

**THE SMALL MAGAZINES OFFICE OF
MAGAZINES CANADA 2003-2007**

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Bachelor of Arts, Concordia University, 1998

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Abstract

After roughly 4 years of operations, Magazines Canada initiated a strategic review of its Small Magazines Office (SMO). The object of this study was to determine the effectiveness of the SMO in serving Magazines Canada member needs. The strategic review considered the strengths and weaknesses of the SMO and proposed that the SMO was inefficient and not serving a unique need. It also proposed that the definition of a “small magazine” was outmoded. A set of recommendations for a new strategy in member service was proposed to and accepted by the Board of Directors and then the membership. Implementing these recommendations resulted in the closure of the Small Magazines Office and the creation of the Cultural Magazines Committee.

Acknowledgements

My thanks and gratitude goes to my mentor and former boss, Magazines Canada CEO Mark Jamison, for helping me understand the complexities of association management. Our many enjoyable conversations during the process described in this report always made my work more interesting and worthwhile.

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INTRODUCTION

Magazines Canada created the Small Magazines Office (SMO) in 2003 to offer its members services to support and promote “small magazines”—generally defined as independent, niche magazines with circulation under 10,000. This is the story of the Small Magazines Office from its beginnings through to its closure after roughly 5 years of operations, focusing on the strategic review process that was the catalyst for the SMO’s end.

I worked at Magazines Canada between January 2005 and September 2008. I started my employment as the Small Magazines Project Manager but in mid-2006 I began performing the role of Magazines Canada Membership Manager, as well. For the Small Magazines Office, I managed programs and services, and facilitated conversation and networking. As the Magazines Canada Membership Manager, I handled all requests for information, conducted surveys, provided access to services and maintained membership records for the entire association.

After about 1.5 years managing the Small Magazines Office, my judgment was that the SMO was not meeting its goals. In mid-2006, I suggested to Mark Jamison, CEO of Magazines Canada, that I conduct a strategic review of the Small Magazines Office that would identify management and operational problems and recommend ways of overcoming these. Jamison agreed, and the basis of this report began.

Ultimately the strategic review set in motion a process to close the Small Magazines Office and proceed with a different strategy to serve Magazines Canada’s small magazine constituency. Its recommendations were taken up after the strategic review proposed that the SMO was not serving members well due to the following reasons:

1. The rationale for the Small Magazines Office was weak to begin with and mirrored that of the rest of the organization;

2. Small magazines were being effectively served by programs outside the SMO and most programs and services for small magazines would be more efficient if handled entirely by other departments;
3. The definition of a “small magazine” was outmoded.

This report discusses the strategic review of the Small Magazines Office and the steps Magazines Canada took in response to it, effectively closing the Small Magazines Office and moving on to a new phase in member services in 2008.

CHAPTER ONE: A Brief History of the Small Magazines Office

The story of the Small Magazines Office (SMO) is a unique part of the ongoing development of Magazines Canada and its mandate of supporting and promoting the Canadian magazine industry. To complete the following sketch of the origins and development of the SMO, I interviewed Magazines Canada CEO Mark Jamison. I also gathered information from committee meeting notes that predate my work with Magazines Canada.

Background and Context of the Small Magazines Office

The history of the Small Magazines Office is part of the history of Magazines Canada and how it developed over its first two decades.

Magazines Canada is a not-for-profit membership association that, at the time of this writing in early 2009, consists of roughly 350 magazine titles. The organization was founded in 1973 to address publishers' concerns surrounding their limited access to the retail market, low share of advertising revenue and vulnerability in the face of heavy foreign competition. Magazines Canada was then known as the Canadian Periodical Publishers Association (CPPA), a name that it kept until the mid-1980s until it became the Canadian Magazine Publishers' Association (CMPA) until 2005. The organization changed name again in 2006 to Magazines Canada to reflect that the association served everyone in the industry, not only publishers.

The Magazines Canada mission statement says,

“Magazines Canada believes in the inter-connected cultural and economic value of a vital Canadian magazine publishing industry. Magazines Canada works to foster an environment where new magazines are nurtured, established magazines are supported

and skills are developed. Its originating and continuing purpose is to promote the value of the sector.”¹

As a professional association, Magazines Canada has succeeded in addressing many magazine industry challenges, and has scored several victories for the industry since it was founded. For example, a national distribution program was at the core of the original organization and continues today. This effort was meant to correct the distribution industry’s focus at the time on bringing only high-circulation, mass-market, mostly foreign titles to Canadian newsstands. The distribution program was, and still is, devoted to distributing Canadian magazines, raising their profile in the market and ensuring that even the smallest titles reach consumers.²

One can argue that certain federal support programs would not have existed if it weren’t for the advocacy efforts of the organization. Magazines Canada has engaged policy makers in dialogue about supporting the magazine cultural industry since its inception, and in 1999, in a lobby seeking to address the market advantages borne by American magazines, the CPPA/CMPA and the Government of Canada engaged the World Trade Organization to enact measures that eventually became Bill C-55, which limits foreign control and investment in Canadian magazines. What followed the establishment of Bill C-55 is magazine industry history: the Department of Canadian Heritage created the Canada Magazine Fund³ in 1999 to help support Canadian magazines and offset the economic challenges posed by competition with foreign, mainly American, companies enjoying large economies of scale. The Canada Magazine Fund (CMF) administered grants to magazines through several programs for ten years and was generally of great benefit to the entire industry.

However the organization was not without its struggles. During the years of the 1980s and early 1990s, larger member companies like Telemedia, Transcontinental and Rogers were

¹ http://magazinescanada.ca/about_us.php?cat=au_mission

² More information on Magazines Canada distribution is online at http://magazinescanada.ca/consumer_marketing.php?cat=distro.

³ In 2009, DCH transformed the Canada Magazine Fund into the Canada Periodical Fund.

bankrolling the organization's lobbying efforts and public affairs campaigns. Meanwhile, the distribution program was operating at a loss and struggling against competition from the consolidating distribution industry. Next, government cutbacks at both the federal and provincial levels in the mid-1990s negatively affected the organization and squeezed resources. The CMPA was running a deficit by the late 1990s, and friction within the organization was rife, according to Jamison. This was expressed in contentious Annual General Meetings, complaints lodged with the organization, intense debate among executive members regarding resources and policy objectives, and the emergence of a cluster of members who believed that the interests of corporate members were running the organization, and running it contrary to its original principles. This group of small magazines included some of the founders of the organization, representing small-circulation literary and art magazines.

This group purported to represent small magazines' interests in the organization. They didn't argue with the existence of several services serving the interests of smaller magazines, such as the distribution program; they wanted attention paid to their interests that they claimed stood apart from those of the large, corporate members in the association. These interests were aimed at underlining and preserving the *cultural* value of publishing, regardless of company profit or size of market.

Spearheaded by new CEO Mark Jamison, the CMPA adopted a governance policy in September 1999. Still in effect, this governance policy directs and guides all committees in the organization to engage in a process that includes broad member consultation by various means. Committees are consultative and report to the Board.

Over the next three years, all committees pursued their mandated objectives—objectives that collectively helped increase harmony within the organization, progress in the CMPA's case for support for all magazines and achieve financial stability. This process resulted in the

increase in membership fees and the plan to merge with another organization, Magazines Canada.⁴ Another result of the process was the creation of the Small Magazines Task Force. The Small Magazines Task Force was struck in 2001 to deal with the discord that was being felt among some members of the association and to take steps to appropriately represent the business and cultural interests of small magazine members. The Small Magazines Task Force was composed of the aforementioned group—9 active, smaller-magazine members of Magazines Canada, many of whom had been with the organization since its very early days. The members of the Small Magazines Task Force: Bruce Porter (*TickleAce*), Bob Chodos (*Voices Across Boundaries*), Barbara Zatyko (*Geist*), Alicia Pace (*ascent*), Harmony Rice (*Spirit*), Gilles Latour (*Education Canada*), Anne Burke (*Prairie Journal*), Joyce Byrne (*THIS Magazine*) and Lisa Sweanor (*subTerrain*), along with Jim Everson, Mark Jamison, Margaret Eaton and Lisa Whittington-Hill from Magazines Canada.

The Small Magazines Task Force was mostly made up of owner/publishers—everyone but the managing editors of *Geist* and *subTerrain* were the founders of their magazines. The magazines they represented varied in editorial content; some were purely literary (*TickleAce*, *Geist*, *subTerrain*, *Prairie Journal*), others were for specific communities (*ascent*, *Voices Across Boundaries*, *Spirit*) and some were journalistic (*THIS Magazine*, *Education Canada*). The Magazines Canada representatives on the committee served to represent the association on the whole and provide guidance to the group. The Small Magazines Task Force moved to address what they perceived as inequity in the membership drawn between the lines of large, corporate magazines and smaller, independent niche magazines.

The members of the Small Magazine Task Force crafted a definition of a “small magazine” for their purposes:

- Circulation under 10,000⁵
- “Driven by editorial” (rather than by the interests of advertising)

⁴ The present Magazines Canada adopted the name of this other organization in 2005. Previous to 2005, Magazines Canada was the name of an organization that studied and promoted magazine advertising. Now, that organization is the Advertising Services division of the new Magazines Canada.

⁵ This is understood as total average annual circulation, including paid subscriber copies, copies sold at newsstand and complimentary copies shipped.

- Independent (parent company owns maximum of two magazines)
- Primarily reader-supported, versus being supported by advertising revenue
- Including a component of volunteer labour⁶

This definition was used until 2008, when the Small Magazines Office was dismantled.

The objective of the Small Magazines Task Force was to ensure that magazines that matched the definition above were well represented within the association, and well served by programs and services maintained for this constituency. To this end, the Small Magazines Task Force recommended the creation of the Small Magazines Office in 2002. In the Task Force's notes the purpose of the SMO was described as to lobby for higher levels of reliable funding, notably for art and literary magazines operating with a high sense of purpose but arguably low profitability, and to provide support to small magazines. In 2003, the Small Magazines Office became a reality.

The Small Magazines Task Force created a mandate for the Small Magazines Office. It states:

“The Small Magazines Office...[has] a mandate to ensure small magazines within Magazines Canada are nurtured, supported and developed. The office is dedicated to promoting the interests of small magazines and ensuring small magazines are aware of the opportunities and support Magazines Canada provides. The office is also responsible for coordinating with all relevant committees and staff in the development, delivery and maintenance of relevant programs, resources and activities that reflect the diverse interests and goals of the small magazines within the constituency. All Magazines Canada staff members—in particular the Small Magazines Project Manager—ensure that the office is organized to help and encourage small magazines to learn from each other, reach a wider audience and achieve their goals.”⁷

⁶ Source: Board of Directors' notes, November 2003.

⁷ Source: Magazines Canada Governance Policy.

Next, the Small Magazines Task Force and staff of Magazines Canada designated four core activities to the Small Magazines Office:

1. To gather information about smaller magazines for other Magazines Canada departments and programs
2. To facilitate conversation between groups and partners in the publishing industry
3. To lobby and advocate on behalf of the sector
4. To run programs and services geared towards small magazines⁸

The Small Magazines Project Manager position was created in mid-2003 to manage the SMO's core activities. A full-time position, this role encompassed planning, project management, policy development, program coordination, committee management and communications. Lisa Whittington-Hill managed the SMO for its first year—she became the Publisher of *THIS* magazine, based in Toronto, in January 2005. I took over as the Small Magazines Project Manager in January of 2005.

The Small Magazines Office Since 2003

After the Small Magazines Office was established, how did the work begin? Some programs, demonstrated in a table below, were carried into the SMO from the organization at large—conference programming, networking events and workshops. The other major task at hand was planning the future of the SMO. A formal planning process was in full swing through 2004.⁹

Part of the planning process was to examine the challenges affecting small magazines and to understand how this type of magazine differs from larger, corporate magazines. The

⁸ Source: 2007-2008 Magazines Canada Business Plan (the first document to contain these commonly understood core activities in written form).

⁹ In a sense, planning continued informally as long as the SMO existed. The Small Magazines Office always had a “work in progress” feel, as it responded to continuous shifts in its constituency, the industry and the political climate.

following is a sketch of the general “small magazine” and how it is different from a mass-market, corporate magazine.¹⁰

Human Resources

- Small staff, low rates of pay and meagre benefits
- Strained human resources make for low capacity and growth
- Staff are often “generalists” who wear many hats
- Strong component of volunteer labour and engagement with community
- Low levels of formal training in business or publishing

Editorial

- Content is geared towards a niche market and special interests
- Strong sense of mission and purpose
- Maximum freedom of editorial choice and discretion

Marketing and Revenues

- Trouble accessing the newsstand and relatively low newsstand sales
- Limited subscriber base potential
- Advertising-free or supported by low rate of retail advertising
- Cost of serving magazine and converting subscriptions is not dramatically lower per subscriber than for a large magazine, i.e. minimal profit margins
- Subscriptions constitute most major and most reliable form of revenue

It appeared to Magazines Canada and the Small Magazines Committee that the features of a small magazine would lend well to the development of programs and services to support, build and advance these small businesses, particularly if built around their challenges—for

¹⁰ This entire sketch was never written down in any Magazines Canada document, but every detail given here was understood as common knowledge at Magazines Canada and was referenced at various times, in various materials.

example, paying for expensive marketing campaigns—and their weaknesses—for example, a lack of training.

As mentioned, the incarnation of the SMO was not the beginning of programs and services to small magazine members of Magazines Canada, but since the SMO was established, these programs and services have changed and grown, many changing in name and scope from year to year. The SMO expanded on the foundations already built by the organization at large, developing more and more highly targeted programs and services based on the ideas of the Small Magazines Committee and others. The following table displays the timeline of all the programs and services offered to small magazine members of Magazines Canada. Appendix A gives fuller descriptions of each of these programs and services.

<u>Program</u>	<u>Start</u>	<u>Stop</u>	<u>Duration</u>
Buddy System / Ask an Expert	2002	2003	1 year
Literary/Alternative Magazine Profile Study	2002	2003	1 year
Small Magazines Spotlight (Pub Night)	2002	2003	1 year
Brown Bag Networking Lunches	2002	2003	1 year
Printed Shoestring newsletter (2x/year)	2003	2004	1 year
Small Magazines Spotlight (Mini-Conference)	2003	2006	3 years
Online Shoestring newsletter (6x/year)	2003	2007	4 years
"On-Call" Project Manager	2003	2008	5 years
Small Magazine Workshops (average 4 events/year)	2003	2008	5 years
Beginnings (Handbook) on how to start and run a magazine	2003	2003	One-time project
Small Magazine Handbooks (5) & Hotsheets (13)	2005	2007	Production 2 years
Shoestring Blog	2007	2008	1 year

Once the SMO was established, Magazines Canada used a range of communications tools to stay in touch with the SMO's constituency: printed newsletters, online newsletters (sent via email and archived on the website) and a blog. The longest-running programs and services were 1) the Small Magazine Workshops and 2) the "on-call" project manager. The most expansive project of the SMO was the Small Magazine Handbook Series—a collection of 5 handbooks numbering over 500 pages and involving 16 authors, all experts in the field of publishing independent magazines.¹¹

The Small Magazines Office was unique; there was no office like it run by any similar print industry association in the world. Magazines Canada's programs and outlook dedicated to the significance of publishing beyond economic terms was distinct among all similar organizations, with the exception of the now-gone Independent Press Association in the United States, which also focused on strategies to promote smaller titles (though organizationally speaking it was quite different).

Within Magazines Canada the SMO institutionalized the difference of small magazines and provide a forum for discussion around the business of small magazine publishing. Using the SMO as a place for dialogue, the Canadian magazine industry over time built a strong presence for small magazines, and entrenched the now-ubiquitous term *small magazine* into common parlance in the industry.

However despite its success in identifying a distinct group with distinct needs and interests, the Small Magazines Office experienced management and organizational difficulties as early as 2005. These persisted through to 2006, when I started the strategic review, which is discussed in the following chapter.

¹¹ The titles of the handbooks are Small Magazine Advertising, Small Magazine Business, Small Magazine Circulation, Small Magazine Editorial and Small Magazine Human Resources.

CHAPTER TWO: The Strategic Review of the Small Magazines Office

The decision to conduct a strategic review of the Small Magazines Office came after almost four years of SMO operations, in the summer of 2006. As the Small Magazines Project Manager in charge of the Small Magazines Office's programs and services, I recognized that the Small Magazines Office was having trouble in delivering on its stated goals—namely to gather relevant information about smaller magazines, to facilitate conversation between groups, to lobby and advocate on behalf of the sector and to run programs and services geared towards small magazines—and I brought these to the attention of upper management.

Several issues indicated to me that the SMO was redundant or ill positioned in the organization. Participation rates in SMO programs were declining, the Small Magazines Office was not able to contribute meaningfully to other Magazines Canada programs and services as expected, and the Small Magazines Committee kept circling around the same topics time and again. The capacity and effectiveness of the SMO was shrinking, and had been shrinking for some time. Mark Jamison (CEO) and Barbara Zatyko (General Manager & Publisher) decided that a strategic review would give more credence to my anecdotal information, formalize these observations and be able to communicate to members the best course of action.

Jamison and Zatyko asked me to answer the following questions in my review of the Small Magazines Office:

1. Is the SMO delivering on original goals (and if no, why not)?
2. Are the resources of the organization being utilized effectively through the SMO?
3. How are the programs and services of the SMO faring?
4. What can we understand from member feedback about the SMO?

5. Is the Small Magazines Office necessary to the maintenance of benefits for small magazine members of Magazines Canada?¹²

In performing the strategic review I relied on on-the-job experience, in-house documents and program statistics, and conversations with colleagues and members of Magazines Canada.

This chapter summarizes what I found out during my strategic review of the SMO. Please note that the information contained in the actual review belongs to Magazines Canada and is confidential. I was given permission to summarize the report and publish the findings.

Performing the Strategic Review

The information and data collected in the review process came from several sources: reports on professional development events including participant evaluations and attendance figures, committee records, communications (emails, telephone conversations, etc.) and interviews. The 2007 membership survey provided more data and information, which I added to my original report in later versions that were transformed into documents for the Magazines Canada Board of Directors.

In terms of evaluating the performance of programs, the strategic review relied more on anecdote and experience than numerical information. There were several gaps in the information available: the SMO did not keep detailed information on participants in its programs and didn't track the use of many services (for instance how many people called the "on-call project manager" for resources and information, how people used the Small Magazine Handbooks). I would have liked to compare membership statistics year over year, to determine how the SMO was affecting membership numbers, but this was not possible for technical reasons to do with the association's database. (One of the many things I learned in the process of my research was the importance of a thorough membership database and

¹² Note that the final question implies that whatever the discoveries of the strategic review, the existence of the group called "small magazines" was not being questioned. The goal of this exercise was never to discontinue serving this constituency in the membership but rather to discover how it can be best served into the future.

complete program records.) However we can assume from overall numbers and the relatively stable size of the organization's membership categories that the constituency of the Small Magazines Office remained relatively flat from 2003 to the end of 2006 like the rest of the membership, though individual titles may have come and gone.

Strengths of the Small Magazines Office

The SMO was inarguably a much-appreciated feature of the organization in the minds of Magazines Canada members. This was confirmed after the fact of the review by the 2007 annual membership survey,¹³ wherein a majority of respondents reported that they found the SMO approachable and its resources effective, appropriate and helpful.

The strategic review identified many strengths of the Small Magazines Office. The SMO contributed to the positive image of the organization and to its body of knowledge. The SMO provided expert assistance to magazine staff that genuinely made a positive difference. The SMO was an intangible meeting place for those operating and interested in independent magazines, all across the country.

As the "on-call" project manager, I fielded numerous inquiries every week that revealed in conversation the intricate facets of the business of independent magazine publishing and its culture.¹⁴ The information, stories and feedback I received as the Small Magazines Project Manager enriched the organization's understanding of the small magazine context. In my role I became a trusted resource, and sometimes a friend, to members of the association, which is certain to have had a positive effect on public relations overall for the organization.¹⁵

¹³ The 2007 membership survey was the first membership-wide survey to be conducted in the years that the SMO was in operation (though not for much longer).

¹⁴ Magazines Canada offered the Small Magazines Project Manager as a resource person who small magazines could contact, during business hours, with any type of question or problem related to their business. As the Small Magazines Project Manager I would endeavour to either answer their questions, forward their questions to a consultant who would provide expertise, enrol them in an appropriate skill-development program or direct them to helpful resources.

¹⁵ Source is mainly word-of-mouth and many "thank-you" emails received by the Small Magazines Project Manager.

Small magazines went to other sources to divulge their news,¹⁶ but they often contacted the Small Magazines Office in times of crisis, seeking support and advice. The Small Magazines Office consulted with many magazines over four years that were facing bankruptcy, meltdowns in human resources, loss of financing, libel charges, or often, tough choices about how to grow their business or respond to their readers. A major strength of the Small Magazines Office was its listening ear. As the only place in Magazines Canada open to random queries, the SMO added “feel-good” to the list of Magazines Canada member benefits.

Remember that the rationale for the Small Magazines Office sprung from a fraught dialogue between members. What the Small Magazines Office did do was promote transparency in the organization and clearly demonstrate its dedication to its members. Organizational transparency (or lack thereof) was a major problem identified by the Small Magazine Task Force in 2002.¹⁷ The SMO was created to settle an argument between two perceived groups in the association (i.e. “big” magazines and “small” magazines) and promote the cultural significance of the industry as equally important as its economics. It confirmed to members that the cultural/artistic impact of magazines has value.

Challenges of the Small Magazines Office

The SMO offered small magazines the opportunity for special programming and a forum for debate, but the actual uptake on the services of the SMO diminished quickly over time. The SMO’s challenges were for the most part related to programming: SMO programs were declining in popularity while programs operated for the general magazine industry were growing; the small magazines office was attracting queries and participation from outside its constituency. All of the challenges outlined below indicated the need to re-think small magazine programming to make it more targeted, more relevant and more accessible for the members of Magazines Canada.

¹⁶ Most often, news was shared first with D. B. Scott, for his blog, *Canadian Magazines*. URL: <http://canadianmags.blogspot.com>.

¹⁷ Source: Small Magazines Task Force meeting notes, 2002.

SMO Programs Declining in Popularity

Member interest in SMO programs had been in perceivable decline until the last quarter of 2006. With the exception of the Small Magazines Spotlight at the national conference,¹⁸ which was always well attended and reviewed by attendees, participation rates were lower than expected for many initiatives run by the SMO, such as the “marquee program,” the Small Magazine Workshops.¹⁹

The review focused on the response of members to the Small Magazine Workshops as an indication of interest in programming specific to small magazines. Participation was lower on average every year, though it wasn't for lack of promotion. “I just didn't have the time,” or “the location wasn't convenient for me,” and “the topic wasn't relevant to my magazine” were the reasons I heard most cited for choosing not to attend the Small Magazine Workshops. One year, when Workshops were scheduled in St. John, New Brunswick, I personally called each magazine member in the area to invite them to attend. When no one enrolled in the workshop—which could have been attended for free with the help of a Small Magazine Bursary²⁰—it was cancelled.

The content of the Small Magazine Workshops was always derived from suggestions from the Small Magazines Committee, and after several years it was clear that topics related to revenue generation—renewal campaigns, online circulation promotion—were the most popular. However the Small Magazine Workshops themselves became a hard sell to magazines running on a shoestring budget. Also, the Small Magazine Workshops, tailored narrowly to specific interests, simply could not appeal to every small magazine and I suspect they were seen as irrelevant to the broader goals of publishing, evidenced by small magazines' uptake of Magazines Canada's more general programs (more on this below).

¹⁸ For reasons unrelated to the performance of the SMO, all small magazine conference programming was led by the Professional Development Office of Magazines Canada as of 2006, with the Small Magazines Committee contributing ideas to the process.

¹⁹ The Small Magazine Workshops was one of the most prominent and time-consuming projects of the SMO, with four workshops per year in four different cities across Canada.

²⁰ The Magazines Canada Bursary program ran for approximately one year, thanks to support from the Canada Magazine Fund of the Department of Canadian Heritage.

There was a year, 2005, when the Workshops were opened up to non-members in order to boost attendance. It worked—heavy promotion to related university and college programs resulted in a sharp spike in attendance in the Workshops. When this happened, Barbara Zatyko²¹ and I debated whether non-member attendance in the Small Magazine Workshops was desirable. On the one hand, high attendance generated more revenue, higher participant numbers for our statistics and might have boosted the reputation of Magazines Canada. But feedback forms collected in 2005 revealed that the actual small magazine staff in attendance thought the non-small-magazine participants had been an intrusion on the learning experience, asking non-relevant questions and stealing the attention of the workshop leader. The decision was made to honour members' wishes: subsequent series of Small Magazine Workshops were promoted solely in Magazines Canada newsletters and on the Magazines Canada website.

Promoting the Workshops less widely ultimately gave Magazines Canada a truer sense of the genuine interest in this program. We discovered that even though members were in favour of small magazine workshops in principle, actual willingness among members to attend was not enough to sustain or justify the expense of this program.

Non-SMO Programs Gaining in Popularity Among Small Magazines

Rather than the small magazine members not doing any professional development, they were pursuing training quite a lot. It just turns out that the programs and services offered by the Small Magazines Office were not those most enjoyed or utilized by small magazines.

For the most part, the programs and services offered by other departments of Magazines Canada—which were open to and well used by the small magazine members of Magazines Canada—were the most popular among small magazines. For instance, the annual direct mail and newsstand marketing campaigns of the Consumer Marketing department, the workshops and courses offered under the purview of the Professional Development Office,

²¹ Barbara Zatyko became the General Manager & Publisher of Magazines Canada in 2006.

and of course, the all-important national direct-to-retail distribution service were all strongly supported by small magazines.

According to the answers of a short quiz on the Magazines Canada membership application form, the Small Magazines Office was not of high interest or priority for most new members. Applicants were always very interested in obtaining retail distribution and taking part in consumer marketing campaigns. They were also very interested in professional development opportunities and information on the advertising industry.²² This is not to say that smaller magazine applicants had no interest in the SMO, but by and large, new applicants were interested primarily in the Magazines Canada programs and services that could help them achieve greater visibility and revenues, understandably.

The Magazines Canada “professional schools”²³ and the Magazine Intensives program managed by the Professional Development department—all conceived for magazines of every size—had gained steadily in popularity since 2004 among small magazine members. Small magazine representatives who took these programs stated in their evaluations that they attended programs designed for larger magazines because they were interested in learning from corporate magazines and wanted to increase their own level of professionalism.²⁴ They believed that it is best to be informed of the practices and principles being employed by magazines such as those run by Rogers Media, Transcontinental Media and St. Joseph Media and stay informed about the advanced tools employed by profit-driven magazines.

SMO Serving Non-Member Needs

The real “clientele” of the SMO was as much students, non-members and new and hopeful publishers as it was small magazine members of Magazines Canada.

²² Source: Membership application forms, 2004-2007. I reviewed these closely as I was also the Membership Manager for Magazines Canada from late 2006.

²³ Namely the School for Advertising Sales, the School for Circulation and the School for Professional Publishing.

²⁴ Source: program evaluation forms submitted after participation in the Magazines Canada Professional Schools from 2003 to 2006.

Many more Small Magazine Handbooks were sold to non-members than members of Magazines Canada since they were published in 2006,²⁵ and most of the Small Magazine Workshops were attended by a higher number of non-members than members. Up to the end of 2006 and following into 2007, more non-members than members used the “on-call” information service, offered to small magazines whereby they may contact the SMO with any question and the SMO would endeavour to find an expert answer.²⁶

Why did the Small Magazines Office serve these people if they weren’t paying members? Though this activity fell outside the mandate of the office, there are three reasons explaining why the Small Magazines Project Manager decided to answer the questions of non-members when they arose: 1) sharing information benefits the industry overall, 2) the people who call may eventually have been interested in membership; i.e. it made for good public relations and promoted membership, and 3) there was often enough time to attend to these requests because of the sporadic schedule of the SMO’s programming.

Organizational Weaknesses

Further complicating the work of the Small Magazines Office was its apparent weaknesses, such as its limited ability to contribute to other Magazines Canada activities in the manner that had been expected, and questions about whether the term “small magazine” was an accurate descriptor.

Small Magazine Input Not Exclusive to SMO

One of the core activities of the Small Magazines Office was supposed to be gathering small magazine information and data for use by other Magazines Canada departments and programs. However in the deployment of programs across the organization, other programs were in touch with small magazines all the time, and did not lack for input directly from small magazines. The distribution service, for instance, is well connected to small magazines, and the Warehouse Manager and Returns Coordinator were in touch with small magazine

²⁵ Source: sales records of Small Magazine Handbooks 2006.

²⁶ The “on-call” resource and information service was not tracked; this claim is based on experience and email records.

publishers on a daily basis. Small magazines provided a great deal of information to the Consumer Marketing and Professional Development departments through their campaign contracts and program evaluation forms. These facts revealed that the Small Magazines Office never had exclusive access to the small magazine sector, and could not claim to have better quality information from small magazines than other offices or departments.

In theory, the SMO facilitated discussion at the Small Magazines Committee level to validate the relevance of Magazines Canada's programming to small magazines. In practice, though, this discussion was easily achieved through any number of means and did not necessarily require the SMO. Other departments could efficiently bypass the Small Magazines Office and gather information from small magazines by themselves. This was possible because in practice, the goals of the SMO (seen through its mandate) were not distinct from those of the larger organization.

Role of SMO in Lobbying Necessarily Limited

Another of the core activities of the SMO was to lobby and advocate on behalf of the sector. Up until the time of my review, the Small Magazines Office had not directly contributed to the lobbying initiatives of Magazines Canada that had had the most impact on small magazines—namely the stay on PAP cuts and participation in the Canadian Arts Coalition in 2006—yet these campaigns had been effectuated under the SMO moniker. In general the actual work of these campaigns had been performed under the purview of the Public Affairs Committee and the responsibility of Jim Everson²⁷ in Ottawa. The Small Magazines Committee was consulted about advocacy efforts, and certain smaller magazines within the membership did occasionally participate directly in campaigns,²⁸ but in the end, the Small Magazines Office had little to do in these campaigns other than send communications (in the form of mass emails, website copy and newsletter articles).

²⁷ Magazines Canada Executive Director, Public Affairs.

²⁸ For instance when *Saltscapes* addressed the Standing Committee on Finance in Halifax in 2005, when the publisher of *THIS* magazine was a member of the delegation that met with the Heritage Minister in 2006 and when the editor of *Border Crossings* met the Finance Committee in Winnipeg in 2005.

Definition of "Small Magazines" Outmoded

In 2006, websites were becoming of vital concern to small magazines. Having a great website, it was believed, was the key to diversifying revenues, attracting larger audiences and selling more subscriptions. Because of the high level of online activity in the magazine industry, and among small magazines, we at Magazines Canada were starting to think that the definition of a small magazine employed up until 2006 had become outmoded.

In the original definition of small magazines, "small" referred to small *print* circulation. However with some small magazines developing their websites into near-publications in their own right, it was possible that numbers relating to the print circulation of a magazine did not adequately represent the size of the magazine's readership or the scope of its business activity anymore.

More importantly, there was never any research to suggest that magazines with circulation numbers of 10,000 and under were distinct as businesses. They are not necessarily similar or dissimilar from their peers or from magazines in other circulation categories, beyond the fact that they have relatively small circulation. They share common attributes, but the variation between magazines defined as "small" is enormous, considering trade, literary and start-up publications.²⁹ Some small magazines are small because they are new, and intent on growing (as *Toronto Life* did, for example); others are small—and always will be—due to their niche appeal. A "small" magazine that is reaching its audience is a *successful* magazine. Magazines in different circulation categories may have more in common than all "small" magazines.

Therefore all small magazines may have different interests and needs, when it comes to being members of a trade association like Magazines Canada.

The definition used by the organization raised the question, "where does a magazine fit in the organization when it attains its 10,001st subscriber?" Many small magazines that were

²⁹ From 1973 to 2007, Magazines Canada was open to consumer magazines only—and not trade publications, which were served by a different association, the Canadian Business Press. This changed in 2008, when Magazines Canada changed its membership eligibility criteria to open the door to trade publications. The intent to open membership to trade titles was already present in 2007 when I was summarizing my review, and I was considering the definition of small magazines bearing trade publications in mind.

part of Magazines Canada for many years had grown into mature publications with circulation over 10,000 (*ascent* being a good example) that still identified strongly with the essential definition of a small magazine.³⁰

One place that magazines with over 10,000 in circulation did fit was in a higher membership fee category. (Categories 1 and 2 were for small magazines, with 1 to 2,000 in circulation and 2,001 to 10,000, respectively). Magazines that had for years been billed in a lower circulation category protested when they were first billed in the over-10,000 category. These members would complain to the Membership Office that though they had a couple more subscribers, they were still as financially strapped and under-resourced as ever, and still operated for all intents and purposes like a “small magazine.”

Magazines that identified with the moniker of “small magazine” still believed at the end of 2006 that they constituted a special group—defined mostly by low profitability and high sense of mission—but my experience demonstrated that this group could not be primarily defined by circulation size. While the Small Magazines Office was definitely successful in knitting the group known as small magazines closer together and highlighting this group’s special attributes, the term “small” did less in actual use to distinguish a particular kind or size of business than it did a cultural orientation.

Summary of the Strategic Review

I put forth in my strategic review the opinion that the Small Magazines Office was not necessary to the maintenance of member benefits for small magazines, for the following reasons:

- Small magazine members of Magazines Canada enjoyed programs and services offered across all Magazines Canada departments.

³⁰ The Publisher of *ascent* in 2006 was Alicia Pace, who claimed several times in conversation with the Small Magazines Office that *ascent* still identified with the term “small,” in the sense that *ascent* remained an independent, editorially-driven, niche market publication after it grew to over 10,000 in circulation.

- The SMO duplicated the efforts and responsibilities of the Membership Office (i.e. tracking membership data and facilitating conversation among members and stakeholders).
- Small magazine programming existed prior to the Small Magazines Office³¹—the name “Small Magazines Office” to encapsulate Magazines Canada’s programs and services for this slice of its membership was not essential.
- The practical goals of the SMO, namely lobbying and programming, could not be performed by the SMO exclusively. The SMO’s goals were not sufficiently distinct from the overall goals of the organization to lead to independently managed programs and services.
- The resources of the organization were no longer being utilized effectively through maintaining the SMO. Other departments had direct access to small magazine information and the uptake on SMO programs was not strong enough to warrant continuing them.
- Though member feedback about the Small Magazines Office was positive,³² low participation rates and uptake on programs and services indicate that members enjoyed the SMO theoretically.

The strategic review suggested that the remaining programs under the SMO’s purview would fare better under different departments, for the sake of efficiency, use of resources and organization. In other words, reorganization could better integrate small magazines across all departments at Magazines Canada.

After the strategic review had laid out its claims about the Small Magazines Office, Magazines Canada embarked on a discussion about the future of the SMO, and how the

³¹ See table in Chapter 1 and Appendix A.

³² Membership survey results in 2007 indicated that a majority of members were “highly satisfied” with the Small Magazines Office.

organization could most effectively serve its broad, varied and dynamic constituency of independent, mission-driven magazines.

Magazines Canada discussed the options and opportunities available and incorporated the recommendations of the strategic review as follows.

CHAPTER THREE: Recommendations to the Magazines Canada Directors Following the Strategic Review

Once I had completed the strategic review of the Small Magazines Office, I circulated a report on my findings between Barbara Zatyko, General Manager & Publisher of Magazines Canada, and Mark Jamison, CEO in late September 2006. From October to December 2006, the three of us discussed ideas for how to correct the problems identified, using solutions that would serve member interests as identified through committee meetings and membership surveys.

What we eventually developed was a policy document, which I started writing in January 2007, for the Board of Directors. This document suggested a reorganization of resources and focus under the aegis of a new “Member Services Office” and a new “Cultural Magazines Committee.” It was included in the materials presented to the Board of Directors in preparation for their meeting on March 31, 2007.

We believed these two new concepts would improve programs, delegate SMO tasks appropriately to other departments and expand on the strengths of the Small Magazines Office. In particular we recommended that Magazines Canada:

1. Move all remaining professional development programming to the Magazines Canada Professional Development department,³³
2. Expand the scope of the Small Magazines Committee, by renaming/reshaping it as the Cultural Magazines Committee, and
3. Build on the similarities between magazines (instead of their differences).

We maintained that a new Member Services Office and a Cultural Magazines Committee would help stimulate conversation, engagement and satisfaction in the membership. What

³³ Remember that conference planning for small magazines had been handed to the Professional Development Office earlier.

we proposed to the Board of Directors was an administrative change (to create the Member Services Office), and an amendment to the governance policy (to modify the mandate of the Small Magazines Committee to focus on supporting the cultural importance of magazine publishing).

Recommendation 1: Establish a Member Services Office

We (Zatyko, Jamison and I) recommended the administrative re-positioning of the programs and services previously managed by the Small Magazines Office in a broader office dedicated to member services—the Member Services Office. The Member Services Office idea united all magazines under one “tent.”³⁴

The Member Services Office concept would kill two birds with one stone: it would expand the capacity of the Membership Office as it absorbed the mandate of the Small Magazines Office. The Member Services Office would play a larger part in research than the present Membership Office. This plan would also send a clear message to the membership that all types of magazines are equal, as they would be served by one comprehensive office.

The Member Services Office plan made sense operationally. One of the chief purposes of the SMO was to act as a service bureau providing access to Magazines Canada programs and resources, assisting and directing members as needed. These activities had always duplicated those of the existing Membership Office. The Member Services Office idea eliminated this duplication.

Since communications and lobbying were both highly relevant activities to the organization and to its members, we figured that a more broadly focused Member Services Office would enhance the internal coordination needed to support industry-wide research and advocacy campaigns, as these activities often relate to magazines of all types, not just small magazines.

We assumed in our discussions that there was much more research waiting to be done in the industry that would involve both “big” and “small” magazines. The 2004 “Gaps and Needs

³⁴ The “Big Tent” philosophy comes from the political sphere. In essence, this model for organizing focuses on listening to different viewpoints and developing a perspective suitable for all.

Study”³⁵ commissioned by Magazines Canada and the Canadian Business Press had identified several topics as areas for potential research and analysis, one year after Statistics Canada scaled back its research into the magazine industry. These research topics were still “up for grabs” in early 2007. Among these topics were performance norms, market data, newsstand purchasing behaviour and an overall profile of the magazine publishing business. Blending the information-gathering activities of the SMO with Magazines Canada’s membership-wide research goals would streamline and de-fragment projects.

Our policy document also put forward that the Small Magazine Workshops and all other small-magazine-related seminars would be better managed and coordinated henceforth by the Professional Development office. Likewise, the Consumer Marketing department should uniquely coordinate and manage its campaigns and the distribution program without depending on the SMO for input that it could gather on its own. The principle here was to let each department focus on its own portfolio with minimal intervention from other departments, for the sake of efficiency and organization.

As far as the remaining lobbying and advocacy responsibilities of the Small Magazines Office, these too could be handed over smoothly to a different department—the new Member Services Office—which could help the Public Affairs Committee coordinate what administrative information it needed to carry out its campaigns, as it had access to and control over the membership data for the entire association.³⁶

³⁵ “The Gaps and Needs Study” was conducted on behalf of Magazines Canada and the Canadian Business Press by Totum Research Inc. in 2005. http://magazinescanada.ca/public_affairs.php?cat=pa_econ

³⁶ A good example of this type of cooperation is a campaign rolled out in 2008 in which Magazines Canada sent letters to all federal MPs informing them of the total number of subscribers to Canadian magazines lived in their ridings. This campaign was effectuated in an effort to convince MPs to protect the Publications Assistance Plan. As the Membership Manager, I prepared mailing lists for Jim Everson, who conceived of the campaign and wrote the letter.

Recommendation 2: Establish a Cultural Magazines Committee

We also recommended that the Small Magazines Committee be “re-branded”³⁷ and given a new mandate as the Cultural Magazines Committee.

The organization still needed to retain a committee that represented the views, needs and interests of the segment of members that until now were called “small.” This group of members was still of vital importance to the organization, but as evidenced through dialogue in the association, was transitioning away from the name “small magazine” and towards something new.

Our policy document stated, “To improve efficiency, a Member Services Office of Magazines Canada would support the Cultural Magazines Committee, as the committee relates to the needs of the largest segment of members in the association, namely ‘cultural magazines.’”

Adoption of the Recommendations

The Board of Directors approved the recommendation to create a Member Services Office on March 31, 2007. However at the same meeting the Board of Directors justly asked, “where did the concept of a ‘cultural magazine’ come from?”

To respond to this question, I wrote a new document, *Rationale for Cultural Magazines Moniker*, to present to the Board in May 2007 that elaborated the rationale for the adoption of the term “cultural magazines.” The Small Magazines Committee had previously discussed the potential for re-naming its focus to be on “cultural magazines” throughout the past year, and had already initially approved the idea.

The document stressed that re-naming the “Small Magazine Committee” the “Cultural Magazines Committee” was a change in name only; our perspective was that the Small

³⁷ “Rebranding” was the term chosen by Mark Jamison. This term carefully implies that instead of an all-out replacement of the SMC, we were suggesting only a modification of the committee. In fact, a number of members of the Small Magazines Committee—whose terms would all be complete in April 2008—were asked to serve on the new Cultural Magazines Committee. The organization’s plans could rationally be likened to a “refresh.”

Magazines Committee had been operating as a *de facto* Cultural Magazines Committee for some time.

We believed that the focus of the Small Magazines Committee, Small Magazines Retail Task Force and the Small Magazines Office had for some time already been preoccupied with the independent magazines with a commitment to advancing art, culture and social issues in Canada, regardless of size. For example, we noted that Magazines Canada members had indicated through advocacy discussions that the budget supporting the Canada Magazine Fund's Support for Art and Literary Magazines (SALM) program would be more effective if managed by the Canada Council for the Arts.³⁸ Also, Melony Ward, Publisher of *Canadian Art*, and Alicia Pace, Publisher of *ascent* (both magazines with circulation over 10,000) had both sat on the Small Magazines Committee. This suggested that an interest in culture, rather than a specific circulation size, was important to this segment of Magazines Canada members.

According to the Small Magazines Committee, the bases for the concept of a "cultural magazine" were as follows:

1. Many of the strongest of Magazines Canada members that were once "small" weren't small in circulation anymore, but were still similarly oriented around the same issues. They should continue to be part of the discussion.
2. The SMO had always been a resource primarily for Canada Council-funded art and literary magazines and other artistic and cultural publications³⁹ that faced the same challenges (ex. obtaining grant funding, a perennially low newsstand presence, working with a lack of professional training).
3. The Small Magazines Committee addressed many issues that extended well beyond circulation; most of the issues that the SMC paid most attention to would be

³⁸ Reference: Meeting notes from the Canadian Arts Coalition 2006-2007 (prepared by Claire Pfeiffer).

³⁹ Of the roughly 300 small magazines in the Magazines Canada membership from 2003 to 2008, on average 75 of these were Canada Council-funded titles year over year.

classified as “cultural” (e.g. raising the profile of art and literary magazines and protecting their access to government funding).

The document I prepared for the Board of Directors also proposed encapsulating its new services for “cultural magazines” under the name Centre for Studies in Cultural Publishing/*Centre pour les magazines culturelles*. This new Centre was imagined as an envelope for all kinds of activities promoting and supporting “cultural magazines,” including industry research. This idea never saw fruition—positively so, in my opinion, for naming an essentially vacant “centre” to encompass certain activities already being managed in the association harkened the same problems that plagued the Small Magazines Office.

This second document satisfied the Board of Directors to the degree that they approved the Cultural Magazines Committee. In May 2007, the full set of recommendations was fully adopted and the Member Services Office and Cultural Magazines Committee plans were allowed to progress.

The next and final step in the process in installing these new concepts in the organization was to propose the necessary by-law changes at the Annual General Meeting (AGM). The membership approved these changes as accepted by the Board of Directors in a vote at the AGM in June 2007.

CHAPTER FOUR: Impact and Results of the Strategic Review

Closure of the Small Magazines Office

Just as in a “soft launch” of a product with little fanfare, the Small Magazines Office opted for a “soft finish”—after the AGM in June 2007 the organization simply stopped using the term “Small Magazines Office.” We included a short article in the following Cover Lines all-member newsletter indicating that small magazines would henceforth be enjoying a new focus on programs and services devoted to their needs, and we edited the website to replace all instances of the word “small” to “cultural.” These communications emphasized that Magazines Canada looked forward to building a stronger case for support for the magazines that are so vital to the Canadian cultural and media landscape.

A few administrative details remained, and until I left my post as former-Small Magazines Project Manager/Membership Manager in September 2008, I helped tie up loose ends in the organization and smooth the transition into a new set of principles and processes by amending by-laws, writing a definition and mandate and installing the Cultural Magazines Committee.

Changes Made to Install Cultural Magazines Perspective

Amending the By-Laws

After the AGM in June 2007, I worked with Barbara Zatyko and Mark Jamison to amend the by-laws to reflect the change to a new focus on cultural magazines. The by-law edits were minor—only about 10 words were changed.

Writing the New Cultural Magazines Mandate and Definition

With regards to internal organization, a foundation had to be laid for the new Member Services Officer and Cultural Magazines Committee. I started this work by developing a new mandate for the Cultural Magazines Committee. This new mandate stated:

“The Cultural Magazines Committee will consider matters relating to the interests of independent (parent company owns fewer than three titles) magazines that support and enrich Canadian culture and dialogue. The Cultural Magazines Committee discusses and recommends ideas that harness opportunities and build strategies that serve these magazines, with the goal of promoting Canadian culture and publishing.

The association defines cultural magazines as publications centered on cultural issues, be they artistic, historical, social or ethnic, or otherwise devoted to supporting the understanding of Canadian identities.”⁴⁰

In writing this mandate and definition, I listened carefully to the voices of the Public Affairs rep Jim Everson and to Mark Jamison, CEO, who were intent on building a new case for support for independent magazines built on their cultural value—a case that already had achieved some momentum with policy-makers and was gaining larger credence as speaking to the strategic objectives of government.⁴¹

But at the same time I wondered, what exactly does the term “cultural” refer to in the business of magazines? I did not feel this question had yet been sufficiently addressed. What definition of “culture” were we using, and what magazines was this excluding?

The idea of “culture” employed by the new plans at Magazines Canada needs to be understood as in the popular sense, not the academic. A “cultural” publication can be one that focuses on any aspect of heritage, society, taste, art, and even political ideology. The boundaries around this term are purposely loose to be able to accommodate new types of magazines as the industry evolves.

⁴⁰ The latest version of this mandate can be found on the Magazines Canada website: http://magazinescanada.ca/about_us.php?cat=au_committees&nID=153.

⁴¹ For example, through the dialogue surrounding the Canadian Arts Coalition in 2006 and the conversations shared with the Canada Council for the Arts during their strategic review session in 2006.

Creating the Cultural Magazines Committee

Next, we moved ahead with the new plans for a Cultural Magazines Committee, inviting select delegates (some who had sat on the Small Magazines Committee) to participate. The term for members of the Small Magazines Committee was one year. This term could be renewed if desired by the committee member, the committee Chair and the Magazines Canada General Manager. All Magazines Canada committee terms begin in September.

The fact that Small Magazine Committee members' terms had recently come to a close was advantageous to starting a new committee under a new rubric. After the Small Magazines Committee held its final meeting of the year in May 2007, I thanked the members of the committee for their contributions. In several months' time, just three members of the Small Magazines Committee were approached regarding their potential interest in serving on the new Cultural Magazines Committee (Anne Burke, Derek Webster and Nadia Szilvassy). Each of these people agreed. The rest of the SMC members were not contacted, and in turn they did not contact Magazines Canada about more committee work.

The new Cultural Magazines Committee was assembled from the three remaining SMC members and the ranks of the Magazines Canada membership. The General Manager (Barbara Zatyko) and CEO (Mark Jamison) invited several publishers of notable art, literary, political, social and cultural magazines to participate.

The original Cultural Magazines Committee became: Shelley Ambrose, Publisher of *The Walrus*; Anne Burke,⁴² Publisher of *Prairie Journal*; Stephen Osborne, Publisher of *Geist*; Nadia Szilvassy, General Manager of *Brick*; Melony Ward, Publisher of *Canadian Art*; Derek Webster, Publisher of *Maisonneuve*; Vanessa Reid, Publisher of *ascent* and representatives of Magazines Canada, Jim Everson, Mark Jamison and Barbara Zatyko.

The new Cultural Magazines Committee was not hugely different from the Small Magazines Committee. Many of the players on the new committee were familiar voices in the

⁴² Anne Burke and representatives of *Geist* and *ascent* had all been active on the Small Magazines Task Force earlier in the decade.

organization and the old SMO, and were apprised of the issues affecting small/cultural magazines. The operations of the new committee were much the same as before and its role was advisory, like the Small Magazines Committee's had been. The difference was that the new committee members were empowered to think about how Magazines Canada could promote the cultural value of publishing, leading to new bases for advocacy and cases for support.

In the fiscal year 2007-2008, the Cultural Magazines Committee met four times. I took part in two of these meetings,⁴³ in which committee members discussed how to better work with large retail chains and distributors and how to make an effective case to policy-makers (in the context of a sweeping review of the Department of Canadian Heritage's programs). The committee also discussed the business models of cultural/independent magazines and the challenges inherent in these, so as to eventually come up with programming recommendations for the Board of Directors.

Note

The vision of a Member Services Office as a department devoted to increasing the research capacity of the organization was not seen through because of financial concerns stemming from the recession that hit suddenly in mid-2008.

⁴³ I left my full-time position at Magazines Canada in September 2008; I continued to work on contract from September 2008 to December 2008, as Member Projects Manager, but was no longer involved in committee work.

CONCLUSION

The Small Magazines Office was now closed, after a review of its performance and positioning, lengthy discussions at the management level, and then an approval process involving the Board of Directors and the general Magazines Canada membership. The loose ends of the SMO were tied and the new Cultural Magazines Committee was at work.

Now that the Small Magazines Office was finished, we had a chance to stand back and assess what we'd learned throughout its life. Beyond everyday questions about operations and program details, was the process of wrapping up the Small Magazines Office a success? Even more broadly, what did the Small Magazines Office say about Magazines Canada, and where did the experience of the SMO take the organization?

Both Magazines Canada and I learned a lot throughout the process of reviewing and closing the SMO, which involved a lot of delicate work soliciting input from members while at the same time steering a conversation that suited the interests of multiple stakeholder groups. It meant getting rid of many preconceived and old ideas about what the association "should" and "shouldn't" be doing in terms of supporting independent publishing.

Closing the Small Magazines Office took finesse on the part of the management of Magazines Canada. Because Magazines Canada is a membership association, everything it does must be member-driven. The process we went through in dismantling the SMO indicated an understanding among Magazines Canada staff and members that the organization must serve members and examine its operations and principles to remain relevant. In other words, the dog must wag the tail. Members had lobbied to create the Small Magazines Office, but then eventually, several of those members left the association. Others grew into different sorts of publications. We observed that the programs and services of the Small Magazines Office weren't working. Magazines Canada made a case for the evolution of the Small Magazines Office without making decisions on behalf of the membership, and the membership through various processes approved that case. The closure of the Small

Magazines Office was an act of cooperation between management, direction and the members of the association. It involved the key activities of an industry association: assessing opportunities and threats, sharing information and building consensus around plans for the future. It was also the final chapter in a long story that Mark Jamison had seen begin when he became CEO.

From the beginning of his tenure, Jamison was tasked to bring greater harmony to the different groups represented in the membership of Magazines Canada. To accomplish this goal, he focused on the concept of the “big tent,” a political metaphor for a space in which different groups can dwell equitably. Instead of paying tribute to any specific ideology, as a “big tent” association, Magazines Canada would look past the small, “partisan” distinctions between magazines and focus on promoting them all for the good of the industry. This strategy has helped the organization recall the original will of the membership, which united to promote Canadian magazines on the whole.

Perhaps certain magazines will feel excluded from the new focus on cultural publishing, if I can make a guess based on my experience as Small Magazines Project Manager. It’s true that some magazines were very attached to the Small Magazines Office as a concept. Also, it is possible that smaller-circulation magazines that focus on commercial subjects (e.g. automobiles, home décor, etc.) or even travel, or hobbies, may think they have been excluded from the new group, though Magazines Canada will continue to provide the same (if not improved) level of service to all magazines.

In any case, the term “cultural magazine” provides Magazines Canada with a new, effective tool and an opportunity to breathe new life into an old discussion around the how and why of type of publication and how to advocate on its behalf. The introduction of this new term makes its entrée into the organization by raising the claim that circulation numbers are only one measure of success and professionalism (and not a particularly useful measure at that, as experience with the SMO has shown).

So what of the Small Magazines Office? What can we say about it now that it is no longer? Programming aside, the SMO served a high-level purpose in the organization. The mission

of the Small Magazines Office was mostly ideological and symbolic, and the Small Magazines Office existed to serve a social need within the membership of Magazines Canada. “Small magazines” constituted a group that felt distinct, non-mainstream, under-resourced, and then marginalized during a specific time in the association’s history. From this vantage we see that the association’s distinction between “large” and “small” magazines was part of the mindset of the association within a particular context.

The association’s struggles to define and serve this special constituency resulted in members understanding that their magazines—and they themselves as directors of those magazines—had more in common than they knew. It was only through examining the differences between large (read: corporate) and small (read: independent) magazines with the Small Magazines Office that the association could have progressed onwards to its new direct focus on the cultural value of publishing.

More than an experiment with terminology, the story of the Small Magazines Office is one of learning, growth and professionalization in the magazine industry.

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Appendix: Descriptions of Small Magazines Office Programs

“On-Call” Project Manager, 2002-2007

The one service offered by the Small Magazines Office throughout its existence. Variouslly called a “service bureau,” an “on-call consultant,” and “referral service,” the Small Magazines Project Manager provided advice, referrals and problem-solving expertise on an on-call basis. This service was not formalized and so there is no information available about who used it, when and how much. However I can confirm that it was a very popular and appreciated service.

Buddy System / Ask an Expert, 2002-2003

The Small Magazines Office began by offering the *Buddy System*. An informal program, this was a service offered to help people working in small magazines connect and share knowledge. There is no surviving documentation from this program. The basic idea is that people would call the Small Magazines Office and describe their interest, and then the Small Magazines Project Manager would put them in touch with an expert in their desired subject. It was a referral system only, without follow-up or tracking. The *Buddy System* lasted for about one year and was helpful enough to members to warrant expanding this type of activity, i.e. networking, into more formalized programs. See *Small Magazines Spotlight* and *Brown Bag Networking Lunches*.

Literary/Alternative Magazine Profile Study, 2003

Meant as a kind of “alternative Print Measurement Bureau” report, this study was commissioned by the CMPA in 2002-2003 and completed by Totum Research. It examines the consumer buying habits of the readers of literary magazines. The objective was to lend to small magazines at least some statistics they could use in their media kits, to help sell advertising space. The study was never repeated. The summary

text is no longer available from Magazines Canada, but the raw data tables are available by request.

Beginnings Handbook, 2003

Beginnings was a guide for new publishers starting their own small magazines, compiled in 2002 by Judith Parker, member of the Small Magazines Task Force and former publisher of *THIS Magazine*. It was printed as approximately 32 pages, and it may have been distributed free-of-charge to members of the CMPA. (No documentation on this project remains, either.) Its content has been heavily modified over the years (by me) and now exists as the *Start a Magazine* guide on the Magazines Canada website: http://magazinescanada.ca/start_a_magazine.php?cat=startamag

Brown Bag Networking Lunches, 2003

Hosted by the CMPA in their office in downtown Toronto, these informal lunches were an opportunity for publishers, editors and other small magazine professionals to gather and talk. From all accounts, these were fun events, but not very successful, as people didn't really have the time to spare. The CMPA proceeded with more tailored programs after this, focusing on specific topics and delivering useful information.

Small Magazines Spotlight

The Small Magazines Spotlight was a special event only for small magazines, associated with the national magazine conference in Toronto. The Small Magazines Committee suggested the visioning and rough ideas for topics addressed; the Small Magazines Project Manager performed all the planning and coordination in concert with the conference planning team and the Professional Development Manager.

Pub Night, 2001: At first the Spotlight was a cocktail-hour meet-and-greet event in the conference hotel bar, for small magazine professionals.

Half-day, 2004-2005: The Spotlight grew into a half-day "mini conference" offering 6 to 9 sessions (workshops, seminars and panels) on small magazine-specific topics. It

was held on the Friday of the national magazine conference, when no other conference sessions were scheduled. It also included a lunchtime session where government agencies spoke to audiences about funding programs. A special edition of the *Shoestring* newsletter was produced for the Spotlights of 2004 and 2005.

Full day, 2006: This Small Magazines Spotlight was held at the Arts & Letters Club of Toronto. Off-site from the rest of the national magazine conference, this was a full day of small magazine sessions (12 in total) plus a sit-down luncheon where invited guest Jeffrey Kastner, co-editor of *Cabinet* magazine of Brooklyn, NY, gave a presentation about pushing the boundaries of the expected in art magazine publishing.

“Integrated,” since 2007: After the extravaganza of 2006, the Small Magazines Spotlight was “integrated” into Magazines Canada’s new national magazine conference, MagNet. Small magazine sessions were no longer relegated to a separate space on a separate day—they were scheduled alongside all types of other sessions. The goal of this integration was to make small magazines feel like a part of the larger industry. There were 8 small magazine sessions offered.

Shoestring Newsletter

Designed as a vehicle to disseminate small magazine news and increase awareness in the small magazines sector, the *Shoestring* came out 6 times per year in print (from 2003 to 2005) and on a sporadic basis when it switched to email format (2005 to 2007). At first, the newsletter contained regular columns and a feature article, commissioned by the Small Magazines Project Manager, but in email form, most of the articles originated with Magazines Canada, other industry groups or were re-posted from the Internet. Some readers may remember the Small Magazines Project Manager’s attempt to instantiate a regular *Small Magazines Poem* in every edition. Only members received the *Shoestring* newsletter.

Shoestring Blog, 2006-2007

The *Shoestring Blog* was Magazines Canada's experiment into blogging. Surveys and committee meetings had revealed that members thought a blog would be a good way to stay in touch with Magazines Canada, and also broaden the audience for small magazine stories. However the blog did not last long, as the care and feeding of the *Shoestring Blog* was greater than anticipated. Also, blogs in general become popular when they provide either up-to-the-minute news, or gossip, and the *Shoestring Blog* tried, but could not provide either, based on the nature of the association maintaining it.

Small Magazine Workshops, 2003-2007

At first, these workshops were half-day events, but by 2005 they had evolved into full-day events, hosted by experts in various fields, plus lunch. In the beginning of this program, different workshops were presented in different cities across the country, but as of 2005, the same workshop was presented 4 times and called a "travelling road show" in promotional materials. The Small Magazines Committee suggested the topics of the workshops. The cities were chosen on a rolling basis. Topics included design, renewal series, governance and direct mail. The Small Magazines Project Manager managed the planning, coordination, promotion and ticket sales.

Small Magazine Handbooks, 2006-2007

This was the most ambitious and extensive project enacted by the Small Magazines Office. An evolution of the Beginnings handbook, this series of five printed handbooks was created to a) capture the ideas and expertise of the small magazine sector in Canada and b) offer small magazine staff, hopeful or would-be publishers and students the most up to date, tailored knowledge on small magazine publishing. The overall objective was to promote the small magazine sector and share the tools of success.

The series involved 17 authors and six illustrators. The planning, editorial development, commissioning, contracts, budgeting, editing, proofing and pre-

production was performed by the Small Magazines Project Manager, as well as the post-production promotion, distribution and sales of the series.

Here is a blurb (written by me) on each one of the titles in the series, taken from the Magazines Canada website:

http://magazinescanada.ca/small_magazines.php?cat=mc_handbooks

Small Magazine Human Resources (2007) is the newest title in our series. Hot off the presses, this handbook will help your organization manage its most precious resource: people. Work better together with this guide to hiring, volunteer and Board management, training, performance reviewing, succession planning, policies and much more.

Author: Alicia Pace, Dulcinea Consulting

Small Magazine Advertising (2006) will answer your questions about how to attract and retain advertisers in your small magazine. Learn how to build campaigns, organize swaps and contra advertising, package a media kit and develop a greater awareness of your readers. An extensive compilation of articles written by some of the top advertising consultants in the country, this handbook will help you get the business you want.

Edited by Claire Pfeiffer and Gwen Dunant

Small Magazine Business (2006) is a special double volume featuring expert advice on business planning, organizational and financial management specific to small magazines. Get this guide and navigate the complicated business of small magazine publishing. Build your small magazine on a solid foundation—create a plan that works, based on the best practices of senior industry consultants.

Authors: Diane Davy, Craig Riggs and D. B. Scott

Small Magazine Circulation (2006) is a comprehensive guide to subscription marketing, order fulfillment and circulation management, and the only source of this information available. Circulation expert Jon Spencer of Abacus Circulation gives readers 85 pages of practical advice in this invaluable resource. Published with a special supplement on direct mail marketing.

Author: Jon Spencer, Abacus Circulation

Small Magazine Editorial (2006) is an engaging look into the editorial practices of celebrated Canadian small magazines and a handy reference guide to the principles of style. Featuring

interviews and checklists, this handbook will enhance the work of any editor, copyeditor or author. Learn from the best. Written by Jane Silcott, Mary Newberry and Lynn Cunningham.

Authors: Cynthia Brouse, Mary Newberry and Jane Silcott

Small Magazine Hotsheets, 2006-2008

The *Small Magazine Hotsheets* are one-page articles that deliver current information on a single topic, written by an expert in the field. The ideas for the topics originated with the Small Magazines Committee, and the Small Magazines Office handled the commissioning of content, editing and production. The *hotsheets* were developed as part of the *Small Magazine Handbooks* project and continued after the handbooks were completed. The *hotsheets* are still available for free on the Magazines Canada website. Here is a list of all the *hotsheets* produced up to the time of this writing:

- Newsstand Distro 101, by Gavin Babstock
- The Care and Feeding of Freelancers, by Kim Pittaway
- The Editorial Plan, by Kim Pittaway
- Tips on Fulfilling U.S. Subscriptions, by Eithne McCredie
- Editorial Budgeting in 9 Easy Steps, by Jessica Ross
- Open Source Content Management Systems, by Dawn Buie
- Hiring the Right Sales Professional, by Matt Robinson
- Making Use of RSS, by Mason Wright
- Blogs and Small Magazines, by Phillip Smith
- Defending Lit Contests, by Brian Kaufman
- Developing Your Niche, by Scott W. Gray
- Fundraising for Small Magazines, by Margaret Eaton
- Know Your Libel Basics, by Hebb & Sheffer
- Low-Cost Promotions, by Hal Niedzviecki
- Online Circulation Promotions, by Jon Spencer
- Online Editorial Features, by Matt Blackett
- Swaps and Exchanges, by Lisa Whittington-Hill
- The Basics of a Good Internship, by Deborah Brewster
- Working With Independent Retailers, by Kevin Potvin