BUILDING AN ONLINE MAGAZINE:
A PROPOSAL FOR REDESIGNING
WESTERN LIVING'S ONLINE EDITION

by
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Project submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

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In the Faculty of Communication, Art and Technology

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This report examines the trends in online publishing and online advertising, and how they impact the consumer magazine industry. It analyzes the web model of Vancouver magazine and the successful revamp of its online edition, and proposes changes that its sister magazine, Western Living, could make to respond to the changing environment and integrate the online and print editions. The paper also discusses how a magazine can optimize its online edition to make it successful and financially viable.

Keywords: online magazine; website optimization; Web design; online advertising; magazine publishing; branding
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INTRODUCTION

Since the recession of 2008, the magazine industry has suffered tremendously. Many consumer magazines have had to shut down or change their publishing models. According to Foliomag.com, 525 North American magazines folded in 2008 while only 335 new titles launched in the same period of time. This equates to about three closures for every two launches. The trend continued in 2009, 428 magazines folded while only 275 started up. Of those that are still in business, many had to reevaluate circulation and distribution, or scaling back the publishing schedules. For example, Life & Style magazine reduced its circulation from 550,000 to 400,000 due to a dramatic loss in advertising sales in 2007. Men’s Vogue shrank from a ten-times-a-year title to a biannual special. A decline in advertising revenue was the major cause for the downturn, since most advertisers cut back their budgets during the recession.

According to data published by Magazines Canada, there was a 9.2% decrease in ad pages in Canadian magazines in 2008 compared to 2007. The situation in the United States has been even more dramatic: the number of ad pages dropped 11.7% in 2008 compared to 2007, and fell 26.6% in the third quarter of 2009 compared to the same period of time in 2008. And since advertising drives the magazine business model, when ad sales drop, revenue drops, and page count drops accordingly. As a result, magazines are compromising quality because editors and designers must cut down editorial content. Most readers are sensitive and feel negative about sudden cuts in content. This potentially endangers the publications as unhappy readers may give up on thinner and thinner magazines.

As a result, online publishing seems to be the only way for the magazine industry to regain life. A significant number of publications such as the Seattle Post-Intelligencer and PC Magazine have shut down their print editions to focus on just their online editions, in the hope of recovering their ad revenue and build online readership. Many other publications have also turned their focus to the online publishing platform to supplement the loss in ad revenue from their print operations. For example, Business Week’s online edition, BusinessWeek.com, generates 20% of all their revenues and has gained a ten times larger online audience than print. The

1 Anderson, “Is Print Dead.”
2 Voltolina, “Dead Print Magazine.”
3 Smith, “What Next?”
4 Ibid.
5 Magazines Canada, “Canadian Consumer Magazine Trends.”
6 Stableford, “Consumer Mags.”
7 Fell, “Consumer Advertising Pages.”
8 Anderson, “Is Print Dead.”
9 Galarneau, “Digital Continues Upward.”
global edition of Business Week magazine has a circulation of 900,000, while BusinessWeek.com has an average of 10.3 million unique monthly visitors.

The biggest factor driving the transition from print to online publishing is the production and distribution costs of a print magazine; as the cost of paper, printing, and shipping are eliminated online. In addition, a change in people’s media consumption pattern since the invention of the Internet is another factor contributing to the online trend. A study by the USC Annenberg School Center for the Digital Future shows that, in general, Internet users read publications including newspapers and magazines online more often than offline. The study also shows that Internet users frequently seek online versions of the same sources. This migration from the print to the Web is even more commonplace in younger generations of readers. All these findings combined with a continued decline in advertising revenue, strongly suggest that print publications should expand their territory to the Web.

The digital trend did not just start during the recession. It has been driven by the growth of the Internet worldwide for the past several years. Statistics show that the number of Internet users has grown worldwide from 16 million in 1995 to 1,734 million in 2009, and the number is still increasing quickly. The impact of the Internet is more evident in North America where 74.2% of the population are now Internet users. Therefore, with or without the recession, more and more readers consume online content and expect an online version of most publications. A magazine without an online edition is unlikely to survive as the print only model may not be sustainable in the long run.

Concurrent with the Internet trend, advertising is also moving online. Internet advertising has been growing quickly since 2002. However, the continued growth rate slowed down to 10.6% in the US in 2008 when the recession hit, compared to 26% in 2007. In Canada, the growth rate was 29% in 2008 compared to 38% in 2007. Nonetheless, the growth rate of Internet advertising still outpaced that of TV advertising. In 2008, Internet advertising revenues in the US were the third largest of all ad media at $23.4 billion, behind TV ads ($29.8 billion) and

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10 BusinessWeek, “2010 Multi-Platform Media Kit.”
12 eMarketer, “Reading Less Print.”
13 Perez, “People Do Read.”
16 Morphy, “Online Advertising.”
newspaper ads ($3.4 billion). On the other hand, advertising revenues in the US from consumer magazines accounted for $12.7 billion. There are three possible explanations for this trend. The first one is that online advertising can reach more users because the online community is growing quickly, causing advertising spending to gradually shift from offline to online. Secondly, online advertising is measurable. Advertisers are able to calculate conversion rates and measure the effectiveness of their ads with tracking systems. They can collect valuable data on Internet users’ online behaviour, which is more difficult to measure with the print counterpart. Lastly, the cost incurred in online advertising is lower. Online ad space is much cheaper than space in traditional media, such as magazines, newspapers or TV. These advantages can make online advertising more cost-effective than traditional advertising. The fast growth of online advertising suggests that magazine publishers should not have the print magazine as their only revenue stream. Instead, they need to offer advertisers the option to promote online.

The growth of online advertising does not mean that magazines should give up their print editions completely. To most people in the publishing industry, print advertising is far from dead. The truth is, advertisers still value print ads and are unlikely to abandon print as their advertising media. In terms of advertising, magazines are considered a more credible medium than the Internet because magazine context provides relevant ads and serves as a buying guide. This increases readers’ purchase intent as a result. Research shows that 47.2% of shoppers are likely to initiate an online search after they see a magazine ad. The MRI Survey of the American Consumer shows that 61% of trendsetters are influenced by magazines, followed by other media: TV (55%), newspapers (53%), and email (26%). Therefore, print is still highly valued by advertisers. They rely on print in the hope that publishers can respond to the fast-changing environment by spending print dollars in a more creative way. In other words, publishers should integrate the print and online editions to offer advertisers packages that can reach target audiences in the most effective way.

Print is not dead, and it probably never will be. However, magazine publishers need to recognize that online readers and online advertising are both expanding. Magazines such as Western Living, whose print edition is the centre of the brand, must accept that the role of print is changing. Print alone can no longer be the only focus for a mass circulation publication. It is crucial for all magazines to devote time, energy, and money to build an online edition of the publication in order to survive in a very competitive industry.

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18 Schonfeld, “IAB Reports.”
19 Arvind, “New Media Interactive Advertising.”
21 Ibid.
About this Report

In the summer of 2009, I worked as an art intern for Western Living magazine of Transcontinental Western Media Group Inc. My main responsibilities included researching and collecting images for the magazine, assisting the art director and assistant art director, and designing page layouts. During my three months of internship, I also had the opportunity to work with the editorial staff of Vancouver magazine, taking on art-related tasks. At times I was asked to find specific images appeared in past issues. I discovered that doing a search on Vanmag.com could help me quickly determine when an article was published and where it is in the print archives.

I started to notice the difference between Vanmag.com and Westernlivingmagazine.com when I was trying to perform the same task for Western Living. There was no search function on Westernlivingmagazine.com and it was difficult to locate the contents I was looking for. After talking to the staff in Vancouver and Western Living, I learned about the redesign of Vanmag.com in the end of 2008, the improvement in the magazine’s online ad sales, and the impact on the magazine in general. This was a great opportunity for me to study and compare two different online magazines owned by the same company, and analyze the implications the online trend brought upon to print magazines.
As more advertising dollars shift to the Internet, magazines need to look beyond their paper products and sell their online properties more effectively. This chapter will introduce Western Living magazine and its current online edition, and discuss why the online edition needs improvement. It will also cover the importance of an online presence to a magazine and the growing trend of online advertising.

2.1 THE MAGAZINE

Western Living is a shelter/lifestyle magazine distributed in British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba to 585,000 urban adults aged 25-54, with high disposable income. It is published ten times a year with a print run of 165,000. There used to be six editions dedicated to specific cities, but the number has been cut down to three editions starting in May 2009. The three editions are the British Columbia edition, Alberta edition, and Saskatchewan/Manitoba edition. The change was made because it is more reasonable for regional advertisers to advertise by province than by city. Western Living’s circulation method also changed in May 2009. The magazine is no longer distributed on newsstands. It is now distributed through controlled circulation with a small percentage (about 1%) of subscriptions.

Western Living magazine provides informative journalism on three major lifestyle topics: home and design, food and wine, and travel. For each issue, a common features signature is created. The features are longer articles that cover a range of topics from home design, décor, and renovation, to food, wine, recipes, and tourism. They are usually illustrated by quality photography in large formats. Other regular content includes “Letters,” “Editor’s Note,” “Travel,” “Sources,” “Wine,” “Pinpoint,” and “The Goods.” “The Goods” is a regional signature specific to each edition. It informs readers of new products and services, or upcoming events scheduled in their province. The amount of editorial content in each regional signature reflects how much advertising space is sold in that market.

As a brand extension, Western Living also publishes Condo, a biannual magazine. Condo features small living space lifestyles, with an editorial focus on interior design, decorating tips and trends, and information on new products and services. It is distributed via controlled circulation and newsstand sales, targeting condo-dwellers with high disposable income in Vancouver. The print run of Condo is 25,000.

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22 Western Living 2009 Rates + Data.
23 Email communication with Kim Peacock, Publisher of Transcontinental Media West, (March 8, 2010).
2.2 THE ONLINE EDITION

The structure of the current Western Living’s online edition is straightforward: most of the content in the print edition is transferred online and reorganized into the following categories: “Homes,” “Food + Wine,” “Travel,” “Gardens,” “City Guides,” “Sources,” “Events,” and “Contests.” The online articles are exactly the same as those in print. The online edition is updated at the beginning of each month (except for the double issues), after the print issue is published. It remains static after each update until the next print issue is published. The new content from the feature articles of the print edition is placed on top of the older content on the homepage. Previously published contents are organized by category, which can be accessed from the menu on the top. The layout is the same for almost every page throughout the online edition, including the homepage: the menu is on the top and two columns are underneath, with the main content in the biggest column on the left. The only sections with a different layout are “Subscribe” and “Customer Care.”

Although most of the content of Western Living’s print edition is available in the online edition, not every photo from the magazine is available. Most of the articles contain only one image from the print edition (see fig. 1). According to Western Living Managing Editor Anicka Quin, they intentionally make partial images available online so that readers would value the print edition more, since readers still prefer looking at large images in print.

![Western Living Online Edition Menu](image)

**A Touch of Glass**
Under architect Brad Lamoureux’s guidance, the kitchen in this modern, open-plan Vancouver home becomes a central feature in a space that embraces the great outdoors.

By Michael Harris

By Michael Harris / Photograph by Jean Henderson

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1 **Glow Sticks**
Southern sunlight is filtered through a five-foot trellis (not shown) that extends from the house; that natural light is complemented by spot lights fitted into discreet recesses in the ceiling, carefully aligned to suggest borders to living areas that the open plan otherwise lacks.

2 **Close Room**
A typical stainless-steel hood fan would have weighed down this breezy space, so the fan was buried inside a dry-walled english kitchen. A stainless-steel grid was derived around the fan, which itself is fitted with additional task lights.

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Fig. 1 Most of the articles on Westernlivingmagazine.com contain only one image from the print edition. (Screen capture of one of the articles on Westernlivingmagazine.com.)
In terms of interactivity, the *Western Living* online edition has almost none. For example, there is no search function or feedback feature on the site. The site basically serves as a digital archive for the publication—an archive consisting of HTML pages—where the text content is directly transferred from the print version of the magazine to the Web. It is difficult to read since the web pages are text heavy, with minimum formatting. When asked for his thoughts on the online edition, Editorial Director Gary Ross commented, “I hardly look at it … *Western Living*’s current online edition only reflects the print edition of the magazine. It’s like putting the content directly to the site. We have to think of the best use of our brand on the Web.”

Due to limited resources, *Western Living* has not been able to fully reach the potential of its online edition to build its brand. In fact, it can hardly be considered an online magazine as it merely duplicates the print edition. An online magazine has a distinguished editorial approach and an established community of readers. It is updated frequently, providing exclusive online content and features to engage readers. Clearly, *Western Living*’s current online presence does not have these qualities. This jeopardizes the brand in the long run, as more and more advertisers seek online magazines that can engage and create communities of readers.

In addition, the Web is changing print journalism. Before the birth of the Internet, news was mostly consumed in static forms of printed text and graphics. Now, print publications are migrating online and the Internet allows editors and reporters to tell the stories in ways that are not possible in print, such as including audio and video clips. As a result, reader expectations are changing. Readers now expect to obtain additional information when they access the online edition of a print publication. For example, they may expect to see an online video of the interview they read in a print magazine. *Western Living* needs to differentiate the function and purpose of the online edition from its offline edition in order to establish a dynamic and effective presence and brand online.

### 2.3 The Trends in Online Advertising

Since the recession, advertising spending has declined significantly in North America across all media, especially in magazine advertising. As a result, many magazines have had to lay off staff, cut budgets, reorganize, or even shut down. Many well established consumer titles including *Vogue, Vanity Fair, Glamour*, and *In Style* suffered a dramatic decrease in page count. According to Publishers

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24 Personal communication, June 26, 2009.
25 Vassallo, “How the Web Has Changed.”
26 Nielsen Wire, “Global Ad Spend.”
27 Smith, “What Next?”
Information Bureau, US magazine advertising pages dropped 11.7% in 2008 compared to 2007. Western Living magazine, along with many other publications by Transcontinental Western Media Group, also experienced a 30-40% decrease in sales, even though it had a steady increase in sales annually for the four years before 2008.

Vancouver magazine, on the other hand, outperformed its sister magazine, Western Living, during the recession. Vancouver’s staff believes that the reinvention of Vancouver’s online edition—Vancmag.com—was the main reason for their improved performance. In fact, the re-launch of Vancmag.com on November 1, 2008 was so successful that the site’s traffic doubled a month later. Ad sales were 100% greater and even ahead of sales target. This shows that online presence is crucial to the financial health of a magazine, especially during economic down times. Online magazines with interactive, multimedia features that attract high traffic are more promising to advertisers.

Indeed, online advertising is growing rapidly. In Canada, online advertising has quadrupled in the past five years and now constitutes 11% of all advertising revenue. One of the reasons is the growing number of Internet users. There were about 1.7 billion Internet users worldwide in 2009, compared to 360 million in 2000. The growth rate between 2000 and 2009 was 380%, and the number is still growing.

In addition, online advertising has lower entry-level costs and is relatively inexpensive compared to traditional advertising in terms of CPM (cost per mille). Online advertising also offers programs such as Google AdWords and AdSense that facilitate audience targeting. These factors make online advertising more cost effective for many advertisers. As a result, most companies are more willing to invest in online advertising than in traditional outlets during the recession, even though their budget may have been lower than previous years.

With too many competitors and an insufficient number of readers and advertising dollars to sustain the market, magazine publishers who can master their online tools to suit advertisers’ and readers’ needs are more likely to stay in the game. Publishers need to know both advertisers’ and readers’ expectations in an online context.

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29 Personal communication with Kim Peacock, July 24, 2009.
30 Email interview with Andrew Mellenger, Lead Developer of Grey Vancouver, January 27, 2010.
31 Personal communication with Gary Stephen Ross, Editor-in-chief of Vancouver magazine, June 26, 2009, and Rebecca Phlips, Associate Editor of Vancouver magazine, June 30, 2009.
32 Anand, “Online Advertising Growth in Canada.”
They need to build their online editions in such a way that advertisers value every advertising space or opportunity available in their online magazines.

Advertisers want to convey their messages to targeted consumers who are more likely to generate sales. Advertisers want to make sure that the readers are their target audience, and that they are loyal to the magazine. In other words, advertisers are looking for magazines that have strong brands. As such, branding in print only is no longer sufficient in this digital era, magazine publishers need to integrate their online and offline editions with their brands as a whole. They need to convince advertisers that their magazines have a close connection with a community of readers who match the advertisers’ target audience, and that advertising with the magazine can stimulate sales, whether in print or online.

An online community is a group of users (or readers, in the case of a magazine) with similar interests who interact with one another and exchange ideas through an online platform. It is imperative for magazine publishers to build online communities because communities can generate revenue in a number of ways, such as display advertising and email advertising. Advertisers prefer marketing their products through online communities since the members’ profiles can be identified, and specific audiences can be targeted. Magazine publishers can develop online communities via several activities, including keeping blogs, publishing reviews, rating/voting, and maintaining discussion boards. The best activities for a magazine are those relevant to its theme, and those that add value for its targeted audience. The activities should nurture a lively online community, since a high-traffic site is more appealing to advertisers.

While it is difficult to track the number of impressions a particular print ad makes and calculate conversion rates through traditional means, it is much more doable online. With the help of tracking software, such as Google Analytics, advertisers are able to collect data on consumers’ online behaviour and measure the performance of advertising campaigns. Knowing such information is critical to finding an economical way to market to consumers, as well as a profitable way to sell, so advertisers generally focus on magazines that have print and Web integration. In addition, advertisers favour online magazines that allow them to collect such valuable data, whether through the publishers’ tracking system or their own.

A multiplatform advertising package is also what advertisers are looking from a magazine. Since print circulation is no longer enough to reach potential audience, advertisers now expect to deliver their messages to targeted audiences through other platforms, such as the Internet and mobile networks, in addition to print. The addition of online (and increasingly, mobile) readers can boost the reach for both the publishers and advertisers. Emphasizing the reach to total audiences is

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36 Smith, “What Next?”
important for selling advertising space. Publishers who develop cross-platform campaigns are extremely valuable to advertisers, since they show a greater promise in audience delivery.

Advertisers look for online magazines that will sell their products. Therefore an online magazine should attract audiences relevant to the content, build an online community, keep the community active and high-traffic, and monitor tracking results. Although Western Living magazine has established its brand through the print edition, signature events, and the side publication Condo, its brand has not been well translated online. As Editorial Director Gary Ross mentioned, the current Western Living online edition is merely an online duplicate of the print magazine, which is not the best way to exploit the brand on the Web. Therefore, Western Living needs to build a new online edition that goes beyond the print content and incorporates additional features to suite readers’ needs. More importantly, it needs to meet advertisers’ expectations in order to create new revenue streams.

2.4 Finding Revenues Online

Magazines that rely on advertising maintain a triangular relationship between the readers, the publisher, and the advertisers. The reader wants to be informed and entertained; the advertiser wants to raise awareness and facilitate sales; the publisher wants to establish readership and sell ads. With three parties with different and overlapping purposes, it is critical for a magazine publisher to find a way to satisfy advertisers and readers while meeting its business objectives at the same time.

When the Web first entered this triangular relationship, most publishers thought that it would work against print magazines, since most of the content online is free. However, as the Internet evolved, it has become an essential part of a magazine’s business model. Fortunately, the Internet presents more opportunities for magazine publishers if publishers know how to use creative ways to integrate online and offline editions to market their brand. It is possible for publishers to make their online business model profitable. The key is to find values that an online magazine can offer to advertisers. These values may exist in several forms, including databases, sponsorship opportunities, display advertising, and online communities.

The subscribers of a magazine are an important asset to the publisher, because the contact information of subscribers can be collected to build databases, which can then be used for referral programs or list rentals. For example, Company A has built a substantial list from its subscribers. This list can then be rented to Company B, which would like to target the same group of people. The contact information could be emails or addresses, so the database can be used in either email marketing or direct mail marketing. According to Martin White, an online magazine marketing consultant, most magazines manage their direct mail marketing through list rentals.
Toronto Life is one of the publishers that rent lists from other magazines and make their lists available as well.\textsuperscript{37} However, there are some privacy issues associated with online list rentals. Magazine publishers need to comply with provincial and federal legislation when dealing with third parties. They also need to inquire subscribers whether they are open to receive promotional material from third parties and give them the option to unsubscribe anytime after sign-up.

Events and online contests can also generate revenue for magazines. Many online publications now offer sponsorship opportunities for companies to market their products and services with free prizes. For example, during the summer of 2009, the Canadian House & Home magazine and Samsung Canada partnered up to organize a contest called Style Intern Search, which gave the winner a chance to live in a suite furnished with Samsung products in downtown Toronto while fulfilling the internship. A blog—Style Intern Blog—enabled the winner to showcase not only his work at House & Home but also some Samsung products in the suite. This way, Samsung gained media exposure through the blog as well as through the House & Home online edition that hosted the blog.

Display advertising is a powerful way to utilize the online edition of the magazine. Basically, the ads can be placed in banners and sidebars on the websites, in email newsletters, or at the beginning of videos, wherever the appropriate content appears. As Martin White mentioned in his presentation at Magazines West, there are still many possible ways for advertising placement that most magazine publishers have not exploited. For instance, publishers can place ads in the confirmation emails for online subscribers, or in pop-up windows of surveys.\textsuperscript{38} Slideshows are also ideal for advertising placements, since viewers tend to browse through the complete set. However, publishers need to be careful not to turn users away with too many bothersome advertising messages.

The online community is a fundamental asset for magazine publishers. Without readers, there are no “buyers.” Without buyers, there would be no advertisers to support the magazine business. Therefore, publishers need to establish online communities that are loyal to the magazines and the brand. The online editions need to incorporate applications such as discussion forums, blogs, ratings, and database search options, which are useful for readers and keep them engaged with the content, and coming back. Online communities are valuable for advertisers since they consist of the same groups of people that advertisers are targeting: people with similar interests and lifestyles.

No matter what strategies or features magazines implement to create these brand values, the outcome needs to be measurable. Metrics such as the number of site visitors, click-through rates, page views, traffic source overviews, bounce rates, and subscription numbers, are all useful information. These metrics are more

\textsuperscript{37} Email communication with Martin White (February 17, 2010).

\textsuperscript{38} Martin White, “Spinning the Web.”
compelling when a publisher pitches the value of the online edition to advertisers. Thus, Martin White suggests that publishers should include significant statistics in their media kits. Publishers need to monitor site performance constantly through some of the tracking services, such as Google Analytics, and adjust their strategies accordingly.

2.5 SUMMARY

*Western Living* has established its brand offline through its print edition and its brand extension, *Condo* magazine. However, it has not fully utilized the potential of its online edition to promote its brand. The lack of functionality and interactivity makes it difficult for the online edition to attract and engage readers. This will jeopardize the magazine in the long run since more advertisers are investing in online magazines that have an established readers community.

In addition to the increasing number of Internet users, three key attributes contribute to the rapid growth of online advertising. They include low entry-level costs, the convenience of tracking online users, and the ability to target consumers more precisely compared to traditional means. As a result, it is crucial for *Western Living* to build a new online edition that meets readers’ and advertisers’ expectations. It also needs to explore different ways that its online edition can adopt to generate new revenue streams. The key is to create and offer value to advertisers. It may exist in databases, sponsorship opportunities, display advertising, and online communities.

*Vancouver* magazine, on the other hand, has demonstrated how a publication can benefit from its online revenue even in economic down times. The next chapter will analyze the redesigned *Vancouver* magazine online edition, and discuss how magazine publishers can optimize their online editions to make them financially viable.

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39 Ibid.
The redesign of the online edition of Vancouver magazine—Vanmag.com—in 2008 has demonstrated the importance of the online presence of a magazine and how it can support building the brand through various functions and strategies. This chapter will discuss the redesign process of Vanmag.com and the Web model of Nymag.com (the New York magazine online edition). It will analyze the principles and strategies that magazine publishers may apply to optimize their online editions.

### 3.1 About the Magazine

Vancouver is a city magazine targeting urban adults aged 18-49 with high disposable income. It has 313,000 readers who reside mostly in wealthy neighbourhoods. It is published ten times a year, with a focus on local news, entertainment, restaurants, shops, and real estate. With a print run of 55,000, it is mainly distributed door-to-door, and also available through selected newsstands, subscriptions, events, hotels, airlines, and public relations companies. With more than forty years of history, Vancouver provides quality journalism and service-oriented articles to its readers.

The contents of Vancouver magazine consist of “Features,” “Cover Story,” “Panorama,” “Eating + Drinking,” and “Endmark.” The topics covered by “Features” range from social issues, media, and entertainment, to food culture. The “Cover Story” is the main focus of an issue and takes up most pages; the topic is usually the same for a specific month every year. For example, the “Cover Story” for the October issue is usually about the best food in the city; for the May issue, the “Cover Story” is dedicated to Vancouver’s annual event “Restaurant Awards.” “Panorama” is a snapshot of the city life in the current month, including news about events, real estate, shopping, and interviews. The section “Eating and Drinking” covers everything about the city’s eating and drinking scenes, including wine picks, bars, restaurants and grocery stores reviews, and chef profiles and interviews.

Vancouver magazine also publishes three annuals—Eating & Drinking Guide, City Guide, and Guestlife Vancouver. Eating & Drinking Guide features the best bars and restaurants in the city, as well as detailed reviews and information about more than 1,000 restaurants. It has a circulation of 25,000 and is only available on newsstands. Guestlife Vancouver is a hardcover publication that is distributed to high-end hotels throughout the city. It provides guides for shopping, dining, drinking,

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40 Vancouver Magazine 2009 Rates & Data.
41 Ibid.
entertainment, and attractions in the city. City Guide is a smaller, paperback version of Guestlife and is sold on newsstands.

3.2 VANCOUVER’S ONLINE EDITION—VANMAG.COM

Vancouver magazine’s current online edition—Vanmag.com—was re-launched on November 1, 2008. Prior to the re-launch, Vanmag.com consisted of static Web pages uploaded from Dreamweaver, a Web development application. A static Web page is a Web page designed with only HTML. It always consists of the same information for all users from all contexts. Static Web pages are quick and easy to build; however, they are difficult to maintain if the site becomes bigger. It is also difficult to keep the pages consistent and current. Since the process of uploading documents as static files involves manual tracking of files and updates from various locations, it is very time consuming to keep the files organized. Therefore, the functionality and interactivity of the original Vanmag.com were limited. There were not any search functions or commentary features to engage users. The communication was only one way.

To fix the problems, the web design firm implemented a CMS (content management system) when they rebuilt Vanmag.com. Now, with the CMS, Vancouver is able to incorporate social features such as commentary and sharing tools, while allowing its readers to consume the content in different ways, such as RSS feeds and location searches. This way, Vanmag.com has become dynamic and engaging for readers. CMS also enables Web managers to update and maintain the online edition more easily. The old Vanmag.com was updated only once a month when the latest issue was published. Now, it is updated on an almost daily basis.

The redesigned Vanmag.com has several sections that reflect the content of the magazine. The topics of the online edition include: “Restaurants,” “Shopping,” “News & Features,” “Real Estate,” and “Entertainment.” “Restaurants” and “Shopping” include reviews and news on eating, drinking and shopping in the city, as well as searchable listings of restaurants, bars, and shops. There is a Shop Girl blog in the shopping section with exclusive online content dedicated to shopping news such as sales, new openings, and new arrivals. Debuted in September 2009, Shop Girl is a recent initiative designed to attract more readers to Vanmag.com. Other exclusive content includes videos of interviews, events, recipes, email newsletters,

42 HTML stands for Hyper Text Markup Language, the language in which Web pages are written.
43 Mellenger, “Vancouver Magazine Redesign.”
44 Ibid.
45 Personal communication with Rebecca Philips.
and an event calendar. The content from the print magazine is posted to the online edition regularly throughout the month.

In the redesign process, one of Vancouver’s biggest objectives was to brand itself online. “Based on our mission statement, we want the online content to be service oriented. We want to put good products on it. We had to think about what people want, what people are looking for when they come to our site,” Vancouver’s Associate Editor Rebecca Philps said. The mission statement of Vancouver magazine states:

Vancouver informs, guides and entertains people who engage with the city. Mixing quality journalism and service-driven pieces, it chronicles and reflects Vancouver’s emergence as a dynamic international city.

By focusing on the topics it specializes in, Vancouver was able to reposition its brand online. Since Vancouver magazine is an established authority in the area of eating and drinking, it turned its focus to restaurant/bar guides online, and this takes up about 75% of the total online content. The “Restaurants” section is also updated more frequently compared to other sections. In the print magazine, on the other hand, only about 25 - 30% of the content is about food, as the print edition aims for more balance among various categories. By emphasizing its expertise in the online content, Vancouver has been able to build its brand through Vanmag.com.

3.3 THE REDESIGN PROCESS OF VANMAG.COM

According to Rebecca Philps, it took them about three months to revamp Vanmag.com. Since the new online edition had to start from scratch, they were looking at the online editions of similar magazines for reference. Of all their surveyed online publications, the New York magazine’s online edition—Nymag.com—was favoured the most. The editorial staff believed that Nymag.com had adopted the best practices online, and they asked the Web design company to use it as a model. In addition to adopting the best practices from Nymag.com, Vancouver’s staff wanted to incorporate similar typography treatment and graphic elements from their print edition so their brand image was consistent online and offline. Rebecca Philps believed that the print magazine and the online edition should be two different products, so they wanted Vancouver magazine and Vanmag.com to serve different purposes. Vancouver magazine provides quality journalism on every aspect of the city, while the online edition Vanmag.com aims to provide valuable guides and
search tools for Vancouverites to use on a daily basis. They aimed to provide more useful services for users and more interactive elements to engage readers with the new online edition.

Nymag.com as a Reference

Of all the online magazines, Vancouver magazine staff favoured the online edition of New York magazine—Nymag.com—the most. Therefore, Nymag.com became the reference Vanmag.com modeled itself after. In fact, Nymag.com also went through a total revamp in 2006. It was re-launched on January 30, 2006. The revamp was a major change in business strategy for the company.50 The old online edition of New York magazine consisted mostly of magazine stories and information databases, without many updates or interaction on the site. The redesigned Nymag.com, on the other hand, focuses on enhanced search functionality, making it easier for users to browse through information on thousands of restaurants, bars, and shops in New York City. The new online edition also publishes Web-exclusive content through blogs and email newsletters. According to Editor-in-Chief of New York magazine Adam Moss, “We want this to become a site that people visit daily and maybe even hourly. One mission [of the re-launch] is to be a Web site that has its own life. It has a relationship with the magazine but is not identical.”51 Nymag.com now runs seven blogs and ten newsletters, with five million unique visitors per month. This tremendous amount of traffic has attracted more advertisers, including luxury brands and movie studios, generating more revenue each year. In 2008, New York’s online revenue made up 20% of its total revenue, print and web combined.52

After the redesign, Nymag.com became a complex network of magazine articles, blog entries, databases, and other miscellaneous Web pages. In 2008, Nymag.com included 15,000 blog posts, 10,000 magazine articles, and thousands of listings. It was becoming so huge that “[the] homepage didn’t display the full breadth of what was on the site,” said Editorial Director Ben Williams.53 The team faced a big design challenge at that time, so they decided to re-launch the homepage in March 2008. The new homepage has a tab system that organizes related content into six main categories: “News & Features,” “Restaurants,” “Bars,” “Entertainment,” “Fashion,” and “Shopping.” As users move their mouse over a category, a drop-down menu shows up and displays subcategories, blogs, or newsletters related to the category (See fig. 2). This way, users can find relative content more efficiently with less clicks and page reloads. There is also a drop-down site map that provides users with an easier way to browse all the content on the site. This improvement has increased the content click-through rate from 75% pre-launch to 80%.54 News feeds are also available for

50 Stableford, “RELAUNCHING.”
51 Shields, “NYMag.com Relaunches.”
52 Nymag.com, “Media Kit.”
53 Stableford, “RELAUNCHING.”
54 Ibid.
most of the topics, blogs, and columns on Nymag.com, so readers can subscribe to
the feeds and check for updates from their personalized aggregators.

Below the menu bar, the content is organized by category in different sections,
such as “Guides,” “The Current Issue,” “Most Popular Stories,” “Videos,” “Events,”
and “Hot Product Picks.” Within each category “box,” users can search for related
content without scrolling to the top to perform a general search (see fig. 3). This
makes searching quicker and more accurate. The overall result is a much more
user-friendly homepage that attracts over 5.3 million users per month, which is
48% more than a year ago.\textsuperscript{55}

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{fig2.png}
\caption{A drop-down menu will show when users mouse over a category tab on
Nymag.com. (Screen capture of the homepage of Nymag.com.)}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{55} Nymag.com, “Media Kit.”
Since 1968, New York magazine has reached 1.8 million readers each week,\(^{56}\) and has become the authority on news, culture, lifestyle, entertainment, fashion, and personalities that define New York City. To transform this brand image into digital pages, there must be more than just words and images, because people read online magazines differently than they read print magazines. As Adam Moss said, Nymag.com is related to the print edition of New York magazine, but it is not identical to the print. Therefore, to keep the brand image consistent in a different context, Nymag.com updates hourly to make it more dynamic and engaging. This includes offering breaking local and national news on politics, food, arts, entertainment, fashion, and sports incorporating video and audio elements. Sometimes New York links a current event with one of its blogs or newsletters. For example, during the New York Fashion Week, “behind the scenes” images and videos are featured on Nymag.com’s fashion blog—The Cut—which acts as a gateway into thousands of fashion shows runway images and interactive games on Nymag.com. Fashion Alert, the newsletter of The Cut, offers extensive, minute-by-minute updates on the New York Fashion Week shows. Being in the capital city of the fashion world, New York magazine has cleverly seized the opportunity to report on this event comprehensively, driving a tremendous amount of traffic to its online edition. During the New York Fashion Week in February 2006, Nymag.com received 42 million page views.\(^{57}\)


\(^{57}\) Smith, “New York Refashions.”
Torrey, Director of Communications, Strategy and Business Development of New York magazine, said, “We consider ourselves a regional magazine, but with a national message.” Through the company’s emphasis on being timely and dynamic, New York magazine has successfully grown and extended its brand online.

Besides frequent updates and interactions that engage more visitors, Nymag.com’s pitch to advertisers includes “targeting an audience based on their interests.” Since the content on the site is organized into different categories, it is possible to identify what visitors’ interests are and what they like to do according to the categories they visit. Email newsletters also provide such information about visitors’ preferences. Therefore, every potential placement in the online edition and every newsletter becomes an opportunity to advertisers. Every Web page, newsletter, and video clip on Nymag.com contains ads. With millions of visitors and subscribers, Nymag.com’s online property has become an extremely effective way to advertise.

Objectives for the New Vanmag.com

As a city magazine, Vancouver’s primary objective for the online edition is to be the number one resource for Vancouverites, as well as national and international visitors who seek information and advice on shopping, dining, entertainment and events in Vancouver. The online edition’s primary purpose is to help users find what they want to know about the city easily and quickly.

To ensure Vanmag.com can top other online competitors, it is important to study the competitors’ sites as well. By examining other similar online publications such as tourism sites, blogs, online newspapers, and local community sites, the Web designers were able to pinpoint certain common problems:

• Confusing layout. There are too many texts and visuals that make it difficult to find the object.
• Outdated content. The content is not updated regularly and becomes irrelevant.
• Ineffective search results. It is difficult to find local events and relevant information based on search criteria.
• Irrelevant reviews. Most of the restaurant reviews are not written or rated by local readers.
• Excessive Web pages. Some content requires too many clicks to access.
• Lack of user-friendly features. Users are unable to save and bookmark events while browsing them.
• Lack of recommendations. Recommendations for shops, restaurants, bars, and events are not available to users.

58 Ibid.
59 Ibid.
60 Grey Vancouver, a proposal for the redesign of Vancouvermagazine.com (computer printout, retrieved from Rebecca Philps, July 2009).
These findings gave *Vancouver* magazine and the designers a guideline of what to avoid or improve on when building their new online edition.

When *Vancouver* magazine presented their expectations for the new online edition, the Web designers believed that *Vancouver* should develop a “true community site” for Vancouverites to share and connect to, and to turn to the “city experts” for advice on city life. By doing so, *Vancouver* could achieve its primary objective of being the number one resource for people who want to know everything about the city. There were five major goals outlined for the new Vanmag.com:

1. To maximize Internet traffic. To meet its business objectives, Vanmag.com must maintain high traffic. This can be achieved by updating content frequently and developing an online community of users who can discuss the content. The user opinions will supplement both the print and online content. Online exclusive content is also essential for generating more traffic to the site.

2. To create “site stickiness.” “Site stickiness” means the amount of time a visitor spends on a site over a given period of time. The “stickier” the site is, the longer the visitor will stay on the site. To increase the amount of time users spend on Vanmag.com, the site must incorporate the best practices in design, navigation, and usability while still offering a variety of functions and tools. Several functions were suggested for the new online edition:

   a. Restaurant guide: provide staff- and user-generated recommendations and reviews on the restaurants in Vancouver for users to search based on several criteria
   b. Event calendar: provide a monthly calendar, with content from the print magazine as well as from readers
   c. Idea exchange: give users the opportunity to upload and share their photos, videos, and events
   d. Interactive map: create a map with events laid out by location
   e. Question and answer: create a section for users to interact with other locals by posting questions and answers
   f. Add an advanced search function
   g. Add interactive sections such as Contests and Marketplace

3. Support site engagement. Vanmag.com must engage its readers by offering a tool that allows them to personalize information meaningful to them. For example, “My VanMag” provides users with the ability to bookmark events, create profiles, manage content sources (such as local weather gadgets and RSS feeds from other sites), organize contacts/friends, and send/receive messages.

4. Ensure accessibility. When searching with the term “what to do in Vancouver” Google returns about 2.2 million results that include tourism sites, news sites, blogs, and local community sites. To attain higher rankings over other competitor sites, Vanmag.com must apply the best practices for Search Engine Optimization

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61 Ibid.
(SEO). This involves tagging and meta tagging; making display copy more searchable; using specific keywords in articles; article titles and subtitles; and generating inbound links to the online edition. The result would make Vanmag.com become a visible and popular city guide to international travelers, as well as an authority on travel. In addition, there should be a variety of sources that direct traffic back to Vanmag.com, such as email newsletters, sharing tools, and display ads on other major Vancouver sites.

5. Support long-term success. Vancouver magazine should continuously monitor the statistics on its online edition, optimizing its content and functionality by either adding new features or removing ineffective features. Vancouver must be aware of what the most popular communication tool is and keep on building new applications to suit users’ needs, such as integrating other social networking sites to promote its events or content.62

By implementing appropriate online practices, Vanmag.com is no longer a static site that simply holds information, but a dynamic online magazine that invites, interacts with, and engages users. The redesign has been a successful one.

### 3.4 THE RESULT

Vanmag.com was re-launched on November 1, 2008. The traffic doubled after a month. The increase in traffic can be attributed to frequent updates in the online edition, email newsletters, social networking, Google AdWords (which Vancouver bought), SEO, and other interactive elements.63 The site now has over 20,000 unique visitors every month.64 With this increase in traffic, the revenue from online advertising also increased more than 100% after a month. Clearly, advertisers have noticed the values on the new online edition that were absent before. At times when they have limited budgets, advertisers want to make their online investments worthwhile.

As a city magazine, Vancouver is very similar to New York magazine with only a slight difference in readership. They both target those who are influential, well educated, and with high disposable income, as well as those who are enthusiastic about their own city. Their editorial content focuses on city life, news, entertainment, dining, drinking, and shopping. Consequently, when Vancouver was remodeling its online edition after Nymag.com, it was reasonable for Vancouver to adopt a similar structure and design. The homepage of Vanmag.com contains a tab system, and the content is organized by categories. In each category, users can also search for guides and reviews on restaurants, bars, and shops.

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62 Grey Vancouver, a proposal.
63 Personal communication with Rebecca Philips.
64 Vancouver Magazine 2009 Rates & Data.
Vancouver aimed to attract online visitors with its Web-exclusive content, like videos and its newly launched shopping blog Shop Girl. Although not updated as frequently as Nymag.com, the new blog indicates that Vancouver is determined to engage more online readers. Another way to engage more readers is to enable commentary on articles and blog posts. However, Associate Editor Rebecca Philps of Vancouver thinks that editors should initiate discussions in the online edition by commenting first, rather than waiting for visitors to do so. Vancouver’s weekly email newsletter—The Fix—offers interesting ideas on how to spend each week in Vancouver; the links on the newsletter direct readers back to Vanmag.com, acting as a gateway to more reviews or articles on the site. Furthermore, social networking tools under each article or review allow users to share the links within their own networks, which might invite other users in the same networks to visit the online edition.

Like Nymag.com, Vanmag.com’s redesign has been a successful one. The revamped Vanmag.com has attracted more visitors and generated more revenue than before. Advertisers now have opportunities for innovative and dynamic advertising on the site, in subject-related articles, in pop-out slideshows, in the weekly newsletter, and also in the blog. In addition, sponsorships opportunities for online contests and special features are available for advertisers to communicate with the online community. By adopting some of the best online practices from Nymag.com, Vanmag.com is able to meet both user and advertiser needs. The rebirth of Vanmag.com has given Vancouver magazine an opportunity to grow and expand its brand in the digital realm.

3.5 Website Optimization for Online Magazines

In an analysis of Vanmag.com and Nymag.com, several common online practices are apparent. Both magazines apply fundamental principles that optimize their online editions. The underlying principles are SEO, website stickiness, and brand building.

SEO (Search Engine Optimization)

With the rapid development in technology, people are spending more time online, and the number of Internet users is increasing steadily each year. According to the Public Data published by Google, there has been a 2.2% increase in the number of
Internet users in Canada every year from 2002 to 2007. In 2009, about 74.9% of the entire population of Canada used the Internet.

Online users’ reading habits have also changed: they used to read long, in-depth literature, but now most of them scan through multiple Web pages within a short period of time. From the data collected in a study in 2008, Jakob Nielsen, a web usability expert, concluded that Internet users have time to read at most 28% of the words during an average visit, on an average Web page. More realistically, they read about 20% of the text on an average page. Their attention span has become shorter than ever, and they are easily distracted by flashy elements on the pages. Also, users spend little time browsing the results of their search. Statistics show that 92.5% of users do not probe beyond the third page of search results, about 75% only look at the first page of results, and about 90% scan only the first and second page of results. Therefore, SEO—improving the site ranking—is extremely important to an online magazine. Without ranking high in search engines, an online publication is more likely to be missed by searchers, regardless of how much quality content it may have.

The benefits of SEO include improved site traffic, perceived relevance, trust, and conversion to sales rate. For an online magazine, these benefits can be translated into attracting more readers, being perceived as the most relevant resource in a certain topic, being recognized as the authoritative voice in a specific category, and having more opportunities to sell its brand to both readers and advertisers. There are several ways for an online magazine to achieve SEO:

1. Place keywords strategically. A search-friendly Web page should include as many keywords that rank as highly as possible rather than only one keyword that ranks number one. The more keywords a search engine can detect, the higher the online publication will rank. Keywords should also include plurals, common misspellings, synonyms, stems, and splits. For good SEO, keywords should be included in articles, headlines, subtitles, Web page URLs, filenames, and links.

2. Optimize title tags. A title tag is the title of the site and its pages appear at the top of the browser window. A page without a title tag will appear “Untitled” at the top of the window. The title tag is important to an online magazine because

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67 Nielsen, “How Little.”
68 Weinreich, “Not Quite the Average.”
69 Nielsen, “How Little.”
70 King, Website Optimization, Section 1.1.
71 Ibid.
72 King, Website Optimization, Section 1.3.
it is often the first thing that grabs visitors’ attention; it is also a key component that most search engines look for. A title tag should include the magazine’s name and keywords that describe the magazine. It should avoid vague wording or phrases that might be used by other countless sites, or exact wording from the site content.73

3. Reinforce the theme of the content. The headers, the title tags, the meta tags, the content, and the URLs of the Web page should all work together to make the topic of that page coherent. This makes the site more prominent when scanned by search engines, and the site becomes more likely to rank highly in the search results.74 For example, if the article is about the 2010 Winter Olympics in Vancouver and a Canadian athlete, the keywords “2010,” “Olympics,” “Vancouver,” and the name of the athlete should be included in the title, the content, and the URL of that page.

4. Promote the online magazine with inbound links. Inbound links are links to a site placed externally. The more inbound links there are for a site, the higher it ranks in search results. An online magazine should build more inbound links than its competitors so it ranks higher. This can be done by registering news feeds at news aggregators, syndicating the site content to other related sites, posting comments and articles with the link to other forums, getting listed in relevant directories and resource pages, exchanging links with other relevant, high-ranking sites, and making bloggers discuss about the magazine. Email newsletters can also boost SEO in a similar way, since they encourage online subscribers to visit the online publication with inbound links.75

5. Utilize social networking tools and online subscriptions. Social networking sites like Twitter and Facebook are the fourth most popular online activity, and the popularity is growing twice as quickly as traditional online activities such as email and searching.76 According to the Nielsen Online research, 67% of Web users visit social networking sites and blogs, which constitutes 10% of all time spent on the Internet.77 Magazines should utilize these social networking tools to promote their online publications and register themselves to create a profile in the networking circle. This not only drives traffic to the site, but also pushes the ranking higher in search results.

**Website Stickiness**

Website stickiness is the amount of time spent on a site over a given period of time. It is often measured in average minutes per month visitors spend at a site.78

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73 Burghgraef, “Better Ranking Website.”
74 King, *Website Optimization*, Section 1.3.
75 Pay, “Newsletters, Blogging And Search.”
76 CTV News, “Social Networking Sites.”
77 Ibid.
Website stickiness is crucial for an online magazine to maintain high traffic volume consistently in order to meet its financial goals, since advertisers look at the numbers of visitors to determine if their money is well spent on an online property. Therefore, the “stickier” an online magazine is, the more valuable it is to advertisers. Without a certain level of traffic, an online magazine cannot possibly survive.

While SEO can boost traffic to an online publication and online users are more likely to enter a site that ranks highly in search results, it is crucial that the users keep coming back to the site. Since most Internet users are used to multitasking, it is easy for them to overlook certain information on a site and quickly move on to another site. As well, users often look at a number of websites for the information they want. Therefore, an online magazine should be able to capture the readers’ attention and keep them coming back with an inviting environment. There are several ways to increase website “stickiness”:

1. Update content frequently. An online magazine needs to be active by updating frequently to keep readers “addicted.” Blogs, email newsletters, RSS feeds, and sharing tools are some of the methods to keep the site current and update the readers. They also serve as gateways that invite readers back to other sections of the magazine. Utilizing a Content Management System (CMS) will allow magazine publishers to update content easily and efficiently.

2. Offer exclusive content. Some of the content should be exclusive to the online magazine. Exclusive content such as video clips and event calendars are great ways to keep readers coming back to the online edition. The online edition should be complementary to the print magazine rather than a duplicate.

3. Make access easy. It is important that an online magazine provides easy navigation and internal search functions. If the readers lose their way or cannot find what they want when reading the online magazine, it is likely that they will leave it and not return. Optimizing the loading time of each page can also prevent readers from navigating away from the online magazine. Research has shown that Internet users’ frustration increases when the load time exceeds 8 to 10 seconds without response.79 In addition, flashy ad clusters can hinder users’ browsing ability and affect their experience when reading online material as well. These ad clusters should be avoided by using fewer, but higher CPM (cost-per-mille) ads to maintain ad revenue.80

4. Provide valuable service. Once a magazine has established its authority on a subject, it can reach a bigger online audience by providing valuable services through its online edition. The service can be for example a business directory, a resources database, a job board, etc. When users find value in an online publication, they keep revisiting it to meet their needs.

5. Interact with users. Internet users tend to stick to sites where they can participate. For this reason, an online magazine should invite readers to generate content and engage in conversations through commentary, Q&A sections, or discussion

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79 King, *Website Optimization*, 147.
80 Sauter, “Website Stickiness.”
boards. Sharing tools from different social networking sites are also effective in inviting more readers to join the conversations. Creating interactive activities that are valuable to readers make the online magazine more engaging.

6. Develop applications for mobile devices. New technologies are allowing people to surf the Web using their mobile devices. Magazine publishers can use this opportunity to develop applications that assist users to easily access magazine content on their devices. For example, fashion magazine publishers can provide a daily tip for what to wear to work or a city magazine can issue alerts for shows and concerts. By making magazine content available in different platforms and making it more accessible, the online (or mobile) edition can become popular among mobile users, which in turn boosts the traffic and advertising revenue.

**Brand Building**

Online brand building has become increasingly essential as the number of Internet users grows each year. More and more companies are using the Web in addition to other media to build their product or service brands. For example, *The Economist* has broadened its brand awareness through several online initiatives, including extending its online edition Economist.com, building a social media platform, and developing an iPhone application. In fact, studies have shown that there is a positive and significant correlation between online experience, attitude towards the brand, brand loyalty, and purchase intention. Research by Müller shows that both consumer magazines and newsletter subscribers are more likely to be loyal to the brand and show more positive attitude towards the brand. Therefore, magazine publishers should integrate their content, design, and function both offline and online, to establish an “integrated brand experience.” To build a brand, the experience must be relevant, important, and credible to the target audience, it must be consistent with the personality of the magazine and its creators, it must be distinctive from the magazine’s competitors, it must be able to connect emotionally with the readers, and it must be responsive to the changing market.

Magazine publishers can build their brand by integrating the offline and online editions through content, design, features and departments, the vision, voice, and personality of the publication. There are several major directions for online branding strategies:

1. Create interactivity. Interactive functions such as a Q&A section and a submission call not only invite visitors to the online edition but also encourage them to learn more about the brand. Visitors are more likely to absorb

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81 Kinsman, “Building a Winner.”
82 Müller, “Branding Impact.”
83 Ibid.
84 Faimon, *Design Alliance*, 338.
85 Ibid.
information from an interactive online edition than one that delivers content in a one-way form. Interactivity can also boost the emotions that visitors have towards the brand, since people’s impressions are stronger when real actions are required.86

2. Enhance loyalty. Online magazines should build functions or features such as fan clubs that motivate readers to commit to a brand. These functions or features should offer participants rewards that make them feel special and different from non-participants. This positively reinforces participants’ commitments to the brand and consolidates the brand. Online magazines should also deliver values that are not offered by their competitors in order to build brand loyalty.

3. Integrate online and offline promotions. Although a print magazine and its online edition should be two different products, the core value of its brand should be consistent in both media. Therefore, integrating the print and online editions is the key to building a cohesive brand. Cross promoting the online and offline editions is necessary to consolidate the brand. For example, a magazine can encourage readers to visit its online edition and watch a video clip from an interview covered in the print edition. Or, the online edition of a magazine can offer a print subscription deal exclusive to newsletter subscribers.

4. Identify the online audience. The print and online audiences can be quite different. Even among the same audience, the expectations, behaviour, and reading habits differ from print to Web. Hence, magazine publishers need to respond to different readership preferences, and adjust the content, features, presentation, and functions in the online edition accordingly. A strong brand identity should be flexible enough to have brand impact on both online and offline audiences.

5. Choose suitable technology. With the abundance of Web applications for building functionality, building an ideal online edition may seem overwhelming. However, it does not mean the more, the better. Magazine publishers should choose to apply only the technology that helps define their brands and meet their targeted users’ needs.87 It is not necessary to follow the most popular feature or service on the Internet, since it may not be relevant to the brand message that a magazine wishes to deliver.

Building a brand online is multidimensional. It means not only presenting a brand image and message consistently, but also establishing a positive user experience, engaging readers, and incorporating the appropriate technology to meet users’ needs. SEO and website “stickiness” also contribute to brand building online. These different dimensions are closely related to each other. For instance, increasing the interactivity on a site can boost website stickiness to generate more volume and hence improve SEO, and in turn make more users aware of the brand. Magazine publishers need to recognize how these dimensions work together in order to create an optimized online experience that supports the magazine’s vision.

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86 Dou, “Using Brand Websites.”
87 Ibid.
Under similar circumstances, *Vancouver* magazine has been performing better than *Western Living* magazine in both online and offline editions for the past year. The redesign of Vanmag.com was crucial in preventing advertising sales from dropping significantly. *Western Living*, on the other hand, has not benefited from its current online edition as much as *Vancouver* has from Vanmag.com. There is consensus among the staff that the current *Western Living* online edition has not reached its full potential on the Internet. It needs to be revamped.

**4.1 WHAT WESTERN LIVING CAN LEARN FROM VANMAG.COM**

Both *Western Living* and *Vancouver* are two major publications of Transcontinental Western Media Group Inc. They have separate editorial and sales staff. They have different editorial focus, different distribution strategies, different geography, and slightly different readerships. However, they have certain qualities in common: both magazines provide journalism and service-oriented articles that focus on lifestyle. Although the editorial content is not exactly parallel, *Vancouver’s* online edition still serves as a good example for *Western Living*. There are several major lessons that *Western Living* can learn from Vanmag.com’s design, structure, functionality, and strategies.

**Design/Structure**

The content on Vanmag.com is organized in five major categories—“Restaurants,” “News and Features,” “Shopping,” “Entertainment,” and “Real Estate.” These categories can be easily located in the menu bar on the top of the homepage. Each category “tab” also has a drop-down menu, so the readers can find what they want quickly and easily (see fig. 4). The information on the homepage is divided into sections that are clearly grouped into “boxes” (see fig. 5). The user interface is simple and easy to follow.
Fig. 4 Each tab on the top of the page has a drop-down menu. (Screen capture of the homepage of Vanmag.com.)

Fig. 5 The content on the homepage is clearly grouped into “boxes.” (Screen capture of the homepage of Vanmag.com.)
The current online edition of Western Living groups its content in different categories—“Homes,” “Food + Wine,” “Travel,” “Gardens,” “City Guides,” “Sources,” “Events,” and “Contests”—which can be accessed from the top menu of the page. The page layout is the same throughout the online edition. The banner at the top contains the categories and information about the publication. Below the banner there are two columns. The bigger one contains the content and the smaller one contains ads (See fig. 6). The information on the homepage is not grouped into particular categories; rather, it is grouped by issue, with the latest issue always on top. The problem with this homepage layout is the lack of communication—visitors might not be able to know where to start. Although each article has a clear title and a short excerpt, there are no quick references that indicate what the online publication is about. The content on the homepage of Vanmag.com, on the other hand, has clear labels, such as “News and Features,” “Recently Added,” and “Best Buys.” Users can thus access the information more easily. By quickly “scanning” the homepage users know what the publication is about. Therefore, Western Living should consider reorganizing the content on its homepage to enhance users’ browsing experience.

The key to designing an online magazine, especially the homepage, is to make the purpose of the site clear to visitors. They should know immediately what the publication is about and what information it contains. Since online users’ attention
span tends to be short, if they do not see what they want within seconds, they move on to other websites. Therefore, the homepage should help users find what they need quickly by emphasizing the top features of the online magazine through a clear navigation bar, compelling titles and images, and call-to-action headlines.

**Functionality**

Vanmag.com has a database which allows users to search for restaurants, bars, shops, and events. Users can either do a general search on the site or a specific search within each category. Furthermore, they can filter the search results by different attributes, such as neighbourhood, price, feature, and cuisine (see fig. 7). Likewise, *Western Living* should construct such a database based on its editorial content. Since its editorial focus is on homes and design, *Western Living*’s database should consist of listings of related products and services, such as furniture stores, interior designers, home design companies, real estate agents, and architects. Users should also be able to search for these business listings through different filters, such as by region. Similar to the listings on Vanmag.com, *Western Living* should provide a short, editorial write-up and contact information for each listing. This is also a way to establish an editorial voice and brand online.

Another function that *Western Living* should adopt from Vanmag.com is the Event Calendar, which lists various entertainment activities in the city. Like the restaurant and store listings, the events can be filtered by type and by neighbourhood. For
Western Living, the event calendar may include all events related to homes, design, food, wine, and travel. In contrast to Vancouver’s Event Calendar, it is not necessary for Western Living to list only local events. Since Western Living also covers travel, it can list events held in places that its readers are likely to visit, such as the Napa Valley Wine Festival.

With the development of the shopping blog on Vanmag.com, a new function has been created for the blog, which allows users to ask the author, Rebecca Philps, also Online Editor of Vanmag.com, questions about fashion in Vancouver. Such “Q & A” functions not only provide a customized service to users, but also engage them with the content of the online edition. Western Living should consider having a similar function that addresses the subjects it covers in the online edition.

When designing the web functionality of an online publication, it is important to identify the purpose of the publication and its target audience. Only when the purpose and the audience are identified is it possible to design a web functionality that suits users’ needs and the magazine’s mandate.

Strategy

Vancouver magazine has utilized several different strategies to optimize its online edition. First of all, Vanmag.com offers exclusive content such as video clips and newsletters that are not available in the print magazine. Offering exclusive online content is one of the most important ways to increase the traffic for an online publication. Therefore, Western Living should map out the possible platforms that are suitable for its online exclusive content. For instance, blogs, email newsletters, video clips, and slideshows are potential tools to be implemented on the Western Living online edition.

Besides offering exclusive content online, it is essential for an online magazine to update frequently in order to maintain site traffic. If an online magazine fails to deliver fresh content, its audience starts to lose interest and will eventually stop visiting the site. This also impacts the online magazine’s financial viability, since advertisers do not invest in online publications with low traffic volume. According to Rebecca Philps, Vanmag.com is updated on an almost daily basis, especially the content of the Event Calendar. Other content is updated from the print magazine, as well as reviews on restaurants and shops. The blog Shop Girl for example, is a new section started in September 2009 as a way to provide more fresh content to online readers. All these strategies have contributed to a significant increase in the traffic of Vanmag.com.

Similarly, Western Living needs to update its online edition more frequently than once a month. Whether it is an event announcement or a blog entry, the key is to offer readers new material regularly. This not only increases site traffic, but also increases site “stickiness.” In addition, it is important for Western Living to ensure
the content is meaningful to audiences in all three regions. For example, if there is a weekly newsletter about new products and services, there should be three different versions of the newsletter specific to each region.

Building an online community is crucial for an online publication to establish a group of loyal readers and its brand. *Vancouver* magazine has used several strategies to engage readers. One strategy gives visitors the opportunity to contribute their thoughts and opinions to each article on Vanmag.com. Rebecca Philips states that their goal is to encourage more user-generated content on the site. In order to initiate conversations and invite more discussions, their editorial staff must comment on the contents as well.

Another tactic that *Vancouver* magazine uses to build an online community is social networking sites and sharing tools. Facebook and Twitter are two major social networking sites where the content on Vanmag.com is syndicated. This not only builds a community among its “followers” or “fans,” but also increases the site traffic, since the links redirect visitors to Vanmag.com. Furthermore, because Twitter followers usually expect frequent updates, *Vancouver* posts not only their own content but also contents from other sources, such as *The Vancouver Sun* and *The Globe and Mail*. Sharing tools are web widgets embedded in each post on a site that allow users to share, with a click of a button, content with their social network communities, such as StumbleUpon, Facebook, and Twitter. Offering the ability to share content with users’ own communities can also boost site traffic, widen the audience reach, and establish a group of loyal readers.

*Western Living*’s online edition should adopt similar tactics for building an online community. According to Editorial Director Gary Stephen Ross, the *Western Living* online edition should offer more interactive opportunities for readers to exchange ideas, such as initiating a discussion about renovation projects and picture sharing of homes and gardens. This can be executed through social networking sites, where readers can upload photos, leave comments, and interact with each other. *Western Living* can develop an online community through these engaging activities, which can help them build its online brand.

*Vancouver* magazine has used several techniques to improve the SEO of its online edition, including tagging, meta-tagging, and changing titles and subtitles to become more searchable. Likewise, *Western Living* should organize all the keywords that are related to its editorial subjects, such as homes, gardens, renovation, architecture, furniture, wine, travel, and real estate. This will enable *Western Living* to achieve a high ranking in the search results. In addition, *Western Living* should also consider buying Google AdWords to ensure a high ranking. It should buy search terms that are not only the most popular but also less competitive so it can minimize marketing costs.
Overall, *Western Living* can learn from Vanmag.com’s structure, functionality, and strategy. *Western Living* needs to refine these principles further to achieve its mission statement and editorial voice.

4.2 Modeling *Western Living’s* Online Edition

Before *Western Living* remodels its current online edition, it would be worthwhile to examine its competitors and their online editions. By examining its competitors, *Western Living* will be able to evaluate external threats and identify opportunities, and build its online edition accordingly. According to Kim Peacock, Publisher of Transcontinental Media West, *Western Living*’s biggest competitors, in terms of advertising sales, are *Canadian House & Home*, *Alberta Home*, *BC Home*, and *Avenue*.

*Canadian House & Home* is a national, shelter/lifestyle magazine that covers home, garden, interior design, food, and entertainment. Its online edition, *Houseandhome.com*, was redesigned and re-launched on April 28, 2009. There is also a digital edition of *Canadian House & Home*, which is simply a digital replica of the print edition that can be downloaded from *Houseandhome.com*. Most of the advertisers in *Canadian House & Home* are national advertisers, since it is a national magazine with only one edition. Although *Canadian House & Home* competes with *Western Living* for some of the common national advertisers, its online edition is not a direct competitor for *Western Living* because it has a different editorial focus and audience. Since *Houseandhome.com* is a DIY, how-to brand, that involves many interactive elements, its audience does not overlap that of *Western Living* completely. The PMB (Print Measurement Bureau) 2009 shows that 68% of *Western Living* readers do not read *Canadian House & Home*. In addition, most of *Western Living*’s advertisers are regional because its print editions are specific to the west coast and prairie region. In order to differentiate itself from *Canadian House & Home* on the Web, *Western Living* needs to design an online edition that speaks to regional readers, rather than one that has a national voice.

*Alberta Home* and *BC Home* are also shelter/lifestyle magazines that focus on home renovation, decoration, design trends and product news. These two publications are probably the closest competitors to *Western Living* in terms of editorial focus and audience. However, as Sales Director Janet Macdonald points out, both *BC Home* and *Alberta Home* are not PMB measured, neither are they C C A B (Canadian Circulation Audit Bureau) audited, whereas *Western Living* is PMB measured and a part of C C A B. In other words, *Western Living* can provide credible proof of its readership and circulation to its advertisers, which makes it more attractive than *Alberta Home* or *BC Home*.

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88 *Western Living* 2009 Rate + Data.
89 Phone interview, January 22, 2010.
Neither Alberta Home nor BC Home currently has a dedicated online edition. The only information about the magazines is on the website of Canada Wide Media Limited. This is actually an opportunity for Western Living, because having its own, dedicated online edition can generate more online revenue as well as establish an online readership. Although Alberta Home and BC Home are both available in digital versions, they are unlikely to build an online community due to the lack of interaction and functionality.

Another competitor, Avenue, is a city magazine based in Alberta that covers events, eating and drinking, arts and culture, and shopping in the city. There are two editions for two different cities: Avenue in Calgary and Avenue in Edmonton. Although the editorial focus of Avenue is different from that of Western Living, it may compete with the Alberta edition of Western Living for the same regional advertisers in that province. The online edition of Avenue is similar to Vanmag.com, which offers users the functionality to search for events, and places to eat, drink, and shop in the city. It also includes several interactive elements to engage readers, such as commentary and blogs. If Western Living wishes to compete with Avenue for the same regional advertisers online, it needs to convince the advertisers that its online edition is able to engage an online community unique only to Western Living. In other words, Western Living’s online edition needs to provide users with certain values that are not available in Avenue’s online edition.

The Internet presents a great opportunity for Western Living since there is not an online magazine in direct competition with Western Living so far. Western Living is a brand with a unique editorial focus and readership regardless of its national or regional competitors. In order to make the brand prosper online, Western Living has to address the functionality of its online edition and ensure that it better suits the needs of its readers. Providing distinct services through the online edition that are unavailable elsewhere would make Western Living stand out from other online publications.

Marthastewart.com as a Reference

Marthastewart.com is the online platform for the four magazines under Martha Stewart’s enterprise: Martha Stewart Living, Everyday Food, Weddings, and Body + Soul. The contents of these magazines are divided into several sections on Marthastewart.com, including “Food,” “Entertaining,” “Holidays,” “Weddings,” “Crafts,” “Home & Garden,” “Pets,” and “Whole Living.” Among these sections, “Weddings” and “Whole Living” are actually two independent sites, each with its own content, structure, functionality, and community.

Despite the extensive size of the online edition, some aspects of Marthastewart.com would serve as good references for Western Living’s online edition. For instance, the general structure and layout design of Marthastewart.com may provide Western Living with an overall framework in organizing and presenting its content. Western
Living’s key pillars—homes and design, food and wine, and travel—could appear in a menu bar on the top of each page. Under each tab, subcategories such as trends, furniture, homes, and gardens can appear at one side of the page. Each subcategory can then lead to another page containing a list of articles or images (see fig. 8).

Fig. 8 The main categories are on the top of each page and the subcategories are listed on the left. (Screen capture of the Food section on Marthastewart.com.)

The articles on Marthastewart.com are often available in a slideshow, with a focus on the image accompanied by a short description. Since Western Living contains mostly journalism instead of how-to articles, a slideshow is probably not the most appropriate way to present the content. Rather, the text should still be the main focus on the page, with a single image on top of the text to give readers more visual clues. The rest of the images can appear beside the article in thumbnails, which readers can enlarge with a click. However, since computer monitors cause eye fatigue easily and readers’ attention span is shorter online, the articles need to be edited to hold readers’ attention. There are a few principles for writing for the Web that would keep online readers from navigating away. These include shortening
content, focusing on writing topics, presenting content in short paragraphs or point form, and labeling paragraphs with subheadings.90

The functionality of Marthastewart.com is another aspect that Western Living’s online edition can emulate. The “Recipe Finder” on Marthastewart.com provides an extensive search function—it allows users to search by keywords and by different filters, such as the type of source, the type of cuisine, and the required cooking time. The users can also refine their search by specifying the type of main ingredient, the courses, the holiday, and time savers (See fig. 9). Western Living’s online edition should adopt a similar approach to construct a search function for its “food and wine” category. For example, the wine search could allow users to search for a wine review by the name of the winery, the originality, the production year, and the type of wine. The food search would enable users to search for a recipe in a way similar to the “Recipe Finder” on Marthastewart.com.

Fig. 9 The “Recipe Finder” on Marthastewart.com allows users to refine search results by different filters and/or keywords. (Screen capture of “Recipe Finder” on Marthastewart.com).

90 Candade, “Writing Web vs Writing for Print.”
Likewise, extensive search functionality should be available in *Western Living*’s core editorial content—the “homes and design.” The current *Western Living* online edition does not have an embedded search function that allows users to search through the “Sources” section. To make this section more valuable and useful to the users, *Western Living* must compile all the information from all issues and build a database for it. The database would act as a searchable business directory specific to *Western Living*’s distribution regions. This way, *Western Living* provides a valuable service specific not only to its readers’ needs but also distinct from its competitors.

Lastly, *Western Living* should consider having different editions of email newsletters like the ones on Marthastewart.com. Marthastewart.com offers different email newsletter subscription options for readers with different interests. For instance, *Whole Living* is for those who want to have a healthy diet and a balanced lifestyle; *Pet Happy* is for those who keep pets and want to learn more about pet care. Similarly, the *Western Living* online edition may issue three editions of email newsletters for the readers in British Columbia, Alberta, and Manitoba/Saskatchewan, respectively. The content of these newsletters may include regional news on products, services, and events, in addition to general information. This resembles how the front of the book—“The Goods”—in the print edition is region-specific. Again, email newsletters for each region will appeal to regional advertisers, as it is a more effective way to market the advertisers’ products and services.

Because of its large scale, Marthastewart.com may not be the perfect parallel for *Western Living*’s online edition, but its structure and functionality can certainly give *Western Living* some insights about establishing a lifestyle magazine online. It presents different types of content in a well-organized and dynamic way that helps users to explore the online content more thoroughly. It also demonstrates how to help users find what they want with an extensive search function. By incorporating these qualities with its web model, *Western Living* would be able to benefit its online edition and build a strong brand to compete with its potential competitors, either locally or nationally.

### 4.3 User Needs vs. Business Goals

Having extensive content and functionality similar to Marthastewart.com is ideal for any online magazine, but it is costly. For a smaller magazine like *Western Living*, there is not enough time, money, and manpower to build a giant kingdom online. Therefore, it is important for *Western Living* to evaluate what features are most cost-effective. To decide which ones are worth implementing in the online edition, *Western Living* has to address both business goals and user goals.

Business goals determine the design of a site, directly and indirectly. For example, during the late 1990s, many websites divided their stories into several pages so that
they could sell more banner impressions. However, this increased the loading time users spent on an article since they had to reload the page several times. Instead of making the websites more user friendly, their design decision was blinded by their business objective. Clearly, there was a conflict between the user needs and the business goal. In the short run, this strategy may be profitable, but in the long run, it may turn users away. Likewise, a magazine’s business goals have influence on the design of its online edition. It is necessary for *Western Living* to outline its short- and long-term business objectives, as well as its user needs in building the online edition.

Users visit an online publication for a purpose, such as reading the latest news and searching for reviews. The functions and features of an online publication build on user needs. To determine user needs, an online magazine like *Western Living* must identify whom its target audience is and why the users visit the online magazine. For instance, the readers of *Print* magazine’s online edition, Printmag.com, are mostly designers and illustrators and the reason they visit Printmag.com is to keep informed about the news in the creative industry. Therefore, Printmag.com offers readers several features to keep them updated, including a job board, events and competitions announcements, and products and services directory.

*Western Living* must evaluate whether a feature can meet both business goals and user needs before deciding whether it is worth implementing. A mutually beneficial example would be email newsletters, which encourage subscribers to visit the online edition, while at the same time generate revenue through display ads. However, in other less perfectly complementary scenarios, such as displaying ads in slideshows, *Western Living* needs to decide whether the feature is worth pursuing and run the risk of potentially sabotaging one side. The key is to find a balance between business goals and user needs. *Western Living* needs to minimize the conflict between two sides while building an optimized online edition.

### 4.4 How Does Western Living Establish Its Brand Online

Being within the same publishing company, *Western Living* certainly has the opportunity to utilize valuable experience from the redesign process of Vanmag.com. However, if *Western Living* implements similar strategies or functionality as Vanmag.com, it needs to consider how it can distinguish itself from *Vancouver* as a brand.

Both *Western Living* and *Vancouver* target similar readership. *Western Living* targets urban adults aged 25–54 with high disposable income, who are:

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• three times more likely to own a home valued at over $500,000;
• 46% more likely to have traveled by air on seven or more business trips in the past 12 months;
• 55% more likely to spend $40,000 or more on a household vehicle;
• twice as likely to spend over $20 on a bottle of wine; and
• more than twice as likely to spend over $1,500 each month on credit cards.

_Vancouver_, on the other hand, targets urban adults aged 18-49 with high disposable income who are:

• four times more likely to have a home valued at over $500,000;
• 2.5 times more likely to have traveled by air for business three or more times in the past 12 months;
• more than three times more likely to own a compact premium vehicle;
• 84% more likely to pay more for good quality wine; and
• nearly three times more likely to spend over $1,500 each month on credit cards.\(^92\)

The only significant differences are in the average age—_Vancouver_’s readers are slightly younger than _Western Living_’s—and in the geographic distribution—most of _Vancouver_’s readers are in the city of Vancouver, West Vancouver, and North Vancouver, while _Western Living_’s readers are spread across top household income neighborhoods in Greater Vancouver, Victoria, Winnipeg, Edmonton, Calgary, Regina, and Saskatoon.

_Vancouver_ and _Western Living_ are in different categories—_Vancouver_ is considered a city magazine and _Western Living_ a shelter/lifestyle magazine—so they are not in direct competition with each other. However, due to the similarity in the readerships of _Vancouver_ and _Western Living_, it is crucial for _Western Living_ to distinguish itself from _Vancouver_ and establish its own brand online at the same time. It is necessary for _Western Living_ to build a brand that is different from _Vancouver_’s so it can avoid competition with its sister publication. _Western Living_ needs to take a fresh approach to develop its branding strategies.

Brand is a broad term that has countless interpretations. Business historian Nancy F. Koehn defines a brand as “a name, logo, or symbol intended to distinguish a particular seller’s offering from those of competitors.”\(^93\) A brand is defined as “a name or trademark connected with a product or producer” on Wikipedia.\(^94\) Advertising expert Jeremy Bullmore suggests that “a brand is not an objective fact; it is made up of a million or more individual and subjective assessments—a

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\(^92\) _Vancouver_ Magazine 2009 Rates & Data, and _Western Living_ 2009 Rates + Data.

\(^93\) Marketer’s Toolkit, 8.4.

consensus of subjectivity.” Brand definitions have evolved from representing a tangible form—a way to recognize a product or service—to an intangible form—the experience/perception consumers have towards the product or service. Regardless how brand is interpreted, it should be considered as a multidimensional marketing tool that communicates its core message to the target. These dimensions can generally be categorized into visual, perceptual, positioning, added value, image, and personality. In an online magazine context, these dimensions are present in the design of the magazine, its editorial focus, the targeted audience, the tone of writing, the editorial voice, and the values that the magazine brings to its readers. Western Living may build its brand online based on these dimensions.

According to Managing Editor Anicka Quin, Western Living recruited the Art Director of Vancouver magazine, Randall Watson, in 2008. He redesigned Western Living in May 2008, and brought the print magazine back to what he had first envisioned. The magazine now has more visual elements and pages with large scale photos than previously. If visual elements are also what Western Living would like to emphasize in its online edition, it needs to think of a way to present them differently from Vanmag.com. Vancouver uses mainly a single image or an image gallery, which expands into a slideshow, to accompany the articles or stories (See fig. 10 and fig. 11). Western Living, on the other hand, may use a different approach to display the images with text. For example, Western Living may emphasize its visual components by enabling a “full screen” function for each interior or exterior shot of the house. Or, if budgets allow, it can produce a “virtual tour” by showing different panoramic views of the interior and exterior of a house, similar to how Expedia.com showcases some hotels. In addition, the page layout and design of Western Living’s online edition should establish its own style so that the viewers can make an easy connection to the brand. The design should also implement typefaces, colours, and other visual elements similar to the print edition.

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96 Ibid.
97 Personal communication, June 2009.
One of the most important ways to differentiate *Western Living* from *Vancouver* is the editorial focus. Although both magazines include food, wine, and real estate in their contents, *Western Living* focuses more on homes and design, and *Vancouver* focuses...
on the city lifestyle. Therefore, Western Living should emphasize the focus on homes and design in the online edition as well as extending the content of this subject area online. For example, it may showcase homes through photos and videos, conduct interviews with interior designers or architects, provide a “Q & A” section for questions on renovation and interior design, or announce home-related events and shows on its calendar. More importantly, Western Living should develop an online community that focuses on the same subject. This can then help the company build its brand online more effectively.

Delivering value to users is another way to differentiate Western Living’s brand from Vancouver’s. Users value an online publication for what types of service or information they can get from it. An online publication is popular if the service or information it offers is useful and unique. Vanmag.com provides readers with a wide range of timely information about the city, such as upcoming events, reviews on newly opened restaurants, and insights about large events, such as the 2010 Winter Olympics. This information represents Vancouver’s authority in the city. Vancouver’s readers value its content because it is reliable. In addition, Vancouver has built several databases from different business directories and reviews on Vanmag.com. This gives users a valuable tool when they need to search for information about a certain restaurant or store in the city. Western Living, similarly, may build databases from home and design related directories in the four provinces, which would allow users to search for local business more efficiently. Such features are valuable to target audiences and in turn, support brand building. Western Living’s online edition should also aim to be the number one resource for local readers who look for advice in home and design. To achieve this, Western Living needs to establish its authority in this subject matter so that readers will read its content.

The writing style—the editorial tone and voice—usually reflect the “personality” of a magazine. It is one of the traits that Western Living can employ to differentiate its brand from Vancouver’s. The writing style of Vancouver magazine is usually critical and humorous, whereas that of Western Living is more sophisticated and informative. When Vancouver was rebuilding its online edition, it wanted to reach a younger audience. Therefore, it allowed the content on Vanmag.com to be edgier than the print edition. Depending on the demographic and the purpose of the online edition, Western Living may need to adjust its writing style accordingly. For instance, if Western Living wants to target homeowners who are also savvy travelers, it may need to replace lengthy travel essays with shorter, point-form information packages.

Brand Building through an Online Community

An online community, by definition, is a group of people who have similar interests and interact with each other regularly online. It can benefit a company’s brand in several ways such as adding value, creating loyalty, spreading the message, increasing

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98 Personal communication with Rebecca Philps.
traffic, generating content, collecting data, and viral marketing.\textsuperscript{99} For a magazine like \textit{Western Living}, an online community can expand their audience, and eventually make its online edition financially viable. There are countless ways to develop an online community. The following activities are the most suitable for \textit{Western Living}:

1. Blog. Since “The Goods” section in \textit{Western Living} usually reports new products, services, and events, a blog may be created and dedicated to these news releases. The blog may also contain new releases that did not make it into the offline edition. The blog would be an ideal medium for new releases since it can be published in a timely manner. Other content options for the blog would be to feature tips and trends on decoration and renovation, occasionally \textit{Western Living} may consider inviting designers or experts to be guest writers. The blog should offer readers valuable information as well as engage readers by inviting them to exchange ideas through commentaries.

2. Social networks. Social networking sites like Twitter and Facebook are ideal for building online communities, since their purpose is to connect those with similar minds and interests to form a network. Benefits of social networks include cost effectiveness (since most of them are free), viral recommendations, long-term customer relationships (because users want to stay in their social networks), community recruitment, and targeted advertising.\textsuperscript{100} \textit{Western Living} may create accounts in selected social networking sites to build its own community there, and promote its online edition to the community. For instance, it can generate an event page on Facebook and invite all the members to join the event. The page can include a link to \textit{Western Living}’s online edition that directs the members to the site for more information. Social networking sites also offer an opportunity for companies to know their community members further because the sites require all users to register first. Although marketing on social networking sites is most effective in targeting a younger audience, baby boomers are increasingly involved in these networks.\textsuperscript{101} Since the age of \textit{Western Living}’s target group is from 25 to 54, social networks are still ideal for supporting \textit{Western Living}’s brand.

3. Discussion forum. Designing a place for users with similar interests to input their thoughts and generate discussions is a great way to establish an online community. It is interactive and engaging. A discussion forum can offer \textit{Western Living}’s readers an opportunity to exchange ideas on topics ranging from homes, design, wine and food, to travel. For example, there could be a “Q & A” section where the users can post their questions about home renovation or interior design. The forum could also allow the users to upload images so they are able to exchange ideas visually. The users are more likely to stay in the same community if they can generate their own content. They are also more likely to visit the online community on a regular basis if they find the discussion forum useful and helpful.

\textsuperscript{99} Buss, \textit{Online Communities Handbook}.
\textsuperscript{100} Ibid, 148.
\textsuperscript{101} Ibid, 153.
There are a few principles of designing online community activities that Western Living should follow. First, the activity should be something that the users want to do. If the activity involves tedious tasks, the users will avoid doing it. Second, the activity should last. It should be interesting and non-repetitive otherwise the users will become bored and eventually give up. Third, the activity should be open-ended. In other words, the topic of the activity should be open enough so the users can generate and maintain frequent discussions. This encourages users to return to the online edition repeatedly. Lastly, the activity should be intuitive so that users know how to start right away. Most users do not want to read an instruction manual, so complicated activities will keep users away.102

Establishing an online community will make Western Living’s brand become stronger and more recognizable. The online community can help Western Living define a brand that is distinguished from Vancouver.

It is important to note that establishing a brand online for a magazine does not mean building a different brand for it. Rather, the Web presence should be integrated into the brand. Even though the online edition is a different product from the offline edition, it needs to integrate with the offline edition as a whole to position and market the brand effectively.

Vancouver demonstrates how a magazine can combine two different platforms to promote a single brand. From design, structure, to functionality and strategy, Vancouver’s online edition provides some good examples that Western Living can follow. However, since Western Living and Vancouver target similar readership, Western Living needs to rethink its brand and how it positions its brand online to avoid direct competition with Vanmag.com. This can be done by emphasizing their differences in editorial focus, visual design, services and values, editorial tone, and writing style. More importantly, Western Living needs to establish an online community distinguishable from Vanmag.com’s, since an online community can productively support brand building.

Similarly, Western Living needs to differentiate itself from its online competitors, such as Canadian House & Home, Alberta Home, BC Home, and Avenue. Western Living should study them individually when building its online edition, so that it can adjust its strategies accordingly and design Web features unique to its online magazine. By providing readers with values that are not available through other similar online publications, Western Living’s online edition will be able to engage more readers and establish strong brand loyalty.

102 Ibid, 44.
The design firm Berg has recently teamed up with Bonnier, a multimedia company that owns more than fifty magazines, to develop Mag+, a portable tablet e-reader for magazines. Mag+ provides readers with the ability to interact online, along with the convenience of reading digital content—a vision that combines the quality of the print and the Web. Similarly, Apple has also recently introduced iPad, a slim tablet computer that displays multimedia content. iPad has the form factor and user interface that simulate the physical reading experience, as well as the capability to allow publishers deliver content in dynamic ways, and include video, audio, and online interactivity. Whether or not e-readers such as Mag+ and iPad are going to be the future of magazines, or even replace print magazines altogether, there is an undeniable trend that offline publishing is moving online. Through these digital mobile devices, publishers are able to deliver enhanced information in ways that are not possible for print publishing to do. Thus, magazine publishers need to invest in digital publishing and make their contents available in different digital platforms. A single revenue stream from offline publishing is no longer sufficient to sustain a magazine business, recession or not.

While online advertising is growing and many print publishers have made their move to capture market share, some have doubts about whether the online advertising revenue is enough to cover the loss of print ads. Although the cost of online publishing is significantly less than that of traditional publishing, there is still much less revenue from online advertising than from print advertising. The typical online CPM (cost per mille) costs between one-seventh and one-tenth of print CPM.\footnote{Kinsman, “Why Would Anyone.”} Print advertising rates are higher but advertising budgets are migrating online. This print-Web paradox is the biggest problem that many magazine publishers are facing currently.

To deal with this phenomenon, some digital publishers have started to charge readers for their content. The New York Times has just joined the list. It will start charging readers for full access to its Web content starting 2011. Its move to charge for online content is because its online advertising revenue is not enough to offset the decrease in print ads. The New York Times claims that the move could increase online revenue without losing advertisers.

However, PC Magazine abandoned its print edition in 2009 and moved completely online. For PC Magazine, it is more reasonable to cut print costs since 70% of revenue comes from online advertising, which has increased at an average of 42% annually since 2001.\footnote{Benton, “PC Magazine.”} Also, the Web-only publishing model is more suitable for faster publishing schedules, which allows PC Magazine to publish technology news in
a timely manner. This model may not work as well for the New York Times since the content of the New York Times is very different from that of PC Magazine.

Whether the models used by the New York Times or PC Magazine will be sustainable is yet to be determined. Since online publishing is still new for most magazine operations, only time will tell what Web models will work. For now, the best way to deal with the print-Web paradox is to monitor where the audience is spending its time and attention.

Research has shown that the number of Internet users is still growing quickly, and they read online material more often than offline material. In fact, people go to online material first because many of the print sources, especially newspapers and magazines, are available online now and are often free. Clearly, readers are migrating to the Internet and mobile devices. People expect to see an online version of most print resources. They also expect to see additional information available online compared to the print edition.

Therefore, it is essential for magazine publishers to develop an online edition for their publications. Whether the print content is completely or partially available online, the key is to offer what the readers want. The online edition needs to offer built-in functions that provide value to the users, as well as different activities that can engage online communities. Thus, a mere online duplicate of the print version is not enough to engage the audience and build an online community. It is certainly not appealing to advertisers.

The redesign of Vanmag.com provides a good example of the importance of publishing online for the financial health and brand building of both the online and the offline editions. In comparison, Western Living has not fully utilized the potential of the Web to support its brand. The Western Living online edition lacks of functionality and interactivity that are required to build an online readership. This would put the publication in an unfavourable position in terms of online advertising, and its inactiveness on the Internet would endanger Western Living’s financial health eventually. Therefore, it is crucial for Western Living to redesign its current online edition, and apply the best practices and strategies to enhance its SEO, site stickiness, and online brand building.

While it is helpful to consult other magazines’ online models, Western Living needs to comprehensively analyze its brand position online in order to achieve differentiation from its competitors. One key is to create and offer readers value not available from other competitors. This allows Western Living to develop an online community unique and loyal to its brand. To survive in the evolving publishing industry, Western Living needs to build an online edition that attracts an expanded audience, boosts online revenue, and makes the proposition sustainable.

105 eMarketer, “Reading Less Print.”
Will print survive if everyone in the industry focuses on the Web? It will if it works together with the Web. Print is not going away, but the role of print magazines is changing—it is no longer the only medium to build communities and connect audiences. A smart publisher should integrate the offline and online editions of a magazine to strengthen its brand. It is a matter of survival. A publishing model that incorporates both the print and the Web is most likely to be successful in the long term.
B I B L I O G R A P H Y


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