine online, I feel it needs to be interactive and add a little "something" to the current product!

***What printed magazine do you enjoy reading the most?***

Anything really, but normally Computer Arts / Intelligent Life / National Geographic.

***What is your favourite online magazine?***

I do not really read any.

***And finally, as an influential member within the media industry, could you provide an insight to help establish exactly what the role of printed media in today's technological society is?***

I am not sure really... My main thinking behind the layout of our magazines is to keep it simple and easy for the reader to look through.

If I were starting the venture today, I would still go for the printed option as I think the is still something in having a physical / tangible product (as opposed to an email / data file waiting in my inbox for me to stumble across).

I think that web based magazines and newsletters etc... are good when used to accompany an existing product.

## Interview 2

Email Interview with Trevor Klein, Producer of BBC Slink

### ***What is your official position at Slink?***

Producer

### ***How many of you are on the Slink team?***

1 x Producer (me)

1 x Assistant Producer

+ a number of freelance writers who contribute articles

### ***What are the biggest costs you and your team incur?***

The main costs are paying the Slink team's wages, paying freelance writers and a small number of annual licenses for games and interactive products.

### ***What is Slink?***

Slink is an online magazine for teenage girls (12-17) and part of BBC Switch, the BBC's cross-platform brand for teenagers.

Our content is a mixture of advice and entertainment, with 'agony aunt' style articles, factfiles, games, quizzes, horoscopes, videos, discussion topics, features and more. Our readers help us write our features by contributing their stories and ideas, and interactivity and collaboration are at the heart of what we do.

We also have a mobile site (text SLINK to 81010), where you can find much of our advice content as well.

Generally our users come to Slink to enjoy themselves, but know they can come back when they have a problem or need advice.

### ***How many unique hits do you get per month?***

We get around 300,000 monthly unique users.

***Why did Slink decide to be online only?***

Slink evolved out of the old BBC Teens website and has always been an online proposition. The site is built around opportunities for comments, collaboration and interactivity which traditional print media do not offer.

As we're part of the BBC, something that is core to our site is being non commercial and being a public service, so online is the best way for us to deliver this. We're not beholden to advertisers or other commercial interests, so we can focus on delivering the best content. We're also able to reach a very, very large audience at little cost to us (no printing, distribution costs, etc), which means good value for money for license fee payers. And, more importantly, there's no cost for the user. Print magazines can be quite expensive when you're not getting loads of pocket money, or you're saving up for that new clutch from TopShop.

Crucially though, being an online/mobile proposition means that we can react quickly and stay current - we're not publishing once a week, or once a month, we're publishing at least once a day and our readers know they can come back every day and always find something new.

***Do you feel Slink is disadvantaged in any way being solely online?***

Once someone buys or picks up a print magazine, chances up more people will end up reading it, at least in part, when it's left lying around. It's very helpful from a brand building and advertising point of view. Even people who've never read HEAT have heard of it, or seen it lying around.

Sadly, the same is not true for Slink. If you know about it already, chances are you love it and use it all the time, but it's hard for that word of mouth to spread.

***What printed magazine do you enjoy reading the most?***

Personally I enjoy reading Empire, as I'm very much into films, though I have never had a subscription and only buy it very rarely. To be honest, I don't need to read it, as if I want to find out about a film I have other online sources I check first.

### ***What is your favourite online magazine?***

Don't have one. To be honest, I think even the term online magazine is a bit old fashioned and it's really only an easy way to describe to people who aren't that familiar with the online world what something is. It's quite a limiting word as, essentially, a magazine is just a broadcast, whereas something like Slink is far more of a conversation and collaboration with the audience. I enjoy a number of blogs and sites that COULD be described as online magazines.

Examples: <http://www.badscience.net> <http://www.boingboing.net> <http://lifehacker.com>  
<http://mutantreviewers.wordpress.com> <http://www.theonion.com>

### ***And finally, as an influential member within the media industry, could you provide an insight to help establish exactly what the role of printed media in today's technological society is?***

It's all data. Everything's data. Describing something as a 'magazine' is just an aggregation of data. Printed media is often (not always) high quality chunks of data (an article here, an image there, an agony aunt answer somewhere else) all aggregated into a topic (Celebrity Gossip, Film Reviews, etc). But I don't want to wade through pointless stuff - what if I don't care about a certain kind of celebrity or film? There's a lot to be said for being able to thumb through a magazine when you're on the move, so I see things as going one of two ways:

- 1) Printed magazines will die. Everything will move online and people will read them on their smartphones or e-book readers or netbooks when they're on the move.
- 2) Printed magazines will go very, very niche. There will be a service (probably from Google) where you can customise the data feeds that you want in YOUR PERSONAL printed magazine, based on something like your RSS reader. Then every x number of days, it will print you your own bespoke magazine that for a small fee will get delivered to your door. If you can't be bothered to create your own personal magazine you'll be able to, in a similar way to Twitter, 'follow' someone else who has put together a brilliant one and get your own personal copy. Who wouldn't want to be reading the same magazine that Stephen Fry put together?



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