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MAGAZINES: THE A-LIST



BEST TO BE 'LUCKY': Editor Kim France and Publisher Sandy Golinkin zero in on the shopping experience.

MAGAZINE OF THE YEAR
LUCKY

'Magazine About Shopping' invents a genre; delights readers, marketers; and takes top spot on Ad Age A-List

By JON FINE

ADVERTISING AGE'S Magazine of the Year does not nourish the tattered spirit of a restive nation. Nor does it locate the thus-far-faint cultural pulse that's gradually quickening into the next big movement. Nor does it, via seduction or force, engage readers in grappling with the deeper sociopolitical issues of the day. It displays product—clothes and beauty items,

ON THE WEB

You can find *Advertising Age's* A-List of 2003's top magazines online at AdAge.com, OwikifIND.aap07j

specifically, and the shops that sell them—with a minimum of text and tells readers how to buy.

A magazine, as one senior-level editor at another title puts it, that sees the world as "a series of products to be consumed." A magazine for women, but one that

does not muddy that focus with anything about relationship, health or career advice. A magazine that includes its own take on Post-it notes, to better flag the goodies readers crave.

The culture warriors in the audience can start hand-wringing, if they haven't already. But since its late 2000 launch, Conde Nast Publications' *Lucky* has invented a genre, made its influence visible elsewhere—seen any eye-candy product pages in magazines lately?—and, not least, delighted marketers and readers.

"The Magazine About Shopping," as *Lucky* bills itself, See **LUCKY** on Page S-4

INSIDE

The A-List

Starting with 'Lucky,' editors pick the top 10 magazines of the year **Page S-2**

A-List profiles

Meet some of the stars behind this year's A-List honorees **Pages S-6, S-7, S-8**

Editor of the Year

'Wicked smart' Cullen Murphy brings his talents to bear at 'The Atlantic' **Page S-10**

Publishing Exec of the Year

Stephen Lacy comes from outside to boost Meredith **Page S-12**

Launch of Year

'Budget Living' builds following by showing how to spend smart, live rich **Page S-14**

AdAge SPECIAL REPORT MAGAZINES: THE A-LIST

1 LUCKY

Parent: Conde Nast Publications
VP-publisher: Alexandra W. Golinkin
Editor in chief: Kim France

Ad pages:	1,045.9	▲ 61.3%
Total circulation:	834,802	▲ 7.1%
Subscriptions:	614,526	▲ 7.4%
Single-copy sales:	220,276	▲ 6.4%

Purists pshawed and advertisers scratched their heads when *Lucky* announced. Seems so long ago now, even if it's not yet three years. Chin-stroke about the depressing cultural implications if you must, but "The Magazine About Shopping" continues to record explosive growth. Last year in this space we wished for *Lucky for Men*—well, funnily enough, *Cargo* hits next spring. Is *Lucky Home* next?



THE A LIST

In a magazine market still pulling itself together, these 10 winners make the top grade with Ad Age editors for excellence in 2003

2 REAL SIMPLE

Parent: Time Inc.
Publisher: Robin Domeniconi
Managing editor: Kristin van Ogtrop

Ad pages:	795.2	▲ 55.9%
Total circulation:	1,375,355	▲ 31.3%
Subscriptions:	1,022,454	▲ 40.6%
Single-copy sales:	352,901	▲ 10.1%

The wobbly launch is far behind it, if not the odd exit of the former Managing Editor Carrie Tuhy, but neither event seems more than a minor speed bump as *Real Simple* becomes Time Inc.'s next franchise. Its numbers would be eye-popping even if the magazine world wasn't still mired in the Never-Ending Recession. There is no other way to put it: Real Something.



3 COSMOGIRL

Parent: Hearst Magazines
Publisher: Kristine Welker
Editor in chief: Susan Schulz

Ad pages:	504.5	▲ 14%
Total circulation:	1,279,436	▲ 21.3%
Subscriptions:	855,720	▲ 30.7%
Single-copy sales:	423,716	▲ 5.9%

Began as an exclamation-riddled offshoot of powerhouse *Cosmopolitan*, to take on the teen girl niche then owned by *Seventeen*. But four years after launch, *CosmoGirl's* ad pages still mushroom, and its circ is fast closing in on that of its once-far-off old-school rival *Seventeen*. To make the circle complete, *Seventeen* is where you'll now find the antic editing style of founding *CosmoGirl* Editor Atoosa Rubenstein.



4 THE ATLANTIC MONTHLY

Parent: The Atlantic Monthly Group
Publisher: Elizabeth Baker Keffer
Managing editor: Cullen Murphy

Ad pages:	403.5	▲ 19.9%
Total circulation:	520,174	▲ 3.6%
Subscriptions:	465,774	▲ 1.1%
Single-copy sales:	54,400	▲ 30.8%

Able stewarded by *Ad Age* Editor of the Year Cullen Murphy, the newly-revitalized-but-very-long-running *Atlantic* found its way back to, and maintains, top-of-mind status among the medium's highest-brow players. Next, a big bet on increasing subscription price pends for '04.



5 COOKING LIGHT

Parent: Time Inc.
VP-publisher: Christopher C. Allen
VP-editor: Mary Kay Culpepper

Ad pages:	979.9	▲ 8.8%
Total circulation:	1,617,193	▲ 0.8%
Subscriptions:	1,349,038	▲ 0.5%
Single-copy sales:	268,155	▲ 2.7%

An oasis of strong and steady growth. Not even the third straight year of recession stilled *Cooking Light's* steady upward progress. It ain't *Wallpaper* or *Saveur*, but that also ain't the point. The point is serving a growing readership with sharp, well-tuned edit, and watching advertisers flock to it.

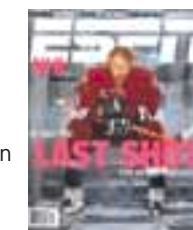


6 ESPN THE MAGAZINE

Parents: Walt Disney Co., Hearst Magazines
VP-publisher: Christopher Collins
Editor in chief: Gary Hoenig

Ad pages:	1,131.9	▲ 8.6%
Total circulation:	1,692,735	▲ 10.2%
Subscriptions:	1,656,777	▲ 11%
Single-copy sales:	35,958	▼ 16.7%

It may bear the ESPN name, but don't write it off as a program guide for its big brother on cable. The title had enough substance to win a National Magazine Award in 2003. And while Time Inc.'s *Sports Illustrated* outscored *ESPN* in ad pages through September, topping 1,600, *SI* is down 6.8%.



7 ESSENCE

Parent: Essence Communications Partners
Publisher-CEO: Edward Lewis
Editor in chief: Diane Weathers

Ad pages:	999.9	▲ 29.7%
Total circulation:	1,068,214	▲ 1.5%
Subscriptions:	812,116	▼ 0.6%
Single-copy sales:	256,098	▲ 8.7%

The inclusion in Time Inc.'s Women's Group joint buy hardly hurts it—but inclusion in that group alongside the likes of *People* and *In Style* doesn't account for the strong newsstand performance either. Another strong year for this franchise, but then how could it not be, given that *Essence's* year kicked off with Ed Lewis winning a Henry Johnson Fisher lifetime achievement award?



8 MORE

Parent: Meredith Corp.
Publisher: Carol E. Campbell
Editor in chief: Susan Crandell

Ad pages:	512.7	▲ 35.1%
Total circulation:	852,884	▲ 18%
Subscriptions:	748,284	▲ 20.6%
Single-copy sales:	104,600	▲ 2.1%

The women-of-a-certain-age niche has a body count made up of past ambitious attempts like *Lear's* and *Mirabella*. But it took Meredith, the prototypical tortoise in an industry still captivated by hares, to make it work. And the strategic fit is felicitous: *More* neatly fills out its niche in Meredith's portfolio of women's titles alongside *BH&G*, *LHJ* and newcomer *American Baby*.



9 MEN'S HEALTH

Parent: Rodale
VP-publisher: MaryAnn Bekkedahl
Editor in chief: David Zinczenko

Ad pages:	692	▲ 21.5%
Total circulation:	1,697,026	▲ 2.3%
Subscriptions:	1,241,467	▲ 2.6%
Single-copy sales:	455,559	▲ 1.4%

Rodale's mass men's title is back on track. Ad pages are poised for another year of double-digit growth. The editorial consistently executes its mission under Editor in Chief David Zinczenko, who manages to stay on track between gossip-column blurbs and nights at Elaine's. (Did we mention the TV-star girlfriend in L.A.?)



10 DETAILS

Parent: Fairchild Publications
VP-publisher: William Wackermann
Editor in chief: Daniel Peres

Ad pages:	730.8	▲ 31%
Total circulation:	418,005	▲ 0.1%
Subscriptions:	348,030	▼ 0.8%
Single-copy sales:	69,975	▲ 4.5%

Let's start by banning the horrid coinage "metrosexual" that those who market Fairchild's rebirthed-again men's title have seized upon. But let's finish by realizing that the rise of men-who-moisturize dovetails nicely with the new *Details* demographics. The bonus is the stabilized editorial product, its wit and focus and voice—one willing to not take itself too seriously.



AdAge SPECIAL REPORT MAGAZINES: THE A-LIST

MAGAZINE OF THE YEAR: LUCKY MAKING SHOPPING MORE FUN



With its seductive business model and single-minded focus, *Lucky* hits a home run in the magazine game. Advertisers and readers like what they see, so look out for line extensions and, more importantly, more magazines like it.

LUCKY from Page S-1

launched to what VP-Publisher Alexandra "Sandy" Golinkin admits was some advertiser bewilderment. But *Lucky* has attracted nearly a million subscribers and newsstand buyers who find its pragmatic approach to fashion irresistible. It's spawned a male-aimed offshoot, *Cargo*, at its parent company. Hearst Magazines and Time Inc. are considering their own takes on titles with shopping components. (A Hearst spokeswoman confirmed such a title is in development; a Time Inc. spokesman declined comment.)

It's not that hard to see why. *Lucky* is a very seductive business model. In a time when magazines must scrap for every ad and newsstand dollar, a shopping magazine that won't require the staff heft of, say, a newsweekly is budgetary manna. Advertisers and especially retailers love *Lucky's* fostering an old-media version of what Microsoft's Bill Gates once termed "friction-free capitalism." *Lucky* creates an editorial environment that is, essentially, all about marketers—making for a pretty formidable commerce machine.

"Everyone's talking about accountability and return on investment," says George Janson, senior partner-director of print at WPP Group's Mediaedge:cia, New York. "*Lucky* does that in a very profound way," he continues, citing "compelling case studies" of marketers that have run ads "and seen an actual lift in sales."

Perhaps most miraculously, the deft and inclusively hip tone of the magazine now wins grudging kudos from some who've decried it as another signpost of an ever-more-imminent cultural apocalypse.

SOUL DEATH?

"The execution of *Lucky* is much smarter than anyone could have hoped for," says *New York Magazine* (and *Folio*;) columnist Simon Dumenco, who nonetheless doesn't entirely back off from an earlier assessment that product-obsessed magazines like *Lucky* and Time Inc.'s *In Style* represent a sort of "soul death" for American culture. "It's a step away from the usual sort of women's magazine inanity about why you should consume something," by positing "you should consume something because of its merits, not because

some idiot celebrity wore it down a red carpet because some publicist gave it to her for free."

Such "soul death"-styled charges are old hat to *Lucky* founding Editor in Chief Kim France, as her detailed response to them testifies. "I can see why people would think that it means the magazine world is going to hell when this really hot magazine is a magazine without paragraphs," she says. "I get that. At the same time, all I ever tried to do was to fulfill a need, and by doing that I wasn't trying to squash anything meaningful in our culture." (Ms. France's byline appears with some regularity in the "*The New York Times* Book Review.")

"I really did feel very strongly that women had a more satisfying relationship with their catalogs than they did with their fashion magazines, because their catalogs gave them the clothes that they wanted in sizes that fit them and at prices they could afford," she continues.

Nevertheless, even Ms. France, previously a deputy editor at *New York Magazine* in its Kurt Andersen glory days, sounds slightly scared at what her *Lucky* has wrought.

"Does my jaw drop in focus groups where women look at the 'Ask the Editors' column"—a relatively straightforward question-and-answer feature—"and say, 'I don't want to read that page because there's too much text there'? Yes. That freaks me the hell out."

"It was, almost, so simple that people were confused," Ms. Golinkin says of her pre-launch attempts to sell *Lucky*. She recalls, in particular, one early sales meeting in which "a high-level figure" stood up and offered some heartfelt condolences.

"I just want you to know," she says this person said, "that the agency really supports Conde Nast, and we know that you must be uncomfortable that you haven't found your way yet, and we're really sorry that this magazine looks like a catalog. We're sure you will figure it out."

Such assessments were more common than you'd think today. "I thought it was stupid when I first heard about it," says Pam McNeely, senior VP-group media director at Interpublic Group of Cos.' Dailey & Associates, Los Angeles. "I wasn't quite catching the cultural significance of it."

The launch was aided by a "charter

advertiser" discount—a deal unheard of in the halls of Conde Nast—which for some advertisers still runs, at lesser levels than at launch, until the end of this year. Ms. Golinkin says such ad pages only account for 10% of the title's 2003 total, which is expected to approach 1,500. If *Lucky* had ended 2002 with that ad page total, it would have been in the company of such powerhouse titles as *Glamour* and *O, the Oprah Magazine*.

Lucky has also pushed hard into a regional sell unique to Conde Nast, hitting 14 different markets each month with localized retail sections. One-time full-color ad page rates for such sections range from \$11,400 for New York to \$5,150 for Toronto. (The magazine's standard open page rate is \$55,160, which will rise 11.2% to \$61,325 after a 5.9% rate base increase in January from 850,000 to 900,000.)

"Because of their non-traditional format," says Ms. McNeely, "they are able to break out

of the Conde Nast straitjacket in terms of the different things they can do."

But despite the sharp and smart execution of its mission, *Lucky's* very nature makes some look at it oddly, and the magazine's non-traditional format—with its inherent plasticity in the separation of advertising and editorial—have raised eyebrows.

Lucky has long been a topic of conversation for the American Society of Magazine Editors, which sponsors the National Magazine Awards and sets forth standards governing the ad/edit divide.

The most recent iteration of ASME guidelines, amended in September, contains a passage warning against listing brand names on covers or cover flaps in connection with contests, after *Lucky* and other magazines made such moves.

ASME has also expressed concerns over

Lucky's "stickers" page, which allows readers to flag pages of must-have items. In the past, this page had the word "Lucky" on it, and currently it shows scaled-down pages from the current issue. ASME members express concern over reader confusion: ad or editorial?

"I draw the line really scrupulously. Without that line drawn, *Lucky* has nothing," says Ms. France, who's a member of ASME.

"It is not deceiving the reader in any way," offers one non-Conde Nast industry executive. "The Magazine About Shopping—that's really straight."

CELEBRITY ANGLE

Indeed, *Lucky's* unvarnished focus had the odd effect of making *In Style*, with its pages of celebrity red-carpet snaps and fantasy layouts of stars' home lives, seem slightly dated and prudish, as if it felt an institutional need to dress up what, at heart, was a re-edited catalog.

But celebs have started appearing on *Lucky's* covers—starting with singer Mandy Moore in September—in a move that reverses the title's no-celebrities stance when it launched. (Which also helped differentiate it from *In Style*.)

"I completely contradicted myself," Ms. France cheerfully admits, but she cites concerns about sticking out on a crowded newsstand—and, presumably, that segment's role in further pumping up *Lucky's* circulation numbers. "It wasn't a decision I came to comfortably, but once I thought about it, I felt like we were stupid not to try it."

Even without the celebs, though, readers and the marketplace embraced *Lucky*. Which is why Ms. Golinkin now looks forward to conquering the last challenge.

"I look forward to the day when *Lucky* wins an ASME award for general excellence," she says, "even though we don't have articles. Because I think it will be when the magazine industry admits they accept *Lucky* for being wildly different, but extraordinarily wonderful for readers."

Ms. France has a less sanguine view: "I certainly know not to expect a general excellence award from ASME."

But, she adds, "I don't care so much. I know I've got the readers, and that community respects me." ■

"I draw the line scrupulously. Without it, 'Lucky' has nothing"

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A-LIST PROFILE: ESSENCE 'SPIRITED' TAYLOR CONNECTS

By JANET STILSON

SUSAN L. TAYLOR, editorial director of *Essence*, has been showing people the stuff she's made of ever since she was 13.

Shortly after Ms. Taylor moved from Harlem to Queens and started seventh grade at a Catholic school there, a nun pulled her hair when she was writing on the blackboard. "Susan turned around and said, 'Don't you do that to me!'" recalls Kathleen Lane, a marketing consultant who's one of Ms. Taylor's oldest friends. "Everyone gasped. Her spunkiness and daring were incredible."

That's not exactly what one would expect from Ms. Taylor's serene countenance as she sits in her office above Times Square or from her inspirational "In the Spirit" columns in *Essence*—just as one wouldn't necessarily expect much grit beneath the glamor-babe covers of this monthly.

But as a 33-year veteran of *Essence* and its longtime editorial leader, Ms. Taylor has made sure that alongside lighter subjects like fashion and beauty, there's substance in the pages of this member of *Advertising Age's* 2003 magazine A-List.

"There's a large group of African-American women who want to see major changes take place in our community," Ms. Taylor says. "There's great cause for black people to feel angry, when you look at how we're demonized in the news."

Connecting with those people in ways that resonate positively is what *Essence* is about.

Sure, the September issue had a big cover teaser that read: "Why he won't marry you." But Earl Black, associate media director at WPP

Group's UniWorld Group, New York, notes that "editorially, they seem to be doing less and less 'How to catch a man.' That used to be their reason for being... They look better than ever. Their covers are fabulous."

And for those improvements, Ms. Taylor is quick to give credit to her editor in chief, Diane Weathers.

Such impressions among the ad set may account for *Essence's* big growth during the first nine months of this year. The magazine's ad pages were up 29.7% over the same period in 2002, according to Publishers Information Bureau, and ad revenue increased by 32.6%—all in a somewhat shaky ad economy.

GROWING DESPITE DOWNTURN

"Even in periods of downturns or recessions, we continue to grow revenue, and we grow in circulation as well," says Edward Lewis, who has seen the 33-year-old publication through several such periods.

Mr. Lewis is a co-founder of *Essence* as well as chairman-CEO of Essence Communications Partners, which counts Time Warner as a 49% owner. One benefit of that linkage is *Essence's* inclusion in Time Inc.'s Women's Group joint buy.

While subscriptions were down slightly (0.6%) in the first half, according to the Audit Bureau of Circulations, renewal rates are currently 58%. And single-copy sales climbed 8.7%, according to the audit bureau, despite a newsstand price hike from \$2.75 to \$2.99 last October.

"This is the first time that we didn't take a dip in sales [when there's been a price hike], and in fact our sales increased," Mr. Lewis says.

Part of the sales retention may have to do



RETHINKING: Edward Lewis and Susan L. Taylor have managed to extend the *Essence* brand in difficult times.

with a larger proportion of editorial to advertising, moving from 56/44 ad-to-edit ratio to 53/47 more recently, he says.

The magazine is just one way *Essence* Communications makes money. There's also an investment in *Latina*, as well as the annual *Essence* Awards show and *Essence* Music Festival. A product line includes eyewear, hosiery and books. And coming up next: two new magazines earmarked for 2004 and 2005. There's also a TV channel in the works.

Still, *Essence* can certainly expect challenges from the magazine competition. *Heart & Soul*, for example, saw an ad-page increase of 39.4% through September, though the 368 total is less

than half that of the more established *Essence*.

Karen Jacobs, exec VP-director of print investment at Publicis Groupe's Starcom Worldwide, Chicago, notes *Essence* may face challenges on another front as well: "I hear that the teenage pop segment in America is one that sees itself as multicultural. ... As teens grow up, will they still feel the same need and connection to magazines that speak more specifically to one cultural niche or another?"

In Ms. Taylor's view, mainstream women's magazines can only go so far. "We say we are a mirror," she says, "the only place where black women can read deeply about themselves." ■

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A-LIST PROFILE: COSMOGIRL VOICE IS ITS STRONG POINT

By JENNA SCHNUER

AND THEN THERE were ... lots. Yup, five years ago the major titles in the teen category were *Seventeen*, *Teen*, and *YM*. Now *Teen* is gone, newly adopted *Seventeen* is undergoing a major makeover under Hearst Magazines, and there's a slew of new girls, including *Teen Vogue* and *ElleGirl*, in town. The standout: Hearst's *CosmoGirl*, with a powerful editorial product and ad story that earn it a spot on *Advertising Age's* A-List.

Launched in 1999, *CosmoGirl* has always had its eye on the numbers big sis racks up. "If you look at *Cosmopolitan*," says *CosmoGirl* Publisher Kristine Welker, "there's our road map."

CosmoGirl's ad page total of 504.5 through September is up 14% from a year ago, according to Publishers Information Bureau. Circulation of the 10-times-yearly magazine is

on the rise, up 21.3% to 1.3 million for the first half, says the Audit Bureau of Circulations.

Aggressive rate-base increases of about 25% per year have become status quo at *CosmoGirl*. "We get the strong existing ad group to pay for the rate base increases," Ms. Welker says, adding that half of all ad spending in the teen category comes from a group of 20 advertisers, and *CosmoGirl* gets 21% of those dollars.

Ms. Welker is looking for the next growth spurt to come from smaller advertisers. Although she stresses *CosmoGirl* won't offer discounts for buying both titles, Ms. Welker says Hearst will emphasize that between *CosmoGirl* and *Seventeen* the company catches the attention of 75% of teen girls.

The *CosmoGirl* team—and the magazine's advertisers—all agree: The title's key strength is its voice. In a word, *CosmoGirl* is about empowerment. Through initiatives like the get-an-internship Club 2024, "we actually give [readers] real opportunities, not model contests," says new Editor in Chief Susan Schulz. "It feels like a person, not a magazine."

EMPOWERING MAGAZINE

From the advertiser side, Jamie Gluck, VP-brand marketing at Hot Kiss, says the magazine's voice is "empowering and independent." Though the apparel marketer advertises across most of the teen titles, Hot Kiss runs most of its ad pages in *CosmoGirl*, which Mr. Gluck considers "synergistic" with his company's image.

Laurianne Murphy, director of media planning for Bonne Bell Cosmetics, another *CosmoGirl* advertiser, says it "gives every girl



AT 'COSMOGIRL' HELM: Publisher Kristine Welker and new Editor Susan Schulz charge ahead with double-digit ad growth.

CHRIS CASSIDY

a chance to feel good about who she is, whether she's an athlete or into volunteering."

Because of the sexy reputation of big sister *Cosmo*, "We took a wait and see attitude [about *CosmoGirl*], and now we're completely on board," says George Janson, senior partner-director of print at WPP Group's Mediaedge:cia, New York. Mr. Janson, whose clients include Chanel and Masterfoods USA, adds that *CosmoGirl* seems "to take a holistic approach to the lives of teenagers [vs. the celebrity- and fashion-gear coverage of other titles]. They have dimensionalized the category."

The *CosmoGirl* team has been incredibly steady since the launch. The first big change was announced this summer after Hearst's acquisition of *Seventeen* from Primedia. *CosmoGirl* founding editor (and Helen Gurley Brown protégé) Atoosa Rubenstein, moved to

the larger, but faltering, *Seventeen*, and Ms. Schulz, then executive editor at *CosmoGirl*, got the nod to move up to the title's top edit spot.

A *CosmoGirl* staffer for three years, Ms. Schulz is good to go: "Yes, there are big shoes to fill, but I have a different taste in shoes, and they're just as cool."

The official pen-passing takes place in the November editor's letter. "The whole vibe was to point out to the reader that I've been there all along," says Ms. Schulz. "They do know me, they just don't know they know me."

Hot Kiss' Mr. Gluck isn't worried a bit about the change. "Atoosa's legacy for the book is the team she built," he says.

"Atoosa and I are friends, but even sisters are competitive," Ms. Schulz says. "I know she's going to make *Seventeen* great, and I'm going to make *CosmoGirl* even greater than it was before." ■



NEW CHALLENGE: Atoosa Rubenstein to enliven *Seventeen*.

CHRIS CASSIDY

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A-LIST PROFILE: ESPN THE MAGAZINE IRREVERENCE SNAGS FANS

By JANET STILSON

I F EVER THERE WAS a moment that defines *ESPN the Magazine*, it was when San Francisco 49ers receiver Terrell Owens followed up a touchdown on "Monday Night Football" last year by pulling a Sharpie pen out of his shoe, inscribing the ball and handing it to an acolyte in the stands.

"The preponderance of people over 35 thought this was a travesty and a disgrace. And the majority of people under 35 thought it was the coolest thing in the world and great entertainment," says Gary Hoenig, who has the silvered beard and fine mess of office debris one would expect from the editor in chief of the most male of all magazine species.

The sheer audacity of Mr. Owens' move made it cover story material for *ESPN the Magazine*, which directly aims at the "cool" set, employing a style that's big on visuals and articles that tend toward the irreverent. That's in keeping with what was the modus operandi of the magazine's cable TV forebear at the time the every-other-weekly was created almost six years ago.

The magazine's stories may be lean, but don't tell Mr. Hoenig and crew that the wordcraft is wimpy. Mr. Hoenig says there was a "staff rebellion" about two years ago, when the edit team took exception to the opinion the content wasn't as potent as it could be. The validation came this year, when *ESPN the Magazine* won a National Magazine Award for general excellence in the

1 million-to-2 million circulation category.

"We feel we can be to athletes what *Rolling Stone* was to musicians in the '70s and what *Vanity Fair* was to celebrities in the '80s," Mr. Hoenig says.

The strategy has certainly paid off for *ESPN the Magazine*. Its nearly half-century-old competitor, Time Inc.'s *Sports Illustrated*, is still clearly a champion with close to 1,700 pages of advertising through the first three quarters of 2003, compared with *ESPN the Magazine's* 1,131.9 pages, according to Publishers Information Bureau. But *SI's* ad pages are down 6.8% from a year earlier, while *ESPN the Magazine* is up 8.6%.

The title's performance has scored *ESPN the Magazine* a spot on *Advertising Age's* A-List.

REACHING GUYS 18-34

There's nothing to suggest *ESPN the Magazine's* performance is eating into *SI's* advertiser base, says Christopher Collins, VP-publisher of the ESPN title, which is the product of a joint venture between ESPN parent Walt Disney Co. and Hearst Magazines.

Media buyers say *ESPN the Magazine* has actually helped grow the number of advertisers that consider magazines an opportunity for reaching the 18-to-34-year-old male base.

Originally, *ESPN the Magazine* only targeted major sports like basketball, football and baseball, notes Pam McNeely, senior VP-



NOT YOUR FATHER'S SPORTS MAGAZINE: Editor Gary Hoenig and Publisher Christopher Collins aim to keep it "cool."

CHRIS CASSIDY

group media director at Interpublic Group of Cos.' Dailey & Associates, Los Angeles.

"They missed out on a lot of business," she says. "But they realized the error of their ways and embraced all sports. The readership has grown, and it's a much more relevant publication."

Ms. McNeely also gives *ESPN the Magazine* kudos for not falling into the trap of merely serving as a TV listings guide for the ESPN TV network, as has been true for some other spinoff magazines of TV channels.

Despite all the success, *ESPN the Magazine* has had to contend with a growing number of laddie titles that are going after the same advertisers. And that's kept *ESPN the Magazine* on its spikes. "In the last year and a half, we've gone from being the hunter to the hunted," says Mr. Collins.

The publisher doesn't divulge his magazine's renewal rates. But he can't avoid

Audit Bureau of Circulations figures that show the magazine's single-copy sales fell 16.7% in the first half of 2003. Mr. Collins, however, contends the publication started to trend up in that area during the last couple of months, and that *ESPN the Magazine* never factored in newsstand sales as a big part of its growth.

But the loss is "pretty significant," in the opinion of George Sansoucy, senior VP-director of print and convergence for Interpublic's Initiative Media, New York. Nevertheless, Mr. Sansoucy draws no ultimate conclusions. "The newsstand situation [for magazines as a whole] is in amazing flux," he says. "I'm not seeing any trending per se."

On the plus side, total circulation climbed 10.2% to 1.7 million in the first half. *ESPN the Magazine* expects it to reach 1.75 million by yearend, and will raise its rate base 6.1% to that number from 1.65 million in January. ■

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EDITOR OF THE YEAR

CULLEN MURPHY



The Atlantic Monthly shows it can increase advertising and circulation by publishing journalism of substance, courtesy of its managing editor, Cullen Murphy. Now, its ambitious goal is to make readers pay a lot more for that content in 2004.



DARREN MCCOLLESTER

By JON FINE

SO THE IMPROMPTU walking tour guided by Cullen Murphy, managing editor of *The Atlantic Monthly*, reaches Copp's Hill Burial Ground—Boston's second-oldest cemetery—just as his interviewer asks him about the health of long-form magazine journalism.

"I would much rather have more and better competitors than to have this being left as some kind of exotic species that lives only in captivity, basically," he says, while surrounded by tilting headstones bearing epitaphs blurred by time. "The middle ground between news potato chips"—the light-bites desk jockeys glean while zooming around the Web—"and the vast meals served in books has almost disappeared." But, says Mr. Murphy, "My bet is that I am not the only person in the world who misses this."

We're about to find out if he's right as *The Atlantic*, where a surprisingly high percentage of the magazine world's best-crafted and most-deeply-thought pieces has appeared over the past few years, plans an ambitious attempt to make its readers pay more. Key factors in its favor, of course, are the quiet authority of Mr. Murphy's leadership, and the smart and surprising magazine that *Advertising Age's* Editor of the

Year puts out every month.

Mr. Murphy's office is as text-dense as his magazine. Its bare-brick walls are lined with furlongs of books ranging from Andrei Gromyko's memoirs to Ace Backwoods' how-to on homelessness, "Surviving on the Streets." A stack of recent magazines includes *Vanity Fair* and *The New England Journal of Medicine*, although not the U.S. Army War College quarterly *Parameters*, which Mr. Murphy later touts. The most noteworthy office art is an enormous "Prince Valiant" comic strip, which he writes and his father illustrates.

BOSTON IN 'ATLANTIC' DNA

It's not the smart-set glamor one finds in the offices of Conde Nast Publications' *New Yorker*, which remains the key foil for *The Atlantic* (and vice versa) among serious magazines. Both titles' DNA reflects rarefied versions of their hometowns. *The New Yorker* is glossier, and at one with its city's speed-of-light discourse and voracious cultural and intellectual appetites. *The Atlantic* is less flashy, unconcerned with any kind of fashion or celebrity, and more attuned to academic values. (The Boston roots also account for its forgivable obsession with most things Kennedy.)

Though *The Atlantic's* book-reviews-cum-essays from Christopher Hitchens and

Caitlin Flanagan turn many a tart and lovely phrase, its stock-in-trade is its big-think deep-dig pieces, an arena in which it's arguably bested all contenders in recent years. Among many others: William Langewiesche on the World Trade Center cleanup, the crash of EgyptAir Flight 990 and today's sea piracy; Robert Kaplan on the differing roads the Middle East could take as typified by Yemen and Eritrea; and Mark Bowden's primer on interrogation.

In them, the magazine still displays a culturally contrapuntal tendency to, as one editor puts it, "let its articles find their own lengths," and explore nuance to arrive at conclusions that resist bumper-sticker or nut-paragraph summation.

The magazine's stepped-up game has won notice. "*The Atlantic* was always running these really great, long stories, but in the past couple of years they managed to apply that expansiveness to pieces a little more urgent and a little more immediate," said Robert Levine, a senior editor at *Wired*.

In his 18 years at *The Atlantic*, Mr. Murphy played key roles in both its tweedy tradition and its reinvention brought about by the late Editor Michael Kelly and the dollars devoted by new owner and Chairman David Bradley. He was former Editor in Chief William Whitworth's No. 2 when Mort Zuckerman owned *The Atlantic*, and remained in that role for the newly charged locomotive Mr. Kelly cheerily piloted. (One of Mr. Murphy's main tasks was making sure Mr. Kelly's train ran on time. In its loving obituary for Mr. Kelly, killed in April while covering the Iraq war, *The Atlantic* noted his "wallets and cell phones litter three continents.")

Mr. Kelly stepped down to become editor at large in September 2002, at which point Mr. Murphy became *The Atlantic's* top editor. But insiders are quick to point out the unusually collaborative relationship Mr. Murphy enjoyed with Mr. Kelly, and also the qualities of Mr. Murphy's tenure now becoming apparent.

"He is very organized, very efficient and wicked smart," says Charles Mann, a longtime *Atlantic* correspondent. "A very strong and directive editor."

Some of those directives, Mr. Murphy says, involve additional adjustments to the magazine's metabolism via rejiggering deadlines to allow later closing on news pieces. As well, a continued focus on foreign affairs,

politics and domestic affairs, and books. "We have to choose our targets wisely," says Mr. Murphy. "The question becomes, with limited space and resources, where do you place your bets and where do you have the most impact?"

Which reflects the choices that serious, ambitious monthlies face today. *The Atlantic* is not scaled to reach a million in circulation. On the ad side, it's made nods to affinities for "special" editorial packaging. But the annual theme issues it publishes—"State of the Union" and "Education," both initiated by Mr. Murphy—are clearly driven by intellectual rather than marketplace concerns. Mr. Murphy mulls starting a business-themed issue, but that's a far cry from unabashed ad-seeking plays like a fashion issue.

HARD TO MAKE A BUNDLE

"It's hard to find a model where you're going to make a lot of money with this particular form," admits John Fox Sullivan, group publisher of *The Atlantic*, which nevertheless occupies the No. 4 spot on *Ad Age's* A-List. The question is how to reach break-even or marginal profitability. *The Atlantic* looks to do this by putting the onus on its readers—as many magazines have threatened but few have attempted—by dropping rate base by 27.8% to 325,000 from 450,000 and doubling its average subscription price to \$30.

It's a bold move in an industry not known for boldness. Mr. Sullivan, by way of bolstering his case, says the magazine posted steady single-copy sales increases while boosting cover price to \$4.95.

"We are producing a really fine product for educated people, most of whom have some means and are willing to pay for a fine product," says Mr. Murphy. "We are now putting this on the line."

Arguing against *The Atlantic's* inconclusive track record in monetizing multiple National Magazine Awards. (*The Atlantic* has racked up five in the past two years.) Arguing in its favor, as Mr. Murphy does, is the public's appetite for serious non-fiction—examples in the book world include Eric Schlosser's "Fast Food Nation" and David McCullough's John Adams biography. Much of *The Atlantic's* native habitat may have disappeared, but perhaps this exotic breed can survive in the wilds of today's marketplace. ■

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PUBLISHING EXECUTIVE OF THE YEAR

STEPHEN M. LACY



Financial background helps Meredith's publishing group chief make the quick decisions necessary after 9/11 and the recession. Now the self-described elephant hunter is building a solid team to fix the sore spots and extend the brands to keep Meredith growing.



CHRIS CASSIDY

By JENNA SCHUER

MONEY GUY. Elephant hunter. Elvis impersonator.

An odd package but, in the form of Stephen M. Lacy, president of Meredith Publishing Group, one that works extremely well.

Mr. Lacy joined Meredith Corp. as VP-chief financial officer in 1998 and, for most of 2000, ran the company's interactive and integrated marketing operations. He was named group president in November 2000.

"There is a benefit to coming in and looking at things without the emotion. The financial background allows me to make a decision more quickly," says Mr. Lacy, 49, who before coming to Meredith had never worked in publishing.

At Meredith, the publishing bucket includes magazines, books, brand licensing, interactive media, integrated marketing, and database and information systems operations.

Meredith Corp. Chairman-CEO William

Kerr named Mr. Lacy publishing group president when Christopher Little left. The group had already seen years of growth so "the biggest challenge was to keep the momentum going," Mr. Kerr says. Then came Sept. 11, 2001, and the recession. "Then it was how will we lead the pack coming out?" Mr. Kerr says. Mr. Lacy's efforts toward that end have put him in the spotlight as *Advertising Age's* Publishing Executive of the Year.

MILITARY TALK

Mr. Lacy and the other Meredith executives pepper their conversations with military and sports language. It's a striking contrast to the home and garden subject matter the company concentrates on, but also a fitting mind-set: Strategic planning and strong leadership have contributed a great deal to the company's growth and bottom line.

For 2003, Meredith predicts a combined 16% ad page growth for its six biggest titles over 2002. Through September, Meredith's ad pages were up 14.5% from a year ago,

according to TNS Media Intelligence/CMR.

Operating profits for the publishing group, which includes a total of 17 subscription-based titles, hit \$46.4 million in the fourth quarter, ended June 30, up 24% from the previous year. Meredith noted especially strong performance for *Ladies' Home Journal* and *More*, saying both titles boosted ad pages by more than 30%. For all of fiscal 2003, operating profits for the publishing group climbed 17% to \$139.3 million.

Meredith was at the "right place at the right time," says Ed Atorino, director at investment bankers Blaylock & Partners. "The trends [like home decorating and food] went their way, and they capitalized on it."

One of the most successful ad programs under Mr. Lacy has been the Home Initiatives Group. Started two years ago, the group "pursued 90 to 100 accounts where we put together programs to dominate their budgets," he says. The group creates plans that go beyond specific titles or ad programs. Focused on "breaking down silos," Mr. Lacy and the other company executives emphasize that the brand that matters most is Meredith itself.

Mr. Lacy, a self-described "elephant hunter," doesn't like to waste time on small projects. They require just as much attention as larger, "move the needle" initiatives, but don't contribute as much to the bottom line.

"One of our mantras is that bigger is better," says Jerry Kaplan, exec VP-Meredith Publishing Group. "The focus is on generating revenue and putting out the best product we can."

Mr. Lacy is also focused on putting the right team in place to meet those goals.

"One of Steve's great strengths is his ability to pick and motivate talent," says Mr. Kerr. But once Mr. Lacy installs them and gives them the resources they need, Mr. Atorino says, he leaves them alone.

Case in point: the revitalization of *Ladies' Home Journal* under new Editor in Chief Diane Salvatore. Although the title had strong circulation, there was little excitement over it in the ad community, and the magazine's

readers were, well, getting older. Ms. Salvatore's new team "gave [the 100-year-old title] a shot of B-12," says Mr. Kaplan.

LHJ's turnaround was "phenomenal," Mr. Atorino says, adding it's one of the most "unheralded success stories" in the industry. At yearend, *LHJ's* ad pages will be up 23% over 2002, to 1,500, according to the publisher.

LINKING WITH CHRYSLER

Other elephantine initiatives under Mr. Lacy include a bevy of *Better Homes & Gardens* brand extensions—from a licensing deal with Home Interiors & Gifts to the expansion of *BH&G* special-interest publications and custom publishing deals for clients including DaimlerChrysler and DirecTV.

Two other subjects that put a sparkle in Mr. Lacy's eyes include book publishing and the Internet. Meredith aggressively courted book partners in the home and food arenas. Its best sellers include titles for Home Depot and cable hit "Trading Spaces," and recently published titles with cable channels HGTV and Food Network. On the Internet side, the company has just about hit a three-year goal of 1.5 million subscriptions through the *BH&G* Web site, at half the cost of offline subscription acquisition.

Next up for the publishing group: a focus on women in earlier stages of life and on Hispanic women. A foundation was set for both areas with the 2002 acquisition from Primedia of American Baby Group, which includes Spanish-language titles and a magazine popular with first-time moms.

Research into the needs of Hispanic consumers is ongoing. "You've got to be there early and seize your position," Mr. Lacy says.

But Mr. Lacy also recognizes that you can't build a company on strategy alone. Giving your employees a pat on the back and a good laugh helps. Like three years ago at the company's E.T. Meredith Awards for Creative Excellence, when the planned Elvis impersonator backed out. Mr. Lacy stepped into the jumpsuit and, Mr. Kerr recalls, "brought our troops to their knees." ■



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AdAge SPECIAL REPORT MAGAZINES: THE A-LIST

LAUNCH OF THE YEAR BUDGET LIVING



Not a personal finance magazine, not just a women's magazine, *Budget Living* wins a loyal base of fans by spreading its mantra of "Spend smart. Live rich." This year's Launch of the Year finds its niche by promoting style, joy and the satisfaction of saving a buck.



'BUDGET'-CONSCIOUS: Publisher Donald Welsh and Editor Sarah Gray Miller

CHRIS CASSIDY

By JENNA SCHNUER

LAUNCH-HAPPY Donald Welsh usually gets his ideas while vacuuming. The business brains behind a mountain of titles including *Budget Travel* and *Muppet Magazine*, Mr. Welsh spent one carpet-cleaning spree thinking about his auto savvy daughter's car-shopping experience.

The 33-year-old woman was infuriated when a salesman would only address her not-as-car-capable husband. Big mistake. Mr. Welsh, 59, believes the current crop of money-focused magazines does the same thing. In the U.S., 52% of assets are owned by women and that will grow to 60% by 2010, Mr. Welsh says.

The executive wanted to launch a magazine, with the same thrust as *Fortune* or *Money*, that his daughter would read. From that point, *Budget Living* was on its way—and marks 2003 as *Advertising Age's* Launch of the Year.

The recession also inspired Mr. Welsh, as well as "finding out how powerful women's buying power is today, and that it was chic to be cheap. Those things were all happening" all at the same time.

NOT SOLELY ABOUT FINANCES

Not solely a finance magazine, *Budget Living* also has elements of Time Inc.'s vastly successful *Real Simple*, itself one of *Ad Age's* A-List magazines for 2003 and Magazine of the Year in 2002. Both titles offer up do-it-

yourself advice.

"Women's magazines today are not giving the info on how to buy a car, how to invest in a 401 (k), how to save for your kids' college fund and all those aspects of one's life," Mr. Welsh contends. "Women had to go to the old boys' club, the *Fortune* magazines, the *Money* magazines, which have less than 20% female readership, to find out the kind of information they needed to run their lives."

In his role as co-founder and publisher of *Budget Living*, Mr. Welsh met with 30 candidates before finding his editor in chief. After launching Rodale's *Organic Style*, Sarah Gray Miller, 32, was taking some time away from the magazine industry. Her former boss, Dorothy Kalins, pushed her to meet with Mr. Welsh. (Ms. Miller wore a \$5 jacket she had customized with new buttons.) After meeting with Mr. Welsh in January 2002 over a few beers, Ms. Miller realized she "couldn't stop turning the idea around in my head." She met with him again in March, and delivered a budget and architecture for the magazine soon after.

Ms. Miller's name isn't plastered across the cover of *Budget Living*, but her life is well-represented inside. She's used her apartment and friends for photo shoots, and long before she even met Mr. Welsh, she was living the title's tagline: "Spend smart. Live rich."

Eight issues in, *Budget Living Media's* namesake title is clearly a hit—with readers and advertisers. One of the 30,000 reader e-mails they've received: "I would want *Budget Living* to be my 'Magazine on a Desert Island'; tough choice, because for brain candy you can't beat *People*, and for brain protein *The New Yorker* or *The Economist*, but for overall joy, style and satisfying content I would have to go with *BL*."

The title launched in October 2002 with a rate base of 300,000. It was bumped to 400,000 in April/May 2003. In February/March 2004, the rate base will rise again to 450,000, and with a frequency boost to 10 times per year in October 2004, yet another increase to 500,000. *Budget Living's* newsstand sell-through is a "little over half," says Mr. Welsh. At chain bookstores, the sell-through is a stellar 60%.

ALOT OF FAITH

The magazine ran 474 ad pages through the first seven issues, according to the publisher.

"We had a lot of faith that it was going to succeed," says Mark Brown, Detroit-based group communications planning director for WPP Group's J. Walter Thompson USA.

The magazine's philosophy of "affordability without sacrificing style" is a "spot-on match" for his client, Ford Motor Co.'s Ford Focus, Mr. Brown says.

Budget Living advertisers run the gamut from Target Stores to Estée Lauder Cos. to Sony Corp.

On Nov. 23, a weekly *Budget Living* UPI syndicated column will launch in 25 to 50 newspapers. Also going to print is "Home Cheap Home," the first *Budget Living* book from Perigree Books, a division of Penguin Group (USA); it will hit bookstores in May 2004, and "Party Central" will follow in October.

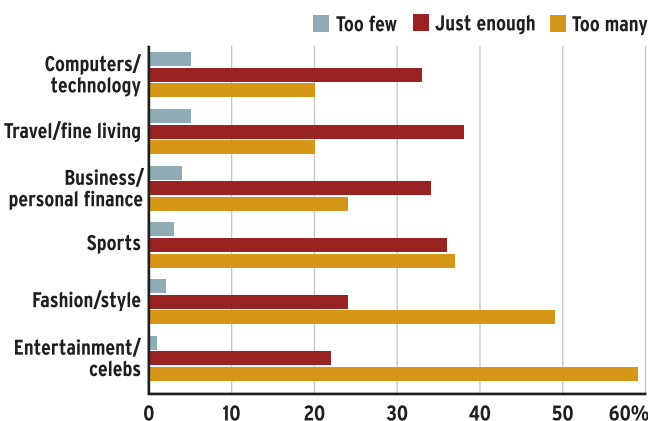
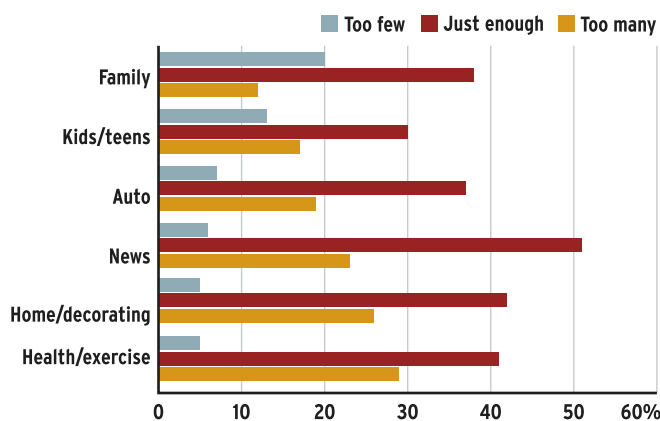
Mr. Welsh is currently working with the Beanstalk Group, a brand licensing management company, to put *Budget Living* housewares, like sheets, on store shelves. He wouldn't mind a partnership with a large store, much like the one Martha Stewart has with Kmart Corp. In the works is a TV show, which, Mr. Welsh says, is "the final piece we don't have yet." ■

AND NOW A WORD FROM YOUR READERS

More than eight in 10 people read magazines. That's a piece of good news from an online survey Knowledge Networks conducted for Magazines: The A-List. But there's more to the story. The nationwide consumer panel consisted of 1,355 respondents surveyed in August/September. Among the findings:

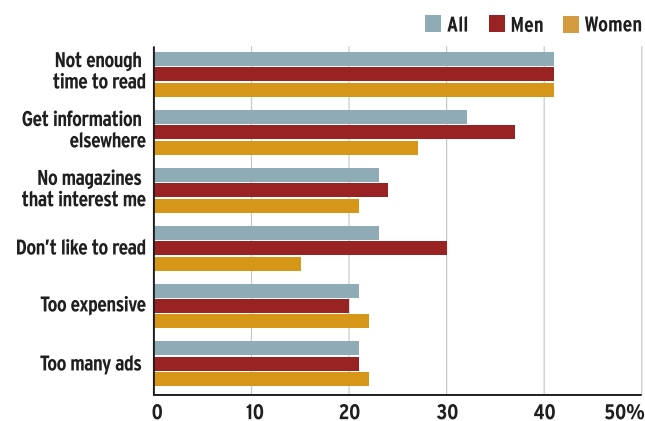
WANTING MORE ... OR LESS

One in five respondents says there are too few family-themed magazines; 59% say there are too many entertainment titles.



WHY SOME DON'T

Among the 14% who don't read magazines, their reasons for not:



Note: Respondents could give more than one answer or reason. Go to knowledgenetworks.com for more data including respondent reaction to magazine ads, and breakdowns of responses by age and household income.