

The Web Publication Development Process for Engaging Small Communities

by

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Abstract

This report outlines the process used for creating the Master of Publishing 25th anniversary web publication and discusses the design and editorial practices implemented to engage the main audience, the program's alumni. The report also explores the application of Lean manufacturing, a process improvement methodology, to the publication development process and suggests Lean practices and tools that can be used to improve and maintain the publication in the future. Best practices for the management of the publication and increasing community engagement are also discussed.

Keywords: MPub network; online publishing; Lean manufacturing; Lean thinking; process improvement; online community

Dedication

To my mother and father for economically sponsoring my education, and to frozen pizza for gastronomically sponsoring this report.

Acknowledgements

I am very grateful to the Master of Publishing faculty, particularly John Maxwell and Monique Sherrett, for caring enough to create the opportunity to work on the publication this report discusses and thus, allowing their students to gain publishing experience.

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Table of Contents

Declaration of Committee	ii
Abstract	iii
Dedication	iv
Acknowledgements	v
Table of Contents	vi
List of Figures	viii
List of Acronyms	ix
Glossary	x
Introduction	1
Chapter 1. MPub Origins and Alumni	3
Master of Publishing Foundations	3
MPub Student Characteristics	4
Chapter 2. 25th Anniversary Web Publication Goals	7
MPub Celebrations	7
COVID-19 Pandemic Pivot	7
Primary and Secondary Goals	8
Primary Goal 1	9
Primary Goal 2	10
Chapter 3. Web Publication Development Process	13
Stage 1: Establishing Communication	14
Identifying Key Alumni Contacts	14
Creating Project Identity	15
Gathering Alumni Email Addresses	16
Mass Emailing	17
Stage 2: Producing Content	18
Defining Editorial Voice and Content Categories	18
Collecting Content	19
Editing Website Content	21
Stage 3: Designing Website	22
Typography and Color	22
Customizability	23
Navigational Structure and Layout	23
Programming and Plug-ins	25
Stage 4: Launching Publication	26
Lessons Learned	27

Chapter 4. Optimizing the Web Publication	28
Lean Thinking	28
Applying Lean Tools to Web Publication	29
Tool 1. Using Jidoka Automation for Communication	29
Tool 2. Using Voice of the Customer (VoC) for Producing Content	30
Tool 3. Using 5S for Designing and Maintaining the Website	31
Tool 4. Using Kaizen for Evaluation Post-launch	32
Chapter 5. Best Practices for Sustaining Web Publication Engagement	36
Create and Observe Handover Procedure	36
Set SMART Goals	37
Offer Value to Increase Engagement	38
Measure Success and Re-orient Accordingly	38
Conclusion	40
References	41
Appendices	44
Appendix A: Google Form – MPub Alumni Mini Interview	44
Appendix B: Google Form – MPub Network Media Upload	45
Appendix C: 6 Building Blocks of the SFU Brand	46
Appendix D: Test Email using Marketing Platform Mailchimp	47
Appendix E: Comparison Pages with and without Elementor	48

List of Figures

Figure 1 – Project team scope notes	13
Figure 2 – Web publication development process timeline	14
Figure 3 – Initial process steps for collecting email addresses	16
Figure 4 – Corrected process steps for collecting email addresses	17
Figure 5 – Header typeface options	22
Figure 6 – Color palette options	22
Figure 7 – Planning navigational structure	24
Figure 8 – New vs. returning website visitor analytics	34

List of Acronyms

5S	Sort, Straighten, Shine, Standardize, Sustain
CCSP	Canadian Centre for Studies in Publishing
CISP	Canadian Institute for Studies in Publishing
CSS	Cascading Style Sheet
HTML	Hyper-text Markup Language
MPub	Master of Publishing
SFU	Simon Fraser University

Glossary

Jidoka	Automation within the production process that signals an error and requires human action to correct.
Kaizen	A business philosophy that aims to continuously improve the operations within a process.
Lean manufacturing	A method of industrial manufacturing that focuses on the elimination of waste and continuous improvement within the manufacturing process.
WordPress	A free, open-source content management platform that is used to build, design, and maintain websites.

Introduction

The Master of Publishing (MPub) program at Simon Fraser University officially began its student intake in 1995, making 2020 the 25th anniversary of MPub. To celebrate, the Publishing department at SFU had originally planned two parties for June 2020—one in Vancouver and one in Toronto. Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated the cancellation of any large gatherings and therefore, the department postponed these parties to a later date.

However, as the anniversary still needed to be acknowledged in some way, the faculty commissioned a 25th anniversary commemorative publication, for which two MPub students from the 2019 cohort were hired —Melissa Swann and myself. While we worked collaboratively, Melissa took charge of the visual design and programming aspect of the web publication's development and I took on the editorial and communication/co-ordination responsibilities. The resulting publication, hosted at <https://sfumpubnetwork.ca/>, and the process of its creation, is the primary subject of this report.

Chapter one aims to establish the context for celebrating 25 years of MPub and the anniversary publication's audience. It explores how the program was first approved by the university as well as who the people involved in its development and approval efforts were. It also describes the type of students that the program attracts, what their backgrounds are, and what they typically do in their careers as alumni. With this target audience in mind, chapter two outlines the goals for the 25th anniversary celebration. These goals had to be adapted from the original in-person event to an online publication due to the COVID-19 pandemic. To meet the primary goals for the web publication, additional secondary action goals are defined, which mark the start of the web publication development process.

Chapter three describes the publication's development in four separate stages, from the announcement of the publication in June 2020 to its launch in September 2020. First, the establishment of communication and engagement efforts with the alumni for the anniversary are outlined. Then, the creation of the website's design and technological considerations are described in detail as well as the process of gathering and curating content to populate the website. The challenges faced in

these various stages of development, and how they affected the publication, are also explained in this chapter. The solutions to address them are detailed in the next.

Chapter four introduces Lean manufacturing as a process improvement methodology and describes how specific Lean tools and practices can be used to correct or improve the parts of the publication efforts that were negatively impacted by the challenges faced during the development stages of the process. The theme of continuous improvement is carried on to chapter five, which suggests certain best practices that will enable the web publication to grow in a sustained manner and drive community engagement for its audience in the future.

Chapter 1.

MPub Origins and Alumni

MASTER OF PUBLISHING FOUNDATIONS

The Master of Publishing program was launched at SFU officially in 1995 after a decade of internal lobbying and fundraising. Ann Cowan, then director of the Writing and Publishing program at Continuing Studies at SFU, and Rowland Lorimer¹, then faculty in the Communications department spearheaded the efforts to approve the program. MPub was initially proposed by the Canadian Institute for Studies in Publishing (CISP). Now the research arm of Publishing@SFU, CISP was first known as the Canadian Centre for Studies in Publishing (CCSP) and was established in 1987 at SFU after an advisory committee made up of ninety-five industry representatives—both academic and commercial—determined a significant interest and need for the establishment of a Canadian research and educational facility that would concentrate on publishing.²

Cowan and Lorimer led the committee and released *The Canadian Centre for Studies in Publishing at Simon Fraser University: A Prospectus* in 1987 as a summary of the findings and recommendations that the advisory committee put forth for the Centre. In addition to providing continued professional education through workshops and short-term courses, the prospectus proposed a graduate-level program in publishing studies with the purpose to ‘give the student both the skills needed to work in publishing and the understanding necessary to creating the industry in the future.’³ The prospectus also notes the importance of emphasizing managerial and business skills in publishing education, which includes having an ‘understanding of market trends, business techniques and theory, and an awareness of the possibilities offered by changes in technology.’

¹ Lorimer, Rowland. “Some Context in Text: The MPub Origin Story – MPub 25th Anniversary.” Accessed January 12, 2021. <https://sfumpubnetwork.ca/stories/context-in-text-the-mpub-origin-story/>.

² Johnson, Leanne. “The Master of Publishing Program: Strategic Positioning for the Re-Invention of Publishing.” Thesis, Master of Publishing Program - Simon Fraser University, 2010. <http://summit.sfu.ca/item/9938>.

³ Cowan, Ann, and Rowland Lorimer. 1987. *The Canadian Centre for Studies in Publishing at Simon Fraser University: A Prospectus*. Vancouver – Simon Fraser University.

Fortunately, there was also much support and agreement on the need for a national publishing program from high-profile industry members within Canada, such as Douglas Gibson (Publisher at McClelland and Stewart 1988 – 2009) and Cynthia Good (Publisher at Penguin Canada 1982 – 2003). The program, including its curriculum, was designed in collaboration with similar experts from the publishing industry, notably James Douglas (Co-founder of Douglas & McIntyre) and got its final push towards approval by the university Senate in June of 1994 when significant funding was secured from Ralph Hancox, who was CEO of Reader's Digest Canada at the time.

As the program stands in 2021, it is no surprise that MPub's curriculum design has been through multiple evolutions. However, even over two decades later, the emphasis on educating students to understand publishing as a commercial effort, and the involvement of industry members in the program, have remained consistent. As well, marketing by Publishing@SFU consistently positions MPub as the only graduate-level program in Canada that prepares students for employment within the industry through its practice-based coursework and the mandatory work placement students complete through the department's many industry connections.

MPUB STUDENT CHARACTERISTICS

The professional and hands-on nature of the program is what entices most students to apply. A June 2019 report by Boxcar Marketing, which dove into MPub's student demographics (past and present) in order to reorient the department's marketing strategy, stated that student applications and course feedback often indicate a desire for real professional and practical skills.⁴ This suggests that a primary reason students choose the program (besides the prestigious Master's degree) is that on completion, it provides strong prospects to successfully gain employment in publishing, enhance existing skills, or learn new skills to apply within the industry.

Accordingly, the professional nature of the program sets high demands for its applicants. As detailed on the Publishing@SFU MPub Admissions page, candidates must have a minimum GPA of 3.0 and must not only demonstrate that they have some prerequisite knowledge of copy editing, marketing, and the publishing process but must also understand the basics of financial accounting and have experience

⁴ Sherrett, Monique. "MPub Strategic Marketing Plan 2020." Report – SFU Master of Publishing, Boxcar Marketing, June 04, 2019.

working with Adobe software InDesign and Photoshop. With these high-level expectations, it is no surprise that using data from 2013 to 2019, Boxcar's strategic marketing plan described a typical MPub cohort (of fifteen to twenty students) as collectively having an undergraduate average GPA of 3.4. Additionally, this academically driven group is 90% female (the gender skew is not surprising considering 70% of Canada's publishing industry workforce is female⁵) and is between the ages of 22 – 34, but tending towards the younger. Some students come with a few years of work experience, while others are straight out of an undergraduate degree in English, Communications, or the arts. Also of note in the report is that from 1995 – 2009, 90% of MPub students were Canadian, however, from 2013 – 2019 international students accepted into the program rose to 27%. This increase in international students can be explained by Canada's open immigration policies and the opportunity for international students to continue to work in Canada after course completion with a Post-Graduate Work Permit.⁶ The province of British Columbia on the west coast of Canada is also an attractive location for both international students and Canadians to live, and according to the Boxcar Marketing strategy report, this location is consistently ranked as one of the top reasons students choose SFU for their publishing studies.

After completing MPub, alumni typically flow into the publishing industry in one form or another as publishers, editors, marketers and publicists, designers, or researchers. Some also turn to academia as English, communications, arts, and publishing instructors. In an interview of 22 alumni from the 1996 – 2008 cohorts conducted by MPub graduate Leanne Johnson for her final MPub report in 2010, 94% reported they were working in the publishing industry. In 2020, 44 alumni ranging from all cohorts responded to a Google Form interview sent out for the 25th anniversary MPub celebration. 93% of these respondents reported working in one of the roles mentioned above. Also, 11% reside in the USA, with the remaining 89% in Canada. Though the size of both interview respondent groups doesn't provide a holistic view of MPub alumni's post-graduation careers, they are a reliable indication of the streams graduates typically pursue.

⁵ Nordicity. "The Canadian English-Language Book Publishing Industry Profile." Final Report, July 2018, 16.

⁶ Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada. "Understanding Canada's Immigration System." February 9, 2018. Accessed January 27, 2021. <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/campaigns/irregular-border-crossings-asylum/understanding-the-system.html>.

Since its inception to date, MPub has churned out over 400 graduates and counting. With a post-graduate degree that holds its own unique degree of weight and esteem, some alumni from older cohorts now occupy senior and managerial positions within key publishing establishments in Canada. Several have even started their own publishing, design, and marketing companies. Many of those who still reside in Vancouver, and even some from Toronto, make regular appearances as guest lecturers for each new cohort, affording the new members of the community a view from both sides of the industry. Educated, high-achieving, and currently working in publishing, these 400+ alumni are the target audience for which the project team developed the 25th anniversary web publication.

Chapter 2.

25th Anniversary Web Publication Goals

MPUB CELEBRATIONS

Historically, the SFU Publishing department has made it a point to celebrate milestones and special events by organizing memorable parties for students, alumni, faculty, and any MPub adjacent industry members. Typical MPub parties or receptions often have between 20 – 50 attendants, are a casual affair with food and drink, and are held either in Vancouver’s downtown Publishing offices or a nearby restaurant. The department plans them for special occasions, such as founder Rowland Lorimer’s retirement and MPub’s 10th anniversary, as well as every year for the new cohort at the start of the program and at the conclusion of the big book and media project presentations.

Naturally, a silver jubilee anniversary signifying a quarter century of MPub was a momentous milestone for the program. The department had arranged for a party to be held in June 2020 in Vancouver, home of MPub, and another in Toronto, where a majority of Canadian publishing takes place and where many MPub graduates work. With the east and west coasts covered, they expected that more alumni than usual would attend the anniversary celebrations, allowing ample opportunity for older, more recent, and current MPubbers to mingle, reminisce, exchange stories from MPub days, laugh, catch up, and network with each other.

COVID-19 PANDEMIC PIVOT

Unfortunately, in late January 2020, the first case of COVID-19 was recorded in Ontario and others followed. By early March, British Columbia and Quebec also had multiple cases of the virus, leading the Canadian government to recommend national work-from-home policies and educational organizations to institute online-only learning.⁷ COVID-19 is a virus that causes respiratory illness and is transmitted through droplets

⁷ Berry, Isha, Jean-Paul R. Soucy, Ashleigh Tuite, and David Fisman. “COVID-19 Intervention Timeline in Canada.” *Canadian Medical Association Journal* 192, no. 15 (April 14, 2020): E420–E420. <https://doi.org/10.1503/cmaj.75262>.

of human saliva or nasal fluids .⁸ Because there was no vaccine or cure at the time for the virus, no large groups (of seven or more) were allowed to gather in any public spaces in order to prevent potentially infected individuals from infecting others. Additionally, all individuals were encouraged, in some regions even mandated by a lockdown, to stay home and only go out for essential activities such as grocery shopping or medical visits. With an earliest possible vaccine delivery being over a year away, there was no way to know for certain when these social distancing restrictions would be lifted. This meant that both the anniversary celebrations in Vancouver and Toronto would not be taking place in 2020.

Therefore, with the parties postponed to a later, safer date, the Publishing department thought to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the program with a publication of some kind. The faculty proposed the publication as an opportunity to provide two current MPub students in search of an placement with publishing experience and income during a financially difficult season. Initially, the publication was conceived as a one-time printed magazine-esque product that would function as a keepsake that reminded alumni of their program experience. However, a limited budget and the logistical complications caused by the lockdown made distribution too high a barrier for a printed product. So for its much greater level of feasibility and flexibility, the faculty decided that the 25th anniversary commemorative publication would be released as a website.

PRIMARY AND SECONDARY GOALS

Originally, the celebratory parties planned for the summer of 2020 had their own goals and desired outcomes. An unquantifiable, abstract aim for the parties was “fun down memory lane,” where alumni get together, reminisce with each other about their time in program, tell funny stories, and laugh over shared experiences across cohorts. Through this, graduates from older cohorts would become familiar with newer faces joining the publishing industry, and vice versa, allowing for cross-cohort networking so that a sense of community could organically begin to form (as they historically have at similar events). Additionally, there was a plan to organize the alumni by cohort, gather contact information, and use it to create a more active alumni network in the future. However, with the celebration now being channeled

⁸ World Health Organization. “Coronavirus.” Accessed January 27, 2021. <https://www.who.int/westernpacific/health-topics/coronavirus>.

through an online medium and not a physical one, these goals had to be reached a different way. Still, the web publication was commissioned with two primary goals very similar in intent to those of the originally planned parties, and to meet each of these goals, it was also important to identify key secondary action goals that would help achieve the primary ones.

Primary Goal 1

SHOWCASE 25 YEARS OF MPUB MEMORIES IN AN ENGAGING ONLINE SPACE

To define the key actions that would meet this goal, we first clarified what we envisioned “memories” and “engaging online space” to be. *Memories* constituted any content that reflected the quintessence of MPub—this meant that even if the published content referred to a unique event experienced by just one alum or cohort, it should still be relatable to alumni from other cohorts by calling to mind similar experiences or environments. For example, a story about a student dealing with stress during the book project by making paper cranes would be relatable not because of the paper cranes, but because every MPubber knows the fast-paced, high demands of the book project. Such content would then be put together and published in an *online space*, which at this early stage, when even the structure of the content had not yet been decided, meant only that they would be hosted on a website created using WordPress.* Additionally, in order for the online space to be *engaging* for its target alumni audience, the website had to a) be easy to navigate and b) take a multimedia approach by having different types or combinations of content such as text, audio, video, and interactivity.

In the past 25 years, the Publishing department did not itself have any official or well-maintained database of content that collected and preserved images, student accomplishments, or events from the program that could serve as memories for the publication. There is also no existing MPub student association body that could facilitate the organized collection of such content. So in order to accurately portray the experience of the program for alumni to reminisce over, this content had to be pulled from the audience—the alumni themselves—which led to the setting of the secondary goals below.

1. Spread the word to and through alumni

* WordPress is a free, open-source content management platform that is used to design and maintain websites. It is the current standard for any of the SFU Publishing department’s online publication needs.

As there was no longer going to be a gathering for which invitations could be sent out, we would first need to inform alumni that in lieu of the 25th anniversary parties, a publication was forthcoming. Additionally, once enough of the audience for the publication were made aware of the publication and its purpose, they would in turn be able to inform any MPub alumni they were in contact with about it.

2. Receive content for publication from alumni

After ensuring that the main audience was aware of the upcoming publication, the next goal was to receive content contributions from interested alumni. While some material would be generated by my teammate and I, content such as images and stories from individual graduates' experiences would have to be gathered from the alumni themselves in order for the publication to be truly representative of, and of interest to, the audience for which we were creating the publication.

3. Publish the content

Once we received the content, it would have to be arranged and publicized on a website. The design and user interface of the publication would need to be simple but also attractive in order to ensure that the audience could easily access, view, and enjoy the content that was curated for them.

Primary Goal 2

ESTABLISH A BASE FOR A WELL-CONNECTED, ACTIVE NETWORK OF ALUMNI

MPub cohorts run small at 15 – 20 students per cohort, making it easier for students to form strong bonds with a few of their fellow graduates. In Johnson's interview of the 22 alumni from the 1996 – 2008 cohorts, 100% reported being in regular contact with at least a half dozen other members of their respective cohorts. Contextually, MPub graduates form a small community working in an already small industry—according to a December 2020 IBISWorld report, the Canadian book publishing industry employs only about 6,650 workers.⁹ When combined with the fact that most Canadian publishing is concentrated in the Toronto and Lower Mainland areas, it is not unusual for an MPub graduate to meet several alumni from other cohorts in the course of their careers. However, most alumni connections remain limited to an individual graduate's network bubble, meaning that each individual from the six

⁹ Koronios, Eva. "Industry at a Glance - 5113CA Book Publishing in Canada - MyIBISWorld," December 2020. <https://my-ibisworld-com.proxy.lib.sfu.ca/ca/en/industry/5113ca/industry-at-a-glance>.

fellow graduates an alum might be in regular contact with is likely in contact with the same six graduates as the others. This shows that each MPub cohort is not as well connected as it could be but also that there is not much connection across cohorts in a relatively small community. It is also of note that in Johnson's interview, all 22 alumni reported either helping other alumni find publishing jobs or being helped by other alumni to find publishing jobs. Hence, a strong network of alumni in the future is beneficial not only for the SFU Publishing department, but for the alumni themselves. While such a network cannot be wholly formed over one summer of preparing the 25th anniversary publication, we planned secondary action goals, as outlined below, to establish a foundation which could be built on later.

1. Create an up-to-date email database for all alumni

Though the majority of email addresses for past graduates were up-to-date and accurate for cohorts within the past seven years, mailing lists for older cohorts—namely 1995 to 2013—remained either incomplete or out-of-date as the department did not have any current and collated information on them. Therefore, a new database needed to be created, which could be trusted to contain accurate email addresses for all past graduates to facilitate better communication with alumni in the future.

2. Get alumni to share basic information on current location and job

Similarly to the lack of an up-to-date email address database, there is no official record in SFU's Publishing department that tracks where graduates end up working or what field they choose to work in. This information is often only passed on to the department through word of mouth. Understandably, no graduates will always have a static job title, organization, or base location as careers and life circumstances will shift and change. However, in order to facilitate better engagement between the department and alumni and between the alumni themselves, it was important to receive these basic details.

The intent of these primary goals remained the same despite the change from original parties to online publication as they were predetermined when the publication was commissioned and needed only to be translated in functionality. Likewise, the secondary goals of informing the alumni, receiving and publishing content from them, and creating an alumni database with accurate and current information were the actions that we understood to be necessary even before any significant planning of the commemorative publication had begun. So while these

were pre-set goals at this stage of *pre pre-production*, there was little direction as to what actual process we should follow to meet them going forward. We also had many questions concerning the nature of the publication—what was the editorial vision? Would the website be a one-time publication? Would the content structure follow a linear history of the program? We had few clear guidelines for the project despite the broader limitations that provided some boundaries. For example, we had no budgetary allowance, and, technologically, we were limited to WordPress’s built-in capabilities as well as our own skills with the platform. Editorially as well, we were fairly dependent on contributions from alumni. However, the open scope of the project and the relaxed supervision could be interpreted as the freedom to form our own process and create and publicize the publication using much of the knowledge gained through the MPub program. Admittedly, this organic and free flowing way of working would bring its own challenges, but at the forefront were the two primary goals and the knowledge that completing each secondary action would bring us closer to meeting them.

Chapter 3. Web Publication Development Process

Before the publication development could start in earnest, our aim at this time (May 2020) was to define the scope of the project. In collaboration with John Maxwell, Director of MPub, and Monique Sherrett, Boxcar Marketing Co-founder and MPub adjunct instructor, we began formalizing on paper the aims of the publication, what it was meant to achieve, what its future uses could be, what format it would be in, and what kind of content it would contain. We also created a timeline, however rough, organizing all the actions we knew for certain needed to be taken in the near future. These included everything from creating a working plan for the following four weeks of pre-production to deciding that the publication would exist on a separate domain independent of the Publishing@SFU website. This would allow more freedom in the design and branding of the website, as well as more informal and adaptable content types. Here, it's important to pause and observe that this process of formalization, collaboration, and agreements between key stakeholders added some degree of definition and direction to the project, paving a clearer way forward.

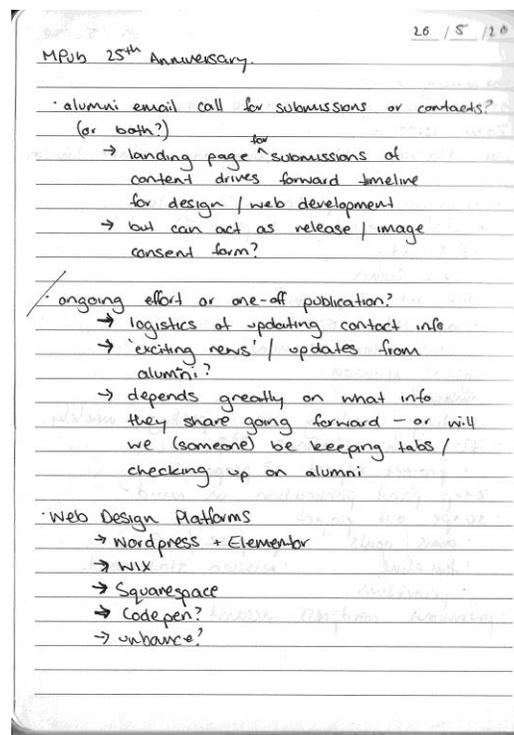


Figure 1 – Project team scope notes

The primary and secondary goals that we had set pointed to a clear starting point—we needed to establish contact with the alumni before any other significant steps could be taken. From there, the progress made in development depended on the availability, or lack thereof, of content and content contributors, design options, technical capability, and time available at the stage of development we were in. At times, this dependency caused activities from one stage to bleed into the activities of another and vice versa.

The process that we followed to produce the MPub 25th anniversary commemorative web publication can be broken down into four stages:

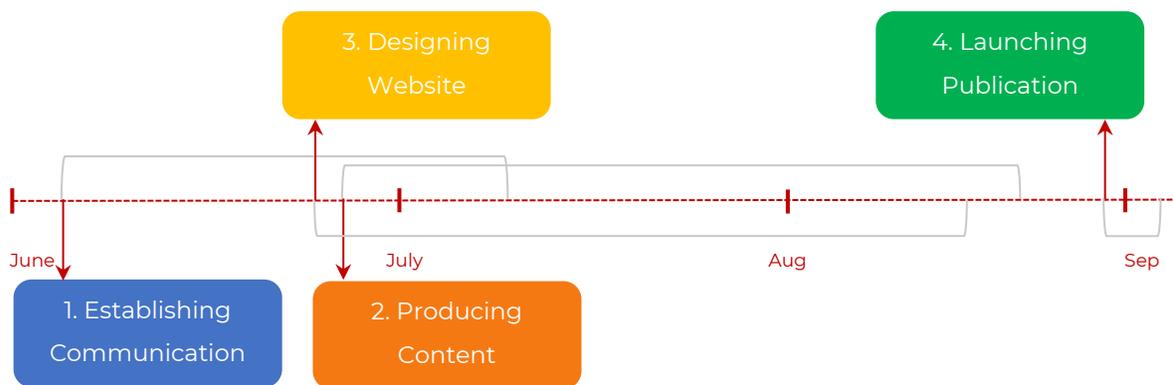


Figure 2 – Web publication development process timeline

STAGE 1: ESTABLISHING COMMUNICATION

Identifying Key Alumni Contacts

To spread the word to all the alumni about the upcoming web publication, we first wanted to contact key alumni from each cohort. Because bonds naturally develop within each MPub cohort rather than across cohorts, our goal was to identify one or two graduates within each cohort who were considered most likely to a) engage with the anniversary efforts and b) be able to gather and provide email address for their fellow cohort members. Contacting these alumni first would provide a greater chance of reaching a larger number of alumni from each cohort. John Maxwell, the project supervisor and director of MPub, selected the key alumni as he has been involved with the program since 1995, its first official year of student intake, and therefore was considered most familiar with graduates and cohorts from the past years. Five of the

current MPub faculty who were themselves MPub graduates also put out a call for email addresses to their respective cohorts.

We used email as the main medium to contact the key alumni. Email is a marketing tool that is more personal for reaching target audiences than social media and proven to be more effective at resulting in conversions.¹⁰ (For the purposes of the anniversary publication process, ‘conversions’ are any positive actions that the alumni take in response to requests for help or engagement in the development process.) As the first step, the team populated a list of all past and current MPub students and added in any email addresses that were already known—this was the beginning of the organized database of alumni. For the more recent cohorts, email addresses were pulled from mailing lists maintained by Jo-Anne Ray, SFU Publishing program manager and MPub program advisor since the program’s inception.

Creating Project Identity

In parallel to these initial efforts of making contact with alumni, we were also creating a project identity from which to carry out all the anniversary communications. This involved first purchasing a domain to host the website on, and then creating an email address attached to the same unique domain name. By this point, it had been decided that the website would be a core element used to strengthen the network of MPub alumni in the future and therefore, the email address and website domain name chosen would need to have validity for the long term and be left broad enough for a variety of prospective applications. The key words for the project were ‘MPub’, ‘network’, ‘alumni’, and ‘SFU,’ and after considering various combinations of each of these words, the website domain sfumpubnetwork.ca and email address info@sfumpubnetwork.ca were chosen. The project supervisor used Reclaim Hosting, a small hosting service that provides website and domain infrastructure for educators and educational institutions, to set these up. The next step was to enable either my teammate or I to send and receive emails with the project email ID. Gmail is the most widely used email service worldwide¹¹ and all members of the project team used it for their everyday communications. Therefore, instead of using an entirely new email application, the simplest and most convenient way to use the project email was

¹⁰ eMarketer. “Email Marketing Benchmarks: Key Data, Trends and Metrics.” February 2013. https://cdn2.hubspot.net/hub/36315/file-249160529-pdf/docs/emarketer_email_marketing_benchmarks_key_data_trends_metrics.pdf

¹¹ Petrov, Christo. “50 Gmail Statistics That Show How Big It Actually Is In 2020.” TechJury, June 30, 2020. <https://techjury.net/blog/gmail-statistics/>. Accessed February 19, 2021.

incorporating the email ID into an already existing Gmail account. This proved efficient for switching between formal project emails and personal communication within the team.

Gathering Alumni Email Addresses

Early in June, the external effort to connect with the alumni began. We sent emails to 46 key alumni announcing the upcoming 25th anniversary publication and requesting aid in contacting any additional members of their respective cohorts or providing email addresses for them. Problems with collecting email addresses in this indirect manner quickly became apparent as consent from individuals was required before any email IDs could be forwarded to us by the key alumni. So logistically, the process looked like:

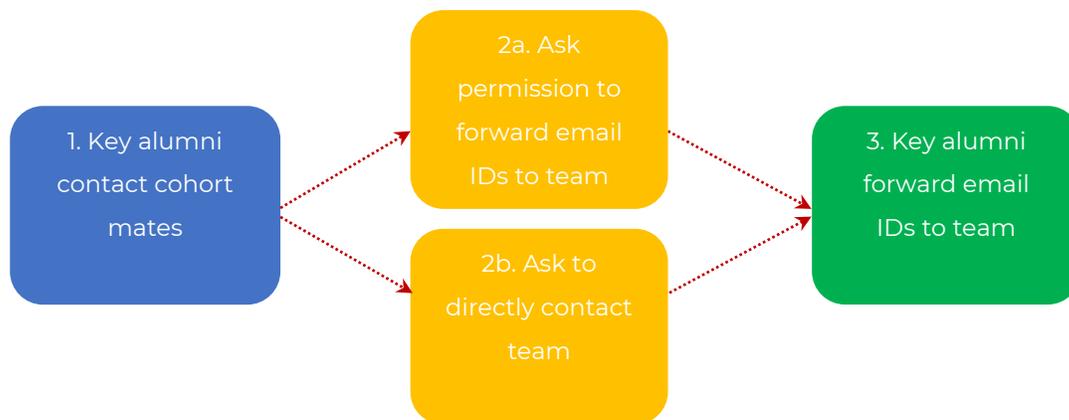


Figure 3 – Initial process steps for collecting email addresses

This process was fairly inefficient as it took longer for contact information to reach the team and required more consistent action from the key alumni, which led to some data not reaching the desired destination. Fortunately, the problem was soon rectified by creating an email sign-up form on the main page of the publication website (by this time, preliminary branding and design decisions for the website had been made in parallel). With the form and a short introduction to the anniversary set up, we simply had to send out the website link to our available contacts and allow alumni to opt-in to being contacted themselves. Thus, the process became shorter and more direct.

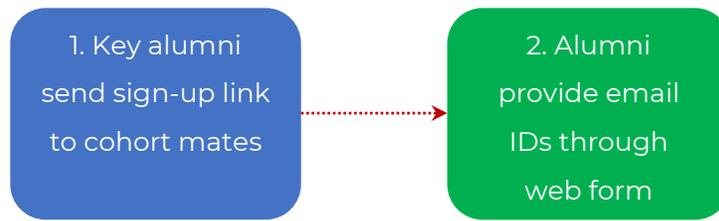


Figure 4 – Corrected process steps for collecting email addresses

Another benefit of using the website form was that it established direct communication so that more alumni became aware of the upcoming anniversary publication and the intention to create an engaged MPub network. However, while the sign-up process was simplified, another challenge arose in the transfer of the newly registered email IDs into the alumni database. The web form transmitted the email sign-ups directly to the project email account and from there, the email addresses had to be manually typed into the Google spreadsheet which constituted the alumni database. These manual transfers were tedious, highly prone to human error, and required consistent and careful attention to each new sign-up notification to ensure none were missed. Despite this, by the end of June, the alumni database had email addresses for about 50% of the alumni, which we considered a success for the purposes of the publication project.

Mass Emailing

With initial contact established with the alumni, we wanted to gain some more information for the alumni database. We designed a Google Form with seven questions that all the alumni could submit responses to ([see Appendix A](#)). Three questions pertained to basic information such as current job, job title, and city of residence, which we would update in the database. The remaining four asked about personal experiences in their careers and what role MPub played in them. The form also included a link to a media upload form ([see Appendix B](#)) where alumni could send in any images, videos, or documents containing their MPub memories for publishing. However, at the end of June, sending the emails encouraging the alumni to fill in these forms proved somewhat difficult. Instead of sending one mass email to nearly 200 email addresses, the emails had to be divided into four separate batches and scheduled an hour apart from each other in order to avoid the emails bouncing

back due to an overloaded email client server. Within Gmail's interface, this meant that even though an alumni group mailing list existed, sending mass emails in batches required manually selecting approximately 50 email addresses from the mailing list for each batch. Though this process was inefficient and also susceptible to human error, it was deemed sufficient for the project's purposes. We had established communication lines for the project and it was time to move on to the next stages of development, which, despite some challenges, progressed smoothly as the publication became more and more defined.

STAGE 2: PRODUCING CONTENT

Defining Editorial Voice and Content Categories

In the summer of 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic had changed normal day to day realities for everyone in multiple ways. Office spaces had closed and employees worked from home. The majority of meetings and social activities were taking place online. Schools had also closed for the summer, requiring parents to entertain and supervise their children at home while also working. Additionally, summer is also a time when many traditionally go on vacation. It was under these circumstances that we announced the anniversary publication and under these circumstances that we were asking for engagement and contributions from the alumni. This was challenging as many alumni were naturally less inclined to dedicate any time to contributing content along with their other responsibilities. Being aware of the situation, we were cautious of demanding too much time, and diplomatic when seeking contributions in any communication with the alumni, as we did not want to express pressure to be involved with the project.

The lack of 'push' for contributions led to some uncertainty regarding the amount and variety of content we would be able to collect to put together a compelling publication for our audience. We aimed to take a mixed-media approach and include video, audio, images, interactivity, and written content in order to keep the website as engaging and interesting as possible for any viewers. This would also allow for versatile and adaptable content in future additions to the publication. The ideas for potential content pieces included interviews that would be turned into articles, Q&As, memories of unique MPub experiences, previous book project and magazine/media project reports, highlights of successful alumni careers, and video clips from alumni. But though we had ideas, the 'voice' of the publication remained

unclear. In early June, the closest definition we had for the publication's editorial tone was a sentence in an email sent to an interested contributor—

“We want the publication to reflect the experience of MPub and the work that all the alumni have put into the program, and their own careers outside of MPub as well.”

However, as the summer progressed and communication with the alumni and within the project team continued, the editorial vision and tone of the publication became clearer. An excerpt from a July 2, 2020 email reply to an alum wanting to write a piece describes the editorial vision accurately—

“We really have no specific guidelines except that we want to keep things on the shorter side, so about 500 – 700 words. And we definitely want to keep it positive but with interesting/thoughtful angles. Humor is always welcome! Depending on what you write, a few related photos would be appreciated.

The idea is to reflect on something that struck you personally during the program - it could honestly be any object, event, lesson, assignment, or even faculty member that you found interesting, curious, or funny. We want the publication to be memory focused since it's an anniversary but we also want it to reflect the experiences of the unique individuals who were part of the program.”

With a more defined voice for the publication, and after narrowing down which of our content ideas were technically feasible given our limitations, we were able to identify three key categories of content—stories, interviews, and an image gallery. At the time of publication, stories were any content pieces created by members of the MPub community that reflected specific memories unique to MPub, interviews were any content pieces that resulted from direct conversations with community members, and the gallery was full of images from MPub sponsored events, student field trips, classroom activities, or parties. Knowing these categories in turn informed certain design aspects of the publication—namely, the navigational structure of the website and page layouts for each type of content. With the three categories in mind it was also easier to pursue and develop content.

Collecting Content

For pieces of content such as written stories, images, and interviews, co-ordination and collaboration with contributing alumni was ongoing throughout summer. Although strict content specifications for word count or image quality had not been

set, interested contributors were given guidelines to follow for any content they planned to submit. Besides alumni experiences, it was also important for us to encompass the program's history from the very beginning, from as many viewpoints as possible, to truly reflect the essence of MPub. Fortunately, many of the key players who were involved with the program since it launched were still involved with the program, or somewhat MPub adjacent, making them a reliable source of information to tap. These persons included the founder, Rowland Lorimer, and John Maxwell, current director of the program, and we were able to generate historically true content from each of them to immortalize in the publication. In addition, we also tracked down and reunited the three original students of the program on a video call. This group interview resulted in a piece of content that presented the evolution of the program from a unique student perspective. In addition, since several of the Publishing faculty were also once MPub students, we sent them a form-based interview through which we were able to produce a piece capturing their unusual student to staff experience. Involving these key MPub community members not only provided the audience different perspectives on the MPub program that hadn't been widely seen before, but also served to historicize 25 years of MPub for the entire community.

Another key community member is Jo-Anne Ray, who, for the majority of alumni, is their first point of contact with the Publishing department. Her distinctive, humorous storytelling style is well-known throughout the SFU Publishing community so it was vital to showcase her recollections of MPub experiences over the years in a way the community would be familiar with—through audio. We set up an informal interview and recorded all the curious or funny stories from the program's history that she could recall, which we would later turn into bite-sized audio clips.

We also wanted to publicize one of the quintessential MPub experiences which we knew would be relatable for all the alumni—the book project and magazine/media project. Since the program began in 1995, the syllabus has included these two projects—one per semester—spanning over seven intensive weeks each. The group projects, including a smaller technology project, are a cornerstone of the program and culminate in fully developed business plans, professionally designed reports, and product prototypes for made-up businesses. They are commonly described as a stressful but skill-building experience by students and were therefore important to showcase in the publication. We selected a few eye-catching and unique reports and project materials to feature from those stored at the Publishing offices

and created content pieces for each highlighted project that included photographs, descriptions of the faux magazines and publishing houses, and the project group members.

A challenge we faced with trying to cover the rich history and evolution of MPub was that for many of the earlier years of the program—primarily 1995 to 2002—there was little to no usable digital evidence due to the limited degree and quality of technology available at that time. This meant that images of cohorts, project report files, and memories were hard to come by from those years and thus, were largely not represented in the final publication.

Editing Website Content

Once images had been collected, stories written, and interviews conducted, the next step was to edit and shape each item to complement the editorial voice and design style defined for the publication. We modified images, such as those of past project reports, to match the warm sepia tint that other images on the website also featured. We edited submitted stories in collaboration with the authors to meet the informal, humorous, memory-focused voice of the publication. We transformed interviews into written reflections or Q&A style pieces and edited and organized the audio interview with Jo-Anne Ray into short clips that highlighted interesting and amusing stories from over the years of her MPub tenure.

After editing the content, we then uploaded it to the website according to the layouts and styles designed for each content piece. Placing the content in its intended environment allows for any glaring errors or missed aspects to be quickly noticed and rectified on the page. By doing this, we learned that it was crucial to ensure that all peritext was present and accounted for in order to maintain cohesiveness across the publication. Peritext is any supplementary text that contextually supports the main content on the website. Examples include the one-sentence meta descriptions in the previews to each content piece, informative captions for all images in the gallery and content pieces, and introductory text for each content category. Likewise, in the interest of accessibility, we also added alternate text for images and a transcript of the audio clips to the website. However, editing the content and its appearance in this way was only made possible because a majority of the publication design and functionality had already been created and put in place in a parallel effort to the development stages hitherto.

STAGE 3: DESIGNING WEBSITE

Typography and Color

The first step in designing the website publication was to establish a visual identity. A visual identity, such as for a brand or online blog, is made up of specific colors, typefaces and typography, and graphics which are used in a consistent style set across all brand communication. Since by its nature our publication was connected to SFU, a relationship with the university had to be visually represented. However, the web publication also had autonomy due to the independent domain and did not have to match all of SFU's branding and visual style. The use of a consistent color palette improves brand recognition by up to 80%,¹² so we chose to work within the deep and bright red color palette that SFU uses for its branding ([see Appendix C for SFU's visual brand](#)). For typefaces, we considered some alignment with SFU branding, readability, and hierarchy of header text and main body text. It was also important to choose fonts that would load consistently on any device and browser, so we limited our options to typefaces easily accessible through Google Fonts. With these guides in mind, we experimented with typefaces and color palettes before making a decision based on what best matched our informal editorial tone and design vision of simplicity and clarity.

COUNTACH - BOLD
GRADUATE - REGULAR
TEKO - LIGHT
TEKO - SEMIBOLD
OSWALD - MEDIUM
RUBIK - BOLD ITALIC
SAIRA EXTRACONDENSED - REGULAR
OPEN SANS - CONDENSED LIGHT ITALIC
ROBOTO CONDENSED - ITALIC

Figure 5 – Header typeface options

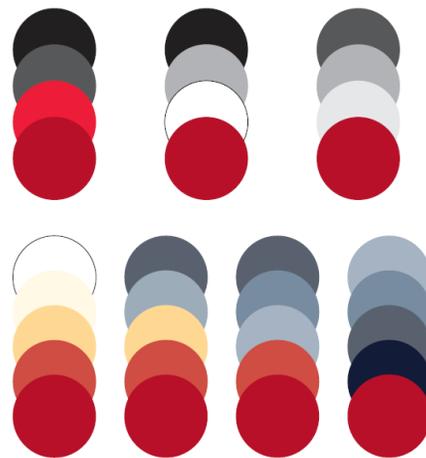


Figure 6 – Color palette options

¹² Shaoolian, Gabriel. "10 Marketing, Web Design & Branding Statistics To Help You Prioritize Business Growth Initiatives." Forbes. Accessed March 11, 2021. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/gabrielshaoolian/2018/08/10/10-marketing-web-design-branding-statistics-to-help-you-prioritize-business-growth-initiatives/>.

Customizability

Next, we had to carefully choose a theme for the publication within the WordPress infrastructure. Themes inform the structural layout of pages on a website and are templated using CSS. In order for the website's future development and potential expansion to be easy and efficient, we aimed to select a highly customizable theme. Customizable meant that layouts, colors, and typography could be manipulated without having to excessively edit the already existing code. Unfortunately, our initially selected theme was not compatible with some of the customizations we wanted and we therefore had to change the theme to something more flexible. For example, the original theme had limited design options to customize the header and footer sections that would appear globally across the website, which would have affected the overall look and feel of the publication. Another important step we took to enable efficiency of development was to install the Elementor plug-in. Elementor is advertised as the number one website page builder for WordPress users and the benefit of using it is its user-friendly interface. WordPress's two in-built page editors, while usable, are not intuitive and require extra programming or plug-ins to stylize and place content according to desire. In contrast, Elementor is a highly intuitive page builder that allows users to simply drag and drop desired elements or in-built widgets directly onto the website page. In practice, this made the addition of components like an image carousel with Elementor a two-step process versus five or more steps with the standard WordPress editors, while still allowing for the same level of customization. Elementor also allows quick editing for responsive design, helping us to ensure that all publicized content displayed consistently across mobile devices and computers.

Navigational Structure and Layout

The primary goal of the MPub network website is to maintain a connection with the target audience. Since the target audience are MPub alumni who have already been through the MPub program, the website did not intend to 'sell' the experience of MPub, only to reflect it. This intention had to come across not only in the language used but also in the overall structure of the website. A standard website structure is to have a main homepage that contains navigational links to other main pages through a menu bar at the top of the screen. In function, this was the structure we chose, but in order to convey a less formal and more organic appearance, the standard menu

toolbar style was replaced with visually separated 'hubs' of content. As the design and editorial decisions were made laterally, the amount and titles of the content hubs depended on the variety of content we would be able to produce. The key decision of having three content categories—stories, interviews, and gallery—automatically determined what the content hubs would be.

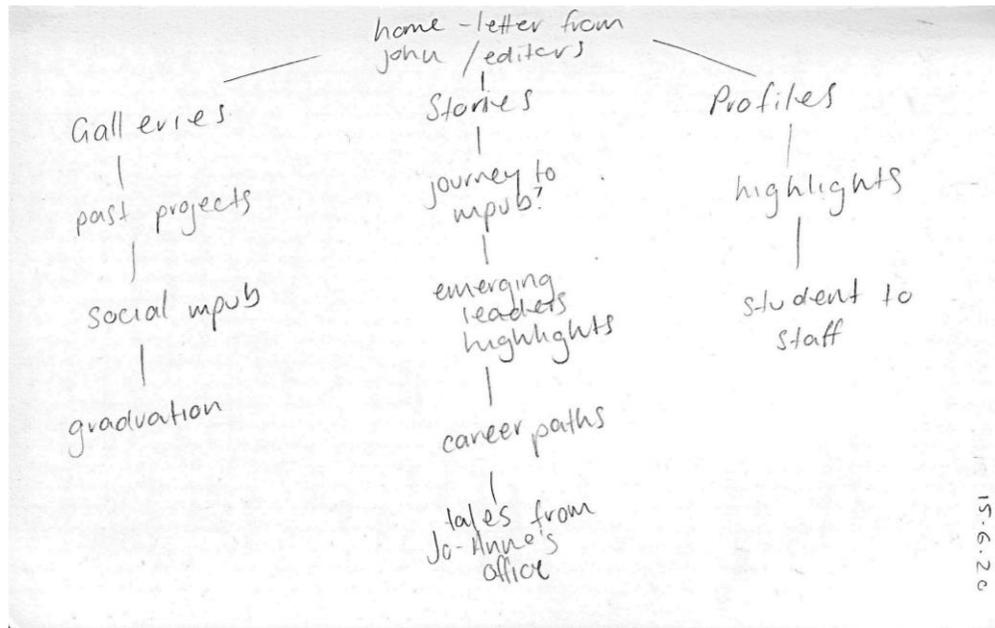


Figure 7 – Planning navigational structure

We initially aimed to lead the viewer linearly through the content hubs, adding to the history of the program as the hubs progressed. After realizing that the amount of available content didn't lend itself to a linear progression, our thinking switched to allowing the user to freely navigate between the content hubs, without needing to view any one in order to understand another. Fortunately, this switch didn't change the planned navigational functionality. However, we continued to have to make small adjustments in layout designs depending on the nature of the content produced. For example, though we utilised a basic template for content pages, individual content pieces sometimes required surplus images, sub-headings, and sub-sections, which, using Elementor, we were able to easily add and customize.

Programming and Plug-ins

Some of our ideas for content pieces required additional HTML coding or plug-ins that would automate the code for us. As we couldn't purchase any high-end plug-ins that could do this, the success of these additions depended on compatibility with WordPress and Elementor, and team programming skills. For example, one of our initial content ideas was to display an interactive timeline of notable MPub events and achievements in the program's history, which viewers could scroll and click through to learn more. As HTML is the standard language for displaying web content, there were many resources and examples online to base the timeline on. Unfortunately, due to an incompatibility with the existing website design and our lack of expertise with the programming language, this content idea had to be put aside for the 25th anniversary publication.

A working addition to the publication was a flipbook plug-in, which allowed the viewer to essentially 'flip' through the pages of a joke yearbook created by a past cohort. Though slow to load, it works successfully on a computer screen, however, the flipbook currently cannot be viewed as intended on mobile devices, which is a responsive design issue we also faced when creating the gallery. As the gallery was one of the main content categories, it needed to have an attractive and customizable layout that worked on all devices. After several free gallery plug-ins were tested for compatibility, the one we settled upon came with some compromise. Although the plug-in chosen allowed customizable layout and responsive design, it increased the image load time significantly, making the viewer wait for up to one minute for all the images to appear in their selected layout positions. Though one minute may not seem significant, research shows that the percentage of viewers who stop engaging with, or leave a website, increases rapidly once a webpage takes more than just three seconds to load.¹³

Plug-in compatibility is a commonly known issue with WordPress because it is an open-source software, meaning that an infinite number of developers can add, refine, and update their programming to make improvements to their WordPress integrated plug-ins. Therefore, multiple plug-ins, including Elementor, on the base WordPress platform can cause bloat—extra lines of codes and settings which are unnecessary, redundant, or contrary to other site settings—making a webpage load

¹³ Anderson, Shaun. "How Fast Should A Website Load & How To Speed It Up." Hobo, February 11, 2020. <https://www.hobo-web.co.uk/your-website-design-should-load-in-4-seconds/>.

more slowly. This was a concern not only for the launch of the publication but for the website's longevity as well. However, by making compromises such as adjusting the theme, finding alternate plug-ins, and focusing on feasible content, we overcame main technological challenges with setting up the website and the publication was nearly ready to be launched.

STAGE 4: LAUNCHING PUBLICATION

The publication launch date was set for September 8, 2020, which marked the end of summer and the beginning of the first day of the Fall academic term. As we had completed content production and website design, and had established a communication line to access our audience, the launching process went smoothly. In the week before the launch date, we aimed to complete a final check of all the elements on the website publication and to ensure that they were functional. Another consideration while making the final changes was to ensure consistency in language and presentation across the publication.

The finalization tasks began with proofreading all the written content on the website, including peritext, image captions, and alternate text. We corrected any errors in the excerpt or preview text for all visible content pieces. Next, we added and tested navigation links to and from the different content hubs under each content piece for users to be able to easily switch between types of content. We accommodated certain last minute additions, such as image insertions and featured content pieces on the home page to encourage viewers to explore. Along with approving the content and functionality of the website, including gaining approval from the project supervisor, we also drafted a launch email. The email's intent was to announce and encourage the alumni to view the publication, but it also aimed to set up future expectations for the MPub network. It informed alumni that the publication was an ongoing effort that would continue to invite content contributions and be a place for the MPub community to reconnect. Importantly, it also announced the creation of the Alumni Advisory Board. The Board was introduced as a way to give any eager alumni the opportunity to organize alumni events and create a stronger community. In its nascent state, the Board is envisioned to be a committee that will plan connectivity events such as workshops or professional development webinars for MPub alumni in the future.

With all the pre-launch steps completed, we scheduled the launch email for release and our contract period was complete. My teammate and I no longer had the responsibility of maintaining the MPub website, though we retained our login access. However, the project email address was removed from the Gmail integration and these basic handover procedures signified the end of the development process for the MPub 25th anniversary publication.

LESSONS LEARNED

The tasks in the publication development process were essentially made-up as required for each stage. As we did not follow any kind of publication development blueprint, in hindsight, it is no surprise that many actions performed could have been simplified and improved.

In the communication stage, the creation of the web sign-up form to simplify email address gathering was effective to a degree, however, it would have been more efficient for the long-term to integrate a Mailchimp form into the website and use the Mailchimp platform to manage all aspects of communication with the alumni from the very beginning.

The lack of significant content contributions, including images, also affected the perceived value of the final publication. To gain more meaningful contributions and generate more interest in the website and the MPub community in the future, it will be important to provide incentive for the alumni to contribute, such as opportunities for self-promotion or networking. Similarly, for the website design to have longevity and retain the interest of its audience, it is important for the user's experience when interacting with all aspects of the site to be pleasant, quick, and engaging. Therefore, any site additions and plug-ins that cause pages or page elements to load slowly must be avoided.

Finally, at the launch of the publication we had no stipulations for the close of the project, such as handing over any guide documents that could be used in the future. The success of the project was also not formally assessed, and the team did not create any follow-up plans for the future development and promotion of the website or the growth of the MPub community. This left the publication largely ungoverned, and its future uncertain.

Chapter 4. Optimizing the Web Publication

LEAN THINKING

The MPub 25th anniversary web publication was a relatively small endeavor for Publishing@SFU; for the department's purposes, the publication was deemed a success—nearly 50% of total alumni email addresses were recorded, the publication was launched on time, a small foundation for a future MPub network was laid, and the two primary goals were considered met. However, it is apparent that some of the methods used during the free-flowing process of developing the publication were inefficient, caused errors, and impacted the quality of the final product, as well as its development in the future. To optimize these inefficiencies and error-prone process steps, and thus improve the final product in the future, Lean thinking can be applied.

As described in Peter L. King's *Lean for the Process Industries: Dealing with Complexity*, Lean originated as a process improvement philosophy within the production system of the Japanese manufacturer Toyota in the 1940s and it started gaining recognition and being adapted globally in the 1980s. Lean thinking is rooted in organizational culture and built on a set of principles focused on defining value, eliminating waste, and continuously improving. Implementing a Lean strategy involves following the key Lean principles of specifying value in the product, eliminating all non-value adding, wasteful activities from the process, making all the process activities flow smoothly, and continuously improving the process activities. These principles are put into practice by using a variety of Lean tools and sub-methodologies to optimize or correct specific activities within a process.

To put these principles in simple terms, the successful development of a valued product by a system is dependent on the process steps put in place by said system, which the product has to go through. To improve the product, activities that are wasteful need to be eliminated or continuously improved within the process. In Lean, 'waste' includes any recurring defects or errors that require rework, time spent waiting for key actions to be completed, or even available but untapped resources.

Though Lean thinking was originally developed for factory-based manufacturing, in the years since, it has been successfully applied in a variety of environments within the fields of healthcare, construction, insurance, education, and

agriculture. For instance, in 2012 the CEO of Denver Health, a public healthcare network in Colorado, estimated a financial profit of \$127 million while simultaneously reducing the cost to patients for hospitalization after implementing Lean tools in internal processes.¹⁴

APPLYING LEAN TOOLS TO WEB PUBLICATION

Tool 1. Using Jidoka Automation for Communication

Jidoka, automation with a human touch, is a Lean tool that can be applied to the email related challenges that the 25th anniversary publication process faced in stage one—the sign-up and recording of alumni email addresses, followed by the inefficiency of batch emailing. Jidoka ‘builds in quality at the source by providing equipment with intelligence to stop automatically when it senses it is producing off-quality material.’¹⁵ Essentially, automation affords greater efficiency, reduced human labor, and no errors (provided the mechanism has been set up correctly). An automated solution for mass communication is using an online marketing service like Mailchimp.

On average, companies that automate their online marketing with such services have a 53% higher conversion rate than companies that don't.¹⁶ Integrating a marketing automation service into the publication website would enable the automated addition of all alumni email sign-ups and alumni basic information to a contacts database, thus eliminating the error-prone activity of manual entries in a spreadsheet. Additionally, personalized, and visually attractive, emails could be sent simultaneously to all email addresses maintained in the database, eliminating batch emailing ([see Appendix D for an example email](#)). We attempted to use Mailchimp in July to solve the batch emailing problem, however, test emails using the free, basic-level service showed that the emails ended up in the receiver's junk folder. Therefore, in order to be an effective solution for the MPub publication and community, an

¹⁴ Trenkner, Tina. “Denver Health Becomes Profitable After Using Toyota as a Template,” February 2012. <https://www.governing.com/archive/gov-denver-health-becomes-profitable-after-using-toyota-as-a-template.html>.

¹⁵ King, Peter L. *Lean for the Process Industries : Dealing with Complexity*. Second Edition. Productivity Press, 2019. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429400155>.

¹⁶ Pettys, Angela. “A Beginner’s Guide to Marketing Automation.” Moz. Accessed March 5, 2021. <https://moz.com/blog/marketing-automation>.

automated communication and database maintenance service will likely require monetary investment.

Tool 2. Using Voice of the Customer (VoC) for Producing Content

We had the intention to try and recreate the experience of a party where alumni chat and catch up with each other at the start of publication development. But as the process moved forward, the focus shifted away from that vision to mainly ensuring that we populated the website with content that was technologically practical. As a result, the development process was largely one-sided and as the project team, we did not initiate opportunities for the alumni to interact with each other, or the website production. In a post-publication interview, Monique Sherrett, MPub alumni and online marketing professional, echoed this, noting that the alumni couldn't get involved in the process or give their feedback, and that there was a lack of sustained excitement for the launch due to the one-sided production.

In his book on using voice of the customer in business, Robert Coppenhaver writes, 'the biggest factor in product launch failure to realize potential and meet the needs of the market is poor product definition.'¹⁷ Granted, the anniversary publication wasn't considered a failure, but in order for it to be engaging to its alumni audience in the future, the website should provide some value to them; and the only way to accurately define what the alumni consider value to be is to ask the alumni what they value. VoC, a tool not just exclusive to Lean, can be used in this case to ensure that the publication delivers the value that the alumni want.

In *The PDMA Toolbook 2 for New Product Development*, Gerald Katz defines VoC as 'a complete set of customer wants and needs expressed in the customer's own language, organized the way the customer thinks about, uses, and interacts with the product or service, and prioritized by the customer in terms of both importance and performance.'¹⁸ VoC can be gathered by asking questions in one-on-one interviews before a new launch, or through focus groups, surveys, or feedback interviews post-launch. Once VoC is gathered, it can be distilled into specific requirements and implemented into the product. For example, a survey could be carried out asking

¹⁷ Coppenhaver, Robert. *From Voices to Results - Voice of Customer Questions, Tools and Analysis: Proven Techniques for Understanding and Engaging with Your Customers*. Birmingham, United Kingdom: Packt Publishing, Limited, 2018. <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/sfu-ebooks/detail.action?docID=5371696>.

¹⁸ Belliveau, Paul, Abbie Griffin, and Stephen Somermeyer. *The PDMA Toolbook 2 for New Product Development*. Hoboken, N.J.: Wiley, 2004.

alumni what they want to see the MPub network develop in the future. If the VoC indicates a desire for more direct engagement with other alumni, this could be addressed by adding a comment section under each content piece on the website, creating an alumni group on social messaging apps like Facebook, or organizing virtual meet-ups on video conference platforms.

Tool 3. Using 5S for Designing and Maintaining the Website

The major challenge when designing the anniversary publication website was achieving a balance between customizability and the programming required to realize it. An obvious recommendation to solve this would be for the department to invest in a paid service that can optimize the website to reduce the need for the various plug-ins and remove any bloat. However, this is not a long-term solution as, in the future, the publication will need to be maintained and updated by an individual within Publishing@SFU in order to stay relevant.

In the six months since publication, content hosted on the website has undergone changes that have resulted in inconsistencies and deviations from its original intent and design. For example, a prominent 'Apply to the MPub Program' button has been added to all content pieces, breaking the natural flow of the content, straying from the established style guide, and visually indicating to readers that the target audience is not MPub graduates. As these additions were made using the classic WordPress editor, the design and layouts established by Elementor were overwritten, resulting in an inconsistent set of content pages ([see Appendix E for an example of a page with and without Elementor formatting](#)).

To avoid such inconsistencies in the future, and to enable the sustained maintenance of the website, the Lean workspace organization tool 5S can be used. The goal of 5S is to ensure that the workspace—in this case the WordPress user interface for editing and managing the website—is organized and standardized to a point that any deviations are easy to notice and correct. 5S can be implemented in this workspace, or even shared MPub network folders, in five steps:

- Sort – Remove all unnecessary items across the workspace interface like unused plug-ins and widgets, unpublished posts and pages, unused images in the media library, obsolete CSS, and extra templates.

- Straighten – Customize the menu items in the user interface and color code options according to priority for ease of use. Place all editable posts, pages, or images in logical order and ensure clear titles and numbering.
- Shine – Clean up or hide all menu items that will rarely, if ever, be used and remove or re-sort all content items that seem out of place or redundant after straightening.
- Standardize – Create a house style guide document listing all the standards for publication management concerning typography and color usage, layouts for each content category, how to edit with Elementor, plug-in settings, and special notes on usage for any individual in charge of website maintenance. Guides for editorial voice and language should also be included.
- Sustain – Put processes in place, such as linking the guide documents to every new individual in charge, and continue cycling through the first four steps to ensure a consistently organized workspace that won't revert to a cluttered interface where it is easier to make mistakes.

Tool 4. Using Kaizen for Evaluation Post-launch

Launching the anniversary publication was a simple matter of proofreading all content and notifying alumni via email. This was the end of the publication development process and there was no follow-up evaluation of the publication, the project's successes and shortcomings, or actionable plans for future improvement. In any project, no matter the industry, a lack of formal evaluation ensures that an inefficient process will continue uncorrected, which in turn ensures that the quality of the outcome will be little improved the next time. In his *Shipbuilding Management* guide, George Bruce writes,

'After the completion of any project, including a ship, the final activity should be to make an evaluation of how the work was conducted. [...] It is important to make a thorough and truthful evaluation, both to avoid making the same mistakes in the future and also to identify and spread good practice.'¹⁹

Therefore, a Stage 5 should be added to the publication development process—Evaluating Publication—to allow the publication to continuously improve. This is where kaizen comes into practice. Kaizen, meaning continuous improvement, is a

¹⁹ Bruce, George. "Completion and Evaluation." In *Shipbuilding Management*, edited by George Bruce, 209–14. Singapore: Springer, 2021. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-8975-1_19.

core Lean philosophy that is effective when implemented through short, focused kaizen events. Kaizen events are dedicated to addressing a single aspect of a process or its outcome. In cases where a problem cannot be identified, VoC can be used as a tool to define where the publication needs to improve. However, as in our case, since the publication has only recently been launched, a kaizen event could be focused on evaluating website usage statistics using Google Analytics (which had been set up early on in the design stage) and making very specific website changes in response to the evaluation conclusions.

GOOGLE ANALYTICS RESULTS

On September 8, 2020, the day of the anniversary publication launch, the publication was visited by a total of 141 users, 66% of the MPub alumni contacted by the project team. Over 200 MPub community members were emailed a link to the publication on that day, so it is no surprise that 92% of traffic to the website was from a direct source rather than any social media. Along with the home landing page, content pieces within the story and interview categories, particularly those featured on the home page, achieved longer duration views than other pages and also had website exit rates well below 30%. This indicates that the audience liked the content and likely found it engaging enough to continue interacting with other pages on the website. Unfortunately, the gallery page had a very high bounce rate of 75% and a higher than average exit rate of 44.5%. This means that 75% of viewers who started their website visit on the gallery page ended their website visit on the gallery page and 44.5% of total website visitors ended their website visit on the gallery page. This behavior is attributed to the slow load time of the image gallery causing visitors to close the page. A similar effect is seen for the mock yearbook page as the flipbook plug-in is not mobile-friendly and is also slow to load.

In the months since the launch of the publication up to February 28, 2021, the website has had a total of 387 visitors, with only 17% being returning visitors. An average of two minutes is spent on the website with an average viewing of three pages per visit. Returning visitors tend to spend longer on the website looking at more pages than new visitors, resulting in a bounce rate of 52.6% compared to the 75% for new visitors. According to digital marketing company Custom Media Labs, a healthy bounce rate for most types of websites is usually within the 30% – 60% range. In the anniversary publication's case, new visitors to the website post-launch have only spiked due to social media posts aiming to entice MPub applicants. For every

spike, there is a correlating Twitter or Facebook post promoting a specific content piece, which new visitors view and then exit from without engaging with any other website pages. From this behavior, and considering that no new content was added to the website since the launch, we can conclude that a majority of the new visitors are not MPub alumni.

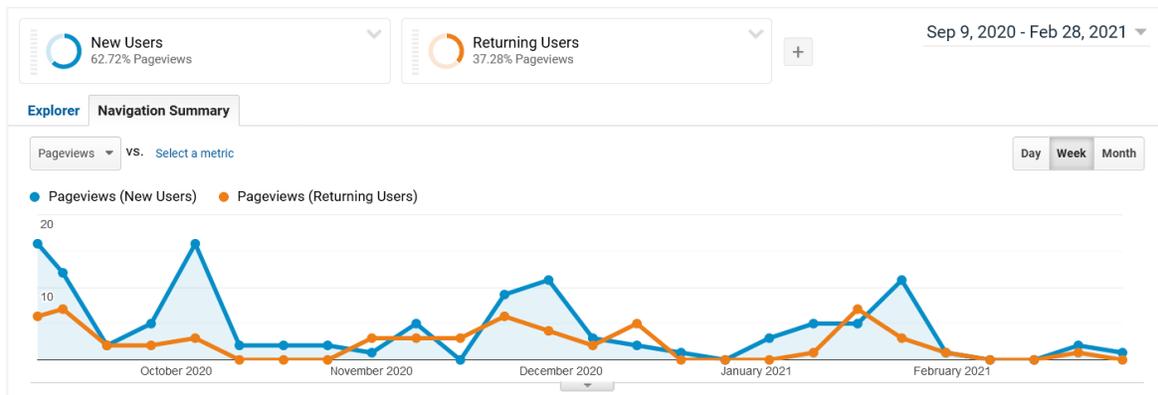


Figure 8 – New vs. returning website visitor analytics

From the assessment of the analytics, it is apparent that the target audience, MPub alumni, explored the stories and interview content categories on the website and were interested in viewing the gallery but left the page due to the slow load time. As the gallery is the key content category that visually evokes the experience of participating in the program, it's important that its performance is improved in order to keep the audience engaged in the future. The publication manager can practice Kaizen here by installing a simpler plug-in or using the in-built gallery that both Elementor and WordPress provide for free. The possibility of allowing the viewer to search for or sort through the images according to cohort year or event categories should also be explored to encourage further engagement.

For the MPub network website to sustain audience engagement in the long term, future kaizen or continuous improvement events can be organized to perform Search Engine Optimization, ensure an efficient email delivery system, introduce an element of interactivity to the website, or add more content categories. Continuous improvement is a Lean philosophy not only useful in the evaluation stage of a process but can also be applied to enhance the product for its next iteration. To improve the web publication by minimizing inefficiency, and to sustain its relevance to its

audience in the future, the publication manager can also practice kaizen by following certain best practices.

Chapter 5. Best Practices for Sustaining Web Publication Engagement

After 25 years of operation, the MPub alumni community is a slowly growing one and gains between fifteen to twenty new members annually. This growth rate of 2% – 3% has been consistent in the past two decades and will continue to remain steady for the foreseeable future. The publication, too, will have to match this steady growth in order to continue reflecting the experience and essence of the MPub program for its expanding community.

In a post-launch project interview John Maxwell, director of the program and anniversary project supervisor, reflected that though the web publication began as a short-term project, it's now an anchor for the alumni and, if maintained, could keep the alumni thinking about the program on a regular basis. This in turn might lead them to recommend the program to others, and result in recruitment benefits for the department. The MPub program is a key component that sustains the SFU Publishing department and it benefits from alumni, and other MPub community members, each year as they willingly return to share their professional expertise and insight with the newest MPub cohort. It is therefore worth the investment to use certain best practices to maintain the publication if it can strengthen the connection between the alumni and the department, increase available human capital, and perhaps even provide some benefits to alumni in return.

Create and Observe Handover Procedure

If the decision is made to invest in the upkeep of the publication, an individual will have to be hired to actively work on maintaining the website. As an MPub student knows what makes up the MPub experience best, this responsibility will likely go to a current student or very recent graduate of the program. However, no matter how often or to whom the responsibility is passed on, a formal handover procedure will ensure that there is minimal inconsistency both in the publication updates and any MPub network communications that take place.

Following a handover procedure, known in business environments as knowledge transfer, is a management technique designed to increase the probability

of success in a project. It allows any capable project manager to quickly assess the state of the project and establish appropriate goals and plans for its future. For the web publication, a handover procedure can be as simple as sharing a document that defines the publication's mission, editorial tone, website design style guide, and recommendations for possible future content. This will prevent any future instances of overwriting the established design styles or making additions contrary to the publication's mission. The guide document should be updated or added to before every handover so that the next individual in charge is aware of the standards to maintain and the changes or additions that the publication requires.

Knowledge transfer procedures can also be created to ensure that alumni information remains up-to-date. For example, LinkedIn connections can be used to gather location and job information or automated email reminders could be scheduled to encourage alumni to update their basic information.

Set SMART Goals

Another project management technique that increases the potential for success is setting SMART goals. Setting goals that meet SMART criteria guarantees that the project's main objectives are clearly defined and makes it easier for the team to know what needs to be done. 'A well-formulated objective ensures that all parties are aware what the task at hand involves, what needs to be accomplished, and when. In other words, it guides the team in the work they perform.'²⁰

SMART goals are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Time-bound. In the case of the anniversary publication, the project team had two primary goals—a) showcase 25 years of MPub memories in an engaging online space and b) establish a base for a well-connected, active network of alumni—which were both considered met. However, as no numerical metrics were targeted, it is difficult to objectively assess the degree to which they were met. In the future, SMARTer goals for the publication might be 'one new video and two written content pieces will be published on the website by September 30' or 'five interviews with five alumni will be conducted in the next two months.' Note that these goals are achievable and realistic and meet the other SMART criteria as opposed to a goal that is broader and vaguer such as, 'increase website engagement'. Setting a series of SMART goals to meet a larger

²⁰ Teeuwen, Bert. *Lean for the Public Sector: The Pursuit of Perfection in Government Services*. Productivity Press, 2018. <https://doi.org/10.1201/b10378>.

mission is also beneficial because they make evaluation at the end of a project or task much easier.

Offer Value to Increase Engagement

From the analytics of the website traffic it is confirmed that a majority of the alumni contacted explored the publication to varying degrees. However, with no additions to the publication content and no further communication from the MPub network email address or Publishing@SFU social media accounts, website activity has dropped almost to zero. In order to keep the alumni engaged and coming back to the publication, it not only needs to be updated periodically, but also must provide them with some incentive or value in order to keep content contributions regular. For example, a 2013 study on alumni engagement for a marriage and family therapy program found that alumni expressed a desire to participate in social professional interactions if they contained an element of learning.²¹ If such a desire is confirmed for MPub alumni through VoC, then educational material, faculty and student research, or presentations that provide valuable publishing industry insight to alumni could be added to the publication to increase engagement.

Another method of incentivizing members of a community to participate and stay engaged is to offer alumni prestige-building or self-marketing opportunities. For example, alumni could be encouraged to contribute content that outlines a successful project completed in their careers, which not only illustrates their own skills but also provides the audience with insight into what their fellow alumni have contributed to the publishing industry since graduation. This may in turn open up further avenues of interaction and networking amongst the alumni. However, in order to understand whether this approach is what alumni would find valuable, it is very important to first gather VoC and use the feedback to then set SMART goals for the publication.

Measure Success and Re-orient Accordingly

If SMART goals have been set correctly based on audience feedback, the publication manager will easily be able to assess how successful the engagement efforts have been and the areas in which improvement needs to be made. Once the publication

²¹ Torres Bernal, Aníbal, and Diana Mille. "Initiating Alumni Engagement Initiatives: Recommendations from MFT Alumni Focus Groups." *Contemporary Family Therapy* 36, no. 2 (June 1, 2014): 300-309. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10591-013-9274-2>.

has grown to the desired level of engagement within its community, future engagement approaches will inevitably have to evolve in order to continue sustaining and providing value. At this point, it will again be crucial to involve key stakeholders, both within the alumni community and the Publishing department, in order to redefine the mission of the publication, reassess the needs of the audience, and launch the next development process to implement the changes necessary.

Conclusion

The 25th anniversary MPub web publication was created as a way to celebrate the program's history and to provide its students with employment despite the sudden pandemic. Though it was imagined as a one-time release, the process of publication development and the apparent potential uses of the outcome have turned the publication effort into a community-building initiative that could strengthen the connections between the MPub alumni and the SFU Publishing department, ultimately benefiting both.

Due to its unstructured nature, the publication development process faced challenges in several stages. Large scale communication with the alumni and database maintenance were the initial pre-production struggles, followed by difficulties with the technical and programming side of website building on WordPress. However, despite these challenges, and the limited availability and variety of content, the launch of the publication was successful and well-received by the alumni audience.

To improve the quality of the current publication, as well as involve the alumni in its evolution in the future, specific Lean tools can be integrated into development activities. These tools include the automation of email and alumni database maintenance and using the voice of the customer to direct and provide value to alumni through future iterations and additions to the publication. Also important is to evaluate the impact of each change to the publication and to continuously improve specific aspects of the publication through kaizen events.

Finally, if the publication is to serve as a home base from which the MPub alumni community can be fostered, it needs to sustain relevance for its audience and continue to engage them in creative ways. Best practices to ensure this consistent engagement include creating and following formal handover procedures for publication management and the setting of SMART objectives, which allow for easier evaluation of the success of any engagement initiative. The MPub community is small but closely knit, so any future events focused on bringing the community together are likely to be successful if they provide its members with value, both personally and professionally.

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Appendices

APPENDIX A: GOOGLE FORM – MPUB ALUMNI MINI INTERVIEW

Hello MPubber! As we gather memories and highlights from our alumni, we also want to touch base and find out where you have gotten to since graduating. We've tried to keep this little catch-up interview short and sweet, so feel free to answer the questions below in as much detail as you'd like.

If you have any photographs, videos, or other MPub memories to share with us, please upload them at <https://forms.gle/45hcpvFEXWDKwJXJ7>.

Let's begin!

1. Please enter your name.
2. In what city do you live?
3. With what organization do you currently work?
4. What is your job title?
5. What part of your job do you enjoy doing the most?
6. What skill do you most depend on for your work?
7. Tell us about one project completed during your career that you are proud of.
8. Tell us three things that you learned during MPub that you still find useful today.
9. Do you consent to your basic details being updated in the alumni database?
 Yes No

APPENDIX B: GOOGLE FORM – MPUB NETWORK MEDIA UPLOAD

Hello MPubber! We are looking to add media to our online commemorative publication that will showcase our alumni as well as MPub's best moments. We're on the hunt for any MPub memories that we can share with your fellow alumni on the publication. Please use this form to submit any photographs, videos, or other fun memories you may have from your time in the program.

Name:

Please attach up to 10 files.

Where possible please use the following file naming convention:

INTAKEYEAR_YOURNAME_x (ie: 2008_JANESMITH_1)

[Add file button]

Please indicate below that you consent to the publication of your submitted files on the publication website.

I consent

APPENDIX C: 6 BUILDING BLOCKS OF THE SFU BRAND

Logos



Find out how to use the [SFU logo](#) with your department's name and learn about limited use of SFU's official crest.

Tagline



Canada's Engaged University is SFU's [new tagline](#). Learn how to incorporate it into institutional communications.

Fonts



Learn about [SFU's standard fonts](#) for professionally designed items and our system fonts for desktop applications.

Colours



Learn about SFU's [brand colour palette](#) and how to perfect that SFU red in print and digital applications.

Photography



Find out when to use black and white images and what [style of photography](#) represents the SFU brand.

Tone of voice



Learn how to use the right [tone of voice](#) in your storytelling to express the five brand attributes.

[*From the SFU Communicators Toolkit](#)

APPENDIX D: TEST EMAIL USING MARKETING PLATFORM MAILCHIMP



Hello Mahima!

After many weeks of work behind the scenes, we are excited to announce a 'soft launch' of the MPub anniversary publication! Please head over to the [MPub Network site](#) where you will find a warm letter from John Maxwell, MPub's current director, and a feature article from the eloquent Leena Desai of the 2017/18 cohort.

We're still collecting and putting together more memories and musings as we ramp up towards the final publication, so please reach out if you have anything to share with us.

And if you'd like to update us on what you've been up to since graduating, please fill out the [mini interview](#) we set up for you.

In the meantime, stay tuned!

Cheers,

Mahima & Melissa

Editors, MPub 25th Anniversary Commemoration

[Go to the publication!](#)

[Unsubscribe from this list](#)



APPENDIX E: COMPARISON PAGES WITH AND WITHOUT ELEMENTOR

MPUB 25TH ANNIVERSARY

A QUARTER CENTURY OF PUBLISHING IN SFU

MY MPUB DAYS WERE NEVER LIKE THIS

HEAVY WACHOLDER
MPUB 2011/12
PUB002 2020



Robert McEwen, *The Good Old Days View Never Like This*, 1976, oil on linen, SFU Art Collection. Gift of the artist, 2000. Photo: SFU Gallery.

Most memories I have of MPUB are fond: late nights in the project rooms, debating the specifics while drinking straight-up wine out of plastic goblets, sharing snacks from the bottom of the unrefrigerated cooler, but one in particular has both haunted and propelled me: *The Parting*. If you did the program in the last twenty years, you know which one I mean.

A silver-haired character (Robert Frowd?) does himself in a colorful *Spreads* note after a librated woman across a beach. He arms outstretched as if to caress her. The woman looks back at him, her hair whirled around a dizzy expression-making. I imagine *Spreads* never. Another man in the foreground is more underneath an umbrella, his reading material—a copy of Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer*—cast aside as he can't bear the weather making good in a hot and long drive (perhaps for a moment to enjoy the beach unimpeded). Signs of disorientation—arm print, swimwear, some, a bag—make the scene. The figures float in space above their heads, SFU as it is, a collection of things. A range of skin tones are on display, but it's unclear if this is diversity or just a bunch of white people who like to tan.

What does it all mean? I'm no art historian—I'm off working in book publishing ten years after the program—and this lovely hallway, juxtaposed with the work's title, *The Good Old Days View Never Like This*, suggests a false nostalgia for a time that never really existed or it's intended as a riff on the saying, "The good days were never really that good," and the painting's broad perspective a reminder that the male gaze is an equally forced cultural perspective (I wonder).

What intrigues me most, though, is how the painting found its way to the third floor of Harbour Centre in the first place. Who decided it should hang in the north-south lounge populated mostly by MPUB students, serving as the backdrop for many a group photo or as a conversation starter at the many receptions held in that space? (The plaque states that it was donated to the SFU Art Collection in 2000 by the artist, Robert McEwen. SFU Gallery tells me no one on staff was around when the painting was donated, so I guess we'll have to ask the mystery 01.)



Still, it leaves me wondering: is the location a coded message intended for the program's staying audience? Treasure your salad days, with your made-up PBUs and your Padglights before you publishing for those? "Ergonomics," "Subjective Freedom" to read at all events, as *Spreads* did through the Miller classroom? That's a lot of a stretch. "Keep your eyes on the prize!" *Spreads*.

And when the painting was relocated from the lounge where it found itself in the MPUB imagination to a more neutral space next to the elevators in 2016, what did that say about the state of publishing and campus culture? Did someone decide enough was enough—that the largely women-dominated cultural club didn't need to be here anymore to be here anymore to be a *Spreads* moment in the making while they were just trying to learn about Canadian cultural policy on book sales CSO?

One of my MPUB colleagues remarked recently that she thought of the male gaze as her project report, wondering how to get it done. Another commented that the image would make for a good "tag yourself" meme. If in the spirit of it (but make it a *Spreads* meme) that her employees said to her: "I've always disregarded this painting, but I've never not noticed it."

She's right. It's the most forgettable yet indelible piece of corporate art I've ever encountered. I hope *The Parting* lives within range of the Publishing offices for at least another twenty-five years, when books are less sacred to our brains. And I hope it becomes a permanent, its casual summer imagery gradually overwritten by accomplishments of future cohorts—students who have faith we build a more equitable publishing industry.

#pub002off
[Apply to the MPUB Program](#)



STORIES

INTERVIEWS

GALLERY

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STORIES CALL

MPUB 25TH ANNIVERSARY

MY MPUB DAYS WERE NEVER LIKE THIS

HEAVY WACHOLDER
MPUB 2011/12
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