Abstract

As the current magazine industry stands, there is a prevailing trend within the men’s sector. Publications, generally speaking, tend to target older, more affluent and established men. The reasons for such a choice are obvious; this demographic is more likely to possess a steady income, and consequently, remain capable of renewing a magazine subscription.

Publications that focus on younger demographics tend to cater to a more niche audience. Such publications are Wired, Game Informer, and Maxim. With my creation of Maelstrom Magazine, I hoped to craft a general men’s publication with the spirit of Esquire, but possessing content that would attract a younger demographic.

Acknowledgements

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Rationale

My inspiration for this thesis project is a direct result of a magazine management course I participated in during the fall semester of 2011. The course required an in-depth analysis of a specific sector within the magazine industry. I chose to place the men’s sector under the microscope.

I found that this particular portion of the industry was prone to certain trends. Within recent years, “lad mags.” or magazines that depend upon sexual content are suffering a steep decline. Playboy, for example, suffered a decline of 51 percent in ad revenue and a 47 percent drop in circulation from 2006 to 2010. My first
decision, even though it needed little reinforcement, was to not depend on vacuous, visual stimulation that could be found quite readily on the Internet.

Secondly, I noticed that most publications that were enjoying rises in both circulation and ad revenue tended to cater to an older, more affluent audience. *Esquire, Outside,* and *Men’s Health* all possessed a predominately male audience with a medium household income of more than $48,000. Each of these publications enjoyed an increase in circulation from 2006 to 2010 of at least 2.8 percent.

While this would at first indicate safe grounds for a target audience, I wanted to break the mold. In studying ten separate publications for the course, I found that the median age of these magazines was 37.2 years of age, while the median household income was $85,882. This could indicate that it would be a bad idea to focus on a younger demographic, however, to me it indicated an untapped market. General publications directed at a demographic between the ages of 20 and 30 were nearly nonexistent. The youngest demographic I found in my research was possessed by *Complex,* which had a Median Age of 29.

So, I decided to craft a magazine catering to this demographic. I wanted the publication to possess wide-ranging content similar to that of *Esquire.* I decided to include articles that examine social issues and trends affecting men of this age, while also providing entertainment reviews, how-to’s and works of fiction.

The question is, how do I create content that entices such a demographic. I made the initial decision to have my features focus primarily on men of my chosen demographic. For example, the articles “In Spite of Pain” and “A Day to Quit” both focus on men in their early 20s.

As a result of my decision to create a general publication, each issue needed to be tied together by a loose, over-arching theme. For the November issue, I selected the subject of bravado. I wanted to utilize articles that reinforce the ideal of masculine strength.

To play upon this theme I first elected to craft “In Spite of Pain.” This article questions the motivations behind men willing to sacrifice their bodies in full contact sports. The idea was to examine something that is so
apparent within our society that it is rarely questioned. For my primary source, I interviewed Christopher Ballard. The 21-year-old falls within my chosen age demographic, filling the first of the requirements I had set for myself. Ballard competes in rugby at Ball State University, and has suffered multiple injuries over the course of his athletic career. Yet, his drive to compete persists to this day.

In order to provide an expert source for the story, I interviewed Dr. Lindsay Blom, a sports psychology professor at Ball State University. Through her insight, I was able to examine Ballard’s motivation through a psychological lens, thus validating the premise of the story. As a result, the story hopefully allowed readers to examine their own motivations within the world, and to provide a different take on the world of athletics.

My second feature, “A Day to Quit,” focused on the subject of quitting smoking. This fell within the theme of bravado, in my opinion, because kicking a smoking habit is extremely difficult, and requires a certain wherewithal that not all people possess. It also fit within the publication in a timely manner, thanks in large to the National Smoke Out taking place in the month of November. For this story, I interviewed a 22 year-old smoker who has made multiple attempts to quit, and provided advice through an interview with a smoking cessation counselor employed by the National Cancer Institute. The story was also backed by multiple statistics surrounding the subject material.

Finally, my last feature, “A Father’s Son,” focuses on how having a father present during childhood affects people. For this story I utilized unused interviews with Kyle Macy, a former National Basketball League player and college basketball coach. Through Macy’s success within the basketball world the audience learns how a father can positively impact the life of his child thanks to Macy’s father’s constant nurturing of his son’s affinity for basketball as a child. Then, the article shifts to show how a father’s absence thanks to divorce negatively affected a young man. Through these two perspectives the audience may be able to grasp the issue in a way that cannot be achieved through simple statistics and figures.
While at first this article does not necessarily fit within the theme of the publication, it does when one considers the ideal that fatherhood requires constant work, and living without a father requires a certain degree of mental fortitude. Also, while the story does not necessarily focus on men of my chosen age demographic, the topic of fatherhood is readily relatable to by many men, especially those who in their 20s may be looking to their fathers for advice on how to find their way in the world.

For my department titled “Modern Times” I chose to utilize a wide range of content. Within it I featured stories centered around television, athletics, and music. I hoped that with a wide range of topics, I’d be able to at least include something that would appeal to any reader. I chose to include an album review in this section, as opposed to creating a separate music section, because I didn’t necessarily want the publication to have a focus on music. This is not because I place a lower value on music, but rather because I possess limited knowledge within the field. This is unlike the topic of film, which I am pursuing a minor in, and included a specific department dedicated to film reviews. However, I did at least want to address the topic of music in some form, because it is such a prevalent force within society.

I chose to write “Rise of the Anti-Hero” because it allowed for an opportunity to craft an op-ed piece on the subject of television. I focused on how the more popular television series today are based upon anti-heroes, and examined why this may be true. “Billboard Eye Black” focused on the current situation of the acceptance of homosexuality in athletics. I chose this topic because it fell within the bravado theme thanks to the courage required for some to come out within the athletic world, and it is a timely piece thanks to the prevalence of the movement to garner the acceptance of homosexuality. This prevalence also lead me to believe that readers would be interested in such an article.

Finally, I included a demographic dubbed “Laughing at the Big Guys.” I chose to largely ignore the subject of politics within my publication for two reasons. One, because my knowledge within this realm is extremely limited, and two, because it was discovered during my magazine management course that people rely more on
internet publications for political information as opposed to monthly magazines. However, I elected to simply craft
a mildly humorous infographic as opposed to a full-blown article. I assumed that this way I could get around my
lack of knowledge by not tackling any hard political stories, yet still include something political during an election
year when political fervor peaks. Also, I assumed that my chosen demographic would enjoy the idea of poking fun
at larger-than-life, wealthy politicians because such figures are nearly impossible for men in their 20s to relate
to.

I also included a department titled "Manly Movies of the Month" in my publication so that I could flex my
review writing muscles. Thanks to my film minor, I believe I am qualified to craft opinion articles of this ilk, and I
was looking for the opportunity to do just that. I did decide, that I did not want to be limited to only recent
releases. Rather, this department would feature a review on a recent release and also a film that is anywhere
from a year to several decades old. This way, readers can discover films they have yet to experience. Do to the
nature of film reviews, I did not find it necessary to fit these articles within an issue’s chosen theme.

I chose to take a specific approach with my film reviews. During one of my film courses my professor,
Wes Gehring, made a statement that stuck with me. He said, “People do not set out to make bad films.” His
meaning was that films are created with a certain purpose in mind, and that it is helpful to keep this in mind when
watching one. So, I decided to avoid a points system in my reviews. Rather, I set out to inform readers what to
expect during a film through revealing its genre and what works well within a film. Negative aspects of a movie
were included, but never the focus. My rationale was to point out what a movie is and reveal whether or not it
would appeal to a reader’s specific interests. This way readers can decide if a movie is worth their hard earned
money based upon whether they specifically could enjoy it, as opposed to relying on the reviewer’s interests. This
decision works for my demographic, because typically those within their 20s do not possess the disposable
income of older demographics.
Lastly, I chose to include a fiction department. I modeled this decision on the tendency for publications such as *Esquire* to include such works within their pages. I felt that such a practice allows readers to expand their interests, while simultaneously allowing for my demographic to expand with the inclusion of yet another sort of content.

Departing from the topic of written content, I had many decisions to make regarding the appearance of *Maelstrom Magazine*. First of all, I had to decide on a color palette. I decided early on that I wanted my publication to appear masculine, yet simultaneously vibrant. Taking a note from the likes of *Esquire* and *Gentleman's Quarterly* I chose a palette that consisted of bright blues, oranges, and yellows. For example, *Gentleman's Quarterly* utilizes bright reds and blues, while I have seen *Esquire* uses reds, blues, and yellows. These colors, while vibrant, do not evoke a feminine feel, which I believe would be off-putting to a male audience. Most importantly, I specifically avoided utilizing pictures and graphics that consisted of pastel shades and pinks, because these are frequently used in publications directed at a female demographic.

Next, I chose to take advantage of a modernistic design for the publication. I wanted the magazine to appear modern, elegant, and simple. To achieve this I decided to use strictly Helvetica Neue fonts and mostly other sans-serif typefaces. These, I felt, lent to the masculine feel of the publication while maintaining a modern look. I initially toyed with using a more outlandish style, such as grunge, but decided that a simpler design would better suit the demographic of my publication. From my observations, most general men's publications tend to utilize a simpler, more straightforward design style.

With my basic knowledge of Gestalt theory, I created layouts that allowed for an easy, liquid eye flow over each page. I included small design flourishes such as drop caps and graphic elements that made the pages interesting, but were not in and of themselves distracting.

Photos, as with any publication, made up a big part of my magazine's visual style. I primarily utilized vibrant, eye-catching photography and images that remained mostly un-adultured by unusual filters or color
schemes. I did, however, choose to utilize an all black and white photo scheme for my feature “In Spite of Pain.” This allowed the magazine’s primary features to differentiate itself visually from the rest of the publication’s content. I also made the decision early on to not include photo captions. My reasoning was that I wanted my photos to seamlessly coordinate with the content of the publication without requiring the reader to diverge from the written content of the articles for too long.

The final component of my publication was the inclusion of ads. These ads obviously needed to specifically cater to my chosen audience, otherwise their inclusion would remain moot. During my research for my magazine management class, I discovered that specific industries are frequently utilized within the men’s sector. Male grooming and bathroom product ads are an extremely common feature within the sector, so I chose to include a Gillette advertisement. Also, alcohol and tobacco ads are heavily used in men’s publications, so I chose to include a Jack Daniels whiskey ad and a Magic Hat Number 9 beer advertisement.

Because I chose to focus on entertainment and athletics within my publication, I decided that advertisers within these industries would be drawn to my readership. So, naturally I included advertisement for Red Bull, Demarini baseball bats, and the television series Breaking Bad. Also, because my demographic represents a good portion of the video game industry’s core audience, I included an advertisement for Halo 4.

A common feature of general men’s publication is the inclusion of automobile and high-end clothing advertisement. Because my chosen demographic does not enjoy the income typically necessary to afford new cars and high-dollar clothes, I chose to omit such advertisements. For obvious reasons, these sorts of companies would not be interested in trying to garner the attention of a demographic incapable of affording such products.

Throughout the course of my thesis, I believe I maintained a steady, consistent feel for what I was trying to accomplish. And I believe I did just this. My features, departmental pages, reviews, advertisements, and visual style all cater to a 20-30 year-old male demographic in various ways. Through my research in my magazine management class, and by extensively reviewing circulation data provided by the Audit Bureau of Circulation, I
believe that I discovered a mostly untapped male demographic that, with the proper content, could be enticed into enjoying *Maelstrom Magazine*.

**Works Cited for *Maelstrom Magazine***


Face-to-Face interview with Christopher Ballard. 574-229-7262.

Face-to-Face interview with Dr. Lindsey Blom. Icblam@bsu.edu

Face-to-face interview with Chad Ellis. 216-363-9934.

Telephone interview with Alexandra of the National Cancer Institute. 877-448-7848.


Telephone interview with Kyle Macy. 859-230-4479.

Telephone interview with Evelyn Macy. 859-268-6856.

