

**Digital Magazines and Wordpress:
A Case Study of Two Digital Magazines During
Their Development and First Year**

by

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Abstract

This report analyzes two Wordpress based digital magazines with a focus on their development and first year of publication. The report examines each case and their unique successes in developing digital publications that are capable of achieving each publisher's required functions.

This report presents two methods of creating digital publications using Wordpress and outlines the strategies and methods used with the purpose of acting as a guide for publishers embarking on a similar path.

Keywords: Wordpress; magazine publishing; digital magazines; online publishing; Page One Publishing; Royal BC Museum

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Table of Contents

Approval.....	ii
Abstract.....	iii
Acknowledgements.....	iv
Table of Contents.....	v
Figures.....	vii

Introduction1

Chapter 1. Context and Vision.....4

A. <i>Salt</i> by Page One Publications.....	4
Background.....	4
The Origins of <i>Salt</i>	7
Aim and Function.....	8
B. <i>Curious Quarterly</i> by the Royal BC Museum.....	8
Background.....	8
The Origins of <i>Curious</i>	10
Aim and Function.....	12

Chapter 2. Digital Design13

The Form: An Introduction to Wordpress.....	13
A. <i>Salt</i> Process.....	15
Planning and Design.....	15
Development.....	16
Testing and Revisions.....	20
Delivery.....	22
B. <i>Curious Quarterly</i> Process.....	24
Planning and Design.....	24
Development.....	28
Testing and Revisions.....	30
Delivery.....	30

Chapter 3. Assessment and Recommendations33

A. <i>Salt</i> Assessment.....	34
Evaluation.....	34
Recommendations.....	36
B. <i>Curious Quarterly</i> Assessment.....	38
Evaluation.....	38
Web Traffic Analysis.....	38
Survey.....	39
Internal Review.....	40
Recommendations.....	43

Conclusion45

References48

Figures

Figure 1.	Saltmagazine.ca by Page One Publishing.....	23
Figure 2.	“What is Project CODE WORDS?” by rjstein. An article from Medium.com	26
Figure 3.	“The Boys in the Bunkhouse” by Dan Barry. A multimedia enhanced article from <i>The New York Times</i>	27
Figure 4.	The cover of the Royal BC Museum’s first issue of <i>Curious Quarterly</i>	32
Figure 5.	<i>Curious Quarterly</i> Web Traffic Analysis	38
Figure 6.	<i>Curious Quarterly</i> Visitors by Country	39

Introduction

In the current technological age, circa 2015, the bar has been raised for web standards. Online readers are searching for specific, engaging material and they decide on this material in a very short amount of time. Current statistics continue to report that “a stunning 55% [of web users] spent fewer than 15 seconds actively on a page... one in every three visitors spend less than 15 seconds reading articles they land on.”¹ Potential readers expect efficient, functional, accessible digital publications. Publishers must ensure their online presence achieves all of these expectations to encourage readers to engage with their content. A huge aspect of this, excluding content standards, depends on website design. So how can small publishers create digital publications that fulfill reader expectations?

Small publishers require professional, functioning digital publications without having to exert excess energy in the form of time and money. In 2014, I had first-hand experience with two digital publications via internships with two organizations. Over a period of eight months I worked with the two publishers, Page One Publishing Inc. (Page One) and the Royal BC Museum (RBCM), to bring their digital publications into a new phase of life. Page One created a digital publication based on a print publication. The Royal BC Museum’s digital publishing department reassessed a one-year-old digital journal and transitioned it into a second year. This report is based upon the valuable problem solving, learning resources, development, and evaluation related information gained developing digital publications.

¹ Tony Haile, “What You Think You Know About the Web Is Wrong,” *Time Inc.*, March 9, 2014, <http://time.com/12933/what-you-think-you-know-about-the-web-is-wrong/>

This report presents two digital publications created by small publishers that achieved great success while utilizing free, digital resources. This is a challenge that most publishers are facing due to the widespread importance of technologies and online interactions within the industry. These cases should act as a guide informing some of the basic, necessary, and technical aspects of creating and maintaining a digital publication. There is a plethora of resources and tactics available outlined in this paper that can significantly increase the functionality, usefulness, and strength of digital publications, specifically pertaining to the website development software Wordpress. Wordpress is an online, open-source, website software that is free for anyone to use and is an incredibly powerful tool for creating and managing websites, blogs, and digital publications. Both Page One and the RBCM used Wordpress to create and produce their digital publications.

Through an in-depth look at the development processes of these publications, this report considers a few of the many ways publishers can tackle the task of creating quality, unique digital publications. This report examines the pressures facing small publishers to create online excellence while simultaneously running busy print and digital production schedules with limited resources. It looks at the process of creating Wordpress based websites and the methods and modifications that can be made to create and develop high quality websites. With Page One's *Salt* magazine as an example, this report explores various techniques to overcoming the technical barriers facing small publishers wanting to create digital publications in-house. With the RBCM's *Curious Quarterly* as an example the report discusses the specifics of choosing and hiring a third-party developer to assist in the creation of a digital publication. With *Curious*, the report continues to explore the challenges and nuances facing a web-based publication (S: Is this a correct assumption?) as it reaches the end of its first year and the creators estimate its future value.

If more small publishers can learn the basics of digital publishing using Wordpress, their digital presence could become a much stronger contributor to their business. With the demands of running a business the burden of maintaining a digital publication often falls low on the list of priorities for small organizations or departments. When a digital publication lacks key functionality and appears out-dated it speaks poorly of the

organization that owns it. With the excellent online resources available in 2015, this is unacceptable. Digital publications require either in-house resources or money for a developer, however the tasks and methods discussed in this paper can be easily acquired, as long as the publisher makes it a priority.

Digital publications can create and expand audiences by publishing current content and maintaining an active social media presence therefore increasing visibility and interaction with users. Small publishers can create the beautiful, professional digital publications that users expect by providing up-to-date content, and by utilizing some of the tactics outlined in this paper. In this way, publishers can create a digital presence that is worth something to their organization. They can monetize their digital publication, grow their audience, interact with that audience, and compete with larger companies on a digital scale.

Chapter 1. Context and Vision

A. *Salt* by Page One Publications

Background

Page One Publishing Inc. is a lifestyle and business magazine publisher showcasing Vancouver Island. Lise Gyorkos, President, and Georgina Camilleri, Group Publisher, founded Page One in 1998 with the desire to create “content for audiences who want to be inspired, informed, and on trend”² an idea that became the company’s motto. Page One currently publishes four magazines and offers a wide variety of in-house creative services. Page One operates with thirteen staff members organized into three departments: sales, editorial and design. Subscriptions, ad revenue, and external publishing projects allow Page One to distribute their popular magazines for free. Like many small publishers, Page One aims to do as much work in-house as possible to ensure consistent work.

Page One publishes four topical magazines: *Douglas*, *YAM*, *Fresh*, and *Salt*. *Douglas* Magazine is Southern Vancouver Island’s “premier business media brand”³. *Douglas* is published six times a year and has an annual circulation of 180,000 copies mainly distributed through pick-up racks around the greater Victoria area. *Douglas* subscriptions are offered at a rate of \$36.00 for three years or are otherwise available free at a host of Vancouver Island businesses⁴. *Douglas* was established in 2006 focuses on the unique business culture of Vancouver Island covering topics including finance, sales, marketing,

² “About,” Accessed July 10, 2015, <http://pageonepublishing.ca/about/>

³ “*Douglas* Magazine,” Accessed July 10, 2015, <http://pageonepublishing.ca/douglas/>

⁴ *Douglas* is distributed to Canadian Western Bank, Cascadia Liquor Stores, Business Development Bank, Victoria BMW, Vancouver Island Tech Park, Three Point Motors and other Vancouver Island businesses. “*Douglas* Magazine,” Accessed July 10, 2015, <http://pageonepublishing.ca/douglas/>

real estate, travel, and profiles. The magazine is geared towards an audience interested in staying up-to-date on the full particulars of the Vancouver Island's business sector. With 71% of their readers in senior executive positions *Douglas'* audience expects high-quality content about current business topics.⁵ *Douglas* magazine features their content on a Joomla-based website located at douglasmagazine.com. Joomla is an open source content management system some web developers prefer over Wordpress. It was one of Page One's first websites and has an avid readership despite its simple design.

Page One creates digital editions for *Douglas*, *YAM*, and *Salt* that are available for all devices via their website. These editions feature simple enhancements such as bookmarking, zoom, search, and more. Page One's digital edition strategy utilizes electronic publishing platforms, initially Joomag⁶ and Flipping Book⁷ and now Issuu⁸. These electronic publishing platforms are commonly premium services that create enhanced versions of PDF files.

YAM magazine (You and Me magazine) was established in 2009 and is a lifestyle magazine published for a Victoria BC audience. *YAM* is published six times a year with an annual circulation of 210,000 copies distributed via subscriptions and pick-up racks in Victoria neighbourhoods. Subscriptions are available for \$36.00 for three years. *YAM's* audience is a 70-30 female to male ratio. Many readers own a home and are interested in participating in many of the activities that occur in the province's capital.⁹ The magazine hosts six departments: Home and Garden, Fashion and Beauty, Food, Health and Fitness, Travel, and Arts and Culture. From 2009 to 2013 *YAM* magazine did not have a website. Yammagazine.com was created directly after the positive feedback and success of the creation of the *Salt* magazine digital publication at saltmagazine.ca (this will be further discussed in Chapter 3). *YAM's* digital strategy was influenced by the

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Joomag is a free digital publishing service that creates interactive, HTML5 publications. "Joomag Home Page," *Joomag, Inc.*, Accessed June 13, 2015, <https://www.joomag.com/>

⁷ Flipping Book is an online publishing platform that specializes in PDF versions of print publications. "Flipping Book Publisher," Accessed June 8, 2015, <https://flippingbook.com>

⁸ Issuu is a magazine publishing platform. It allows readers to customize their digital magazine subscriptions. "Issue Home Page," Accessed June 13, 2015, <http://www.issuu.com/>

⁹ "YAM Magazine" Accessed July 10, 2015. <http://pageonepublishing.ca/YAM/>

response from *Salt* readers for the *Salt* digital publication discussed in this report. The *YAM* digital publication features articles, contests, and multimedia content in an easy-to-navigate layout. *YAM*, like *Douglas*, has a digital edition available online to readers.

Fresh magazine is a consumer magazine created in partnership with Thrifty Foods, a supermarket chain operating 27 stores on Vancouver Island and the Lower Mainland¹⁰. *Fresh* is a seasonal magazine with a focus on food, health, and living. It is published four times a year with an annual circulation of over 400,000 copies distributed free in-store. The magazine promotes seasonal fruits and vegetables with “tried and true recipes”¹¹ created by Thrifty Foods for a majority female audience. Back issues of *Fresh* are available via the Thrifty Foods website as a digital edition. As most readers pick-up *Fresh* in-store at the grocery store till, there is no plan to expand *Fresh*'s digital strategy beyond the digital edition.¹²

Salt is Page One's most recent publication established in early 2013. *Salt* is “a fine living and travel magazine about Vancouver Island for Calgarians offering unique travel experiences and desirable investment opportunities to a premium demographic”¹³. Many Calgarians, or “snowbirds”, travel to BC to escape the harsh prairie winter and to enjoy the coastal regions of BC. *Salt*'s audience is interested in fine dining, real estate, vacation homes, tourism, boating and other outdoor activities. They have impressive buying power and are interested in all Vancouver Island has to offer. *Salt* is a coffee table quality magazine published twice a year with an annual circulation of 60,000 copies. Distribution is facilitated in Calgary, Edmonton, and Vancouver through a partnership with Avenue magazine and the Globe and Mail. *Salt* has a digital edition in line with the digital editions of *Douglas* and *YAM*. *Salt*'s digital strategy is explored at length throughout this report.

¹⁰ “Thrifty Foods,” *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopaedia*, Accessed April 8, 2015, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thrifty_Foods

¹¹ “*Fresh* Magazine,” Accessed July 10, 2015, <http://pageonepublishing.ca/fresh/>

¹² As of the publication date of this report, Page One Publishing no longer publishes *Fresh*.

¹³ “*Salt* Magazine,” Accessed July 10, 2015, <http://pageonepublishing.ca/salt/>

The Origins of *Salt*

Page One began planning for *Douglas*, *YAM*, and *Salt* digital publication updates in late 2013 with the objective to improve and enhance their magazines' online presence. The digital editions provide specific benefits to Page One's readers but lack the benefits of a more comprehensive digital strategy. Page One wanted to continue with their digital edition strategy while creating a new online space, creating more user interaction with their content.

Page One understood that much of their content on subjects like Vancouver Island hotspots, restaurant reviews, profiles on Vancouver Islanders, and more could reach a larger audience. *Salt* was a smart choice for starting a new digital publication because, of all the Page One publications, *Salt* has the most direct community who could benefit from a robust online presence to aid in their consumer choices.

With the development of a new *Salt* digital publication, Page One wanted to address what was lacking in their digital editions. Electronic publishing platforms, like Issuu or Flipping Book, are limited in their ability to engage readers. They can be difficult for social sharing, rapid usability, and looking up a specific article, department, or author. The new *Salt* digital publication would focus on providing as much access as possible to readers. This includes the optimized layout and distribution of content, ease of sharing content, availability of company information, opportunities for social media interaction, and exclusive content only available online.

One aspect Page One wanted to address was the creation of an up-to-date niche business directory. The businesses and advertisers featured in *Salt* represent the lifestyle of those who live or vacation on Vancouver Island. Many of the affluent readers of *Salt* visit, vacation, or eventually live full-time on Vancouver Island. Having access to notable, current Vancouver Island businesses from a reputable, trustworthy source is incredibly important to some readers. The digital publication was designed in part to address the lack of this information in the print and digital editions. The Resource Centre, as well as the Transportation department, and the powerful search engine all contribute to the digital publication's functionality for its readers. The resource centre would also be a source of revenue for Page One, which will be discussed in Chapter 2.

Another reason for Page One's desire to update their digital strategy is to present an online presence of each publication that matches the quality and brand of the print publications. *Douglas'* Joomla website created in 2007, while functional, is dated by many technology and design standards. While the print publication has expanded and developed since 2006, the website has stayed relatively the same and remains a challenge to edit from the backend. In creating a new Wordpress-based digital publication, *Salt* could act as a guide for a future *Douglas* redesign. Wordpress was chosen as the platform to best facilitate these aspects and will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 2.

Aim and Function

Based on these reasons and the needs of Page One, *Salt* will need to achieve a number of objectives as a digital publication in order to be considered successful. *Salt* will need to act as an extension of the print publication through quality design and niche material covering Vancouver Island. It will need to strengthen and enhance the brand via this platform to reach a broader audience. *Salt* will need to offer increased interaction with readers via social media sharing opportunities, and exclusive online content. It must act as an up-to-date resource centre for readers interested in businesses associated with the magazine's niche themes. As a digital publication, *Salt* will need to act as a source of revenue (to support the maintenance and upkeep of the digital publication) through advertising and marketing opportunities. *Salt* will need to allow Page One to repurpose print content that is easily shareable between social media platforms. The digital publication will need to simplify content updates so that the responsibility of uploading articles can be shared by a variety of staff members.

B. *Curious Quarterly* by the Royal BC Museum

Background

Founded in 1886, the Royal BC Museum Corporation is an important part of BC's history. The province's museum and the British Columbia Provincial Archives showcase natural and human history with a focus on BC's past. The museum boasts over six

million artifacts with three permanent galleries and a host of popular temporary exhibits. The museum's goal is to "broaden understanding about our province and inspire curiosity and wonder"¹⁴ through research and learning. The museum has won many awards and remains one of BC's shining achievements.

The RBCM has a large workforce comprised of paid and unpaid staff. In 2012 there were "over 500 [volunteers] and outnumber the Royal BC Museum Staff 4 to 1"¹⁵. The museum is divided into numerous departments that operating within the areas of study, conservation, preservation, museum events, and activities. The New Archives and Digital Preservation Department manages the museum's websites and e-commerce websites, internal databases, digital archives, and assists with technical support. This department is also tasked with the creation and development of the museum's online exhibitions and digital resources. This includes projects like "100 Objects of Interest" a curated collection of some of the museum's most interesting, famous, or peculiar artifacts. The New Archives and Digital Preservation Department also helped organize a collaboration with the Google Art Project to make public some of the museum's most beloved paintings, including many works by famed BC artist Emily Carr.

The RBCM also developed and created *Curious Quarterly*, the museum's digital journal built on a custom Wordpress theme for the museum's needs. *Curious* connects the public with the curators and staff of the Museum to discover their unique perspectives and hear their incredible stories. The New Archives and Digital Preservation department approached *Curious* as a way to interact not only with a larger audience of museum visitors but also the online community of museums. Many museums are embarking on new ways to bring current digital technologies into the museum sphere.

The digital nature of the journal and the time and energy dedicated to its creation are part of the reason why the journal was not created by the museum's publishing department. The museum's publishing department publishes around six books per year

¹⁴ "About the Museum," *Royal BC Museum Corporation*, Accessed January 20, 2015, <http://royalbcmuseum.bc.ca/about/>

¹⁵ "Royal British Columbia Museum," *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopaedia*, Accessed April 8, 2015, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Royal_British_Columbia_Museum

by museum experts and outside contributors on topics concerning the province's human and natural history. The Museum publishes books on topics such as First Nations art, botany, Emily Carr, and entomology. The books are developed and edited by the museum publisher and produced by the museum's graphic designer.

What's InSight is the magazine for museum members. It is either sent digitally or in the mail four times a year along with membership information. It is also available at the museum store for purchase. The membership department produces the magazine together with the museum graphic designer. What's InSight features content created by curators and staff at the museum. The magazine provides insider information on upcoming exhibits and events as well as a behind-the-scenes look at the everyday work of museum staff with a focus on conservation and preservation projects. Members who wish to read it digitally can access what's InSight online. The digital edition is an enhanced PDF created on Issuu digital software. What's InSight does an excellent job of promoting the events and exhibitions at RBCM and voicing the museum's need for membership, donations and visitor support.

The Origins of *Curious*

In 2013 Eric Espig, Web Specialist at the museum during *Curious'* first year, began developing a project he hoped would be a fresh approach to a digital publication not only for the Royal BC Museum but also the online museum sphere. Espig wanted to create a modern, polished digital journal to showcase the stories and perspectives from the museum's expert staff. Espig began *Curious* with the desire to create a digital-only publication that contributors could populate with little help from a digital editor or web-master.

The Royal BC Museum boasts some of the country's top curators, archivists, and researchers. There is an abundance of content created by these museum staff in the form of exhibits, events, talks, seminars, papers, and studies. The museum has implemented a staff profile website equipped with areas for staff to share their work via a Wordpress publishing platform. Many museum staff are active uploaders who use the website as a way to publish their research online, sharing it with the larger community of

interested readers. The staff profiles website is an easy, efficient platform that provides substantial information for anyone to read. The drawbacks of this system lie in the accessibility of the material; there is no feature to alert readers of new uploaded content and a reader must navigate to a specific curator or archivists profile page in order to locate material. There are also staff members who, for reasons such as time, ability, or productivity, do not upload to the website. The staff profiles website holds a variety of academic papers, articles, personal blog posts, and multimedia content that is under-utilized. Espig realized this was an untapped resource that could easily be published by *Curious Quarterly* for the benefit of museum staff.

As the guest editor of the fourth issue of *Curious Quarterly*, I sent out a call for submissions to RBCM's curators, archivists, artists, and museum staff as well as staff of other learning institutions. Many of these contributors were interested and excited to get their work published in *Curious*. Many saw *Curious* as an excellent first opportunity for publishing their work, others were happy to publish work on their side studies or areas they pursued as "passion projects" rather than their main body of study. Some contributors used *Curious* as a way to publish work based on recent talks or digitize articles published before the museum had an online presence. The digitized articles are transcribed to a digital format (usually a plain text file format) and the content is then uploaded onto *Curious*' Wordpress backend for publication.

Espig wanted to pursue a digital-only publication to continue this ease of publication but more importantly to pursue the museum's ideal of "provid[ing] a dynamic forum for discussion and a place for reflection"¹⁶ outlined in the CEO Jack Lohman's desire for a "new approach"¹⁷ outlined in his Vision 2017 document. Lohman sees the need for the museum to engage visitors in new ways with a focus on digital infrastructure to promote the museum's many assets. In doing so, Lohman hopes to "enable greater access to [the museum's] collections"¹⁸ via the digital realm.

¹⁶ "Vision 2017," *Royal BC Museum Corporation*, Accessed January 20, 2015, <http://royalbcmuseum.bc.ca/about/vision-2017/>

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ "Royal BC Museum Home Page," *Royal BC Museum Corporation*, Accessed January 20, 2015, <http://royalbcmuseum.bc.ca/>

Aim and Function

Based on the museum's strategic plan and Espig's unique strategy, *Curious* will need to achieve a number of objectives as a digital publication in order to be considered successful. *Curious* will need to strengthen and enhance the visibility and public engagement with the Royal BC Museum and its collections. It will need to fulfill the requirements set out in Vision 2017¹⁹ for the museum's digital plan. *Curious* must present a unique side of the museum that cannot be found anywhere else. The digital publication must prove to be an asset to the museum, as decided by an executive committee at the end of the first year (based on audience metrics, staff review, and process overview).

¹⁹ Vision 2017 has 4 main strategic priorities for the museum's future. Number 2 is to "Strengthen our digital infrastructure and reputation." "Vision 2017," *Royal BC Museum Corporation*, Accessed January 20, 2015, <http://royalbcmuseum.bc.ca/about/vision-2017/>

Chapter 2. Digital Design

The Form: An Introduction to Wordpress

Salt and *Curious* are both built on the online, website software Wordpress, created by Matt Mullenweg and Mike Little created in 2003. In 2015, Wordpress had been downloaded over 17 million times²⁰ around the world with translations in over 40 languages.²¹ For many, Wordpress is the obvious choice when creating a website because it is well known for being easy to use, incredibly customizable, and relatively quick to set-up. “With usability at its core, along with a strong following and ever-growing community of practice behind it, its continued adoption seems inevitable.”²² It is reported on Wordpress.com that the website hosts 23% of the world’s websites.²³ Both organizations, Page One and the Royal BC Museum determined Wordpress would fulfill their digital publications needs.

Wordpress is an open source software, which means its code and structure are open to the public to download, edit, use, and improve. As an open source software, Wordpress is constantly improving and will continue to do so as long as users find new ways to use and refine the code. There are a huge number of contributors to Wordpress who have created themes, plugins, customizations, add-ons, and resources that are free and available for anyone to use, just like Wordpress.

²⁰ “Wordpress Download Counter,” Accessed May 23, 2015, <https://wordpress.org/download/counter/>

²¹ “Translate Wordpress,” Accessed May 23, 2015, <https://make.wordpress.org/polyglots/teams/>

²² Emily Ross, “What in the Word?: Why WordPress is Considered ‘the’ Content Management System,” *PUB802, Technology & Evolving Forms of Publishing, TKBR Blog, SFU*, January 29, 2014, <http://tkbr.ccsp.sfu.ca/pub802/2014/01/what-in-the-word-why-wordpress-is-considered-the-content-management-system/>

²³ “Wordpress.com Home Page,” *Automattic*, Accessed May 23, 2015, <https://wordpress.com>

Wordpress produces quality results for the wide range of skill levels that use it. Websites can be hosted by Wordpress at Wordpress.com²⁴ or hosted by the web developer at Wordpress.org. To reduce costs, both *Curious* and *Salt* chose to host and maintain their own websites by using Wordpress.org. They were then able to download themes and customize them using Wordpress WYSIWYG (“What You See Is What You Get”) editor.

To create a website with Wordpress the website will need a domain and host provider, a server and database, the newest version of Wordpress downloaded from their website, and then further customization with themes, plugins, and more.²⁵ Once set up, a Wordpress website can be managed from the backend through a selection of options and modules. Wordpress’ straightforward backend and simple structure allows those with limited experience to create powerful, beautiful websites with no formal training.

Wordpress uses a collection of PHP and CSS files to create an HTML based website. Wordpress utilizes these files from databases (PHP and SQL) that have a unique setup in order to be able to run a website. File and folder setup within a website’s database is specific and can be broken down into three main components: wp-content, wp-admin, and wp-includes.

The wp-content folder deals with a website’s parts including themes, templates, and plugins. The wp-admin folder deals with the tools on the backend of a website. These are the tools that a web developer uses to create, edit, and manage a website’s content. The wp-includes folder holds all the files that actually make a website run. All of the files in a Wordpress database can cause a break or crash of a website if edited incorrectly.²⁶

Different file types (PHP, CSS) use their own coding language and learning these languages, while achievable, is the most difficult part of setting up a custom website.

²⁴ There is a variety of packages available ranging from free to around \$400. “Wordpress.com Store,” *Automattic*, Accessed May 23, 2015, <https://store.wordpress.com/plans/>

²⁵ While the process may seem complicated at first all the required information is available online at “New To WordPress - Where to Start,” Accessed March 24, 2015, https://codex.wordpress.org/New_To_WordPress_-_Where_to_Start

²⁶ More information at “A Beginners Guide: Understanding WordPress’ Internal Functioning,” *SympleWorkz*. Accessed March 11, 2015. <http://www.wpexplorer.com/wordpress-internal-function/>

However, there is a huge collection of resources available for learning how to code with these languages. The first thing a beginner will need is a markdown editor or text editor.²⁷ There are a many free sophisticated text editors available online that can assist in creating functional files.

The next step is to become more comfortable with PHP and CSS in order to be comfortable editing and customizing Wordpress files. The amount of resources available for those willing to learn is astounding. “The amount of user generated content around WordPress is astounding and speaks to the fact that this CMS has gone beyond a set of tools and forayed into ‘brand’ territory.”²⁸ A quick Google search can easily produce a huge number of articles, videos, courses, and learning opportunities for those interested in learning to code. The volume of resources for every type of learner is the direct result of the huge volume of Wordpress users.²⁹

A. *Salt* Process

Planning and Design

The planning and design of *Salt* came from the desire for Page One to connect with their audience on a more direct forum. Page One had a wealth of content that could be reused for a digital magazine from the print edition of *Salt* and sister magazines. This content could easily be repurposed and packaged in a way that could represent the publisher well and show off their strengths. Page One has a large collection of high quality photography, concise writing, and seasonal content that is idea for a digital platform.

Page One began the design process by looking into different themes available for the Wordpress platform. The team’s graphic designers then mocked up what the digital

²⁷ Most computers have a basic text editor built in for Mac computers it is called TextEdit, and for Windows computers it is called WordPad.

²⁸ Ross, “What in the Word?: Why WordPress is Considered ‘the’ Content Management System.”

²⁹ More information available at Codecademy (<http://www.codecademy.com/>), W3schools.com (<http://www.w3schools.com/>), CSS-Tricks by Treehouse (<https://css-tricks.com/>).

publication could look like in those templates and began determining what the digital publication needed and what the team wanted. This narrowed down which themes worked and what themes would need customization. This discussion was extremely important because it brought to light what additional features *Salt* would need. These included a comment system, a search bar, social media integration, multiple posts categorization, recent posts widget, related posts widget, colour customization, and a mobile responsive design. One feature that was incredibly important to Page One was for the *Salt* digital publication to feature a resource centre. The reasoning was twofold: to help its readers interact with Vancouver Island businesses, and to monetize the digital publication beyond basic web advertising.

The theme they chose was by the theme developer HermesThemes aptly named 'Victoria,' a theme intended for hotels and B&Bs. HermesThemes is known for having high-quality themes, mobile responsive design, easy customization, and a quick support team. Throughout the process HermesThemes aided Page One in some of the customizing needed for using the theme as a digital magazine. Specifically this included creating a more interactive, substantial homepage. The team then began work on developing the digital publication for the needs of the readers and the publisher.

Development

The *Salt* digital publication team, consisting of a creative-technical manager, a graphic designer, and a web design intern, began work setting up the theme and inputting information about *Salt*. This included setting up a homepage, an "About" page, a header menu, and a footer. Per the HermesThemes theme, the footer has the ability to be customized with widgets. Widgets are a Wordpress feature that can easily add content or options to a site with little to no code experience required. The *Salt* footer appears at the bottom of every page of the digital publication and provides vital links for users looking for content, and information about *Salt* and Page One. These include advertising opportunities, contact information, social media links, subscription links, a link to the *Salt* "About" page, and an option to read past issues of *Salt*'s digital edition. Page One began work on the functionality of the digital publication creating six departments: Living Here, Arts and Culture, Food and Drink, Homes, Adventure, Transportation, and Resources.

With the theme in place the team had to decide how the content would be distributed, for example issue-by-issue, or a rolling collector of articles. A key objective for the homepage was to ensure readers could access new information every visit with the release of each *Salt* print magazine while also ensuring older articles and material were available. The homepage was customized with the idea of featuring new content with the release of each issue.

The next step was to decide on an upload schedule for new articles. Having a webmaster or digital specific person on staff is favourable to ensure the digital publication is well maintained and current. Without making this a priority the digital publication can easily become out-dated, which would lead to frustration for many readers. The task was assigned to Jeffrey Bosdet, Creative-Technical Manager, and subsequently the Design department as they were closely involved the creation and development of this digital publication. Once the issue had been sent for distribution the articles would be uploaded to posts, edited, enhanced with media, tested, and then set to “draft” until the publication date. The update frequency would be determined by the staff in charge of uploading and could take precedence when time allowed in the schedule. Since the magazine is published only twice a year, a slow content upload over a few months after each magazine publication date would actually benefit the currency and longevity of the digital publication. Uploading content on a slow but regular schedule with a big push around print issue publication dates shows the readers the digital publication is up to date and constantly active.

An early challenge was ensuring articles could be categorized in three ways: the department, the issue, and tagging (for SEO and better website navigation). These categories are extremely important for enhancing the digital publication’s search engine, for users researching a specific topic, and for better website navigation from one article to the next. This could have been addressed in many ways including custom code or plugins. Page One decided to create specific taxonomies for issues, department, and keyword tags.

Mock content was added to the digital publication to test out the style and format of articles. To populate the whole publication with mock content³⁰ a Wordpress plugin was utilized for the test. *Salt* articles quickly replaced mock content as the digital publication's development progressed and other aspects of the digital publication demanded attention.

To alter the theme the team purchased from HermesThemes to fit a magazine feel, large image sliders were added to each department homepage. These image sliders were created with the use of the excellent plugin, Nemus Slider³¹. This plugin has the option to create automated image sliders with images from the most recent articles within a specific category (e.g. show the five most recent articles in the Home department). It can also sort articles for an image slider based on comments, alphabetical, or random. It is easily configured to show only specific post types such as events or testimonials. On top of these features this plugin features attractive looking transitions (e.g. slide or fade) and a host of ways to customize the look of each individual image slider. The plugin is easy to use with a dependable support forum.

Jetpack³² is a popular plugin for new Wordpress users because in actuality it is a host of plugins packaged as one. It aims to serve as a one-size-fits-all plugin that provides everything a web designer could need. Jetpack offers features such as a related post widget, tiled photo galleries, sharing opportunities for readers, comment sections, and other enhanced elements. The major complaint with this plugin is that because of its size it can bog down Wordpress websites and significantly add to a website's load time. This is especially true when a website is using other active plugins. Tech Radar has compiled a list³³ of website speed tests for learning more about a website's load time.

³⁰ A list of mock content solutions is available here: James Owers, "Dummy Content For WordPress Development," A Web Developers Blog. Accessed March 11, 2015, <http://jamesowers.co.uk/wordpress/348/dummy-content-for-wordpress-development/>

³¹ "Nemus Slider," Accessed January 14, 2015, <https://wordpress.org/plugins/nemus-slider/>

³² "Jetpack for Wordpress," *Automattic*, Accessed June 18, 2015, <http://jetpack.me/>

³³ Matt Swider, "Internet Speed Test: 10 ways to test and boost your speed," Tech Radar, February 07, 2014, <http://www.techradar.com/news/internet/broadband/internet-speed-test-5-utilities-to-test-your-speed-1153954>

Mobile-ready optimization and responsive design are an important function for most online activities as the rate of smartphone and tablet users grows. Mobile-ready optimization is a key selling feature of many Wordpress themes and plugins, including the Jetpack plugin and *Salt's* HermesThemes theme. This feature allowed *Salt* to seamlessly translate to a mobile-friendly interface when the publication is viewed on any small device, an essential for *Salt's* travel-focused audience.

Premium advertising services are plentiful for small businesses creating websites. Page One decided to apply their “in-house” strategy to save money and because it is so easy to do so. The majority of top 10 lists for the best advertising software point to the popular Wordpress plugin Ad Injection by user reviewmylife. This plugin requires basic knowledge of Wordpress file functions and widgets as described at the beginning of Chapter 2 in this report. Having this basic knowledge saved Page One from having to pay a third party for simple leaderboard and skyscraper ads. The creator has provided an excellent beginner’s tutorial³⁴ and help section³⁵ and the set-up is very straightforward though somewhat technical. Once installed, users can insert ads into their website by inserting code into template files and adjusting the style via the backend.

This plugin has over 40,000 installations and offers a ton of useful features at no cost.³⁶ The features include ad rotation, ad quantity, ad configuration filters, and flexible ad alignment. The robust plugin may look overwhelming to users unfamiliar with Wordpress PHP files but these features make it superior to many ad plugins. Page One required custom ad configuration, rotation, and CSS styling for their digital publication, which made the decision to use Ad Injection a simple one.

The Resource Centre proved challenging because of the quantity of information that needed to be presented. Resource centres or business centres are often laid out as lists of hyperlinked text. These are functional but they do not entice users to explore and can be ineffectual. Page One explored layouts that were engaging, picture-heavy, and

³⁴ “Ad Injection Installation,” Accessed January 14, 2015, <https://wordpress.org/plugins/ad-injection/installation/>

³⁵ “Ad Injection FAQ,” Accessed January 14, 2015, <https://wordpress.org/plugins/ad-injection/faq/>

³⁶ “Ad Injection,” Accessed January 14, 2015, <https://wordpress.org/plugins/ad-injection/>

matched their brand. Prospective companies were categorized into sectors the *Salt* audience is interested in. Various Wordpress plugins were tested. Some were specifically for business centres, sales, or listings; others were general tables, and information displays.

After testing many of these the web team found that most plugins were bulky, not appropriate in style, ineffectual, or out-dated. A simple display grid created with the Wordpress backend post editor was decided as the best option. By creating a structure based around images, the team was able to hyperlink information, and style the centre in the *Salt* digital publication style. This rudimentary way of creating the Resource centre allowed the team much more freedom to manage the center's content. The web team disabled and uninstalled all the unused plugins and moved on with the custom Resource centre. Disabling unused plugins and maintaining a digital publication's plugins are incredibly important to maintain a digital publication's speed when loading. Excessive and bulky plugins can significantly slow down a website.

As a final touch, a favicon was added to the digital publication. A favicon is a small, square icon representative of a website that is commonly located in the address bar in most browsers, browser tabs, and bookmarks. The favicon, usually a logo, is 16x16 pixels and can be constructed via free favicon builders available online.³⁷ The favicon can be imported into a website by putting the favicon.ico file directly into the website's directory. While favicons may not be incredibly important to the functionality of a website, they are a necessary "finishing touch" for establishing an online brand presence.

Testing and Revisions

A few key lessons continued to crop up throughout the development of the *Salt* digital publication. These required constant testing and revision during the development process in order not to be overlooked. Testing is an important aspect of the development process and needs to be a priority.

³⁷ "Favicon.cc Home Page," Accessed March 25, 2015, www.favicon.cc

The first of these lessons is to ensure the website has browser inclusive code. Firefox, Chrome, Safari, and Internet Explorer are all different browsers that sometimes require custom code for the respective website, especially with CSS code. These issues become clear when testing a website at every stage of development on multiple browsers. Browser-specific CSS is very specific to what a programmer is trying to do, but if a website works on one browser and not on another, this could be the reason.³⁸ Testing is the key to ensuring code works on multiple browsers and is very important for optimal functionality.

Two things that should never be overlooked in a professional website are consistent formatting and high quality photos. Sloppy formatting and low-resolution photos are an immediate sign that the creators are not educated and properly maintaining their website. When done right these two things should go unnoticed. Readers will be able to navigate the website in any way they choose because information will be categorized thoughtfully and efficiently (i.e. they can find posts, authors, tags, and dates because things are categorized). A professional website cannot have low quality photos; it shows lack of care for what viewers are seeing. These professional measures create an environment that does not ask anything of the reader except for them to read; it does not take away from the reading experience, on the contrary it enhances it.

Page One's theme requires a specific sized "feature photo" for their department pages, a feature of the HermesThemes theme. Posts were tagged with relevant keywords to optimize search capacities via the *Salt* search engine as well as external search engines. Featured photos and keyword tags were added to the list of requirements for every article (joining author, title, magazine issue, excerpt, photo credits, functional hyperlinks, and the date). Regardless of post length, style, or content, Page One ensures all articles look and function in the same way to ensure readers have access to any and all information.

Photos are not to be overlooked on a professional magazine website so it is important to obtain copyright permissions from the print magazine's photographers to use online. Low

³⁸ For an extensive list of browser specific CSS code visit Browser (<http://browserhacks.com/>).

resolution or poor quality photos are not enticing nor do they sell anything to the reader. This means ensuring digital images are converted to the proper file type for online viewing. In many cases this means JPEG (JPG) files, short for “Joint Photographic Experts Group”. These files are best for colour photographs because they retain colour while reducing the file size.


Delivery

The *Salt* digital publication was officially launched on the print publication date of the Fall/Winter 2014 issue of *Salt* magazine. *Salt* took three months to create at a beginner’s pace and involved the time of two staff members to build. This included the upload time of three past issues.

The digital publication’s initial reviews from *Salt*’s closest followers were extremely positive. Page One made sure to do a social media push as soon as the publication was launched. This included Facebook and Twitter posts across all of Page One’s magazine accounts. Page One also created a contest to give users a reason to visit the digital publication promptly. The prize was a trip to Vancouver Island with some exciting perks and had over 200 entries. The contest was promoted for a month in the print edition of *Salt*, online via the digital publication, and through all of *Salt*’s social media.


Page One’s hands-on strategy created a unique web experience with all of the customizations wanted. This strategy takes time and there are some difficult aspects of it, such as learning to code and to use Wordpress, which are two unavoidable aspects. But investing in these skills will help the organization in the production of future web projects. Page One invested their time to create *Salt* and saved money in the process by not having to hire a third-party developer. Page One maintained control and therefore the integrity of the digital publication was maintained. The resources available online to learn the skills needed to create a digital publication are abundant. If a small publisher has the time and energy required to invest in the creation of a digital publication, then they can create their desired publication with great success.

Figure 1. Saltmagazine.ca by Page One Publishing



salt
FINE LIVING & TRAVEL ON VANCOUVER ISLAND


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Artist profile on blacksmith Jake James and his Metchosin workshop.


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MOST ROMANTIC BEACH

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Top Vancouver Island craft beers and where to get them.


CONTINUE READING



A BEACHCOMBERS DREAM HOME

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CONTINUE READING



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Keep your game sharp all year round at these all-season Vancouver Island golf courses.

CONTINUE READING



RESOURCE CENTRE

Search for local events, products, and services on Vancouver Island.

CONTINUE READING

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B. *Curious Quarterly* Process

Planning and Design

In early 2013, Eric Espig together with the New Archives and Digital Preservation department staff began to develop a digital journal, *Curious Quarterly*, as a solution to one of the problems he saw at the museum in his position as Web Specialist. The problem was a good one to have as a publisher: too many experts at the museum were publishing their content online but with little visibility. Espig wanted to create a publication that solved this visibility problem, while also creating a modern digital platform.

Curious was influenced by distinguished websites known for their functionality and reading experiences. Websites like Medium.com and *The New York Times* interactive stories, provided insight for a media heavy reading experience free from distractions, with a minimalistic design. Medium is an online publishing platform developed by Twitter cofounders Evan Williams and Biz Stone in August 2012.³⁹ The core idea behind Medium's development was for the platform to be "simple, beautiful, and collaboration"⁴⁰.

"New upstarts like Medium and Upworthy are eschewing page views and clicks in favour of developing their own attention-focused metrics."⁴¹ The website is void of sidebar advertisements, excessive links or any documentation that is nonessential to the reading and writing that happens on the website. The writing on Medium is not overwhelmed with advertising, "link bait" (online advertisements meant to trick readers into clicking them) or excessive sidebar material much like the special, enhanced articles created by *The New York Times*.

The New York Times articles are created as special, one-off pieces of writing that focus on story, data, and the reading format. The stories are interjected with multimedia and

³⁹ "Medium (service)," *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopaedia*, Accessed April 8, 2015, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Medium_\(service\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Medium_(service))

⁴⁰ "About Medium," *A Medium Corporation*, Accessed April 8, 2015, <https://medium.com/about>

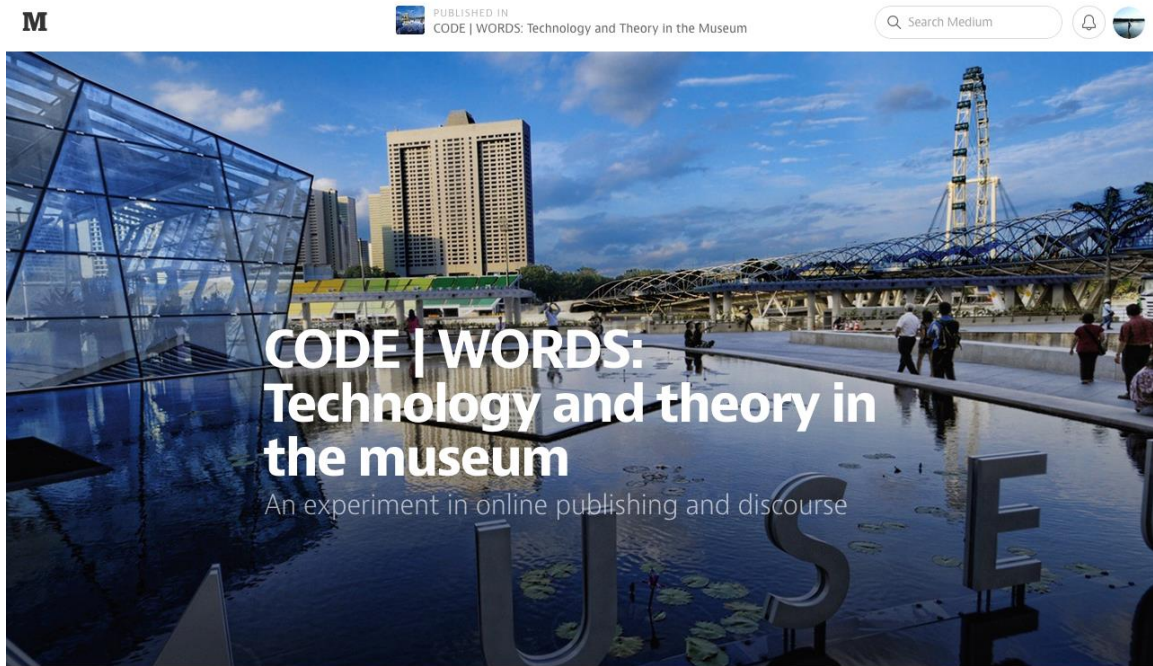
⁴¹ Haile, "What You Think You Know About the Web Is Wrong."

interactive elements that work to enhance but not distract from the story. Videos, image sliders, interactive maps, looped moving images, and other media are dispersed throughout these stories in a way that supports and furthers the story rather than distract or rehash information. These enhanced stories are an experience to read that is very different from reading a standard New York Times article. Espig wrote of these subversive reading experiences as follows: "If the publication's design is elegant enough, the measure of success may be how seamlessly the reader moves from reading to listening to viewing and back to reading without even noticing the transitions."⁴² With these experience-based websites⁴³ in mind, Espig and the museum began work on *Curious Quarterly*.

⁴² Eric Espig, "Synesthesia: Multisensory Publication in a Multisensory World," *Center for the Future of Museums*, June 3, 2014, Accessed July 5, 2015.
<http://futureofmuseums.blogspot.ca/2014/06/synesthesia-multisensory-publication-in.html>

⁴³ See, for example *The New York Times* by Dan Barry "The 'Boys' in the Bunkhouse"
(http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2014/03/09/us/the-boys-in-the-bunkhouse.html?_r=2).

Figure 2. "What is Project CODE | WORDS?" by rjstein. An article from Medium.com



What is Project CODE | WORDS?

Project **CODE | WORDS** is an experimental discursive publishing project that gathers a diverse group of leading thinkers and practitioners to explore emerging issues concerning the nature of museums in light of the dramatic and ongoing impact of digital technologies on society.

Project **CODE | WORDS** is an effort to gather and harness the discourse occurring among the museum technology community, the quantity and quality of which have grown and matured tremendously over the past

Figure 3. "The Boys in the Bunkhouse" by Dan Barry. A multimedia enhanced article from *The New York Times*



Kassie Bracken/The New York Times

The 'Boys' in the Bunkhouse

Toil, abuse and endurance in the heartland.

THIS LAND By DAN BARRY MARCH 9, 2014

WATERLOO, IOWA — A man stands at a bus stop. He wears bluejeans, cowboy boots, and a name tag pinned like a badge to his red shirt. It says: Clayton Berg, dishwasher, county sheriff's office.

He is 58, with a laborer's solid build, a preference to be called Gene and a whisper-white scar on his right wrist. His backpack contains a jelly sandwich, a Cherry Coke and a comforting pastry treat called a Duchess Honey Bun.

The Route 1 bus receives him, then resumes its herky-jerky journey through the

Development

To create *Curious Quarterly* the Royal BC Museum worked with thenumber⁴⁴, a creative agency based in Victoria that specializes in website and app development, thenumber was a sensible choice for RBCM because the agency values digital aesthetic and “strive[s] to create unique ways of interacting with technology.”⁴⁵ The agency created the custom *Curious* Wordpress theme and the *Curious* app based off the website for mobile devices. The agency also helped develop the journal’s identity.

Choosing a third-party to assist in the development of a website is a decision that should be made carefully. There are many creative firms and web developers to choose from and the decision should be based on experience, expertise, portfolio, and reputation.

Because Espig had such a clear view of what he wanted *Curious* to look like, it was simply a matter of connecting with the right developer for the Royal BC Museum. thenumber, fit the bill exactly: “With clear aesthetic references and fascinating content, [thenumber] collaborated with the RBCM team and arrived at a digital publication, inhabited by the look, feel, and convenience of a journal.”⁴⁶

The developers at thenumber were able to create a custom theme and backend specifically made for *Curious* to function as a journal. The backend allows information (such as articles, titles, and more) to be categorized in any order so as to allow a digital editor to curate each issue. thenumber’s theme allows for an entire issue to be drafted as a single unit and released to the public all at once, giving the digital journal a true publication date. The theme includes issue covers, end pages, author bios, a robust search engine, and responsive design for mobile devices. The agency also created specific mobile apps for iOS and Android.

Each issue of *Curious* is spearheaded by a guest editor and based around a theme. The theme could be based around museum events or exhibitions as well as ideas of

⁴⁴ “thenumber Home Page,” Accessed July 10, 2015, <http://thenumber.ca>

⁴⁵ “About Us,” Accessed July 10, 2015, <http://thenumber.ca/about/>

⁴⁶ “Royal BC Museum,” Accessed July 10, 2015, <http://thenumber.ca/work/royal-bc-museum>

exploration, imagination, and creativity within the sphere of the RBCM and the museum world. So far the *Curious* themes have been Collection, Noise, Time, and Pacific Worlds. The first issue, Collection, focused on the fact that only a small percentage of the museum's collections are actually on display. The rest are stored in the museum tower and archives so the Collections issue was a perfect platform to bring them to the public. Noise and Time pushed the contributors to challenge the way they think about their work at the museum with splendid results. Pacific Worlds highlighted the speciality of the museum, the history of BC, with a focus on the Pacific Ocean.

Once a theme is chosen, the guest editor sends out a call for submissions to the museum's staff and volunteers. Curators, archivists, professors, students, security guards, tour guides, and historical actors have all had the opportunity to contribute to *Curious*. Submissions included field reports, statistics, video clips, interactive images, and sound bites. By the fourth issue, *Curious* was accepting external contributions from other museums, museum experts, artists, and other authors connected to the RBCM. Pacific Worlds was proud to feature work from the Hong Kong Maritime Museum by Robert Trio, art by notable artist Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas, and the photographs of Iris Parr from her 1930s voyage across the Pacific Ocean on the Empress of Canada.

Each issue of *Curious* ranges between twelve to twenty-four articles. Articles are interspersed with images tying the theme together. Issues have a front cover and a back cover, called "The Curiosity". The front cover follows *Curious'* minimalist design by depicting a solitary object chosen by the guest editor to represent the issue's theme.

Issues are created on the backend of Wordpress through a unique categorization field created for *Curious'* custom theme by the agency. The *Curious* theme allows an entire issue to be created and edited before publicly publishing the content. The theme also features custom post types for articles and the interspersed images. Once content is uploaded to Wordpress, the guest editor ensures links, multimedia, cover photos, authors, and tags are in place before proceeding. The number created a straightforward interface to reorder issues with little trouble; this allows the guest editor to curate the issue and arrange the articles in any particular way.

Testing and Revisions

After the first issue of *Curious* was released, the creators began to understand what the readers wanted from this exclusive museum publication. The team continued to push topics and articles that could showcase *Curious'* multimedia capabilities. The social media response to *Curious* was extremely positive. Page views grew with the publication of each issue and the publication found a clear voice within the RBCM's publication sphere.

Curious went through a period of revision and close inspection after its first year. These will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

Delivery

"Today, at the Museums and the Web Conference in Hong Kong, the Royal BC Museum launched its latest museum-world innovation – *Curious Quarterly*, the journal app."⁴⁷ *Curious* was delivered at the Museums and the Web Conference in Hong Kong by its creator Eric Espig. The outcome of *Curious'* launch was very positive and the sleek, modern approach to the digital journal resonated with the conference attendees. The attention to the look and functionality of the digital publication were a huge part in its success. *Curious* began as an idea in the summer of 2013 and the digital publication was completed in December 2013. *Curious* involved the time of one RBCM staff member and one staff member from thenumber.

To maintain the minimalistic look of the publication the design had to create an innovative digital RBCM experience. Just as RBCM redefines the museum space with every new exhibit, *Curious* redefined the museum's digital space with *Curious*. The digital publication had to retain the brand standards of all RBCM ventures but do so while maintaining *Curious* style. This was accomplished by creating a responsive logo and straightforward outgoing links.

⁴⁷ "Royal BC Museum Launches *Curious Quarterly*," Accessed January 20, 2015, <http://www.goodrelations.ca/news/royal-bc-museum-launches-curious-quarterly>

While the idea that contributors could upload to *Curious* at any time was a thought-provoking one, it inevitably became a secondary method of uploading. The development of an issue as a cohesive unit became an important part of the *Curious* identity, with each issue revolving around a unique theme. To maintain consistency as well as allow for the issue's digital editor to proof articles, the twitter login contributions fell to the wayside. This demanded a longer upload time and more work for the digital editor but ultimately created more well rounded issues and resulted in a regular publication schedule.

The attendees at the Museums and the Web Conference in Hong Kong were very responsive to the idea as were those subscribers who read the first issue via the museum's social media. The museum succeeded in creating something unique by focusing on creating a digital journal that delivers a very positive reading experience.

In this case, hiring the number creative agency was exactly the right choice because it allowed the RBCM to focus their energy on developing a project rather than learning code. The agency worked seamlessly with the RBCM staff and their technical support was invaluable following *Curious* launch. In *Curious'* first year, the digital journal saw a steady increase in readership per issue. With every issue articles were being sent and shared more frequently. By the fourth issue, the museum saw that *Curious* had the foundation as a respected, impressive digital publication that could be grown into something much bigger. From this realization the RBCM decided to undertake a review of the journal to see exactly what readers thought of the issue.

Figure 4. The cover of the Royal BC Museum's first issue of *Curious Quarterly*



Image courtesy of the Royal BC Museum and Archives.

Chapter 3. Assessment and Recommendations

As *Salt* and *Curious Quarterly* neared the end of their first year it became apparent that it would be needed to evaluate the performance of the projects. Inevitably, the ideas and themes of what the organizations wanted from their digital publications evolved over the first year. Each organization took time to analyze the publications with a critical eye in order to determine if they were successful in their first year, if the publications had a future, and what changes might be necessary.

For Page One, *Salt* needed to act as an extension of the print publication, strengthen and enhance their brand, reach a broader audience, and interact with their audience by creating quality digital content out of their print content. The web team designed the digital publication matching the quality design and niche material published in the print publication. The web team also added a resource centre section for readers to utilize when looking into Vancouver Island businesses. Finally *Salt* was intended to be a source of revenue in order to cover the running costs of the digital magazine.

For the Royal BC Museum, *Curious* needed to highlight the museum and its collections by presenting a unique, insider view of the museum. It was required to fulfill the requirements set out in RBCM's digital plan for the future as articulated in the Vision 2017 plan. The digital publication needed to have an interested and growing audience and thus prove to be an asset to the Museum. This was determined by an in-depth review of the *Curious'* strengths and weaknesses after its first year of publication. The review came at the right time as *Curious* was in need of new management after the previous digital editor, Eric Espig, moved on to a new digital department at the Canadian Museum of History.

Salt and *Curious* gained reader loyalty by providing readers with the best possible publication components in their first year. Both digital publications offered quick load

times, minimal website lag times, link and search engine optimization, and unique content. As the publication move into their second year, the publishers need to analyze their publication statistics and try to determine new goals for monthly views and growth percentages. While these figures are important checkpoints and yearly goals, what is most significant to a digital publication's success is the continual growth and engagement of the publication regardless of speed. Innovating and improving their digital marketing strategy for the future is the best way to increase a publication's daily and monthly activity. Evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of the digital publications is the key to understanding how and where to improve that strategy.

A. *Salt* Assessment

Evaluation

Salt's first year can certainly be deemed a success. The first year included popular contests, positive reader feedback, website upgrades, and multiple back issues uploaded to the digital publication. Page One focused on *Salt* as a template for more Page One Publishing digital publications. The publication provided excellent training ground for Wordpress development and functionality. And various metrics were put in place to monitor the publication's success based on Page One's aims and functions. With these metrics Page One has been able to identify *Salt's* successes as well as areas that could benefit from some development. *Salt* continues to grow its daily view count and Page One is happy with its progress throughout the first year. The digital publication is vital to *Salt's* 2015 digital presence and has successfully acted as a testing ground for Page One as they begin to plan their next digital magazines.

To evaluate *Salt's* digital performance, Page One based the evaluation on metrics that represented the goals set for the publication, including revenue, increased user interaction, and increased readers. Some metrics include comparing numbers from before and after the publication launch. These include magazine sales, subscriptions, and social media activity. Others were based on how many advertisers signed-up to advertise digitally on the *Salt* digital publication.

The publication itself provides basic metrics that can be enhanced with the Jetpack plugin. These stats appear on the backend homepage and are very helpful as a weekly, monthly, or yearly look at the publication's progress. These analytics include page views per day, a detailed look at the publication's record-breaking days, total views, and more. It also details what users search in search engines to find *Salt* Magazine and what type of device is being used to read *Salt*. Page One found that many users are looking for specific Vancouver Island business and are then forwarded to *Salt*'s profiles of these companies. Other users find the publication when they are trying to understand a certain aspect of the Island, such as 'craft beer vancouver island,' or 'coastal construction'. The Wordpress stats also show where users are coming from, which can be especially helpful in analyzing social media strategies by comparing Facebook to Twitter. Facebook and Twitter both played important roles in *Curious*' page views but Facebook had the most direct effect of bringing readers to the digital publication.

The most analog way of determining *Salt*'s success is also one of the most important. Personal reviews from readers and subscribers to Page One or comments on the *Salt* digital publication allowed the Page One staff to hear what readers had to say of the publication. Some of these include the popularity of business profiles, the enthusiasm for high-quality photos especially regarding the coastline, and the value readers place on the more personal interactions available on Facebook.

In their first year, *Salt*'s average views per day increased 18% from an average of 22 views per day in December 2014 to 26 in July 2015. In such a short lifespan this could point to a steady incline that could prosper over a few years. For a niche publication like *Salt*, a few number of views can be hugely effective since readers are searching for specific information (such as tips on buying a boat, or the best Vancouver Island spas). *Salt*'s total view count neared 5,600 hits at the end of their first year. This humble number is a success for *Salt*'s first year as it proved that *Salt*'s previous Facebook-only readers were excited for a more in-depth digital *Salt* environment. Growing this niche audience into a responsive, devoted community will benefit *Salt*'s daily views.

Recommendations

A realistic goal for the *Salt* digital publication over the next two to three years is a monthly average of 80 to 100 views per day. This goal describes a digital environment that hosts return readers and return Facebook readers who share and engage with the new and timely content available. If *Salt* continues with its increased readership at the rate it has been growing since its launch day, the digital publication's readership will grow slowly. But if Page One is able to attract more readers through a more intense Facebook marketing strategy they could speed up the average monthly view count and work to double their current views from 26 to 52 in *Salt's* second year.

Salt's Facebook page generates 21% of traffic through the publication. *Salt's* Facebook-heavy interactions with readers are based on their readers' needs; most of its readers are interested in updates on Vancouver Island properties and vacation opportunities (especially in the peak travelling seasons). To continue to engage these readers to move from Facebook to the *Salt* digital publication, Page One will need to focus their energy on creating Facebook content with strong leads to the digital publication. Cross-site promotional content with the *Douglas* digital publication or via *Salt's* Twitter should become a secondary strategy, as these have not proved to be as effective as *Salt's* Facebook account. In the future, Page One should nurture and diversify *Salt's* Facebook community in order to increase traffic and grow *Salt's* audience.

Part of *Salt's* year two digital strategy should also include an expansion of their contest series. With each contest *Salt* was able to attract the attention of a large percentage of their traffic (anywhere from 300-600 views per contest). If Page One continues with its plan of creating a new contest for every season, this would represent an opportunity to grow *Salt's* return readership.

After the first year, Page One was able to deem *Salt's* digital publication a success based on these metrics and their initial goals. These initial goals included monetization, increased business, increased subscriptions, and the plan to create more magazine digital publications in-house with limited resources.

The digital publication generates steady revenue through the nonintrusive methods of advertising. This monetization of the publication covers the resources used to get the digital up and running. It also covers the maintenance and upkeep by in-house staff. Businesses utilizing the resource centre have noticed an increase in traffic coming from the business profiles on the resource centre. As the *Salt* print publication is aimed at readers interested in Vancouver Island, *Salt's* digital publication acts as a second step for those readers ready to act on that interest.

One of the most important goals of the digital publication was to increase user engagement with *Salt's* content and social media accounts. The digital publication proved to be an incredible resource for the Page One social media coordinators who manage the accounts: these accounts now link to articles, contests, photo galleries, and more high quality content created by Page One.

The digital publication has created an impressive digital space for *Salt* readers that equals the coffee-table quality print publication. By connecting more possible readers with *Salt* and its high-quality material the magazine has increased its subscription's rates.

The success of the *Salt* digital publication development has provided extra incentive to expand all of Page One's digital realms. Using the knowledge gained from creating *Salt* online, Page One created a digital publication for their popular magazine *YAM*. The *Salt* digital publication was used as a template for the other magazines in two ways: as a literal Wordpress theme template and as a template for success in developing a digital publication. The Page One suite of digital publications will have the opportunity to be created on one Wordpress installation, saving time and energy, with Wordpress' feature Multisite. A multisite is a "feature of WordPress 3.0 and later versions that allows multiple virtual sites to share a single WordPress installation."⁴⁸ The *YAM* digital publication is receiving a steady increase in visitors and is proving to be a popular resource for readers. The *Douglas* digital publication has also been improved to match the publisher's new digital standards.

⁴⁸ Rachel McCollin, "The Ultimate Guide to WordPress Multisite," *WPMU DEV by Incsub.*, Accessed January 20, 2015, <http://premium.wpmudev.org/blog/ultimate-guide-multisite/>

The process of creating *Salt* provided the learning opportunity needed to create a united digital presence for Page One magazines. To take advantage of this experience, Page One is planning to develop similar digital versions of their other titles, as well as looking into opportunities for cross content between publications.

B. *Curious* Quarterly Assessment

Evaluation

After *Curious*' first year, the Royal BC Museum took some time to reassess its place at the museum. The resounding conclusion was that *Curious* had successfully achieved the aims set out in early 2014. This assessment also brought up areas that *Curious* could improve upon as well as a better understanding of the readership. Evaluating *Curious* allowed the team to see how the journal could grow and expand in the future to best aid the museum.

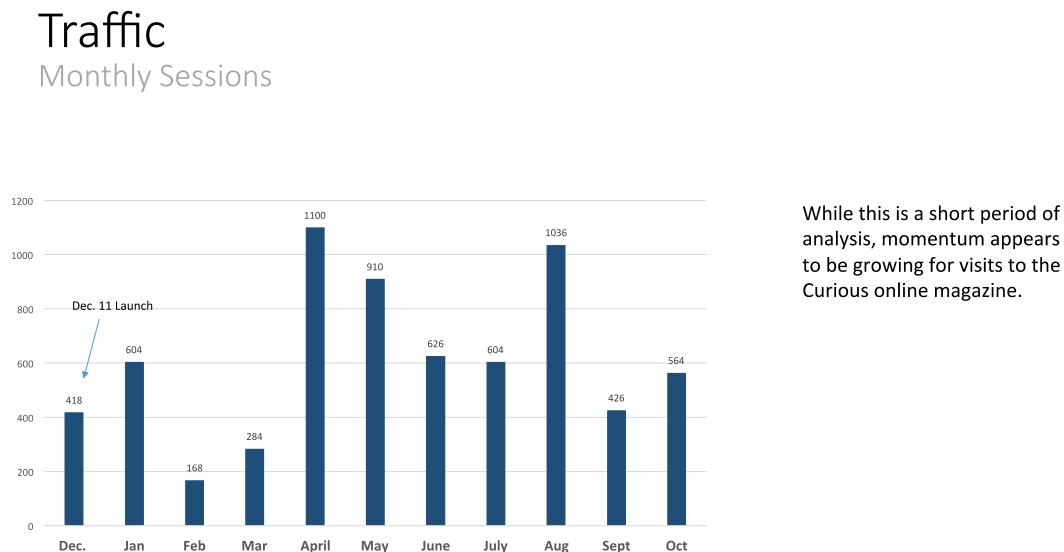
The evaluation had three-steps: a web traffic analysis by a third-party company; a survey of *Curious*' readers; and an internal review of *Curious* via the RBCM staff. A data analysis company evaluated *Curious*' audience and web traffic to provide an encompassing picture of the journal's reach. Current *Curious* readers were presented with a survey delivered concurrently with the release of the fourth issue. The internal review was an assessment of the process of creating an issue and how that process changed over the first year of publication. It was also an opportunity for RBCM staff from all departments to offer their feedback about the journal.

Web Traffic Analysis

The data company's third-party web traffic analysis offered invaluable insights about *Curious* and its readership. This premium service presented the data collected in an all-encompassing way so it is easy to understand and includes information from all browser and device types. The review of *Curious* showed that the digital publication was growing in slow, but exciting ways. Visitors were coming from over 85 countries with 91% of these identifying as English-speakers. As expected repeat visitors had a lower bounce rate than new visitors, with new visitors making up 68% of all visitors. Facebook referred

the most visitors to *Curious* at 62%, this is from the RBCM Facebook posts on *Curious* issues or articles as well as posts from readers sharing the journal's content with their friends. Months when new issues were published were the most popular, the second issue, *Noise*, gained the most with over 1,100 views in a month. There was also evidence indicating that more readers were accessing the journal every month. In its first year the publication *Curious* averaged 687 monthly visits.⁴⁹

Figure 5. *Curious* Quarterly Web Traffic Analysis



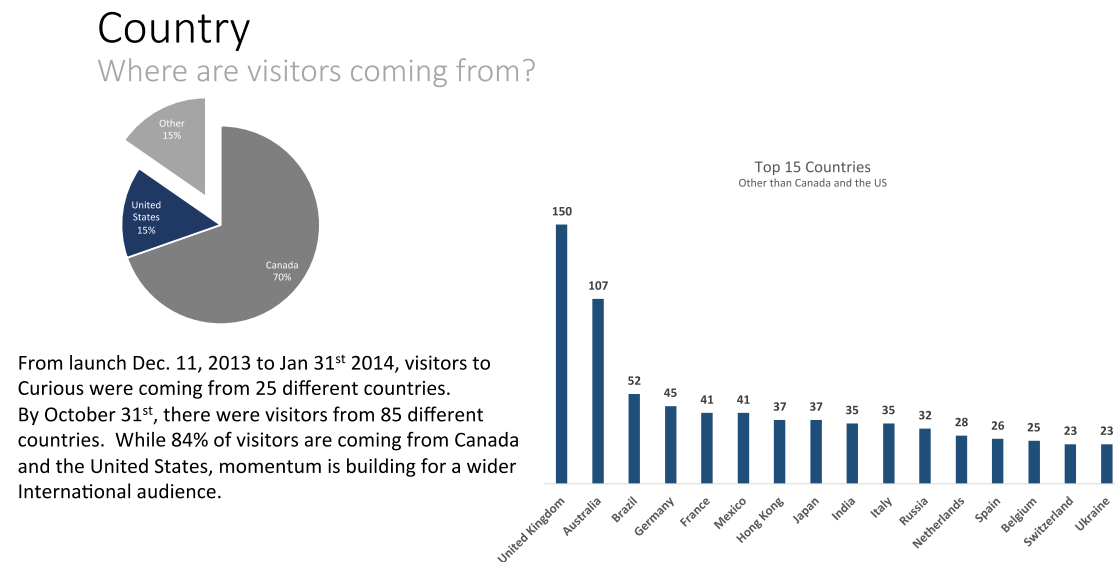
Survey

An online survey software called Fluid Surveys facilitated the external audience review. The software is highly customizable and the data collected can be formatted into graphic results. A concise, pop-up, optional survey was presented for readers upon visiting the *Curious* homepage. The seven questions ranged from “How did you find out about *Curious*?” to “Do you share *Curious* with your network?” The data from this survey showed an overwhelmingly positive response: readers offered insight on the past topics

⁴⁹ “*Curious*: Web Traffic Analysis, December 11, 2013 (launch) to October 31, 2014,” *The Royal BC Museum*, October 31, 2014.

they enjoyed and topics they wanted to see in the future. Many readers wrote about the high-quality reading experience that *Curious* provides. But most importantly the survey showed that there is a significant amount of readers who were adamant that *Curious* stick around because they were excited about its future. The survey allowed the Museum to prepare for *Curious'* second year of publication; this is discussed in greater detail in the Recommendations section below.

Figure 6. *Curious* Quarterly Visitors by Country



Internal Review

A committee of interdepartmental Museum staff reviewed *Curious* with a focus on issue development, content, and audience as the internal review. The executive committee asked the hard questions that can easily be forgotten with digital development and looked at the time frame and resources needed to create one issue. Recent changes in departments meant that the fourth issue of *Curious* was created in a very different manner than the first issue of *Curious*. The committee also looked at the response each issue received on social media.

The second aspect of the internal review related to a more personal response from the museum staff. Staff were asked to provide their review of *Curious* from a personal standpoint and in relation to their position at the museum. The museum staff review, though informal, brought up some of the concerns and questions from other departments (along with positive reviews). Many aspects of *Curious* caused both positive and negative reactions; for instance, some staff felt *Curious* as digital-only limited its audience and the journal could have a place in print as well. A common remark was how excellent the multi-media articles are for creating interactive experiences. One issue that was brought up was how to bring readers back to an issue after it is first published. This brought up the idea that *Curious* is a long-read and perhaps a segmented release schedule (releasing articles in groups to form a whole issue) might bring in more readers. Staff also had issue theme ideas and remarked that although they work at the museum everyday, they too love a “behind-the-scenes” look at the cultural institution. Staff also mentioned the visibility of *Curious* on the museum website, something that had previously been overlooked. Staff were excited for the opportunity to read articles not only by their colleagues but also by other museum’s staff and educators. This proved important to the executive committee as they determined to focus on community involvement as they moved forward with *Curious*.

Overall the staff review revealed some ideas for streamlining the process of development and encouraging the journal to grow into a publication the whole museum can truly boast about. The review provided some concrete suggestions for doing this and showed the *Curious* review team that the staff has a vested interest in the publication.

The value of *Curious* resides unquestionably in the readers’ relationship with the museum. If *Curious* consistently promotes the work done at the RBCM and all its activities then it will prove to be of value as a long-term museum program that strengthens the RBCM’s identity and position *Curious* was evaluated on whether it promoted visits to the museum and if it encouraged engagement with visitors and potential visitors. It was also important to look at whether or not *Curious* and the RBCM could contribute to the growing digital landscape of museums and learning institutes.

During this evaluation time however it was important to distinguish if the journal should act more from a marketing standpoint or if it had intrinsic value on its own. The museum though a world-renowned cultural institution is also a business, and that business needs visitors to the museum to continue operating. *Curious* was evaluated with the idea that perhaps it could facilitate sales (of tickets, memberships, merchandise, etcetera) alongside its reading material. This could then rightly determine *Curious'* marketing value and its influence in bringing visitors into the physical museum.

The executive committee one-year review of *Curious* took a detailed look at all aspects of *Curious* in order to determine what its future would and could be. Every aspect from development to marketability was assessed by a variety of museum staff to analyze year one and plan for year two. It occurred as *Curious* began to gain more traction in readership, around the time of the release of the fourth issue of *Curious*, titled Pacific Worlds.

The review occurred for two reasons: the creator of *Curious*, Eric Espig was no longer present to run and operate the digital journal. This created a void that had to be filled or *Curious* would suffer. Second, the museum's Vision 2017 document was a force created by the CEO Jack Lohman in order to reinvigorate the museum as it moves into bigger and more exciting projects. The motto of Lohman's vision for the museum's future was: "Bigger thinking, better design, bolder ambitions"⁵⁰. *Curious*, with its bold design and multimedia focus, could act as a standard for any new museum digital creations, so long as it had the audience and readership to define its worth.

The idea of reassessing and revamping content is fundamental for the long-term success of digital publications. Digital publishing provides an exciting space for change and growth, something the museum takes seriously. The RBCM have a much better understanding of *Curious* and its audience after reviewing the digital publication from all sides. This will probably not require a complete overhaul of the digital publication, but it will mean that the museum can work to grow the areas of the journal that demand attention. Bringing in new readers and growing their audience are essential aspects of

⁵⁰ "Vision 2017," *Royal BC Museum Corporation*, Accessed January 20, 2015, <http://royalbcmuseum.bc.ca/about/vision-2017/>

their plan. The RBCM has plans to review *Curious'* growth frequently at specific stages of its life as they have seen the positive affect these evaluations can have on providing a platform for carefully curated long-term plans.

Recommendations

From the data, the museum understood the extent to which *Curious* and its content were spreading around the web. During the first five years *Curious'* average visit per day goal should be expanded to 500 views per day as a monthly average in launch months. As the digital publication's content caters to a larger audience launch months should show a large influx of visitors reading and sharing the newest issue.

Curious is formatted in a way that makes its content easy to share and discuss. This quality must be at the focus of *Curious'* post-launch marketing strategy. *Curious'* web traffic will likely fall into a pattern of spikes and valleys as the month following an issue launch garners more attention than others. What is important for *Curious'* success is to not drop down too low in readership numbers in the months following a launch. This ambitious goal will take a loyal readership and many years to achieve. If *Curious* can aim for 500 views per day for the launch month in the next five years then the RBCM will have achieved something unique in the museum world with its digital journal.

Curious' highest monthly session in its first year reached 1100 views. This coincided with the release of a niche and engaging issue that was promoted through the RBCM's social media before and after the launch. The digital strategy for launch months will have to make full use of the museum's marketing channels and social media communities. As *Curious* grows and includes a wider variety of authors from other institutions, the museum will be able to utilize these external communities to grow *Curious'* readership. Reposting and creating new connections over the non-launch months will also be an important aspect to increase *Curious'* monthly session rate. New information on past *Curious* topics can allow for opportunities to share older articles and issues for those readers who may interested in an article's development.

Five hundred views per day is a large goal for a compact digital publication like *Curious* but with the connection to the RBCM and the applicable content to museums, schools,

researchers, and museum-lovers building a larger *Curious* audience should be attainable in just a few years. In the least, it is something to work towards as *Curious* continues to reach out and connect with local, national, and international museums, and notable figures in the field.

The information from the web traffic data provided a platform on which to continue building *Curious* in its second year of publication. Increasing monthly views through increased social media action, reader interaction, and enticing content are a crucial part of the digital strategy for year two.

Conclusion

The focus of this paper was to examine the challenges faced when developing a digital magazine. There is a demand from users for high quality online publications that provide a host of functions; small publishers must live up to this demand to earn the attention of these users and develop audiences. The paper highlights a variety of ways in which publishers can achieve this with a focus on the early stages of development, software choices and other digital resources, and the process of evaluation. By exploring two digital publications during their development, creation, and first year of operation, the paper covered just a few of the different strategies available to publishers.

As is expected in web development the process to create and produce these two digital publications was unique to each of them. Staff investment differed between the two projects based on the method of creation each organization chose. Two staff members built *Salt* over an intensive three-month period while learning the basics of web development and Wordpress. While a staff member of RBCM hired an experienced web developer from an external agency to build *Curious* over a four-month period.

A major difference between *Salt* and *Curious* was that *Salt* was created based on the print edition of the magazine, repurposing content from past issues, where *Curious* was completely original and conceived solely as a digital publication. Page One's choice dictated how the new digital edition of *Salt* would be created because it had to be recognized by the magazine's print edition readers. Page One knew they wanted traditional magazine departments and for *Salt* to act like other digital magazines. Working from print content and transferring it online allowed Page One the opportunity to expand on their magazine's theme with high-quality images and even more content thus proving more value for *Salt's* audience. With videos, image sliders, information about Vancouver Island, and especially the resource centre, the new digital edition of *Salt*

became a strengthened version of what the print edition stands for. Alternatively, the museum created *Curious*' design from almost nothing.

For example, *Curious*' staff profiles had never been grouped together in any medium. At the same time, the amount of content generated by RBCM curators was continually increasing. This meant *Curious* could be created from a blank slate allowing the museum's web specialists the freedom to push the platform conceptually and technically. The challenge was how to link all the content together in an interesting way making the reader want more and possibly visit the museum. Eric Espig, the journal creator, had a clear vision of what he hoped to achieve. Espig sought to create a digital-only publication unlike any museum publication available, implementing a practical Wordpress theme, a focus on the reading experience, and a minimalist design aesthetic.

Where Page One had to choose how to present their content pulled from their print publication, the museum had to choose how to present the content generated by the museum staff as well as choosing the right platform to present it. Page One, notably a smaller publisher than the museum, chose to focus on presenting a digital interactive edition of a print magazine targeting their existing audience. This choice was made assuming that readers would instinctively know how to navigate *Salt*'s digital magazine and find information with little trouble. *Curious* pushes the digital magazine envelope, which is part of its success, however its minimalist design can be challenging for some users, as minimalist design solutions while creating a calm and inviting reading environment can also turn off readers searching for an intensive online experience.

By choosing to create their digital publication without the help of a hired developer, Page One staff had to learn to code, understand the basics of Wordpress and more. This takes time and energy to achieve but proved invaluable to the company as they now have those skills in house to use for future projects. In this method of creation, the Page One team had the ability to reassess and change aspects of the digital magazine throughout the process. The team also had to deal with glitches as they came up during development, without the help of a technical support person (a daunting task). The team's hard work paid off and *Salt* turned out incredibly polished and looking like a mature publication. The RBCM on the other hand had the benefits of a support person

(for a fee) by making the tough choice of handpicking a developer, however in making this choice they had to trust the developers to design the publication. This meant the museum had to convey clearly what they wanted. It worked well and the museum was able to produce a highly polished digital journal.

Another difference between the development processes lie in the Wordpress themes. Page One chose to purchase a theme and customize it to their specifications. They had the task of searching through themes in order to find one that fit their needs. They then had to customize and sometimes work against the theme in order to make it work. Page One succeeded in that task and the customized theme is completely unique to *Salt*. The final solution successfully presents *Salt* using photos, simple colours, and simple design. The RBCM had the ability to convey everything and anything they wanted to a developer who would do his best to create that theme. *Curious* is a completely custom, one of a kind theme, which is something that can be boasted about by the museum. Using resources to work with a developer worked especially well in RCBM's case because *Curious* is such a specific, reading-based platform. With this focus the museum was able to present not only their content but also their platform. Something viewers can be excited about.

This report analyzed two Wordpress based digital magazines with a focus on their development and first year of publication. The report examined the unique successes and struggles of each publisher's development. Both publications were able to achieve the publisher's objectives and now after one year of operation they have the opportunity to grow and expand their audiences. With a focus on Wordpress the ideas presented worked to dispel any myths that small publishers cannot achieve a substantial digital presence with limited resources.

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