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EDITORIAL MANAGEMENT



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Chapter 1

Editorial function



You must identify the principal reason for publishing. Magazines are published either to make money or to convey a message.

For example, publications like *Outside* and *Advertising Age* were created because someone saw a business opportunity. *Prevention*, *Sierra* and the *Journal of Advertising Research* were launched because someone felt a need to communicate.

Mission-oriented magazines

These are used to promote a cause, issues, or company (for example: custom or contract published titles for companies, associations, or groups) with financial viability not the top concern.

Magazines that meet a need

These require a broader and more balanced editorial product, which will attract sufficient revenues from advertising and circulation.

Editors of market-oriented (need) publications require a keen sense of the nature of the market and the advertisers' perception and use of that market.

For the most part, entertainment, education, or information (or some combination of these) are the prime motivators for reading publications, and it is the editorial content that largely establishes the value.

Things to consider

Concept: Can you write a description of the editorial concept in twenty-five words or less so that a sales promotion writer, an advertising salesperson, or a receptionist can understand and

communicate it to an interested outsider? The editor needs a clear vision of the concept and must have the conviction and strength of personality to reproduce the vision issue after issue.

Departments and columns: Are they automatically included because of tradition or is there a genuine need for each in the publication.

Features:

- Are the subjects and approach in line with the overall editorial content?
- Are there enough different articles to provide the necessary variety so that at least one article will be read with interest by every reader?
- Are article lengths appropriate to the subject matter and to the time the reader anticipates spending with the publication?
- Is the illustration genuinely related to the subject, or is it included simply to lighten the visual load?

- Is the headline accurate as well as interesting?
- Is the subhead an additional incentive to read?
- Do the lead paragraphs grab the reader and make him/her want to read on?
- Does a reader finish an article with the sense of having spent time valuably or enjoyably?

Design:

- Is the designer sensitive to pacing, the flow of visuals as the reader moves through the publication? The reader must experience variety yet have the reassurance of familiarity.
- Do you have guidelines (or policy) for an “editorial well” in the publication (no advertising)?
- Do you use pull quotes, graphs and art/photos which encourage readers to “read on?”

Chapter 2

The relationship between editorial, advertising, and circulation



You and your staff create a good editorial product, but that's not enough. Good products need promoters to tell the world just how good they are. When it comes to advertising, it's the sales staff that does most of the promoting. When it comes to your readers, it's the circulation staff. Before salespeople and circulators can sell any product, they have to be sold themselves. And once they are sold, they need to have some interaction with editorial on an ongoing basis to keep abreast of changes.

Salespeople (in advertising or circulation) probably read every issue of your publication cover to cover. But this is not enough. They need to understand the editor's vision, the concept that ties everything in the magazine together into a coherent whole.

The editor needs to make it clear that you are not seeking input (during dialogue with advertising and circulation) on how to edit the magazine. You are providing the logic behind the editorial product—how it serves the reader—so they can do their job more effectively.

You have a magazine to edit, you don't have much time to spend writing memos to advertising and circulation.

Some recommendations include:

- **Write a monthly editorial briefing** on paper or over e-mail. You can tout upcoming features and be sure to highlight the writers and the people profiled.
- **Share your fan mail.** If you get positive letters to the editor let the sales staff read them.
- **Pass along intelligence** that you might have gleaned about the market—it might buttress the



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case for advertising in your magazine.

- **Answer objections** about editorial.
- **Stick to a schedule** so the staff gets used to hearing from you at the same time each month.

Chapter 3

Structuring the publication



A large number of factors influence the process of editorial planning.

Publications are services over time, and they serve living people who change over time. Hence the editorial product is always changing to some degree, but change should only be introduced to preserve the focus of the publication.

A note about editing: The better the editors know the readers, the more appropriate, and therefore effective will be the editorial blend. The ability to make a publication's editorial relevant to more people, without diluting its focus, is the secret to good editing.

Mix

Every issue should include a variety of articles, columns and items that will enable all segments of the targeted audience to take away at least one or two ideas from the issue. This is particularly true of publications with bimonthly or quarterly frequencies.

Emphasis

Editorial should be slightly skewed to serve the most important segment of the publication's audience.

Pacing

Deep wells of technical or dry material tend to cause readers to put a publication aside with the hope that they may be able to get back to it later. They, more often than not, never do. Pacing involves weaving heavier editorial with lighter content.

Planning

Editorial planning should cover a sequence of issues.

Inventory

An inventory, or backlog, of editorial material can be a tremendous asset, particularly when you may need to edit quickly because additional advertising has been sold or when a planned article doesn't pan out. It is important that a good system be put in place to track the inventory. Every six months the inventory should be purged for material that is outdated or simply not good enough to publish.

Input

Editors who are most successful at editorial planning seek ideas and input from every source. This can include, among others, management and staff, mentor groups, editorial advisory boards, focus group participants and readers. Readers are the most important source of input and should be surveyed regularly for their reaction to the publication and its

specific content. However, one of the oldest axioms of editing still applies: readers can't tell you what to put into the magazine, they can only tell you how they like what they get out of it. After all the input, the final decision on editorial content should be made by the editor. A publication edited by committee doesn't work well.

Editorial template

It is advisable that you create one or more editorial templates which contain folio size (number of pages) a breakdown of how those pages will be allocated including cover, editorial well, advertising pages (including house ads), features, news/events, departments and columns (specifying regular and those that may rotate), letters to the editor, etc.

Editorial templates can help you decide at the last minute what editorial to pull or add to a particular issue. This is important particularly when you are trying to monitor advertising to editorial ratios.

Chapter 4

Managing editorial



Creatives

- **“Freedom of movement”**—the degree to which the environment provides adequate resources, support and encouragement, and reasonable targets and goals. Some degree of autonomy is required to produce anything creative.
- **Deadlines can be anti-creative** if they are too tight or arbitrary, but realistic restraints can provide a challenge and spur people on.
- Writers and designers often make **little or no separation between who they are and what they do**, and managing them means dealing with egos that might best be compared to balloons: both

inflated and fragile. For creatives, their writing or art is very personal to them. They are often more sensitive about other people's responses, and you have to be sensitive to that. These employees and freelancers need good, honest, tactful feedback from managers they perceive as professional.

- **It is also important to give creatives enough room to stumble**, to make errors without feeling their identities are on the line.
- **Be aware that overly anxious creatives** are not productive workers.
- **What distinguishes creatives is their drive to achieve**, which makes them wonderful to work with if you can motivate them. Creatives often respond better to managers who emphasize their teacher role instead of their boss role.

- **It is easy for creative people to get bogged down** in the inspirational stage of their work—the idea generation phase rather than the follow-through. Signs that an employee is stuck here include staring into space, pacing, working on the same paragraph or layout ten times and arguing with co-workers.
- **Be careful with praise and criticism.** Attempt to be very concrete and specific.
- **Creative people often are moody** and you may have to deal with their feelings before discussing work specifics.
- **If you are feeling upset** but do not say why, creatives will likely imagine that you are angry with them, whether or not they have anything to do with your problem.

- **Say what you need and why.** Creatives especially need to know why they are doing something.
- **Get your creative people involved** in setting their own deadlines, and make these time constraints believable.
- Every once in a while, **get the staff away from the office** for an informal or planned retreat. They'll get stale otherwise.

Benchmarking

The merit of benchmarking (cost per edit page, pages per editor, etc.) is being debated by both consumer and business publishers as a method to attempt to quantify editorial performance. There may be some value to benchmarking editorial, but it must be applied very judiciously. The hazard is that you do not want to shift focus to quantity at the expense of quality. Most top editors can gauge by instinct and intuition much better than with mathematical grids.

The question of editorial benchmarking stems from companies' ongoing efforts to streamline editorial operations through cost cutting. But if you look only at quantity measurements, you are going to be seriously eroding the quality of your publication.

The primary proponent (and initiator) of editorial benchmarking is a former VP/Editorial Director of Miller Freeman. He advocates measuring performance as a pre-emptive step because the editor's job is so diverse—working on advertorials, conferences, ancillary products—there is less time to devote to the publication(s). His theory is that there is a case for delineating to top management all that editors do and how long it takes to do it.

Caution: With editorial you have an area that is inherently creative and you are trying to impose black-and-white economic principles on it.

The ultimate benchmark is what your readers say about the publication and how they renew (paid or controlled.)

Common editorial benchmarks

For comparing individuals:

1. Inches produced
2. Bylines produced
3. Sources called
4. Story ideas produced
5. Trade-show productivity
6. Travel

For measuring editorial staff efficiency:

1. Editorial expenses as a percentage of total revenues
2. Revenue per editor
3. Average compensation per editor

4. Manuscript costs
5. Average pages per issue
6. Average pages per editor
7. Cost per editorial page

Copy flow

Five key actions that improve editorial copy flow:

- 1. Front-load the process.** Create extra steps early in the editing and proofing process to save steps later on when everything gets more hectic and costlier.
- 2. Get editorial management involved early** in the editing and proofing process. They should look over the article first to identify major trouble spots, review the storyline and any structural problems, and personally and constructively critique the job done by the rewrite editor.
- 3. Build in editorial controls and establish guidelines.** Create rules and procedures for

things like rewriting an article, proofreading a first proof, proofreading all subsequent proofs, or whatever your closing procedure is. These guidelines help you create the kind of quality control that rarely occurs under deadline pressure.

- 4. Establish real-world deadlines.** Create an editorial schedule that makes sense and that everyone on the staff takes seriously.
- 5. Get your staff involved and committed.** Copy flow management needs to be a staff-wide goal, rather than something that is chiefly the concern of the top editors.

It is helpful to develop a roadmap, or diagram, of current proceedings. Examine precisely how each piece of copy is being handled for at least an issue or two. This can help uncover bottlenecks that you can eliminate, correct or streamline.

If your publication is like most, your current production schedule is probably developed by the production editor or manager to meet the needs of the ad sales staff and the printer. Whatever way you design your editorial schedule, try to ensure it meets the needs of your editorial department and then dovetails with the art or ad sales department's needs. This does not mean that you can or should ignore advertising and manufacturing deadlines, rather, your editorial schedule has to be tailored to the natural rhythm of your publication and your editorial staff.

An editorial friendly schedule translates into better staff morale and a higher-quality end product.

Budgeting

An editor's primary goal is to produce the best editorial product the marketplace will support. But your budget has a lot to do with the publisher's primary goal, which is to make a profit.

There must be an annual editorial plan before an annual editorial budget can be created. The plan should spell out the following five points:

- 1. Number of pages you expect to fill** with editorial content and advertising issue by issue, and month by month.
- 2. Shortcomings of the product** that your readers or advertisers already perceive or are likely to perceive based upon research and personal interaction.
- 3. What, if any, changes that affect costs** are associated with how you will address shortcomings. Example: allocation of space to features, departments and columns, the ratio of staff-written to outside-authored material, the quantity, type or quality of photography or illustration.
- 4. What, if any, changes you will make** so that staff operations will be more effective, more efficient, or less costly.

5. What all this means in terms of staff size and, roughly, total editorial expense.

Once you have done the hard thinking that a good plan requires, you are pretty far along in creating the editorial budget. The rest is detail.

Take time to justify any major increase in staffing or other costs. What problem will be solved? What will be the impact on the product? How is the impact important to the success of the magazine?

Rigor helps. For example, if you want or need to create additional pages in the feature section, don't use as a multiplier your average cost of producing a page; use the average cost of producing a feature page in your current product.

On many business titles, travel and entertainment (T&E) is often the biggest single budget item after salary that you can control without having a visible

effect on the product. Break down the T&E budget by individuals.

Besides salaries and T&E, an editorial budget normally includes these categories:

- **Fringe benefits:** multiply salary figures by a fixed fraction, furnished by management. (Fringe benefits include your costs for mandatory fees and taxes required by law. They also include employee benefits such as insurance, retirement plan contributions, tuition, or housing that the company provides to the employee.)
- **Contributors:** freelance writers, outside authors, and columnists. It may also include outside copy editing, proofreading, and other editorial services.
- **Outside art:** outside photographers, purchased photos, outside illustrators, outside layout artists and related copying services.
- **General support:** phone, postage, messenger service, temporary help, equipment, supplies

- **Optional** (based on company policy): allocated costs—the depreciation cost of the furniture and equipment you use, your share of maintenance contracts and your share of corporate services.

Once you have numbers based on changes in staff and pages, consider inflation, contract provisions, etc.

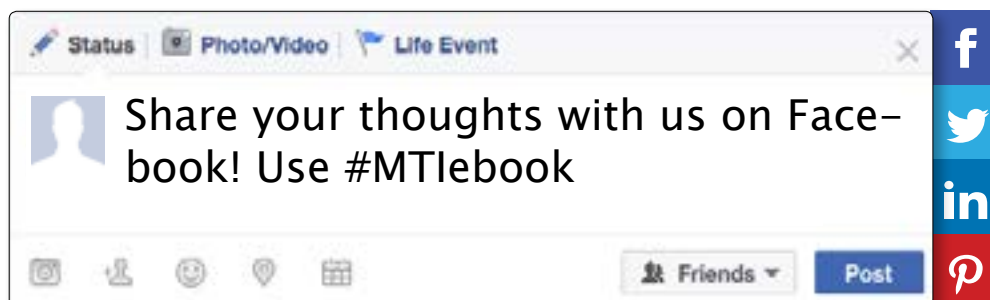
Budgeting should be continuous. Conditions, staff and even plans change during the budget year.

When you have a good budget in hand, you have one of the two tools you need for cost control. The other tool is the monthly operating statement. This statement should show you how much money you have spent to date in each budget category and how that compares with the cumulative expense you had projected in your budget.

Beyond the book

Try writing a monthly editorial briefing for your team. Talk about upcoming features, and be sure to highlight the writers and people profiled.

More information on the business of magazines can be found in the “Managing the Magazine with Confidence and Skill” training manual. To purchase the complete manual, visit: www.magazinetraining.com.



About the author



Lou Ann Sabatier loves publishing, as evidenced by her 35-year career in strategic planning, business development, market research, audience development, management and finance. Lou is principal of Sabatier Consulting, where she has worked with over 100 media clients, giving them the tools they needed to increase profitability. Prior to founding the consulting firm, she worked as a literary agent, as managing director of an international economic magazine, as associate publisher of a national opinion magazine and CEO of a media company. She speaks widely at conferences and workshops throughout the world. Lou is strategic communications director for the 21st Century Wilberforce Initiative, a Christian non-profit advocating for religious freedom. She also served as a trainer with MTI in India, Kenya, and online.



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