MAGAZINES MOVE ONLINE:
THE MOTHER JONES WEB MODEL

by

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ABSTRACT

This report analyzes the trends in online publishing and how they have affected news media, focusing on the evolution of the Website for *Mother Jones* magazine. Established in 1974, the magazine has a history of reporting on American politics and international issues from a progressive perspective. Beginning in 2007, the magazine began a three-phased relaunch of its Website. The report examines the *Mother Jones* Web model for its success in building an online presence for the Website capable of performing the following important functions: offering in-depth content and reporting on breaking news events in a timely fashion, interacting with readers and building social networks, and establishing a recognizable brand that stands out in the media landscape.

**Keywords:** Magazine publishing; online journalism; progressive media; branding; social networks; Web 2.0.

**Subject terms:** Online journalism; Electronic news gathering; Digital media -- Political aspects; Journalism -- Social aspects.
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1 INTRODUCTION: THE MOTHER JONES WEB MODEL

"Mother Jones produces revelatory journalism that, in its power and reach, seeks to inform and inspire a more just and democratic world."

-Mission statement for Mother Jones magazine

Mother Jones is one of the best known progressive magazines in the United States has a circulation of more than 200,000 and a reading audience of more than 700,000. Created in 1976, the bimonthly magazine has been successful in building a loyal readership and attracts a highly educated, affluent, socially conscious and media savvy audience.¹ Mother Jones publishes a range of content that aims to "inform and inspire a more just and democratic world," including long feature articles on political or social issues; interviews with politicians, environmentalists, artists, actors, and other newsworthy figures; reports of little-known statistics on issues affecting Americans such as health care, education, and consumer behaviour; photo essays and illustrations; and short news updates on stories not widely reported in the mainstream press. This project report will address the transition that the magazine is making to the online realm of publishing. The magazine was the first to offer its content online when it launched its first website in 1993. Due to an evolving Internet with changing uses, Mother Jones decided to do a relaunch of its Website and began implementing changes in 2006. In this report, I will look at how Mother Jones has attempted to adjust to trends in online news reporting and magazine publishing, while still maintaining its editorial mission and the characteristics that have helped in attracting

¹ From Mother Jones Advertising Media Kit.
readers. The magazine was also relaunched during the same time period but I will only focus on the changes effected online.

In August 2006, Mother Jones magazine began a three-phased business plan to update its print publication and Website, in order to improve the publication’s overall impact and build a stronger brand image. In this report, using information collected through open-ended interviews and my experience as an editorial intern in the magazine’s correspondents’ office in Washington, D.C., I analyze the changes made to the magazine’s Website and their effects in attracting readers online, maintaining a competitive Web presence, and building the publication’s overall brand. Mother Jones publishes news and investigative reporting with a “progressive” political stance, and has been looking to increase and emphasize original content and breaking news reports on the Website. The final goal of the redesign of the Website is to attract a loyal readership of daily or weekly visitors, and the primary strategy for achieving this is to provide consistently relevant and timely reporting from an independent source.

One of the most influential trends of the Web 2.0—a more interactive and responsive web that uses features such as blogs and social networks—is the rapid pace delivery of news from both traditional, corporate-owned news sources and through more grassroots, alternative online channels such as independent blogs. Most importantly for news media, the Web offers a more immediate way of reaching readers with breaking news reports requiring weekly, bi-weekly, monthly, and bimonthly news publications to provide more regular news updates on their websites. The Internet also offers greater potential for offering a wider range of content such as videos, podcasts, and other multimedia—as well as the ability to interact more closely and immediately with the audience. Many of mainstream and independent news
publications are implementing these tools and features in order to keep pace with the Internet, and attract a large readership.

At the same time, the Web has not altered the purpose of progressive news magazines such as Mother Jones: to investigate news, act as a watchdog on government and the private sector, and possibly influence the direction of public policy or the opinions of its readership. This has not been lost on the leadership of the magazine: Mother Jones editor-in-chief, Monika Bauerlein, sees the Internet as an additional platform for Mother Jones to fulfil its mandate to provide groundbreaking investigative reporting. Bauerlein has noted: “We do journalism essentially, and we put some of it out in a magazine and some of it out on a Website.”

In this report, I will not draw any conclusions about the Web causing the extinction of the printed form of the magazine. According to most industry insiders, both still have pertinent and complementary roles in the current media landscape, and this is the philosophy that Mother Jones ascribes to. Bruce McCurdy, general manager with online business for Mother Jones, says that the current iteration of the Website does not lend itself to the longer, feature-style reporting that is characteristic of Mother Jones magazine. In an interview, he notes: “I would say the Website is an extension of the magazine; whereas the magazine has its own personality and its own mission to fulfil and is designed as a piece of printed material.” Those who predict that media will continue to exist in the printed form say that it is a tactile, format that is more convenient for reading longer articles in several settings.

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2 Phone interview with Monika Bauerlein, editor of Mother Jones magazine, April 20, 2007.

3 Lebanese journalist and professor of journalism at the University of Mississippi, Samir Husni firmly believes that print publications will continue to co-exist with online journalism. “In a wide-ranging phone interview, [Samir] Husni said he believed people would always want print periodicals, even as new media and online sites gain in popularity, but print publications should shift to more analysis and add more photos.” (From “Mr. Magazine Claims We Will Always Crave Ink on Paper,” on MEDISHIFT on PBS.org (Public Broadcasting Service), May 2, 2007, http://www.pbs.org/mediashift/2007/05/digging_deeper_mr_magazine_beli.html.)
Rather, I examine *Mother Jones* magazine's complementary and evolving presence on the Internet as it adopts its new business model that is more oriented towards the Web. I also compare its Website and practices with those of both mainstream and progressive media. In section 2, I look at the history and mandate of the publication. *Mother Jones* was an early pioneer on the Web, and its history in publishing is an important factor in the characteristics of the Website. In section 3, I look at the main functions of Websites that have complementary print editions, analyzing how *Mother Jones* has responded to publishing trends in the Web. Using statistics gathered by the Pew Research Center, I will look at the reasons that more Web users are using the Web as a source of news, and how this has shaped the role of news media. I examine the *Mother Jones* model, focusing on how its Web presence relates to the overall history of the publication, and how it is responding to online publishing trends in the Web 2.0 world. I will illustrate how the editors of *Mother Jones* have decided to implement the publication's mandate in the online realm, and how elements of the Web have been used to build a brand—and even create a community of readers. I will take a general look at the best practices on the Web, analyzing the features and content of a range of online media including corporate-owned traditional news sources, independent alternative news publications, blogs and other new media. Drawing from similarities in the online publishing model, I will look at the main functions of Websites that have complementary print publications similar to *Mother Jones* magazine. In section 4, I detail the process and elements of the magazine's Web relaunch which occurred from mid-2006 to end of 2007. The three phases of the relaunch will be described showing how they relate to the characteristics of the Web and the online media landscape. These three phases are: adding online content and reporting; "breaking" news stories before they are reported
elsewhere; and boosting the Website’s search ranking status in order to attract readers. I will outline the measures taken to achieve these goals and show how they have impacted the personality of the magazine online. In section 5, I compare the Mother Jones model to other media sites within the arenas of mainstream media; progressive, left-leaning media community; and the blogosphere, to examine the features that give Mother Jones a unique and distinct online brand identity. Finally, I draw conclusions about the possible effects of this change, and the possibilities for further editorial growth and brand building opportunities online.
2 MOTHER JONES MAGAZINE

In this section, I introduce Mother Jones as a publication: its history, the characteristics of the magazine, and its editorial voice. I show how these elements have informed major decisions regarding the features and characteristics of the new Website.

2.1 The history of Mother Jones

As noted, Mother Jones takes a “progressive” stance on American politics. In response to industrialization, the American progressive movement first emerged in the late 19th century to advocate for social justice and workers rights. The movement was also an early proponent of causes that Mother Jones regularly advocates for in its reporting. Two issues the magazine concentrates on are environmentalism and antitrust laws. According to its mission, Mother Jones magazine aims to produce writing and reporting that will inform and inspire citizen participation towards justice and democracy. It operates as a non-profit in order to avoid the influence of major advertisers and also to cultivate the mission of its parent organization, the Foundation for National Progress (FNP). The FNP operates the magazine, the Website and an internship for investigative journalism, and aims “to produce revelatory journalism that in its power and reach seeks to inform and inspire a more just and democratic world.”

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^See, for example, Kristofer Allerfeldt (ed.), The Progressive Era in the USA, 1890-1921 (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007)
^The origin of antitrust regulation in the United States can be traced back to the Sherman Act of 1890.
Before the magazine, "Mother Jones" was already a recognizable name standing for courageous activism in support of the United States' labour movement. During her often arduous life, "Mother" Mary Harris Jones (1837-1930) was a notably perseverant political activist who spoke out for unions and against child labour during the Industrial Revolution. A West Virginia Attorney General once called her "the most dangerous woman in America" and, in her own words, she was a "hellraiser." Jones's public speeches captivated her listeners with story telling and raw displays of emotions. She gave her last public address in 1930 in Silver Spring, Maryland at the age of 93.  

The magazine's creation was inspired by social revolutions that had preceded its establishment in 1974. *Mother Jones* founder Adam Hochschild described the period as a tumultuous and politically charged era:

We were still living in the afterglow of the 1960s, when the civil rights and antiwar movements had put hundreds of thousands of Americans into the streets, shaken the country to its core, brought an end to legal segregation, and helped force U.S. withdrawal from the bloody, unjust war in Vietnam.  

Hochschild started his magazine career with *Ramparts*, another politically-charged investigative news publication from the 1960s. *Ramparts* was the first news source to report the Vietnam era U.S. Central Intelligence Agency infiltration of college campuses.

From its earliest days, *Mother Jones* was influenced by the progressive movement and by an editor who had written for *Ramparts*, a publication that was very much out of the mainstream. The era that spawned *Mother Jones*, in the wake of the 1960s and its "hippie" movement, was coloured with attitudes of anti-establishment,

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non-conformism and rebellion that are apparent even in the magazine’s current iteration. The editorial direction of the magazine has consistently been to provide news reports revealing injustices or missteps—particularly of the American government. In its first few years, *Mother Jones* published an investigative piece on executives at Ford ignoring warnings about the dangers the Pinto car. The story was picked up and reported by other media, and led Ford executives to hastily defend themselves before recalling the vehicles from the assembly lines. In 1979, the magazine published a piece reporting that industrialized nations were dumping their pesticides in developing countries. Soon afterward, bills were introduced in three countries outlawing the practice.

2.2 The magazine

*Mother Jones* magazine is clear and simple in its organization. The table of contents consists of “Features” and “Departments.” The Features are longer, narrative, reflective or investigative articles covering issues such as politics, media, activism, the environment. The magazine often has a critical tone and acts as a fervent political and corporate watchdog. For instance, the January/February 2007 issue included a piece on the privatization of the highway system in the United States by Goldman Sachs, as well as a long profile of Lou Dobbs, the CNN anchorman who has earned a reputation for his anti-immigration stance. The April 2007 issue included a feature on the increasing monopolization of the news media industry by large corporations.

Departments are collections of shorter pieces that offer perspectives on topics, graphics and reports under various headings. This section adds to the personality and flavour of *Mother Jones* with injections of humour, graphics and opinions. The Departments are quick takes that show readers the *Mother Jones* perspective on larger
news issues. In a recent “Exhibit” the magazine collected stats on the prevalence of advertising in culture and movies. Exhibits are colourfully illustrated with cartoons and graphics that surround lists of stats and factoids. The Departments are given clever highlighted deks (similar to news headlines) to attract readers. For a news-based periodical, the page design is relatively heavy on colourful illustrations, cartoons, graphics and photos.

In the cultural arena, “Media Jones” is a collection of reports that tends to include an essay, an interview, and reviews of books, films, music and other art forms. Other departments include “OutFront” profiles of newsworthy non-celebrities, media figures and other newsmakers. The magazine upholds its dedication to inspirational or provocative reporting with “Re: Action,” which lists Internet links and sources for further information on the features and reporting in the magazine issue. This section also serves as a bridge between the print and online formats. “PS” is a satirical political cartoon on the last page of the book.

2.3 The Website

In its short history, the Mother Jones website has made enormous strides and redefined the way that the magazine functioned. From basic beginnings essentially as a deconstruction and online presence of the magazine, Mother Jones's editors quickly recognized the capacity of the Web to store large amounts of information in an organized, accessible database of pertinent information. More recently, the magazine has begun updating the site daily with original news content, which has become an industry-wide standard of online publishing.

The Mother Jones Website launched in November 1993, in the same month as Wired magazine's Website and became the first general interest magazine in the United States to offer its editorial content online. At first, the magazine simply
republished the articles from the print version on the Web. For a period of time, readers had to enter a passcode listed in the table of contents of the online version in order to access the freely available articles. In 1995 and thereafter, the Website began publishing Web exclusive stories on the conflict in Kosovo, the Kenneth Starr trial and the Enron scandal, among other news, that received national attention. The intrepid reporting resulted in *Mother Jones* winning two Webby Awards for online political coverage.

In the current iteration of the Website, the magazine includes a number of sections that mirror the magazine, as well exclusive online features. The website is divided into reporting based on areas of interests: “Politics,” “Environment and Health,” “Media and Culture,” and “Photojournalism.” Within the “Politics” section, the website features “Washington Dispatches,” which are glimpses into the goings-on in the U.S. capital city as well as reports on major breaking political news stories. Along with stories on the homepage, the news stories in the “Politics” section are updated daily in order to report on the latest breaking news of the day. The site also features three blogs, a cartoon or graphic of the day, and podcast interviews.

Although produced only once or twice per year, “Toolkits,” online databases with background knowledge on major stories, are featured prominently online. They have played important roles in boosting *Mother Jones*’s online recognition since their inception. The creation of the first Toolkit was the result of a good journalistic find. In July 1995, *Mother Jones* obtained a leaked list of 159 early donors to the G.O.P.’s (Republican) Action Committee under the leadership of Newt Gingrich. The editors decided to post an annotated database of those contributors on the Website. This boosted the Web presence and relevance of the site to its general readers, as well as within political circles. According to reports from *The Washington Post*, the Federal
Election Commission used the database in its investigation of the committee and its activities. Later databases tracked contributions to federal election campaigns, populations in American prisons, and the health of the world’s coral reefs. These databases were very innovative and set important precedents for the Mother Jones Website.

By using the capabilities of the Web in order to communicate the facts behind major news stories, some that are rarely reported by the mainstream press, the magazine has maintained its editorial mission in informing its readership. In order to stay relevant and attractive to Web browsers, the magazine must continue to offer features such as searchable databases of information. It is also essential that reporters are producing new, original content on a daily basis for the Website. The dynamic nature of the Web means that changes to the Mother Jones site are happening quickly in order to keep pace with the trends. In this thesis, I look at how the magazine has chosen to maintain its editorial mission while adopting some conventions or standards of online publishing.

2.4 The staff structure

Since its inception, Mother Jones magazine has seen several strong women editors and has been identified as an authoritative voice on progressive politics with feminist and environmentalist leanings. Now-famous documentary maker Michael Moore was a briefly an editor of the magazine in 1988 before he was fired. (His suit for wrongful dismissal funded the production of his first documentary film, “Roger and Me.”) The current editors are Monika Bauerlein, a former political reporter and editor with the Village Voice, and Clara Jeffery, a former investigative reporter in

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10 Ibid.
Washington and editor with Harpers magazine. Bauerlein and Jeffery have been actively pursuing increased political and investigate reports in the magazine and on the Website. Bauerlein spearheaded the drive for the magazine to establish a correspondent’s office in Washington, D.C. that could report breaking political news online. Both editors have also overseen influential pieces such as the report of ExxonMobil’s funding of climate change deniers, as well as editorial packages on the war in Iraq.\(^{11}\)

The headquarters for Mother Jones are in San Francisco, with a smaller office in Washington, D.C. The editorial office in San Francisco consists of editors-in-chief Bauerlein and Jeffery, two Senior Editors, a managing editor, research editor and assistant Web editor. There is only one reporter on staff and a number of contributing writers and interns paid on a freelance basis. On the business side, the Publisher and the Chief Operating/Financial Officer hold the reins supported by a dozen staff members in advertising, marketing, communications and fundraising. The Washington office was created in mid-2006 as an effort to ramp up Mother Jones original reporting with more on-the-ground coverage of Washington. As of January 2008, the Washington office had 8 staff members. The magazine’s circulation department is run out-of-house.

2.5 Funding and revenue generating channels

The Foundation for National Progress provides the operating revenue for Mother Jones magazine and Mother Jones.com. According to the Charity Navigator, an independent charity evaluator, the foundation received $9,650,897 in revenue in 2006. The

operating expenses for that year were $9,245,089, of which $6,953,964 were for operations of the foundation’s programs (including the magazine).12

With Websites and online news increasingly dominating media, the financial health of some magazines are beginning to deteriorate with falling circulation numbers and the resulting lowered rates for print advertisements. To add to the financial difficulties of this awkward transition period to online publishing, most news publications are still making the bulk of their money through print advertising, partly because advertising online is not valued the same as print advertising. Online ads are still only generating “pennies on the dollar compared to traditional media.”13 In the past year, advertising revenue for news magazines dropped slightly across the board. In the 250 magazines analyzed by the Publishers Information Bureau, ad pages were down slightly by 0.6 percent in 2007, compared to a tenth of a percent drop in 2006.14 The exceptions include the North American edition of The Economist whose ad pages grew by 8.5 percent in the same period.

Mother Jones has fared well economically and continued to expand its print circulation in the transition to online publishing. Between 1997 and 2006, Mother Jones circulation (paid and unpaid) grew from 135,000 to more than 220,000.15 Circulation averages for a period of six months ending in December 2007 were 220,146

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readers paid and verified.\textsuperscript{16} Compared to mainstream magazines, these numbers appear relatively small but it is important to note that the numbers are increasing while other magazines are on the decline. \textit{Esquire} and \textit{Time} magazine had respective circulations of 721,217 and 3,351,872 in the same six month period. \textit{Time} magazine slashed its circulation by 600,000 late in December in order to lower its ad rates in an attempt to boost its revenue.\textsuperscript{17} According to the Audit Bureau of Circulation, many magazine titles had double-digit declines in news sales in 2007—with \textit{Vanity Fair} down 12.8 per cent, and \textit{Playboy} sales down a whopping 35.8 per cent.\textsuperscript{18}

In addition to growing circulation numbers, \textit{Mother Jones} attracts advertisers by appealing to those looking to reach educated and involved citizens. According to readership statistics for the magazine listed in the \textit{Mother Jones} advertising kit, over 79 per cent attended college and 35 per cent have a postgraduate degree, 39 per cent of their had volunteered within the past 12 months, and 22 per cent had participated in environmental causes. The readership demographic presents a targeted market of readers interested in news and current affairs, who tend to be concerned about the environment and other global issues. They also tend to be employed as professionals: over 70 per cent are employed of which 44 per cent are in professional or managerial careers.\textsuperscript{19} Having garnered a loyal readership throughout the past thirty years, \textit{Mother Jones} is in a good position of having its readership base mature along with it. They are

\begin{footnotes}
\item[17] This tactic had been used previously by Hearst Media Incorporated; however, the advertising rates were actually raised in that instance. In 1995, Hearst magazine cut circulation rates at 13 of its 15 titles while raising advertising rates by five per cent and increasing subscription and newsstand prices. (From: Deirdre Carmody, “Magazines, Increase ad rates while cutting circulation? Seems like a good idea to Hearst,” \textit{New York Times}, July 31, 1995. http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=990CE1DC163FF932A05754C0A963958260).
\end{footnotes}
now reaching Baby Boomers (the median age is 50.9) more likely to be financially
stable than a younger, more radical demographic that may have represented the
magazine's earlier readership.

Through the Website, the magazine is able to reach a slightly younger
demographic. The online component boasts a readership of 700,000 unique visitors per
month, with a median age 46.9 years old and median income of $56,900.\textsuperscript{20} The
magazine offers several online advertising options: run-of-site ads (appearing as
banners or sidebars throughout the Website), ads emailed to online newsletter
subscribers (as standalone emails, or as part of the regular \textit{Mother Jones} headlines
newsletter), or links to advertisers' companies and organizations posted at the bottom
of the Website.

\textsuperscript{20} \textit{Mother Jones} "Advertising Media Kit:" "Site Profile" and "Demographics",
http://www.motherjones.com/mediakit/website/visitors-demographics.html
3 ESSENTIAL FUNCTIONS OF NEWS WEBSITES AND BEST PRACTICES ONLINE

3.1 Introduction

In most cases, magazine Websites have only recently emerged as something more than placeholders—or superficial online representations of the print publications—requiring minimal upkeep. The style of browsing through articles, landing on a long feature, and pondering over the writing or gradually reading longer magazine pieces does not suit the average online user who has a specific, more immediate search query in mind.\(^{21}\) The fact that most people are reaching news Websites through search engines (rather than through the front-door or homepage)\(^{22}\) is influencing in the type of information and stories being published online. One of the most significant changes is the speed at which online content is updated, requiring more reporting on breaking news. In this section, I will look at how this change has been brought about by the proliferation of online news sites.

Due to the financial difficulties facing many news publications including newspapers and magazines, there is a sense of increased urgency to evolve with the new uses of the Internet. “The Web, of course, is where the entire news industry is looking for salvation,” wrote Joe Hagan in an article on the evolution of Time

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\(^{21}\) “News magazines have had a difficult time figuring how they fit into the world of the digital media. Their long lead times and more reflective style of writing don’t jibe well with the Web’s continuous nature. And on the whole magazines have lagged behind other media in integrating the Web into their larger plans” (From: Project for Excellence in Journalism, State of the News Media 2007, “Overview”, March 17, 2007, used by permission of the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, http://www.stateofthenewsmedia.org/2007/narrative_magazines_contentanalysis.asp)

News publications are now trying to garner success in the online publishing world by innovative means well beyond publishing long feature reporting online. In their editorial content, staffing, organization and daily operations, magazines like *Mother Jones* are beginning to cater to the online publishing sphere to a greater extent.

In this section, I look at the online functions that have become the standard for news publications such as *Mother Jones*. I will also look at the methods of publishing and innovations that news publications have implemented in order to build their recognition online. I will look at the ways in which *Mother Jones* has adapted to new trends in the online sphere and which features and innovations it has chosen to incorporate in its editorial content and design. This will include discussions of tools to build its online presence and identity, branding tools, and social networking features to increase possibility for interaction and form a connection with readers. I will analyze how these have been implemented by *Mother Jones* and other news publications available online.

### 3.2 Trends in online publishing

The essential functions of news media and other print publications' Websites are:

1. to provide more consistently updated information that is specialized or customized for readers' interests, including multimedia components such as videos, podcasts or images;

2. to offer opportunities for increased interaction with writers, reporters and other users through features such as blogs and options for readers to comment directly on stories; to offer opportunities for social networking and more direct involvement with content presented online through internal (within the

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publication’s Website) and external (to other Websites for other publications or organizations) links to other articles or additional information and;

3. to establish a stronger brand through this expanded content that will reach a broader audience and create additional advertising outlets.

Across the spectrum from magazines to newspapers, from entertainment to news weeklies, publications have reinvented their web presences in order to build stronger brands. Web presences are essentially the representation of the publication online, with additional features such as exclusive multimedia content (video, podcasts and graphics), exclusive online content, blogs, and social networking features. The change has happened over the course of the past decade, but the emergence of the Web 2.0 model within the past few years has considerably accelerated the pace of change. In this report, I look at how trends in Web 2.0 have affected news media in all its forms because newspapers, magazines and—to a certain extent—television news channels take on very similar characteristics online.

Most newspapers and magazines have added multimedia aspects to their Websites in an effort to attract a readership with newer, flashier and more dynamic content. Magazines are trying desperately to adapt by taking drastic economic measures, such as cutting circulation, but also by reshaping their business models. In 2007, major magazine titles relaunched their Websites—including Time Warner Inc.’s Time magazine and the entire range of Hearst titles that includes popular magazines like Cosmopolitan, Travel + Leisure, Town and Country and Popular Mechanics. Time magazine, facing revenue losses on the print end, refocused its resources on the Website, counting both its online and print audience as part of a single readership.

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24The term Web 2.0 was first coined in 2004 by O'Reilly & Associates, a publisher of books on technology and computer software that was established in 1978 and is a leader in open-source technology.
demographic. The strategy for *Time* magazine’s Website is considerably different. The site is a smorgasbord of multimedia content that features stories, columns, blogs, photo essays, graphics, podcasts and videos.

*Mother Jones* has chosen to focus its efforts on a limited number of multimedia features. Rather than try its hand in all the different media to report the news, *Mother Jones* is focusing on the printed story. Even in its Website relaunch, the magazine has decided to continue to focus on what it knows best: high quality, investigative journalism. With the new Website, *Mother Jones* even cut production of its podcasts on “Mojo Radio.” Occasionally, the magazine posts a podcast interview online and this is usually in the culture section. In its blogs, *Mother Jones* often “borrows” and posts videos from YouTube that feature interesting news or other content. “The Riff” blog posts links to music samples in the form of downloadable MP3s that are usually available free of charge.

On its Website, *Mother Jones* focuses specifically on publishing graphics and photos, and this is in keeping with the history of the magazine. From its founding in 1974, then under the artistic direction of Louise Kollenbaum, the magazine aimed to publish high-quality photos and be visually striking. The Website builds on this mandate by offering original photo essays addressing issues such as immigration and consumerism, linked from the homepage along the sidebar with thumbnail images. The photo essays are unique and often very moving or humourous. A recent photo essay

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depicted Mexican immigrants as superheroes as they went about their daily jobs, with a window cleaner dressed up in Spiderman suit.28

Other news media publications have developed their online multimedia features more extensively. *Utne Reader* and other small independent publications have built their own podcasts or online radio broadcasts online. Media conglomerates such as Hearst and Time Warner have much larger coffers; and, therefore, are at an advantage because they can afford to produce this type of multimedia content on a daily or hourly basis in the form of syndicated articles, news clips, video reports and photographs. Time Warner also owns the Turner Broadcasting System, AOL, HBO and Time Warner Cable and evidently has the resources for putting multimedia content on their publications’ Websites. This means Time Warner is able to stream video content from its television channels, print content from its newspapers and other items directly onto a Website such as that for *Time* magazine. Investing even further in multimedia content, in early 2007 Time Warner-owned Time Inc., the largest magazine publisher in the U.S. and the U.K., created its own in-house video studio, enabling the production of video content for the Websites of its 130 magazine titles. The company’s ongoing strategy is to expand their “digital platforms,” equipping their Websites with a wide range of multimedia content.

Other traditionally print publications are producing videos and podcasts in very resourceful, innovative ways. Short news documentaries are being produced by their reporters who are being thrust into roles as videographers. The surprising aspect is that many of these amateur and improvising videographers are producing high-quality short documentary news stories and being credited with surpassing the quality of

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28The photo mentioned was featured in a photo essay on the Mother Jones Website. (Dulce Pinzon, Photo Essay, “Mexican Superheroes,” on Mother Jones.com, http://www.motherjones.com/photos/mexican-superheroes/.)
television news reports.29 This demonstrates the way that the Web arguably offers greater equality in terms of options. The declining revenue for long standing news publications is due to the fragmentation of their audiences with an increasing number of online news sources.

The more equal playing field created by the Web has driven several trends. Firstly, while many major, mainstream publications are struggling with the transition to online publishing, independent titles with smaller budgets are thriving and reaching wide readerships. Most noticeably, major newspapers have been faring badly in the wake of new media's growing popularity with layoffs and cutbacks in newsrooms, particularly in 2007. Poor financial reports and major downsizing have plagued large, reputable broadsheets such as the San Francisco Chronicle, the Seattle Times, the San Jose Mercury News, USA Today and others.30 Perhaps even more so than magazines and other print publications, newspapers are desperately trying to adapt and evolve to survive in the new Web 2.0 world. In one example of adaptation, USA Today now invites its readers to participate on its Website with interactive features and editorial design elements. In addition to snippets from news stories, readers' comments run across the Website's top banner. Readers are further encouraged to participate by creating profile pages that keep track of their comments on the site and articles emailed.

Secondly, Mother Jones and other independent titles are no longer at such a drastic economic disadvantage from major news corporations. The Web encourages smaller media players to be more resourceful, intrepid and to compete with the larger, corporate media. The rapid spread word-of-mouth marketing can garner large

audiences with minimal resources. Independent online publications have garnered large readerships such as *The Drudge Report*, started by a former manager of the gift shop for CBS Studios in Los Angeles,$^{31}$ and *Daily Kos*, a left-leaning, antiwar political blog that receives hundreds of comments from readers for each posting. Nielsen recently rated these sites at the top of the list for the 30 "Most Online Current Events and Global News Destinations." Fox News rated in second place and CNN.com came in fourth.$^{32}$

Finally, smaller, independent publications like *Mother Jones* can also affordably add multimedia content to their Websites. They now have access to citizen-produced multimedia content—at a very low cost. This phenomenon has been dubbed “crowdsourcing:” editorial, video, photographic and graphic content provided by a large and expanding group of willing and able amateurs using digital cameras and other easily accessible forms of technology.$^{33}$ Furthermore, with its specialized, targeted content, *Mother Jones* stands apart from monolithic news corporations whose actual financial clout appears to be waning in the disorienting online environment.

The one thing that can be said with certainty — to a much greater degree than was true a few years ago — is that the notion that a diverse public corporation is best suited to have the wherewithal, resources and experience to manage the future of media is no longer gospel.$^{34}$

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$^{31}$ Matt Drudge on Wikipedia.com (accessed on May 1, 2008), http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Matt_Drudge


Citizen reporting or journalism is one of the trends created by the crowdsourcing phenomenon that developed with the emergence of the Web 2.0. Stepping away from traditional journalism, dwindling resources and advertising revenue have forced newspapers to use untrained reporters to do their reporting. Some newspapers have turned to bloggers to provide reports on local news, and encouraging new forms of reader submitted content that is not subject to the same editorial vetting and fact-checking as stories from staff reporters.

Citizen media are [...] growing in ways unmistakable and engaging. Websites run by citizen journalists are multiplying—rapidly approaching 1,500 heading into 2008—offering stories, blogs and videos. And that trend is considered a healthy one by professional journalists, who call on citizens more frequently to inform their reporting.35

*Mother Jones* editors have also chosen not to follow the trend towards citizen reporting. The mandate and the editorial stance of the magazine do not support the idea of amateur or untrained citizen reporters providing readers with their news and information. Rather, *Mother Jones* is intent on pursuing ambitious, talented writers dedicated to the journalism profession to build a productive staff, as large as budget allows. In a column for *Mother Jones* magazine's "MediaJones," Adam Weinstein argued that the increased use of amateur bloggers as reporters for newspapers could lead to a lack of credible reports, and that newspapers will lose their valuable reputations. "There's a place for readers' blogs and community participation in the 21st-century newspaper, but let's not kid ourselves that they are a substitute for what people look for in their morning paper," wrote Weinstein. 36

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3.3 Creating an online presence

_Mother Jones_ magazine's clear and consistent stance on the nature of journalism and reporting, regardless of the medium, has been a determining factor in the construction and relaunch of the new Website. The editors have tried to maintain their identity as an independent and intrepid news publication in their online presence. The publication invests in cultivating writing and reporting talent, encouraging writers to delve into under reported news stories. According to the media kit, _Mother Jones_.com receives about 700,000 unique visitors per month. The demographic of the audience tends to be younger—in their 30s and 40s, according to Bruce McCurdy, _Mother Jones_ business manager. In a 2004 survey, of 685 respondents, 62.8 per cent of those who subscribed to the print magazine were over the age of 50.\(^{37}\)

The median age of online readers is 46.9, as opposed to 50.9 for the print audience according to the _Mother Jones_ media kit.

The end goal for _Mother Jones_, as well as other progressive and mainstream publications, is to adapt to the online model to gain a wider readership and—eventually—advertising revenue from this channel that will sustain further growth and development. In order to garner the readership that will attract advertisers, editors, business managers and designers need to consider the behaviours of online users when adapting their content online. According to a December 2006 survey, 70 per cent of American adults (or about 141 million people) use the Internet. The most widespread Internet activity, at a rate of 91 per cent of those Internet users, is to use search engines to find information\(^{38}\)—another reason why these sites are the Internet's biggest money makers. Internet users also flock to online reference sites like Wikipedia that

\(^{37}\)"ABC's Subscriber Profile: Mother Jones," Audit Bureau of Circulations (December, 2004).

are updated on a volunteer basis by members of the general public. Thirty-six per cent of Internet users in the United States visit Wikipedia, with an average of eight per cent visiting the site in a single day.\textsuperscript{39} In the emerging Web model, the archetype of the leisurely Web browser is being replaced by a more determined user who already has a goal or research query in mind when they go online. The challenge for magazines is to provide information on demand online.

Establishing a strong niche online can also work to build a readership. \textit{Mother Jones} can present itself as a source of extensive news coverage, as well as a resource for information and context, on major political stories such as national elections. According to McCurdy, \textit{Mother Jones}'s online readership tends to spike during periods of political activity, and experienced a huge surge in the months leading up to the November 2006 mid-term elections in the United States. This relates to another finding of the Pew Research Center that points to higher Internet usage to find information on American politics than in previous elections. According to an August 2006 report, 19 per cent of adult Internet users, or 13 per cent of all Americans over the age of 18 (totalling 26 million people) were online to find information on politics and the mid-term elections on a given day in August.\textsuperscript{40} While most Internet users were visiting major news sites like CNN.com, and newspapers like the \textit{New York Times} and the \textit{Washington Post}, 24 per cent in 2006 were visiting "issue oriented Websites." They were attracted to these non-traditional news sources because of the breadth of


information offered, as well as the change in perspective from local news reporting.\textsuperscript{41} Furthermore, in the lead-up to the 2006 mid-term elections, 41 per cent were online to check up on claims made by candidates or their opponents.\textsuperscript{42} In order to capitalize on this interest in independent, political reporting, \textit{Mother Jones} will have to position itself as a credible, consistent source that will offer readers news they could not find as easily from other sources. The relevance of information is as important as how it is presented and organized. Reports and background facts need to be accessible to a reader looking to gain insight into complex political issues and the specific details of candidates' proposed policies.

As a non-profit under 501(c)(3), a U.S. federal tax classification for non-profit and charitable organizations, \textit{Mother Jones} is prohibited from endorsing any political candidates and must tread rather carefully in these areas, ensuring that politicians on either side of the political spectrum are reported on with the same measure of fairness and accuracy. Nonetheless, \textit{Mother Jones} maintains a progressive perspective on issues in American politics by focusing on immigration, labour, education, the environment, and uncovering stories of corporate irresponsibility, political corruption, and injustice. Becoming a trove for background data and concise investigative reports on political parties or election candidates is an excellent strategy for garnering additional readers. And most importantly, the Web and alternative media sites are now also a platform for breaking major news stories, a privilege that was until recently reserved only for more established print news publications.

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3.4 Providing breaking news in “real time”

Mother Jones as well as other independent or alternative news Websites might be reaping the benefits of a trend for online users to read more of their news from alternative sources. With the emergence of the Web, more irreverent media sources than the traditional fourth estate institutions have become popular—like the Drudge Report and the Huffington Post. The Huffington Post started in 2004 as “a political Web site for celebrity bloggers” (Mother Jones editors Monika Bauerlein and Clara Jeffery have also blogged for the site) and had 2.3 million unique visitors per month in November, 2006.\(^{43}\) That month, the blog announced it would be adding original reporting to its site, entering the ring with mainstream news sites covering major American political events.

The Drudge Report gained fame and recognition when it broke the story of Monika Lewinsky’s affair with former President Bill Clinton in January, 1998. Matt Drudge usually reports himself on one or two stories a day using his connections with political and entertainment industry insiders to uncover news. But his hasty reporting of second-hand rumours has led to several errors, such as the misreporting of an affair between Massachusetts Senator John Kerry and an intern.\(^{44}\) Nonetheless, the site is widely read—with political staff admitting to refreshing the page dozens of times per day.\(^{45}\)

In addition to original writing and reporting, the Huffington Post and the Drudge Report both post links to the biggest news stories on other news sites. But the major difference that these alternative online publications have brought about is the trend


towards breaking news stories online. This has accelerated the pace at which all news publications must function and will drive resources to reporting on breaking news stories. To keep up with online-only publications, like the Drudge Report, newspapers have been forced to alter their models. In the last year, a new development has emerged with newspaper Websites “scooping” their print versions.

A year ago, most newspapers and news magazines adhered to the hard rule that they would not scoop themselves by putting breaking news on their Web sites before it appeared in their print editions. But a rapidly-growing public demand for almost “instant” Web coverage of breaking national news stories has forced even the largest newspapers and magazines—like the Washington Post and Newsweek—to abandon the old rule.46

Given this, the growth of these fast moving alternative news sources online, Mother Jones is facing increased competition in reporting breaking news from outside of the mainstream. While most are not as famous as Drudge or Huffington, an increasing number of amateur bloggers are reporting firsthand on major news events. While this is not a strategy that Mother Jones would like to implement, the reality is that news more and more news is streaming through this channel. News is streaming in from all directions. In February 2007, Mother Jones reporter Daniel Schulmann covered the widely publicized I. Lewis “Scooter” Libby trial in Washington. Libby was on trial in the case of United States v. Libby on charges of obstruction of justice and withholding information from a grand jury investigation after he was suspected of having revealed to reporters the identity of covert Central Intelligence Agency operative, Valerie Plame. The previous month, after two years of negotiations with judicial officials, the 1,000-member Media Bloggers Association won press credentials

for two of its members to report on the trial. "The trial of I. Lewis 'Scooter' Libby, the highest-ranking Bush administration official to face criminal charges, could 'catalyze' the association's efforts to win respect and access for bloggers in federal and state courthouses," said Robert Cox, the association's president.47

In order to compete with the growing number of Internet news sources, news publications have to employ an online staff, or transfer their resources towards the Web. *Mother Jones'* strategy is to ramp up its journalistic staff and expand its offices in both Washington and San Francisco. The magazine now distributes writers to its Washington office that can be on the ground to report on breaking news stories on Capitol Hill. But with the growing multitude of print and online publications doing the same, the magazine must find a way to brand its reporting as distinct. In section 4, I will discuss how the editors have chosen to accomplish that by publishing stories with original perspectives and strong editorial voice.

3.5 Providing a platform for branding

In this section, I will discuss the Internet's capabilities for branding of content using tools such as social networks, and explain how *Mother Jones* has so far attempted to build an online community. I will discuss certain findings that show that an online community for *Mother Jones* would likely be an effective way of inspiring its readers to take action on pertinent issues. While originally associated with commercial products or designer suburban real estate developments, branding now also applies to allegiances to groups, organizations and publications such as *Mother Jones*. According

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to Muniz and O’Guinn, the characteristics of a brand community are shared consciousness, rituals and traditions, and a sense of moral responsibility, or "a specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relations among admirers of a brand." Aaker and Joachimsthaler write:

Because greater involvement and active participation make the Web considerably different from more conventional media, any impact is likely to be more intense. Learning is more likely to be remembered and to influence future behavior; active involvement is more likely to create a bond between the brand and the person.

With its wide range of users, the Web allows a browser to gain advice, information and other input from experts, media pundits, and even—through social networking sites and email—from close friends and family. This is a platform where discussion about news stories and news media can spread immediately, through links to other Websites, discussions on blogs, as well as by word-of-mouth on social networking sites (called “viral marketing”).

All aspects of Mother Jones help to build brand, including the design of the magazine and Website, the features and departments of the magazine, the articles published in print and online, the content of blog postings, the style of reporting, and the subjects covered by the magazine’s reporters. As a progressive-leaning publication, Mother Jones is more likely to focus on issues related to labour, health care, and citizens’ rights. Striving to maintain an alternative perspective, even in reporting on the arts and culture, the magazine focuses on independent musicians and

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48 The term “brand community” first appeared in 1995 in a paper presented by two marketing professors, Albert Muniz, Jr. and Thomas C. O’Guinn that is now the most widely cited paper on the topic (From “Brand Community” on Wikipedia.org. accessed on February 9, 2008, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brand_community.)


artists. This creates a distinctive brand, but how can *Mother Jones* gather its readers to build a visible online community that will contribute to the publication’s recognition on the Web, and its mission of inspiring readers to action?

*Mother Jones* business development manager, Bruce McCurdy has acknowledged that *Mother Jones* will have to decide to what degree the publication would like to embrace social networking platforms. Some other publications have jumped right into the fray of social networks by hosting them directly online. *USA Today* allows readers to communicate with each other in forums. Rupert Murdoch’s News Corporation July 2005 purchase of Intermix, owner of the popular social and self-promotional site MySpace,51 has paved the way for other traditional news outlets to partner with social networking companies. The growth of social networking Websites over the past several years has been astounding, demonstrating that many people have begun to perceive the Internet as a meeting place and forum in addition to a source of information. The social networking site Facebook is used by millions—reaching 50 million in December 2007, just a few short years since its 2004 launch according to Facebook’s own statistics.

Before its relaunch, *Mother Jones* experimented with several community building features on their Website. “Re:Action” was a feature that connected readers to resources for taking action on the topics discussed in the magazine and online. The “Re:Action” feature of the Website and the magazine was an information resource for readers, showing “How to learn more about, or get involved in, the issues featured in *Mother Jones*.”52 This Webpage would list links to organizations supporting causes mentioned in the pages of the magazine. While there was no way for readers to

52Quote from the founder of Zaaadz, Brian Johnson.
communicate or interact on this page, it offered them a way of forming a connection to the topics presented in the magazine. With the relaunch of the site and the shift of focus to original reporting, this feature was removed from the Website by early 2007.

*Mother Jones* also experimented with online social networking by linking to Zaadz, a progressive, left-leaning social networking site, or "a MySpace for people who want to change the world." Members can post their own profiles, pictures and blogs on the site with the possibility of finding people with similar interests. Clicking on a sidebar link to Zaadz takes a browser to the front page of the site where they can see other members' profiles, read answers to questions posted by the Website (ie: Why do you like Zaadz?), and click on subject tags to read discussions. This left-leaning social network was intended to be a space for *Mother Jones* readers with similar interests and philosophies to find each other and interact online, but did not generate a strong *Mother Jones* community—meaning not very many *Mother Jones* readers actually chose to participate. The network was chosen because of an advertising exchange deal, rather than its measured appeal to the *Mother Jones* community. Readers of other alternative titles, such as *Utne Reader*, also use the site and the visibility of *Mother Jones* was not very prominent on the Website. *Mother Jones* ended its partnership with Zaadz with the launch of the new website, and removed any links to the site by early 2007.

*Mother Jones* does participate in social networking through Facebook and MySpace. On these sites, general information about the magazine is posted, and cover images are updated with each new issue.\(^{\text{54}}\) The number of combined users on the Facebook and MySpace *Mother Jones* websites pales in comparison to the general and

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\(^{\text{53}}\)Zaadz means seeds in Dutch.

\(^{\text{54}}\)As of May 1, 2008, *Mother Jones* magazine's facebook group has 377 fans. The MySpace page counts 3,566 friends (many are environmental, political or other non-profit organizations with MySpace profiles).
online readership of the general Website meaning the magazine is not reaching out to a large sampling of its actual print and online readership. By not creating a social networking platform that is independent from other social networking sites such as Facebook and MySpace, *Mother Jones* might be missing out on the potential to build a large community that reflects the entire range of its readership. By housing the community on the Website, *Mother Jones* could also increase online recognition, and possibly boost its search engine rating (if members are linking to their profiles on *Mother Jones*). A social networking platform fits well with the mandate of the *Mother Jones* Website, a stomping ground for those with generally progressive views on American politics that aims to promote active participation in its readers. The Internet seems to be the ideal platform for the *Mother Jones* and the Foundation of National Progress in its mission of cultivating exceptional investigative reporting that inspires readers to take action.\(^{55}\) The stories reported by *Mother Jones* in print or online may inspire a reader, but the Internet can give them immediate access to the resources to accomplish initiatives to support social and political causes. And an online networking group would help build support for causes where readers could provide each other with advice and information.

In addition to the building of in-depth editorial content, social networking is another area where investment could make *Mother Jones* more relevant to online readers. Building the software or infrastructure to have a community online would be a significant investment of time and money for a publication that is already trying to compete with a vast number of online news sources. But the concept of forming a connection with readers while providing valuable information about current affairs builds upon the mission of the magazine and the Foundation for National Progress. The

web offers an opportunity to build a connection between readers and the stories presented in the magazine. Not only can they have connection, but the Web can extend the amount of information presented to readers—leading *Mother Jones* readers to resources to take action on the issues that inspire them.

### 3.6 Staying in contact with readers online

With the shift into the online sphere, magazines have to look beyond print subscriptions towards another model for building a base of readership that will be reached on a regular basis. For many magazine subscribers, email inboxes are now replacing post office boxes. Before the *Mother Jones* relaunch, there were several editions of e-newsletters— emailed out three times a week to those readers who had subscribed online to receive these regular updates. The general *Mother Jones* newsletter was a round-up of the site’s best stories and blogs, as chosen by the editors, sent out on Monday, Wednesday and Friday. “Informed Dissent” was a biweekly newsletter that informed readers how to become more involved in addressing the issues discussed in the magazine. Both were useful tools in reminding readers about the magazine’s content and investigative news articles that gave a fresh take on the news. In the magazine and Website’s relaunch, the “Informed Dissent” newsletter has disappeared, and only a general round-up of *Mother Jones* clips are emailed out three times per week. The magazine has chosen to simplify its outreach efforts, rather than create more specialized content to meet readers various demands. According to the *Mother Jones* media kit, these newsletters reach over 50,000 subscribers.

Many newspaper sites send out specific newsletters on topics ranging from shopping, to investing, to world politics. Offering a broader choice of e-newsletters might be a more effective strategy in targeting readers and keeping their attention. *Mother Jones* could offer intriguing, personalized reports from its Website. Readers
could receive book reviews, photo essays or cartoons, political reports, profiles of major newsmakers, or the latest in green news. This would be a way of offering readers customized content on demand, tailoring the content of the magazine and the Website to their interests.

3.7 Conclusion

In the information overload of the Web, with news content being produced by a whole other set of actors than the traditional pen-and-pad reporters, it is important that *Mother Jones* build a distinctive Website that serves the functions of providing breaking news and in-depth content. Once exclusive, in-depth online content is available, the building of a branded identity is important in retaining new readers, who may come to *Mother Jones* indirectly through search engines or other portals. The evolution of this brand and the Website depend to a certain extent on responding to the trends in users’ behaviours and the emergence of competitors. *Mother Jones* is clearly monitoring these trends but they are not hastily changing their editorial course in order to follow the tide. Instead, the publication is forging its own path in the online world, choosing to adopt certain trends of the Web 2.0 publishing world—and ignore others. For example, like many other news sites, the new *Mother Jones* Website has been transformed to be flashier and more eye-catching with the addition of elements such as a banner with rotating images. It also is more effective at displaying the magazine’s exclusive range of exclusive online content, at the top of the site where a reader is more likely to look. But, with the exception of the photo essays, the Website is maintaining its focus on editorial content rather than video, podcast production, or other multimedia production. This is effective in maintaining a clear identity, but *Mother Jones* still has room to be more experimental and innovative in its online initiatives. Social networking is one area that has yet to be explored by editors.
and content managers in the magazine's San Francisco office. In the next section, I will look in more detail at how the relaunch of the website created a unique and relevant news site. I show how these changes can help keep pace with the evolution of the news industry on the Web.
4 THE WEB REVAMP: A THREE-PHASED PLAN

4.1 Introduction

In October 2006, when I started as an intern with *Mother Jones*, the magazine had just begun to implement a three-phased plan to revamp both the magazine and the Website. The main objective was to garner a broader—and younger—reading audience. The business development team for the *Mother Jones* Website, headed by Business Manager Bruce McCurdy, created a plan to improve the site’s visitor stats. This measurement is seen as one of the most accurate ways to gauge readership for Websites because it counts unique visitors to the site (monitoring the length of time they spend on the site as well) rather than hits or clicks that can be generated by trawling software. McCurdy previously worked for *PC World* magazine and implemented a similar strategy for improving the site’s readership statistics.

During my time as an intern, the plan was just entering the second phase of improvements—with the addition of topic-specific blogs and more interactive content. In this section, I will look at how the improvements and upgrades to the site were gradually made in order to build a wider breadth of editorial content online, complemented by graphics and other features unique to the online component of the publication. Most importantly, I will describe the unique reporting platforms—“Washington Dispatches,” “Toolkits” and the magazine’s blogs—that *Mother Jones* has developed for the Website. According to Pew’s *State of the Media Report*, most news Websites have developed characteristics such as immediacy and customizability to a
greater extent than multimedia content. The "Washington Dispatches," "Toolkits" and blogs are elements that boost these characteristics on Mother Jones.com, adding more timely content and more information in a real-time, on-demand style—Washington Dispatches post breaking news items, Toolkits can be searched for specific background information on major news stories, and blogs provide an outlet for offering readers consistently updated news and reports (often sourced from other news media reports).

4.2 Phase one: Adding online content and reporting

As part of the mandate of the first phase to add daily updates and breaking news stories, the Mother Jones Website at first relied heavily on daily news reports from outside sources in order to have regular updates on their site. Without sufficient reporters or resources to report all the breaking news stories, reporters and editors needed to aggregate news articles from other magazines, newspapers, and new agencies to fill space on their Webpages devoted to news, politics, environment, arts and entertainment. As an editorial intern, I contributed to the general upkeep of the site by posting daily updates about a dozen of the major political news stories for the "News and Politics" Webpage (mostly from outside links including major daily newspapers such as The Washington Post, the New York Times, and the Los Angeles Times). In addition to a list of stories reported elsewhere, the site was kept current with interviews and profiles of major newsmakers from the Mother Jones Washington office.

At the time that I was an intern, the online news reported from Washington was generated by the Washington bureau chief, James Ridgeway, an on-staff reporter.


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Daniel Schulmann, and myself. During the midterm elections, I assisted in research and writing on major election issues such as the debate over stem cell research. Using Lexis-Nexis news database to find articles on stem cell research debates in various states, I was able to begin compiling a list of the arguments being made by candidates on either side of the fence in those states where the issue was in contention among politicians and voters. The bulk of my research was conducted through interviews with staff from the Center for Genetics and Society who had compiled a list of their own on the effects of the stem cell debate in election races. The research was used for a “Washington Dispatch” on the stem cell issue’s effect on election races in swing states and across U.S. In addition, I was able to use the background research I had collected to also contribute a posting on widely-held myths surrounding stem cell technologies to the Mojo blog, the Mother Jones general blog used for staff writers to comment on current news stories. Since posting on blogs is relatively quick and easy, this allows reporters to add original content and news stories at the click of a button.

4.3 “Washington Dispatches” as sources of breaking news

“Washington Dispatches,” intended as reflections on the Washington political scene and reports on government news, were created as a source of regular news updates on the Website. During my time as an intern, the number of dispatches ranged from two to three per week. The dispatches focus on Washington in the broadest sense with profiles of politicians, reports on Senate or Congress hearings, and municipal news from the American capital city. Editor Monika Bauerlein noted: “The original intent was just to file stories from Washington that would break online. We try to [be more] creative because again it doesn’t make sense for us to do what everybody else
is doing.” The Washington-based reporters for *Mother Jones* conduct online research, interviews, on-the-ground coverage for the dispatches. For example, as an editorial intern, I contributed to a dispatch on Jim Webb’s political campaign in Virginia, attending and reporting on an event he attended in Arlington to raise voting support within the Arab-American community.

Often, the style of reporting in the “Washington Dispatches” is different from most mainstream news stories. They are often short pieces but have wider perspectives than the average news report. *Mother Jones* writers have the flexibility to take original angles or interesting points of view on issues and events, without adding their own opinions or editorializing the news content. For example, on March 16, 2007, when Valerie Plame took the stand in the White House Procedures for Safeguarding Classified Information, Washington reporter Leigh Ferrera was able to focus on the media frenzy surrounding the event—rather than the matter of Plame’s testimony as it had been reported in the newspapers that same day. She compared the flood of photographers that followed her trail to the paparazzi surrounding Hollywood celebrities. Valerie Plame’s trial was already being covered by other newspaper reporters and new stories were being constantly filed online. *Mother Jones* contributed this Washington Dispatch as a means of adding to the dialogue with a fresh perspective on a major news event.

### 4.4 Toolkits

While also adding to the depth of content on the site, *Mother Jones* magazine toolkits are a possible key to its further success and a way to distinguish the magazine in the online media market. Started under the editorial directorship of Bauerlein and

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57 Phone interview with Monika Bauerlein, editor of *Mother Jones* magazine, April 20, 2007.  
Jeffery, toolkits are packages of articles, firsthand source material and statistical information on a topic widely covered in mainstream news. This feature also builds on the concept behind the first databases posted on the Mother Jones Website, to collect informative reports exposing the actions of major news players that have had grave or significant consequences in American politics. So far, Mother Jones has created toolkits on the lead-up and development of the war in Iraq ("The Iraq War Timeline"), followed up with one on the history of the war-torn country and causes of further conflict ("Iraq 101"). While toolkits are also published in print in the magazine and as separate print editions, these features are most functional and effective at the Web level. Online, the toolkits provide extensive background information presented via a database that is easily navigable, and the information presented can be customized according to a reader’s interests.

The toolkits are packed with information for inquiring minds and casual Web browsers. While dealing with serious matters, they have a humorous tone and are colourfully illustrated. The slightly controversial logo for the "Iraq Timeline" is an illustration of President George Bush riding a missile. Timelines are presented with Flash, and a reader can scroll along a line marked months and years, linking to the events that happened on those days. In addition, a full text search option is available to scan for people, places, dates, events and other keywords of interest. There are also buttons where a reader can browse through dated entries based on certain tags such as "Mission Accomplished," "Torture," "Quagmire" and "Civil Liberties Eroded."

Toolkits offer exactly the type of content that Mother Jones excels in—such as facts and figures that are often missed in mainstream press, and background character material on the major players in the news—but in a version that is condensed and accessible with immediate access to first-hand source content.
Mother Jones is aiming to create more toolkits, but the challenge lies in allocating resources and budget. These compilations and analyses require a significant amount of time and effort. The Iraq 101 toolkit was compiled and packaged over the course of more than two months. But more investment in these types of projects might garner a wider readership since they have already shown to have a measurable impact. According to their site’s stats, traffic to the Website is increased significantly in the days after a toolkit is posted. The second part of the “Iraq War Timeline,” posted on the site in August, 2006, generated a lively discussion among over two dozen commentators—who both supported and denounced Mother Jones journalistic efforts towards the project. Some complained that the toolkits demonstrated Mother Jones’ leftist bias in reporting the news because the timeline largely included missteps on the Republican side. Many commentators lauded the timeline for its historical information, and it is seen as a useful tool for activists and others.

If they choose to be more experimental and flexible with the editorial content of the Website, as a next step, editors Bauerlein and Jeffery can add features for readers to add their own input directly within the timelines. Readers who think there is a bias towards the Democrats in the information found in the timeline on Iraq, for example, could add their own perspective. The popular political blog Talking Points Memo also created a timeline, but allowed users to add information and updates themselves, inviting them to be a part of the dialogue on the Website and contribute their own information. Most notably, opening the gates to allow user content has been successfully implemented by Wikipedia, the online encyclopaedia. Having users contribute the news content, as in the Wikipedia-offshoot Wikinews, would be an

interesting experiment but could take away from Mother Jones identity as a source of investigative journalism.

The success of Wikipedia's open source model is a sign of two major trends in online publishing: the possibilities of the Web:

1. in publishing accurate news reports and information created by non-professional online users (unpaid writers and editors contributing to the site simply by registering by name) and,

2. in allowing direct access to the sources of information for this content.

The Wikimedia Foundation has a created a very successful Web model that is now renowned throughout the world because it offers online users a novel kind of transparency that is arguably only feasible online. By allowing other users to monitor and edit information, and revealing sources the Website manages to minimize factual errors. The site now receives hundreds of thousands of visitors per day to sites in over 100 languages.  

Mother Jones is not likely to use content generated by readers as they believe firmly in the role of journalists to produce factual news reports. However, the Wikipedia model does show the positive effect of transparency in reporting online, and that supplying links to the full content of news and information sources is a proven way to build reader loyalty online. In an age when news reports are so readily available in print, on television and online, news readers are beginning to expect more than traditional reporting with quotes from named sources. Furthermore, not only are news consumers becoming accustomed to having access to a wealth of information, but their trust in the media has been waning for the better part of the past decade. After events such as the misreporting of the 2000 United States Presidential election

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results, in addition to plagiarism scandals at major newspapers, the percentage of
Americans who said they trusted the media fell to just 36 percent (from 54 percent in
1989). Member of the board of Wikimedia’s division in France, David Monniaux
notes: “Electronic media allow much more extensive footnotes that would be practical
in printed magazine media. Possibly, every ‘fact’ could be traced to some source.”

By positioning itself as a trusted and equally transparent source of news, 
Mother Jones can gain a loyal online audience. In creating repositories of source and
reference material for its informational toolkit packages, Mother Jones is building its
brand and reputation as a reliable, independent and accountable news source. The
bimonthly magazine format allows reporters time to adequately research and
investigate their stories and articles for publication in the toolkit. In the online
format, Mother Jones can be successful in creating a strategy of transparency similar
to Wikimedia by posting links to interviews (even recorded in podcasts or videos),
government documents, and other first-hand news sources. Because news consumers
are becoming more aware that news content can be full of misinformation, the
toolkits may be one way of distinguishing the Mother Jones editorial mission and
attracting donors to the Foundation for National Progress. Mother Jones can continue
to build on the momentum in visits to the site by its informative toolkits on a regular
basis, and featuring them prominently on the site. These features also contribute to
the additional or original content on the Website which is an essential part of the
Website’s relaunch. However, the major thrust of the relaunch happened during its
second phase, with major investments in boosting the site’s original news reporting.

62Email interview with David Monniaux, member of the board for Wikimedia in France, May 16,
2007.
63David Corn, entry on Tom Paine.com, “Who will pay for the news?” TomPaine.com, posted on
April 5. 2006) 
http://www.tompaine.com/articles/2007/04/05/who_will_pay_for_the_news.php
4.5 Phase two: Expanding online editorial content

Phase two of the *Mother Jones* Website reorganizations moved the publication beyond the Website as a news aggregator of daily reports in order to build original editorial content. While the major factor contributing to the development of this content was a significant investment in hiring new writers and reporters, another component of this change was the addition of two new blogs. In early 2007, along with the “Mojo Blog” for commentary on news and politics from *Mother Jones* staff, the Website added the blogs “Blue Marble” to cover environment and health stories, and “The Riff” for media and culture reporting. The new, updated *Mother Jones* site positions the latest entries from all three blogs prominently on the homepage, “above the fold” allowing visitors to catch a quick glimpse into their content.

The “MoJo Blog” is produced by *Mother Jones* staff and is useful in giving a personal voice to the *Mother Jones*.com Website overall, allowing readers to familiarize themselves with the people who are producing the magazine and the Website. The blog offers a brief view into the personality of the magazine by letting readers get to better know the writers since it essentially serves as an outlet for their thoughts on major news stories.

The two new blogs reveal other aspects of the personality of *Mother Jones* magazine: its stance on environmental issues, and its perspective on arts and entertainment. “Blue Marble” is a candid voice on environmental issues largely written by Julia Whitty, a highly acclaimed environmental reporter. Whitty has previously written features for *Mother Jones* magazine on topics such as the health of the world’s oceans and the tipping points that could lead to overall decline of the ecosystem. Positioned as an independent trendsetter rather than a watchdog on the environment or politics, “Riff” has introduced an increase in both editorial and multimedia content.
on the *Mother Jones* Website. The “Riff” posts multimedia comment on arts and culture items. Readers can tune in to the “Riff” to find music samples and new songs from lesser known musicians reviewed or recommended by the *Mother Jones* writers. The blog is also a platform for younger, perhaps more “in-the-know” *Mother Jones* writers to talk about new books, music, movies and other cultural trends.

While readers can comment on postings made on blogs simply by registering by name, the main purpose of the *Mother Jones* blogs is to boost editorial content. Despite a seemingly welcoming online community generally with similar political views, commentary on the *Mother Jones* blogs is not usually very active and is not often solicited. When blog contributors do specifically ask for commentary, readers are more likely to respond. In one blog entry on May 14, 2007, contributor Jonathan Stein asked people to explain why the gas-guzzling SUVs were still on the road given the high price of gas. The blog generated a lively discussion with several dozen readers’ comments on the consumer and energy consumption habits of Americans.64

But in a given week, blog postings receive an average of five comments each (based on my count over the course of a week of postings). This number is much smaller than the thousands of visitors reportedly coming to the site on a daily basis. In proportion to its online readership, *Mother Jones* is about at par with other mainstream news sites in terms of comments and activity on the blog. The *USA Today* blog entries can receive upwards of 300 comments each; however, the site receives 7.7 million readers per month.65

While the two new blogs help to increase the diversity and timeliness of the content posted online, the most important portion of the second phase involved hiring

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new staff. The blogs allow *Mother Jones* reporters to start a dialog on major breaking news stories, but writers often cite news or reports from other sources. Throughout the history of the publication, original, investigative reporting from an independent perspective has been the cornerstone of *Mother Jones*. With sufficient resources, the online model allows the magazine to continue this type of reporting while covering more breaking news stories—instead of having to rely on other news sources to provide the information. While the magazine started as a source of feature-length investigative reports published bimonthly, the Website allows *Mother Jones* to take its place on the daily news media scene, as a progressive voice on Washington politics and other news. According to McCurdy, the magazine had "a rather ambitious" plan to ramp up reporting with young, talented recruits. The initiative called for relative newcomers to professional journalism, rather than well-known established reporters and columnists. This strategy also gives the Website a fresh perspective, and supports *Mother Jones*’ mandate of fostering new journalists and encouraging careers in investigative reporting. In Washington, D.C., the office was expanded in mid-2007 to include a bureau chief, and four new reporters were hired with experience writing for publications such as *The Atlantic*, the *Washington Monthly*, and the *Los Angeles Times*. This represents a significant investment in capital for *Mother Jones* requiring most likely upwards of one million dollars from grants and donations.

4.6 Phase three: Search engine optimization

The third and final phase of the Web upgrade is to implement search engine optimization techniques to direct traffic to the site from search engines such as Google. Search engines, particularly Google, are the main means that Web users reach all other types of sites on the Web such as news sites. This has made a publication's search engine ranking critical to its visibility online and overall Web presence. This
step relies on increasing Mother Jones’s profile online, and happens mostly at a viral marketing level. Viral marketing relies on a piece of information being passed through existing social networks, highly effective in the online realm where information is often repeated through the blogosphere. This is the strategy that Bruce McCurdy implemented as business manager with PC magazine as a way to boost the visibility of the Website.

To a certain extent, Mother Jones can act independently in order to generate increased traffic using tools such as metatags, coding statements embedded in the backend of Websites that allow other sites to quickly understand the content. However, McCurdy calls metatags “a drop of sand on the beach.” Inbound links to Mother Jones from other publications are the most effective means of optimizing search results. “The folks at Google will tell you, off the record, one inbound link to your Website is worth more than all of the other online techniques that you can apply—which is to say optimizing your headlines and your deks and the structure of your page,” said McCurdy. Many Websites try to boost their search engine ratings as determined by the Google algorithm. The Google formula has been created in order to weed out any influence from public relations promotions or marketing initiatives in order to consider the site’s merit only based on how relevant its content is to other Websites.  

4.7 Redesign of the Website

In addition to drastically altering the content of the site, the overall look and feel was changed to more closely resemble other major news sites. During my time as an intern, the Website had a red top banner that listed menu items, two sidebars, and

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two columns in the main body of the page that linked to articles and other content. A larger picture was usually posted at the top of the page, and thumbnail images accompanied some of the links to stories and articles. The Website maintained its two sidebars and top menu bars, but added flashier content and more graphics in the final stages of the relaunch. The top story box became a rotating screen or billboard for the homepage, giving viewers quick glimpses at the day’s leading stories. This method is seen on many other news media sites, such as CNN.com and Time.com, but rarely on alternative, independent sites such as MotherJones.com. The site also considerably increased the graphics and visuals on the homepage, with links to the magazine’s most recent collections of photo essays along a sidebar, a daily featured cartoon, and a featured photo.

With different mixes of categories and multiple layers of content on a Website, a reader has to be guided through with ease. Another consideration is the length of online content. *Mother Jones’s* new site has clear menu guides along the top and side, as well as flashy graphics to attract readers to their top stories. The publication has chosen to focus on shorter news pieces and dispatches on its Website, but this might not be the right direction given that online users are now doing extensive reading online according to a study from the Pew Research Center. In order to find out how news tends to be read in both print and online formats, the Pew Research Center created a device called EyeTrack to track eye movements. Using the EyeTrack to test 600 news readers in four major American cities, a few major findings and trends emerged related to the best design for a news Website. Most interestingly, and counter to conventional wisdom about the Web, the study found that people tended to read more online. When allowed to read a newspaper at their leisure for fifteen minutes, the testers read on average 77 per cent the articles they chose to read
online, compared to 62 per cent of those they chose to read in a broadsheet print newspaper. Also, while visuals and pictures captured attention in print, readers online were looking more for a strong sense of direction and guidance. Unlike in print where most readers were methodical, half of those surveyed tended to scan online sites for information, and navigation bars and teasers tended to attract the most attention.\textsuperscript{67}

5 MOTHER JONES MAGAZINE AND THE PROGRESSIVE MEDIA COMMUNITY

In order to compete with big media, the initial response from left-leaning, independently owned news media was to generously share their pool of resources with other like-minded media organizations. Before its folding in 2007, many alternative publications including Mother Jones were under the same umbrella of the (now defunct) Independent Press Association. The purpose of the IPA was to assist in distributing independent publications to independent bookstores, increasing sales opportunities. Sentiment and shared consciousness aside, without the same financial capabilities as larger media conglomerates, the pooling of resources for distributing magazines was a strategic move in order to be on a level playing field with other major titles. It made business sense to do the same online by aggregating news stories from a variety of other sources in order to develop more content. Mother Jones was no exception, and its initial efforts to expand its editorial content online involved linking to other like-minded publications. Mother Jones magazine shares similar editorial tone and readership as several other progressive magazines and online-only news sites including Utne Reader, The Nation, Harpers, and AlterNet. In the early part of the second phase of Mother Jones's relaunch plan, breaking news updates were often provided by linking to daily newspapers and other daily news sources. Links were also provided to more feature-length or in-depth stories from the alternative press such as The Nation and AlterNet.

As an editorial intern, I was assigned to round up and post the top political stories on *Mother Jones* political news Webpage every morning. In addition to the alternative publications mentioned, these were often culled from the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, the *Congressional Quarterly*. Generally, I started by checking the stories listed on the Google News homepage to gauge the top news of the day. The content of these news clippings was not original, but helped to maintain *Mother Jones* as a relevant source of breaking news online.

This cross-pollination and spreading of news articles within the alternative media community is beneficial for allowing publications with very limited budgets to reach possibly to a wider readership; however, the identities of online publications can be easily intermingled. How much of the identity of a publication is blurred by pairing itself with other news sources? News and community site, *AlterNet* often posts links to stories from *The Nation*, which has a link to the homepage of *AlterNet*. With the tagline “The mix is the message,” *AlterNet* aims to operate as a filter for news. According to the description on its Website, it strives to help its readers “cope with a culture of information overload and resist the constant commercial media onslaught.” *The Mother Jones* daily news round-up served a similar function, steering readers in the direction of news that is in line with progressive issues and causes.

In the final stages of its relaunch plan, *Mother Jones* removed most of the outside links to news stories from its Webpages. The magazine now relies almost completely on its own writers to produce content for the Website and the magazine. Committing to producing mainly original news reports on the *Mother Jones* site is a bold move. This editorial practice, if not an absolute policy, shows the publication can invest the capital and resources to produce enough content to keep their Website updated daily. This is a big step for a bimonthly magazine. After having been online
for more than a decade, *Mother Jones* has the potential to put regularly updated news reports and online feature writing at the forefront of the media landscape.

The content of *Mother Jones* still does not stand completely alone, and the editors must make calculated decisions about how much outside content the site can use in order to expand the reader's overall experience. For its daily listing of news stories on the homepage and section frontpages, the Website has not cut off completely from outside media since the occasional story from outside sources (usually from another left-leaning source). Also, outside news sources are important players in providing background information on news stories in the form of external links within articles. A delicate balance exists on the current Website. *Mother Jones* must stay on top of the competition with original writing and investigative reporting, while still offering readers access to information about the wide breadth of news stories being reported on a daily basis. The Internet has opened the floodgates of information, and has expanded the amount of information that a reader now expects from news Websites. The editor of one of the country's most popular Web sites privately told the Pew Research Center in the fall of 2007: "The walled garden is over."69

With news stories appearing on the Web at dizzying speeds the amount of news content is difficult to manage, even for the most ardent news junkie. As a result, news sites are now being judged on how well they can do this job for readers.70 Consumer demand is greatly influencing the criteria for the design and content of news Websites. *The Huffington Report* has been praised for presenting news from outside sources in carefully edited, condensed versions that will appeal to readers, and appear in convenient pop-up windows directly from the site. From small news publications to

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some of the largest newspapers in the United States and elsewhere, the barriers to outside news are coming down. Across the board, news publications are opening their websites to outside content by linking to outside stories—and even to their own competitors’ stories. For example, the Los Angeles Times, the fourth largest newspaper in the country, announced in February 2008, writers and editors now had the ability to add of hyperlinks in news stories.

The role of the gatekeeper for the mass of information is a daunting task. The *Mother Jones* website usually includes hyperlinks to other news stories or background information in its feature news and other stories. Because of this online feature, *Mother Jones* will have to make daily editorial decisions about which news stories and articles it will link to. Will preference be given to outside news sources within the circle of left-leaning or progressive news media in order to maintain a sense of community? Or will reports from major mainstream news be used because of their wide breadth of coverage? Like other publications, *Mother Jones’s* editors will have to maintain a balance between providing their readers with useful, comprehensive information on the day’s major news stories; and leading them away from MotherJones.com towards other news sites.
6 CONCLUSION

Since its introduction online, Mother Jones has been an innovator that was recognized with national media attention and awards. The Web has allowed the magazine to increase the depth and transparency of its content. The editors have used the Web for storing and providing background data on significant news stories, giving readers a chance to learn from first-hand sources on the major political events and personalities that interest them. Furthermore, Mother Jones has been successful in diversifying its content online: building blogs focused on the environment, the arts, and culture. They have added elements such as graphics, downloadable MP3 files of songs from emerging artists, videos from YouTube of breaking news on television or short documentaries. The magazine has made very visible progress since its first issue: "None of us here a quarter century ago could have dreamed of the World Wide Web; in fact, for the first few years the magazine was even set in hot type, a 19th-century technology using molten lead," wrote Adam Hochschild in the May/June 2001 issue of Mother Jones magazine.

In addition to the newer features available to readers online, the benefit of the Web is its use as a platform for reaching out to readers. Separate from the burdens of distribution and printing costs, the Web does offer a limited form of equality among news media publications such as newspapers and magazines. While they are still competing for readers, magazines can increase their reach and impact without having to increase the number of magazines actually being produced and circulated. And, magazines no longer have to achieve wide scale distribution to bookstores and sellers in order to achieve wide scale impact. They no longer have to compete with the major
names and brands, with access to more marketing resources, to earn very limited shelf space in magazine stands and bookstores. On the other hand, due to the infinite size of the Internet, publications there is a sense of increased competition for the limited attention of readers. Within the time that the concept of a more accessible and Web 2.0 emerged, media sites have also become increasingly fine-tuned and refined. *Mother Jones* has to keep pace with its online neighbours and competitors in order to stand out ahead.

In its relaunch plan, *Mother Jones* decided that the publication should operate more independently online, focusing on expanding its own editorial content while maintaining a focus on investigative reporting with the potential to impact readers and policymakers. In the final stages of its relaunch phase, *Mother Jones* removed most external links from the site leaving room mainly for original stories from the print magazine or articles exclusively available online. The breaking news stories reported online by *Mother Jones* own reporters give the publication more credence as a relevant source of information. In addition, this helps to define *Mother Jones* as a separate entity from other left-leaning political sites with its own distinctive voice and style. Rather than linking to other sites as in the initial phase of the magazine’s relaunch, the *Mother Jones* strategy is now to expand its content online, build the brand as a relevant and important source for alternative news, attract loyal readers, and attract other sites to link directly to *Mother Jones*. Continuing to build this content will require streaming funds towards investing in the hiring of new reporters, and possibly the establishment of new bureaus in addition to the main office in San Francisco and the Washington bureau.

The expanded capabilities and platforms for publishing news online are an advantage but also force editors to make more choices. Just as readers have to choose
discriminately how to spend their limited amount of time online, publishers have to choose how to devote their resources to developing their Website. While the *Mother Jones* Website now appears fuller with the addition of sidebars featuring photos and a rotating banner with the day’s top stories, the site has actually been pared down of its features. Most noticeably, news feeds with links to outside sources, social networking sites, and some features have been removed. The missing features include “Re:Action” that listed resources for readers looking to get involved in the topics presented online, and *Mother Jones* Radio that regularly produced podcasts to post on the site.

*Mother Jones* is taking a gamble that readers—even the younger demographic attracted to the Web—will look to the publication for the same investigative news reports that attracted readers to the print publication. The magazine’s longstanding readership base still expects the *Mother Jones* Website to act as watchdog on the American government. This is an important role given the recent major declines in Americans trust in their media, as well as the damage caused to the reputation of mainstream news media by the nature of their coverage in the lead up to the Iraq War.71 The Website has tried to maintain the same identity as a source of alternative news reports, on stories that are under reported related to social injustices, the economy, and the government.

*Mother Jones*—acting as an up-to-the-minute source of news in its newly launched Website—will now also be expected to report on the same stories that will be making the rounds in mainstream news. The unique perspective of *Mother Jones* online reporting through its “Washington Dispatches”, blog reports, and “Toolkits” will be the distinguishing marks of the online publication. The most clearly effective means

of using the Web's potential are in the *Mother Jones* toolkits. The "Toolkits" are clearly effective in attracting an audience (proving to raise the number of visitors to the Website in the days after they are posted), and they demonstrate the Web's potential for uncovering the many layers of a news story. The background, sources and research that go into reporting are revealed. Having discovered the Internet's potential for comprehensively revealing behind-the-scenes information, combined with a more recent decline in their trust of news reporters, online users are seeking out first-hand accounts and news from the source. The *Mother Jones* toolkits address this demand by providing easily accessible, clearly organized background material on major news such as the United States' war with Iraq. Under the directorship of editors Bauerlein and Jeffery, the Website will be an additional platform, and sounding board for the views, stories and insights from the *Mother Jones* editorial team.

In the online realm, an increasing number of popular bloggers and reporters with progressive perspectives on politics are gaining visibility, and reaching readers. It is important that the magazine has charisma and personality to stand out in the online crowd. *Mother Jones* is competing with blogs like the *Drudge Report*, *Huffington Post*, and many others that are spearheaded by well-known rebellious media personalities. *Mother Jones* has chosen not to focus on attracting celebrity writers, but cultivating their own reporters' talents. The articles published online on *Mother Jones*—such as Daniel Schulmann's report on the practice of "robocalling" prior to federal elections—often gain attention in the halls of the American government, as well as in the news rooms of corporate media companies (Television host Mike Wallace is quoted as saying he reads *Mother Jones*, and stories in the magazine have appeared on the show "60 Minutes").
Editors Bauerlein and Jeffery choose not to follow all the trends in online reporting or even jump on all the breaking news stories because they rely on a loyal, supportive readership that wants something different. Bauerlein, editor of *Mother Jones*, described the *Mother Jones* editorial philosophy as follows: "If we’re just doing the same thing that everyone else is doing than there is no point in spending the resources on it. That’s not what people read *Mother Jones* for, that’s not what a retired school teacher in Minnesota gives *Mother Jones* money for.” Whether online or printed in molten lead, as in the magazine’s early bootstrap days, the articles from *Mother Jones* will consistently be written from a unique perspective, uncover new information, or simply move a reader to take interest in issues affecting the world that surrounds them.

As it moves forward, in order to remain innovative, the magazine may need to make critical decisions about how to incorporate more experimental features such as social networks on their Website. The Web has also been proven to be a strong branding force, bringing people together in a virtual community. *Mother Jones* has room to build and innovate in this area by improving or building upon interaction in the blogs and adding social networking platforms. After a three-phased plan that was intended to build the site’s content, expand the magazine’s audience reach, and boost the site’s online ranking, *Mother Jones* next step might be towards building platforms for social networking and community.

*Mother Jones* is already ahead of the curve in the transition that news publications are being forced to make with news shifting from a product to an information service for its readers. However, the challenge for *Mother Jones* will be

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72 Interview with Monika Bauerlein, editor of *Mother Jones* magazine, April 20, 2007.
in deciding how to provide their readers with the tools and opportunities to take action on the stories that inspire them. The role of journalists is adjusting as they have to react more quickly to news, with rapid and off-the-cuff analysis posted on blogs and in short news updates. The role of the editors and writers of news magazines will be to provide the background information, access to firsthand sources, and other context to make readers understand the implications of fast-breaking news stories. The feature-length story, previously presented to readers as a neatly edited and packaged single piece, now may include links to other stories, to interviews with sources, and information on organizations related to the issues discussed. Navigating the breadth of information online will be the new role for websites like Mother Jones as the news publications look to establish credibility and presence in the Web 2.0 media landscape.
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