

NICHE PUBLISHING IN THE DIGITAL AGE:
CREATING DIGITAL EDITORIAL CONTENT FOR
COTTAGE LIFE

by

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A B S T R A C T

Drawing on experiences from an internship with *Cottage Life* magazine, this project report delves into the digital initiatives that the publishing world is currently embarking on. Starting with an overview of the technological developments that have influenced the publishing world, this paper moves on to look at *Cottage Life* and its parent company Quarto Communications.

Three realms of digital content, along with discussions with *Cottage Life* bloggers and web administrators, are presented; and the realities of the planning, time, and effort that go into the creation of online editorial content – as well as the challenges that must be met – are considered.

D E D I C A T I O N

- To all my friends and family who have supported me while I wrote.

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I N T R O D U C T I O N

As we enter 2011, new digital endeavours are continuously being created to keep the general public connected and informed. For a publisher, it is important to be in all spaces, to be where readers are both physically and technologically. As Shannon Emmerson stated to the Master of Publishing Class of 2010, there are a few people in each separate space who will want your magazine, and to be successful, a magazine wants to get all possible readers to their publication.¹ There are more venues than ever for magazines to reach their readers: there are print editions, magazine websites, social media, mobile devices, magazine sponsored events, and many more.²

Cottage Life is one magazine that strives to be where its readers are, and views achieving that goal as an asset to its overall success. In 1985, publisher Al Zikovitz and his wife purchased a cottage and, once the deed was signed, were left with questions that face many cottagers: “How does the septic system work? How to fix the punky, moss-covered stairs out back? Is the water safe to drink? And, the question on every cottager’s mind: how to avoid getting eaten alive by all the mosquitoes?”³ They quickly realized that if they had these questions, others would as well; Zikovitz began developing the magazine that would become *Cottage Life*. Since its first publication in 1988, the *Cottage Life* brand has expanded into many different spaces, all with the intention of reaching both current and potential readers.

This paper delves into the digital space of a strong niche print magazine, *Cottage Life*, focusing on its editorial endeavours and how it has expanded to make use of new digital technologies. It will begin with a publishing-focused analysis of the development of the internet and the web-based world, focusing on websites, mobile technology, and tablet-based devices. The paper then shifts its focus to one publication specifically – *Cottage Life* magazine – to illustrate how a successful regional Canadian publication has begun to integrate itself into the new digital world.

The final part of the paper looks at the emergence of three new digital technologies, and how specifically they have been explored by *Cottage Life* magazine. First is *Cottage Life*’s award-winning website, established in 2001. Second are blogs that are linked to from the main site, providing updates on different interests from *Cottage Life* editors. Third is an iPad application that shares four years’ worth of content from the Q&A column that runs in each issue of the print magazine. These forays into the digital world have expanded *Cottage Life* as a brand and have allowed a niche publication to continue to offer useful services to their unique readers, and we

1 Shannon Emmerson, “Digital Media at Canada Wide Magazine” (presented to the 2010 Simon Fraser University Master of Publishing class, Vancouver, British Columbia, January 20, 2010).

2 Ibid.

3 “Our Story,” *Cottage Life*, accessed September 10, 2010, http://www.cottagelife.com/index.php/ci_id/3982/la_id/1.htm.

will see how *Cottage Life* continually experiments to stay at the forefront of the new technology.

1: DIGITAL DEVELOPMENTS IN PUBLISHING

In the 1970s, the precursor to the internet was created so that the United States' Defense Department could exchange information and intelligence quickly, due to growing fears of nuclear attack.⁴ The internet is, at its most basic, a system of computers that are interconnected and use Internet Protocol Suite. The Defense Department's system, called ARPANET, was the pre-cursor to the modern day system, though the internet has grown considerably in both size and complexity since then. Note that the internet is to be distinguished from the "World Wide Web," the latter being a specific system of interlinked documents on the internet using Hyper-Text Transfer Protocol (HTTP). HTTP, and thus the web, is how most web pages and websites are transmitted throughout the internet. The internet itself is more inclusive, also featuring such other protocols as Simple Mail Transfer Protocol (SMTP) (most commonly used for email) and File Transfer Protocol (FTP).⁵ It is easy to see how these two terms are accidentally interchanged in popular use, but for the purposes of this paper the terms "web" and "internet" are used as described here.

It wasn't until the 1990s that both of these new technologies began to enter the mainstream and began to be used heavily by different industries and communities. Both organizations and individuals were soon able to access information at a quicker pace, and were able to share information as well.⁶ The publishing industry was one of many groups who saw the need to adapt to the new technology of the web, developing sites that would give their readers another door to their products.⁷ Soon, it became the norm to be online; and recently, many publications have become online-only magazines. Yet the fundamental issues of how to best use, distribute information through, and attract readers to new online systems remains a pressing challenge of the publishing industry today. It is this challenge which provides the foundation for both this paper and the internship that is the basis for its final chapter. The following three sub-sections investigate and analyze three of the current digital platforms for the publishing world: the web, mobile technology, and tablet-style devices.

1.1: The Web

Over the past ten years, the web has become more important to publishing. It has developed into a complex platform that is now used to sell books, share catalogues, send out newsletters, and keep readers connected. Magazines have especially found this venue to be a great resource, an area where the magazine and its readers can

4 Peter Buckley and Duncan Clark, *The Internet* (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 2007), 11.

5 Tim Berners-Lee, *Weaving the Web* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1999).

6 John Palfrey and Urs Gasser, *Born Digital: Understanding the First Generation of Digital Natives* (New York: The Perseus Books Group, 2008), 2 - 7.

7 Sammie Johnson and Patricia Prijatelj, *The Magazine From Cover to Cover*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 23 - 25.

interact. There are a number of ways that magazines have made use of online tools, starting with those that “push” information out to readers, and moving more progressively to ways that engage a readership in discussions. In a digital age when information can be obtained almost as soon as it happens, many feel as though magazines, which are often published on a monthly, bimonthly, or semi-annually basis are too slow to keep up with the “need-to-know-now” population.⁸ The web, however, allows for new content to be generated as often as necessary regardless of production schedule. This simple use of web technology can provide readers with up-to-date information between print publications.

Another information “push” to the readers focuses on multimedia, which can supplement print online by giving a stronger visual than what may have been allotted in print. Magazines have a limited amount of space in each issue and there are often extra photos to accompany a story that do not make it to the printed edition. The web allows for these photos to be published and for readers to see more images related to a story that they found interesting. Videos and audio can all be placed on the web, enhancing reader experience as well. By using the web, a call to action is given to readers of the print edition, they are told to go online to find out more about a topic, and are brought into an entirely new space.

The online world has also facilitated the desire from the general public to “put a face to a name” when it comes to the editors and writers of magazines. Recently a documentary was released about the publication of the September issue of *Vogue* magazine, a piece which followed editor-in-chief Anna Wintour and creative director Grace Coddington. The film grossed over six million dollars worldwide, helping to highlight the demand to see the inner workings of a popular magazine.⁹ The web allows magazines to do this on a much smaller scale. Photos of editors with brief biographies can be posted to the magazine’s “About” page. Podcasts can be created and shared with readers, and videos can feature editors sharing knowledge on a particular subject.

Yet again, these uses of the technology – no matter how interesting – still simply push new information toward the reader. Since these early developments, the online world has evolved to “Web 2.0,” which focuses on a much greater engagement of web visitors in the online content.¹⁰ We now look at a number of web-based tools that help to draw the readers into conversation, rather than simply pushing information at them.

To this end, the web also allows magazines to create an external community to that found of the print edition, bringing readers together to discuss and share long after

8 Jeff Gomez, *Print is Dead: Books in Our Digital Age* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 39.

9 “The September Issue.” Box Office Mojo, accessed November 10, 2010. <http://boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=septemberissue.htm>.

10 Tim O’Reilly, “What is Web 2.0,” O’Reilly, accessed November 10, 2010, <http://oreilly.com/web2/archive/what-is-web-20.html>.

the publishers have distributed content. As an example, many magazines in publication today have a “Letters to the Editor” section that allows readers to respond to articles they enjoyed or disliked. By posting stories online and allowing readers to comment directly on those stories, magazines can now allow for real-time response. This can garner feedback from readers faster, and often in larger quantities, than “Letters to the Editor.” Such comments also allow for conversations to develop between readers. In other examples, magazines will reach out to their online community by posting polls on issues related to content or the readers’ preferences. By doing this, publishers get responses from readers, and are able to tailor covers and content to the preferences of their core audience, thereby helping to ensure that their reader base will remain and return.

Another way the publishing industry has learned to engage their readership online has been through harnessing early conversations between online readers in order to later supplement their print material, which can now be done in many different ways. In some cases, publications use the web to test products prior to releasing them in print. New pieces can be written to work with stories found in print editions, and magazines can share multimedia that would otherwise go unpublished. With accompanying written pieces, readers are able to glean new information about a topic that they found interesting in the print edition; they can be directed to venues to purchase products, given tips on how to build or create something, or just be given more text than what could be fit in the print edition (interviews work especially well with this last example).

Many external platforms have developed in recent years, platforms which have significantly increased the publishing world’s ability to engage its readership using web-based tools. Within the sphere of the web, the recent development of social media has become of great use to magazine publishers. Facebook and Twitter are two dominant external platforms that have allowed the publishing community to share news, event information, and any other tidbits their readers may find useful. Both Facebook and Twitter are easy for publishers to use – not to mention free, in most cases - as they do not need to build a website from scratch that allows for social networking. It also allows publishers to share information as quickly as possible and to direct traffic to their own site for more information. Social networking also allows a magazine to extend its brand, as will be discussed below.

1.2: Mobile

With the rise of Research in Motion’s Blackberry, Apple’s iPhone, not to mention a host of other competing smartphones, users can more easily remain in touch with their online interests as they leave their homes and workplaces. It is now possible

to search for information “on the go” in the majority of North American cities. Wireless networks have been created for these devices and the majority of cellular providers have created data plans for their customers.¹¹

Smartphones have slowly been making their way onto the publishing industry’s radar, with magazines focusing primarily on two areas of mobile technology: mobile websites and applications. Many magazines have created mobile-compatible sites for the iPhone, Blackberry, and other cellular phones. This has made browsing on these platforms much easier for their readership, and overall readability has increased. Usually, magazines do this by designing a page for scrolling rather than for a larger computer screen. When viewing a webpage on a standard personal computer, web designers organize information in a hierarchy. The top of the page generally finds the navigation bar and a search bar for the ease of the reader. Important or new information is usually placed above the “fold” – before scrolling to view photos and texts is necessary. Websites that have been designed specifically for smartphones, on the other hand, place information in a column making it simpler for the user to access.

Applications designed for mobile and other devices have become another area for magazines to create and deliver content. Some magazines have created applications for their website itself, whereas others have created applications that give readers something specific. For example, *Self*, a magazine devoted to women’s health and fitness, offers an iPhone application that gives subscribers exercise routines tailored to different areas of the body.¹² By creating stand-alone applications, magazines give their readers something that they would not receive otherwise and extend their brand into a new venue.

1.3: Tablets

In the past year and a half, tablet readers have been heralded as the saviours of the publishing industry. At this point it is impossible to say for sure whether this will be true. eReaders have sold by the millions from Amazon, Sony, Kobo, and others, but none have been created with the magazine format in mind. eReaders serve books primarily, as the majority of devices on the market are black and white and are the size of an average trade paperback. Tablet readers, however, have taken into account the size, photo quality, and colour that magazines require to be on par with their print editions.

Digital editions of magazines can be used on laptops and desktops but also work particularly well on tablet readers. In many cases, a digital edition is simply the print edition of a magazine presented in a digital format. Other magazines, such as *Wired*

¹¹ “Wireless,” Rogers Communications, accessed October 15, 2010, http://www.rogers.com/web/Rogers.portal?_nfpb=true&_pageLabel=WRLS_HOME.

¹² “Self Workouts for iPhone,” *Self Magazine*, accessed September 25, 2010, <http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/self-workouts/id376720181?mt=8>.

and *The Bark*, create extras including links to external sites – often for their advertisers – videos, and other exclusives. The tablet readers available today make viewing these editions quite simple. Nothing is lost in terms of art direction as colour and image quality remain in most cases. Text is legible and reading can be done in both landscape and portrait formats.

As with mobile phones, applications can be developed for and used on tablet readers. Many applications that have been created can be used on both smartphones and tablets, including those created for magazines. Some magazines have, however, created applications solely for tablet readers. These are often the digital editions of the print magazine, sold with other special digital content for each issue. *Vanity Fair* has done this by packaging each current issue with extra photos, videos, and “special portfolios created just for the [application].”¹³ Many Canadian magazines and newspapers have taken a wait-and-see approach to tablet readers, postponing development until they can see what kind of developments emerge in the coming years.¹⁴ Such Canadian publications as *The Globe and Mail*, *Elle Canada*, and *Maclean’s*, have, however, created applications that work with both smartphone and tablet mobile devices.

It still remains to be seen as to what kinds of innovation will occur in this area. Many magazine editors are, however, taking necessary steps to find out what can be done with tablets and what their readership’s demand is for this fast-growing digital platform.

1.4: Digital Content for Publishing - Review

The web, mobile phones, and tablet readers have each had a significant impact on the magazine world in the past decade. The web has enabled magazines to share information quickly and efficiently with their readers and has given readers a stronger connection to the magazine and its publishing team. Mobile phones and tablets have opened new spaces for magazines to enter. A magazine can now be with a reader at all times and can offer them new, useful, and interesting products that add to their enjoyment.

¹³“*Vanity Fair Magazine*,” iTunes Store, accessed September 25, 2010.

¹⁴ Susan Krashinsky, “Media Players Set to Climb Atop iPad’s Platform,” *The Globe and Mail*, accessed April 3, 2010, <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/technology/personal-tech/apple/media-players-set-to-climb-atop-ipads-platform/article1520855/>.

2: COTTAGE LIFE

Cottage Life has begun to apply some of the digital developments that the publishing world has embraced. As a leading regional Canadian publication, *Cottage Life* from its birth has focused on providing readers with as much information about cottaging as possible. From its staffs' initiatives to the magazine to the *Cottage Life* brand to the current online endeavours, *Cottage Life* has continued this commitment to its readers.

2.1: *Cottage Life* – Background and History

Cottage Life is part of Quarto Communications Limited, which publishes four magazine titles: *Cottage Life*, *explore*, *Canadian Home Workshop*, and *Outdoor Canada*. *explore* was founded in 1981 and is devoted to active outdoor living in Canada. Edited currently by James Little, the magazine tests products for the outdoors, gives tips on travel destinations and activities, and shares events happening throughout Canada.¹⁵ *Canadian Home Workshop* is edited by Douglas Thomson, and is marketed to readers who enjoy do-it-yourself activities. As stated in the mission, “the magazine provides its readers with a mix of classic and contemporary woodworking projects, including information for beginners that will develop their skills and more advanced techniques to challenge and inspire.”¹⁶ *Outdoor Canada* was recently acquired by Quarto Communications from Transcontinental Media and is primarily a fishing and hunting enthusiast’s magazine. It has been published for more than three decades and is edited by Patrick Walsh.¹⁷ Each of these magazines is geared towards Canadians who enjoy healthy, active lifestyles, and are interested in handcrafted projects.

Quarto Communications has existed since the mid-1980s and was created by president, Al Zikovitz. For the first decade, *Cottage Life* was the only brand found under the Quarto umbrella. This brand included the magazine, the biannual *Cottage Life* show (a consumer convention for cottage enthusiasts), a television show, a radio show, and a book division. All of these endeavours focused on cottages and the original mission of sharing cottage-themed information.¹⁸ In 2000, *explore* was purchased from an independent Canadian publisher and in 2009, *Canadian Home Workshop* and *Outdoor Canada* were purchased from Transcontinental media. Currently, Quarto is working on a fall show that will incorporate each brand entitled, The Great Outdoors and DIY Weekend.¹⁹

15 “About Us,” *explore*, accessed September 25, 2010, <http://explore-mag.com/about/>.

16 “About Us,” *Canadian Home Workshop*, accessed November 23, 2010, http://www.canadianhomeworkshop.com/index.php?ci_id=1580&la_id=1.

17 “About *Outdoor Canada Magazine*,” *Outdoor Canada*, accessed September 25, 2010, <http://articles.outdoor-canada.ca/homepage/default/about-outdoor-canada-magazine-n4560234p1.html>.

18 “Our Story,” *Cottage Life*, accessed September 10, 2010, http://www.cottagelife.com/index.php/ci_id/3982/la_id/1.htm.

19 Michelle Kelly, emailed message to author, September 28, 2010.

2.2: The Staff Structure

Available staff resources – or lack thereof - can greatly shape a publisher’s ability to explore and develop digital content. Thus, this section takes a brief look at *Cottage Life*’s staff, focusing the analysis on how those staff are arranged in the organization’s structure.

Cottage Life magazine has five separate departments all contributing to the magazine: circulation, sales, web, production, and editorial (which includes the art department). As their title suggests, the circulation and sales teams focus on subscription rates and newsstand sales, and selling advertisements and creating partnerships, respectively. They also contribute to the web by following statistics on *Cottage Life*’s digital edition and selling advertisement for various web pages.

The web team is made up of an associate web editor and an assistant web editor, who primarily focus their time on uploading content to the web, developing online-only articles, and writing Dockside (*Cottage Life*’s e-newsletter). The production team and the editorial team work more closely with the actual production of the print magazine. Production is made up of three individuals. Their responsibilities lie in ensuring quality on the final proofs before publication.

The editorial team currently comprises nine positions: editor-in-chief, managing editor, deputy editor, two associate editors, assistant editor, art director, associate art director, and senior designer. The current editor-in-chief, Penny Caldwell, started with the magazine by writing articles the year of its founding and was brought on as an editor in 1991. Since 2000, Caldwell has been the editor-in-chief.²⁰ The managing editor, Michelle Kelly, is responsible for all deadlines and stories, and for coordinating workflow between departments. In the past, Kelly has developed stories for larger features, boating features, and design content.²¹ Martin Zibauer is *Cottage Life*’s deputy editor and is in charge of the development of Cottage Cook (a recipe-sharing section) as well as story development for features and other sections.²² Working with Zibauer on the Puttering section is Liann Bobechko, one of *Cottage Life*’s associate editors. Bobechko focuses primarily on nature and environment stories.²³ Blair Eveleigh is also an associate editor and edits the Waterfront section and Great Inventions. He also develops various stories and columns and works on fact-checking.²⁴ Jackie Davis started with Quarto Communications at *explore* and is now the assistant editor of *Cottage Life*. Outside of story development, copy editing, and fact-checking, Davis writes the Q&A column.²⁵ The art portion of the editorial team hire photographers and illustrators, and design all pages.

20 “Meet Penny Caldwell, editor of *Cottage Life*,” *Cottage Life*, accessed September 25, 2010, http://www.cottagelife.com/index.php?ci_id=3955&la_id=1.

21 From interview with Michelle Kelly conducted on June 1, 2010.

22 Martin Zibauer, emailed message to author, August 24, 2010.

23 From interview with Liann Bobechko conducted on May 20, 2010.

24 From interview with Blair Eveleigh conducted on August 10, 2010.

25 Jackie Davis, emailed message to author, August 2, 2010.

As this overview shows, the *Cottage Life* magazine organization has a myriad of areas of work, from editorial to circulation to production, work that is accomplished by a relatively small number of staff. This helps to demonstrate one of the key challenges for any publication wanting to explore new digital technologies: a lack of human resources in an already often-overstretched staff structure, to say nothing of a potential lack of technical skills in the staff base. While publications may recognize the need for digital exploration, they simply may not be able to find the people within their ranks who have the ability and time to do so. In the case of the recent explorations by *Cottage Life* magazine, as described in chapter 3 below, much of the work was accomplished only because of four months of volunteer service by an intern who was familiar with both the publishing and technological worlds.

2.3: The Magazine

After considering the background and human resources of *Cottage Life*, *Cottage Life*'s flagship product, the magazine, must be studied. The magazine is the foundation for any subsequent digital developments, from use of new hardware technologies (such as a smartphone or tablet) to online-based ones (such as online communities and forums).

As stated earlier, *Cottage Life* considers itself “Canada’s only consumer magazine for waterfront cottage and home owners.”²⁶ *Cottage Life* has an overall readership of 956,000 and the Canadian Circulation Audit Board states 71,318 in paid circulation.²⁷ The magazine’s audience is almost evenly split between male and female readers, with fifty-three per cent men and forty-six per cent women. The majority of readers are between the ages of fifty and sixty-four and have been cottagers for their entire lives.²⁸ As a cottage-focused magazine, *Cottage Life* concerns itself with what people do while at the cottages, and has found that its audience enjoys gardening, photography, woodworking, golf, snowmobiling, fishing, boating, and camping.²⁹ The magazine’s readership is divided between those who own their own cottage, share a family cottage, rent a cottage, and visit cottages of friends. Readers are spread throughout the country, with the majority living in Southern Ontario. Most state that they have been reading the magazine for the past decade.³⁰

Cottage Life is published six times a year, and each issue has a special focus. April focuses on real estate, May on boating, June on a grill guide, Summer on entertaining, October on Autumn, and Winter on the annual reader photo contest.³¹ Each month a different cottage scene is found on the cover, ranging from outside shots of cottages to people enjoying cottage activities. The front of book area of

26 “*Cottage Life* Media Kit 2010,” Quarto Communications, (2010).

27 Ibid.

28 28 “2010 *Cottage Life* Reader’s Survey,” *Cottage Life*, (2010).

29 “*Cottage Life* Media Kit 2010,” Quarto Communications, (2010).

30 “2010 *Cottage Life* Reader’s Survey,” *Cottage Life*, (2010).

31 “Editorial Calendar 2010,” *Cottage Life*, (2010).

the magazine, called Waterfront, includes many short articles offering personal experiences, interesting facts, and cottage stories. The section opener is often “My Favourite,” where each month writers discuss their favourite things about their cottages. The section is full of shorter stories covering news from different areas of cottage country to cottagers with something special to share – including their collections, clubs, and other activities that they undertake while at the cottage. Tips are often given to cottagers in this section as well as brief history lessons about certain cottage traditions, such as “An Electrified Ride” which ran in the October 2010 issue and told readers about the history of the country trolley that once took cottagers north.³² Waterfront is followed by Q&A, a section where cottagers can send in their cottage questions and concerns. Every month about five questions are published and responses are provided by experts. Question topics range from health and safety topics to land ownership issues. In each issue, Cottage Cook shares recipes for the average cottager. The Puttering section deals with the do-it-yourself cottager: each issue includes a project, which can either be a day project, a weekend project, or a longer project that the majority of cottagers can complete regardless of skill. Personal stories are also shared by readers who have invented something useful (Great Inventions) for cottage use.

As this review illustrates, the features found in *Cottage Life* are very diverse, serving a wide range of interests. Each issue usually features a cottage story which can be about a family cottage, a renovation, purchasing trouble, or simply a beautifully designed space. There are also features dealing with cottage sports, activities that can be done at the cottage, and any other topics that would interest a cottager and requires in-depth analysis (such as the disappearance of marinas – “Our Marina Crisis” – found in the May 2010 issue).³³ *Cottage Life* closes with Nature Scrapbook and Weekender. Each issue, Nature Scrapbook looks at a different species, animal or otherwise, and shares facts about it with readers. Weekender, on the last page of the magazine, is a place where readers’ photos are shared. Usually, these photos reflect a timely theme to close the magazine.

Looking at the economic aspects of the print edition, the magazine is 42 per cent ads with everything from cars to beauty products advertised.³⁴ For a one-time full-page ad, *Cottage Life* charges \$11,475. From there the prices fall to \$9,060 for two-thirds of a page, \$7,750 for half a page, and \$6,045 for a third of a page.³⁵ Cottage Showcase, Cottage Classified, and Cottage Properties are added to the mix of advertisements placed in the magazine. All of these sections are found at the back of the magazine, prior to Nature Scrapbook and Weekender. Cottage Showcase is a collection of advertisements which include exterminators, investment planning, landscaping, cottage renovators, and much more. Space in the Cottage Showcase is

32 Peter D.A. Warwick, “An Electrified Ride,” *Cottage Life* (2010): 27.

33 Kate Barker, “Our Marina Crisis,” *Cottage Life*, accessed September 27, 2010, http://www.cottagelife.com/index.php?ci_id=36500&la_id=1.

34 Number based on count of advertisements found in the October 2010 issue of *Cottage Life*.

35 “2010 National Advertising Rates,” *Cottage Life*, 2010.

sold for between \$930 and \$2,250 depending on size.³⁶ Cottage Classified is much like the classified section in other publications; ads are text only and sell everything from contracting services to furniture. Advertisements in Classifieds range from \$125 to \$400 depending on word count and size.³⁷ Cottage Properties is a newer edition to *Cottage Life* and is a collection of advertisements for realtors and cottage rentals. These advertisements are sold for \$195 to \$615 depending on size, and an advertiser can gain a full year's worth of exposure online for \$384.³⁸

Cottage Life is based in two offices in Toronto, Ontario. One houses editorial, production, circulation, web, accounting, merchandise, and administrative staff, and the other houses the sales and show teams. Content for the magazine is produced by many different people, including staff members. Writers, photographers, and illustrators are hired on a freelance basis but the magazine has many contributors whom they work with on a recurring basis.

2.4: Cottage Life – The Magazine's Brand

Early on, *Cottage Life* branched out into areas outside of the print magazine. Zikovitz believed that there were other avenues to reach cottagers so he created the now defunct *Cottage Life* television, *Cottage Life* merchandise, and *Cottage Life* Books.³⁹ *Cottage Life* merchandise includes clothing, games, and other gifts. Items are all marked with the *Cottage Life* logo and are cottage themed. Building plans can also be purchased from the *Cottage Life* store, which includes plans for bunkies, outhouses, and picnic tables.⁴⁰ *Cottage Life* Books includes *The Cottage Ownership Guide*, *Best Summer Weekends Cookbook*, *More Best Summer Weekends Cookbook* and *Country and Cottage Water Systems*. Many other titles, from writers who have contributed many times to the magazine, are also sold. Like the magazine, the books featured have a strong focus on the cottage and information needed for a successful cottage experience.⁴¹

In 1994, the *Cottage Life* Spring Show began. The show functions much like an exposition with different retailers and speakers coming to share their knowledge and sell their wares. The spring show brings in an average of 30,000 cottagers over the three-day event, and over 475 exhibitors display their products. The fall show was added ten years later to meet the growing need of winter cottagers.⁴²

36 "2010 Showcase Advertising Rates and Dates," *Cottage Life*, 2010.

37 "Cottage Life Classifieds," *Cottage Life*, 2010.

38 "Cottage Life Properties," *Cottage Life*, 2010.

39 "Our Story," *Cottage Life*, accessed September 10, 2010, http://www.cottagelife.com/index.php/ci_id/3982/la_id/1.htm.

40 "Cottage Life Store," *Cottage Life*, accessed September 10, 2010, http://store.cottagelife.com/index.cfm?ci_id=3283.

41 "Books," *Cottage Life*, accessed September 10, 2010, http://store.cottagelife.com/index.cfm?ci_id=3318&CategoryID=3227.

42 "Shows," *Cottage Life*, accessed September 10, 2010, http://www.cottagelife.com/index.php/ci_id/3959/la_id/1.

The Green Cottager Awards, now the *Cottage Life* Environment Grant, began in 2006 and is given to groups and individuals with “projects that will preserve and enhance the environment of cottage country.”⁴³ The grant is worth \$5,000 annually and is applied for by providing *Cottage Life* with information about the project itself, the required budget, the timeline for the project, and a planned way to measure success.⁴⁴ Since its inception, the *Cottage Life* Environment Grant has awarded cottager, and cottager group, projects ranging from building outhouses to land and water preservation. Applicants are judged based on an evaluation rubric and strong applications “involve many cottagers at the grassroots level, have the ability to inspire other cottagers or groups to do something similar, will begin to have a direct beneficial impact on the environment within two years, and will have a lasting impact.”⁴⁵

Each of these initiatives outside of the print magazine demonstrates an understanding of the idea of being in all spaces. *Cottage Life*’s publisher realized in the late 1980s that cottagers would have needs outside of what the magazine could offer. He attempted to remedy this by bringing more information and opportunities to the reader in a variety of venues.

2.5: Online Overview

As a magazine for cottagers, *Cottage Life* is presented with a unique problem when it comes to the web: in many cases, Ontario cottages are “tech-free,” meaning that an internet connection may not be available.⁴⁶ Regardless of this fact, cottagelife.com pulls in over 50,000 unique visitors each month.⁴⁷ Most visitors to the site reside in Canada but traffic is drawn from the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, Germany, South Africa, New Zealand, France, the Netherlands, Ireland, and other countries. Visitors come from a variety of browsers including Internet Explorer, Firefox, Safari, and Chrome, and thirty-three per cent of traffic is direct. Mobile devices such as Blackberry, iPhone, and iPad are used to view the site, demonstrating that the *Cottage Life* reader is able to access the site while on the move. Each user views on average 3.65 pages and remains on the site for over three minutes.⁴⁸

2.5.1: Cottage Life Website

The homepage of cottagelife.com highlights “The Latest From *Cottage Life*,” which includes text pulled from the print magazine as well as copy created specifically for the web. There is also a sidebar on this page that pulls news from cottage country

43 “The *Cottage Life* Environmental Grant,” *Cottage Life*, accessed September 10, 2010, http://www.cottagelife.com/index.php?ci_id=7266&la_id=1.

44 Ibid.

45 Liann Bobechko, emailed message to author, October 5, 2010.

46 Shel Zolkewich, “iLove Story,” *Cottage Life*, October, 2010, 25.

47 “2010 Web Advertising,” *Cottage Life*, 2010.

48 Information from Google Analytics, accessed August 24, 2010.

and links to regional newspapers. The navigation bar includes ten different tabs: Magazine, Rentals, Articles, Products and Services, Shows, My Lake, Community, Contests, and Subscribe. The Magazine section of the website includes contact information and general information about *Cottage Life* itself. There is also a digital edition, powered by Turn It, which is offered as an added bonus to a subscription to the print magazine. *Cottage Life* has marketed the digital edition as a supplement to print, stating that many of their readers leave copies of the magazine at the cottage and would therefore benefit from having access to forgotten copies once they return home. They also tout the fact that the digital editions allow for articles in back issues to be found quickly and if subscribers live somewhere remote, or internationally, they can receive the newest edition digitally faster and before the print edition arrives.⁴⁹ Individual articles can also be found under the Articles tab and can be searched for by topic.

2.5.2: Cottage Life Online Communities

Cottage Life has developed many online resources that allow their readers and customers to participate in community-oriented activities. While each features their own specific web space, they are tied in to the *Cottage Life* brand and focus on community.

Rentals takes web users to an outside site: cottagelifere rentals.com. Here cottagers can list their own cottage, for an annual fee, or can search for properties. *Cottage Life* Rentals are advertisement for these properties and *Cottage Life* does not get involved financially but promotes the site in the same manner that they promote their magazine to potential advertisers. *Cottage Life* does, however, instruct listers with tips on how to post a successful listing and what kinds of information renters will want to know. The rental guide acts as an extra service provided by a magazine that many of its readers trust, although they do not take any responsibility for renters or listers. Those who enjoy the cottage life but may not be able to afford a cottage of their own are given the opportunity to find a place they can rent short term and *Cottage Life* is able to reach potential readers and gain more traffic to their site. Products and Services includes classifieds advertisements for everything from boats to contractors whereas the Store tab takes site visitors to the *Cottage Life* store where they can purchase games, books, clothing, building plans, and other items with the *Cottage Life* logo. All the information about the *Cottage Life* Spring and Fall shows are found under the heading “Show.” Details about dates and exhibitors are found here with more information added as show dates get closer. November 2010 will be the first time that *Cottage Life*, *explore*, *Outdoor Canada*, and *Canadian Home Workshop* have partnered for the annual fall show.

⁴⁹ “*Cottage Life* Introduces Our New Digital Edition,” *Cottage Life*, accessed September 25, 2010, http://www.cottagelife.com/index.php?ci_id=5766&la_id=1.

My Lake is a community project that *Cottage Life* created so that cottagers in one area could stay connected while they are at, or away, from their cottages. The page states:

“Nobody knows their cottage community better than the people who love to spend time there. We welcome the inclusion of lakes from across Canada and the United States (and the world!), so long as the primary focus stays on recreational waterfront properties.”⁵⁰

My Lake allows users to upload photos, news stories, events, and anything else they think their neighbours may be interested in. Again, by creating this page on their site, *Cottage Life* has moved one step closer to being the main source of cottage information for Canadian cottagers.

Under Community, *Cottage Life* has compiled different resources so that its readers can stay connected to the magazine as well as discuss their own cottage experiences. The Cottage Country Calendar compiles event listings by month in different parts of Ontario. *Cottage Life* has also created forums in this section of their website where they allow readers to discuss any cottage issues they may have. They have divided the forums into several different categories with headings like News, Announcements and Help; The *Cottage Life* Community; Food and Entertaining; Nature and Environment; Renovation and Building; Cottage Maintenance and Repair; Cottage Style; Cottage Issues, Ideas, and General Discussion; Boating; and Cottage to Cottage Buy and Sell Forum. In each of these areas, readers share their own knowledge and ask their own questions, generating a deeper conversation than that which could be had solely with a print magazine. Community is where one can find the social media initiatives that *Cottage Life* has taken on over the past few years and links to the *Cottage Life* blogs.

2.5.3: *Cottage Life's* Social Media

Social media presents some of the most recent, but incredibly important, developments of online platforms. Blogs first rose in popularity in the late 1990s, Facebook started in 2004, and Twitter began its rapid rise to popularity in 2008. Publishers and other businesses alike have strived to keep up with these new online developments. *Cottage Life's* has thus far focused on three social media endeavours: blogs, Twitter, and Facebook.

Cottage Life's four blogs are Penny's Blog, Cottage Style, The Feast, and Cottage Kids. Penny's Blog is posted to by the editor-in-chief, Penny Caldwell, and is full of information about what is happening at the magazine, events going on throughout Ontario, and issues that are of particular interest to cottagers. Stories that other editors and *Cottage Life* staff bring to Caldwell are also placed on her blog.

⁵⁰ “Frequently Asked Questions,” *Cottage Life*, accessed September 25, 2010, http://mylake.cottagelife.com/index.cfm?ci_id=3885&la_id=1.

Cottage Style focuses on decor and design for cottagers. The blog's content comprises both news items from other design sites, and creations of managing editor Kelly (also the blog's author).⁵¹ Kelly posts to her blog on average three times a week and gets around 100 unique visitors per day. She has noticed that the more often she posts the more hits she receives and when she does not post often, visit numbers drop. Her readers are more interested in do-it-yourself projects and anything that seems more antique than modern. Kelly gathers information about her blog from Google Analytics and through the comments made on each posts.

Zibauer heads The Feast where recipes, cookbooks, and fun cooking experiments are shared with readers. The Feast is posted to between three and five times a week and entries are titled with search engine optimization in mind. Zibauer aims to post titles that match what he would search if he were a reader navigating his blog.⁵² He has also found that posts that are marketed with "How to" in the title or are connected to a holiday get more hits.

Cottage Kids is the newest blog to cottagelife.com and is written by associate editor Bobechko. It is geared toward families and "shares tales from the lake, ideas for games and activities, and other stuff that's fun for families to explore at the cottage."⁵³ Since beginning the blog, Bobechko has noticed that posts with useful links garner the most hits and that posting more often gets more hits. Each blog is geared toward a different audience of cottager.

While *Cottage Life* bloggers measure certain rudimentary statistics as described above (e.g. comments and Google Analytics information), there is room for a much greater analysis of their efforts. Each blogger should begin to focus more on measuring the traffic that comes in to their respective blogs, first making sure that they acquire good data through traffic-tracking technologies, and then providing a careful analysis of trends arising from that data. What makes an article more popular than others: length, content, author, timing of post, etc? Furthermore, it would be of benefit to *Cottage Life* to calculate a return on investment for these initiatives. It might be fun and interesting for the authors to write blogs, but do the hours they spend result in a significant increase in traffic, readership, or advertising for the publication? If not, are those staff hours perhaps better spent on other tasks that might increase those areas more significantly?

On their "Follow *Cottage Life* on Twitter" page, a detailed explanation of Twitter is provided. *Cottage Life* then explains to its readers why they may be interested in having a Twitter account, using cottage highway traffic news and updates as an example. The *Cottage Life* Twitter primarily links to stories found on cottagelife.com or one of the four blogs but also shares stories from different sources about events

51 Michelle Kelly, emailed message to author, September 25, 2010.

52 Martin Zibauer, emailed message to author, August 24, 2010.

53 Liann Bobechko, emailed message to author, August 30, 2010.

in cottage country. There are currently 1,305 followers of this Twitter account.⁵⁴ Three *Cottage Life* blogs, Penny's Blog, Cottage Style, and The Feast, each have their own Twitter account. Penny's Blog has 524 followers and her tweets focus on everything from her trips to her own cottage to tips that readers have sent to her.⁵⁵ Cottage Style has twenty followers but has only been tweeting for a short time.⁵⁶ The tweets from this account link to the blog itself as well as the other *Cottage Life* blogs. The Feast has ninety-eight followers and links to many different sources that would be of interest to cottage foodies.⁵⁷ When asked if Twitter has been a useful tool for the blogs, Kelly gets ideas from following other design blogs found on Twitter, stating that "it's a great way to pick up on design/decor-related news in the wider press."⁵⁸ Zibauer does not know if Twitter has increased traffic to his blog, although he pointed to a message that he posted that was re-tweeted by Pee Wee Herman; page views on The Feast "skyrocketed" after this re-Tweet. Zibauer also noticed that Facebook has been more useful for generating traffic to The Feast through the links posted there.⁵⁹ From the website, *Cottage Life* links directly to their Facebook page, where readers can "like" said page and follow links that will take them to interesting stories found on both cottagelife.com and other cottage relevant sites. As of October 1, 2010, 1,904 people liked the *Cottage Life* Facebook page.⁶⁰

54 "@CottageLifeMag," *Cottage Life*, accessed October 1, 2010, <http://twitter.com/#!/CottageLifeMag>.

55 "@PennyCaldwell," *Cottage Life*, accessed October 1, 2010, <http://twitter.com/#!/PennyCaldwell>.

56 "@CotLifeStyle," *Cottage Life*, accessed October 1, 2010, <http://twitter.com/#!/CotLifeStyle>.

57 "@martinzibauer," *Cottage Life*, accessed October 1, 2010, <http://twitter.com/#!/martinzibauer>.

58 Michelle Kelly, emailed message to author, September 25, 2010.

59 Martin Zibauer, emailed message to author, August 24, 2010.

60 "*Cottage Life* Facebook page," *Cottage Life*, accessed October 1, 2010, <http://www.facebook.com/#!/cottagelife>.

3: THREE WEB PROJECTS

Between May 17 and August 31, 2010, *Cottage Life* explored and dealt with three specific digital initiatives. Delving into the digital developments in the publishing world, three distinct digital projects were looked at ranging from writing for the web to developing and launching a summer book club blog to editing copy for an iPad application.

3.1: Writing for the Web

It can be argued that writing for the web has existed since the web's first days. However, with the rise and proliferation of the web, it has become increasingly important for content producers to refine web communication. In the context of the publishing world, improvements in web writing help online content to be better found, accessed, and consumed by both current and potential readers. Thus, it is entirely appropriate that the first internship responsibility was not only to write for the web, but to participate in an increasingly common aspect of digital media: writing complementary web content for a story that was to appear in the print edition (in this case, *Cottage Life's* Summer 2010 issue).

The story that was featured in the magazine focused on cottage rowing trips. The author included interviews with other rowers in the story, and provided a good overview of his enjoyment of the sport. To complement the rowing story, the internship assignment was to write the steps readers would need to take before they could begin rowing themselves. Thus, part of this internship task was to find out where to buy boats, what one would need to look for when buying a recreational rowing hull, the cost, and any other facts that a new amateur rower would need. Through this, we can see that the internship experience was indicative of at least three major activities involved in writing complementary web content: building on the content of the written story, engaging readers in personally becoming involved, and carrying out a substantial amount of research.

The additional content was broken down into four separate sections: deciding what type of boat to buy, considering building a boat, choosing oars, and general water safety. The section on deciding what type of boat to buy was further broken down into three sub-categories: buying new, buying used, or home-building. Specifically, when buying a new boat there are many manufacturers that offer recreational hulls, and purchasers need to consider the costs involved and the reasons to choose a new boat. When discussing used boats, the article focused on what to look for, as small imperfections can cause major problems. The articles then discussed the overall costs involved and listed specific online sellers. As we can see here, it was important to break down web content into sections that were easily digested by readers, as this helped to retain the often-fleeting attention spans of online viewers.

The additional content also drew on an aspect of web writing that is advantageous for any organization: in this case, *Cottage Life's* own market research, specifically information about its readership. Thanks to such research, *Cottage Life* knows that

its readers tend to enjoy cottage projects and many enjoy building different items while away. For this reason, the web content included information on building one's own recreational hull. Two companies who sold building kits and explained the cost that would be involved in this type of project were discussed. The article also explained what items may not be included in a home building kit, such as the rig, oar locks, and oars. Primarily, though, the building process, rather than the end result, was the focus of the story.

The complementary web content also helped to build, again based on a foundation of market research and knowledge of customer base, on *Cottage Life's* brand. *Cottage Life* has a strong commitment to teaching proper water safety techniques to its readers. The personnel involved want to guarantee that photos show boaters in lifejackets and personal flotation devices, and that water safety is stressed whenever required. Since the piece was for newcomers to the sport, an image was chosen that would be familiar to most readers – the Summer Olympic rower. Assuming that many readers would have seen footage of an Olympian rowing without a lifejacket, *Cottage Life* was required to point out that under Canadian law competing rowers are permitted to row without safety equipment simply because a safety vessel is close by should something go wrong. Utilizing the technical resources of the web to highlight this, the online content also linked to Canadian government guidelines for boating safety so that readers could find out in detail what they would need to remain safe on the water. Names of local rowing clubs were also given, so that those interested in rowing could take lessons and learn rowing safety.

In review, writing for the web provided a number of valuable insights into publishing's expansion of the digital world. It encompassed providing additional content, drawing readership into conversations, and carrying out significant research. Content needed to be divided into easily understood pieces, and needed to be focused by building on careful market research and understanding of readership. Special care needed to be taken to adhere to the brand, and digital tools were used where possible to help accentuate that brand.

3.2: The Summer Book Club

In early June 2010, the editor-in-chief stated her interest in creating a summer book club for *Cottage Life* readers. As with web content (discussed in section 3.1, above), *Cottage Life* drew on thorough market research for this new endeavour. Throughout the current editor's time at the magazine, it became apparent that reading is a favourite pass-time of many cottagers. They are constantly searching for book recommendations for their summer excursions. To this end, each issue of the magazine lists a few books in a column entitled Shelf Life, in the Waterfront section of the print magazine. Although this column offers readers suggestions for cottage reading material, the editor-in-chief wanted a more lengthy discussion of a particular title, one where readers would have the chance to read the novel and share their thoughts afterwards. This example helps to identify the first two steps in the creation of a new online section: have an identified, market-driven need, and have a good fit between

the desired format of the new content and the tools that an online suite can offer (in this case, facilitating discussion among readers).

Once these first two steps were taken, the next steps were more practically focused. The next step taken involved competitive and environmental research: look at established book clubs to see what books they chose and how they got readers talking about a book, and to find general inspiration for tools and methods. The three clubs focused on were Oprah's book club, CBC books, and Penguin's book club. Oprah's book club was chosen for analysis due to its leading status among book clubs: it is well known amongst the general population, and has a solid track record of success, having operated since 1996.⁶¹ Oprah publishes a monthly magazine entitled *O* and in the July 2010 issue, there was a feature for the book club where different titles were selected for a summer reading list. Both print and online features of Oprah's book club were studied to determine what was done to create buzz about a selected book and how the club was made interactive. The Oprah book club offers questions for reading groups, character guides, interviews with authors, and many other perks for book lovers.

The next example was chosen for its national Canadian focus, bringing it closer in scope to that of *Cottage Life*. CBC books was used for inspiration here because each year it hosts Canada Reads, a competition in which Canadian celebrities choose a Canadian-authored novel and defend their selection against others. This competition relies on the Canadian public's involvement – without their interest the contest would not exist. For the *Cottage Life* Summer Book Club, the organization wanted to engage readers in a similar fashion to that of CBC's books Canada Reads program. The book club, found at cbc.ca/books, also includes contests and live chats. The live chats were of particular interest as Caldwell, as *Cottage Life*'s editor-in-chief, wanted to converse with readers about the books *Cottage Life* selected and have an open dialogue about each title.⁶² The final publisher selected for book club analysis was Penguin, whose club not only selects titles from their own catalogue, but also offers many perks for those looking to participate in a book club. Penguin selects a book, offers up possible discussion questions, and gives details about the authors' intentions and thoughts behind the novel.⁶³ In addition to these three main examples, a number of book blogs were also studied to determine how an online-only club could be run successfully.

Once book clubs had been researched and analysis had been carried out, planning could begin for the *Cottage Life* Summer Book Club blog. All of *Cottage Life*'s blogs run via WordPress and were redesigned in the summer of 2010 by staff members Zibauer and Kim Zagar, Art Director. Knowing this, the technical specification

61 "Oprah's Book Club," Oprah, accessed October 5, 2010, <http://www.oprah.com/packages/oprahs-book-club-selections.html>.

62 "CBC books," CBC, accessed October 5, 2010, <http://www.cbc.ca/books/>.

63 "Penguin Book Club," Penguin Group, accessed October 5, 2010, <http://www.penguin.ca/static/cs/cn/0/book-club/home.html>.

needed to be respected: the blog needed to be developed to run successfully on a WordPress format. Four questions needed to be answered before *Cottage Life* could establish the book club: Who would be selecting titles? How would the publication generate and keep traffic? How would discussion be led and moderated? And finally, what would happen at the end of the summer?

Part of the internship involved answering these questions and presenting them to members of the *Cottage Life* editorial and web teams. When selecting a title it was suggested that the blog run on a bi-weekly schedule, with one book chosen every two weeks. It was decided that in the weeks leading up to the launch of the club, Caldwell would discuss possible title selections on her own blog. This idea was later modified: *Cottage Life* would suggest their own titles rather than taking suggestions from readers, aiming to choose titles that would be of interest to the majority of the readership, which therefore meant choosing books with themes that would appeal to a diverse group.

In the next practical step, *Cottage Life* would first find out what interest level existed among its readers. As a start, Caldwell posted about the club to determine whether or not readers would respond. Social media then came into the equation. Both Facebook and Twitter are used by the publication. Both could also be used to advertise the book club, determining interest level and what types of books *Cottage Life* readers were enjoying at the time. Twitter also led readers to Penny's Blog and Facebook, where the club was being promoted.

During the club's planning meeting, suggestions were made for the blog itself and how it could maintain traffic. First, it was proposed that readers review books that they themselves had previously read. This would make it possible for visitors to interact with the site right off the bat. It would also enable other site viewers to comment on the recommendations and, in turn, make their own. To keep traffic up, it would be important to bring readers something they had not received before in a book club: choosing books and discussing them in a way that would bring insight into the titles, and posting questions and recapping novels from a cottager's perspective once they were finished.

Live chats and daily updates were also planned to help engage readers in this new online community. The live chats would occur every two weeks – every time a title was finished – and would involve asking questions of the readers and sharing thoughts on each novel. Daily updates would prove to be much easier, allowing the *Cottage Life* intern to ask any question she thought of while reading and responding to any book-related questions that readers had. Deciding what to do at the end of the summer was also easy. *Cottage Life* could realistically do two things: close the blog the week before Labour Day (typically the end of summer for much of the *Cottage Life* demographic) or continue the club throughout the year. It was agreed that closing the blog at the end of prime cottage season would work best, as many readers leave the cottage at the end of August and would no longer have time to read two novels each month while continuing to interact with the blog. After an end-of-

summer analysis, *Cottage Life* could post information online about whether or not the club would return the following year, based on the overall success of the club.

As with many new online developments, the process moved quickly to the next stage. Selecting titles began immediately. The web editor posted a query to *Cottage Life*'s Facebook fans and requested book suggestions from *Cottage Life* readers. A request was also sent to *Cottage Life* staff to find out what they had been reading, and what they thought would work well for the club. Reviews found both online and in other magazines were also consulted and award nominees were looked at to make choices. During the selection process, Random House approached the sales and marketing department at *Cottage Life* and suggested that they provide *Cottage Life*'s club with prizes. Random House had previously worked with the magazine and suggested giving the blog five books a week to give away to readers. With Random House as a partner, some of their titles were included in the *Cottage Life* club's mix. Within a week, the project's lead (i.e. the intern) presented Caldwell with a list that the *Cottage Life* reader would be interested in while at the cottage. Four of the titles were approved and Caldwell decided to leave the final title up to a vote, which would occur in late July 2010.

The next stage of the book club showed another key aspect necessary to online development: responsiveness to readers' concerns and desires. Each title was quite different from the others and selected for a different purpose. The first book on the list was *Outlander* by Diana Gabaldon, a historical drama that follows a woman named Claire from the 1940s back to eighteenth-century Scotland.⁶⁴ *Cottage Life* chose this book for many reasons but primarily because of the response from the *Cottage Life* readers that came through Facebook page and on Penny's Blog. Many respondents stated that they were planning to read the entire *Outlander* series at their cottage and many had already read the series. Because of this response, and the fact that the *Outlander* books had first been published in the early 1990s and were quite popular, beginning with the first in the series would bring those who had already read the book and loved it to the blog.⁶⁵ They would be familiar with the title, thus creating a comfortable space, and would be able to begin commenting immediately. The third novel, *The Girl With the Dragon Tattoo* by Steig Larsson, was chosen for a similar reason. When asked what book readers would like to see on our list, many responded with *The Millennium Series* (to which this book belonged), a series of crime novels set in Sweden.⁶⁶ The series had been getting considerable press throughout the summer due to film adaptations of its titles, and it had a high position on the bestseller list. Therefore, choosing it was simple.⁶⁷

64 "Outlander," Random House Canada, accessed October 5, 2010, <http://www.randomhouse.ca/catalog/display.pperl?isbn=9780770428792&view=excerpt>.

65 "Cottage Life Facebook page," *Cottage Life*, accessed October 1, 2010, <http://www.facebook.com/#!/cottage.life>.

66 "Cottage Life Facebook page," *Cottage Life*, accessed October 1, 2010, <http://www.facebook.com/#!/cottage.life>.

67 Ellen Vanstone, "The Summer of Steig," *The Globe and Mail*, July 20, 2010, <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/the-summer-of-stieg-larsson/article1657742/>.

The second book chosen presented an interesting example of how to get buy-in from organizational staff for a new online tool. Again, this method of engagement focused on providing opportunities for individual participation. That book was *Come, Thou Tortoise* by Jessica Grant, chosen on the recommendation of several *Cottage Life* employees. The book is a “A delightfully offbeat story that features an opinionated tortoise and an IQ-challenged narrator who find themselves in the middle of a life-changing mystery.”⁶⁸ The fourth novel was selected with a similar perspective in mind. The award-winning *The Slap* by Christos Tsiolkas was chosen based on recommendations from book lovers that *Cottage Life* staff knew personally, thus also helping to engage organizational staff in the project. The title had also won the Commonwealth Writer’s Prize Best Book in 2009.⁶⁹ With the final list, the blog had a good mix of genres – historical fiction, comedy, mystery, and social commentary – and authors – American, Canadian, Swedish, and Australian. It appeared as though *Cottage Life* had made selections where at least one title would appeal to any *Cottage Life* reader or book lover.

Selecting the final book returned *Cottage Life* to the principle of engaging the public in a new development. A poll was posted on the main page of the blog and titles were selected through reader comments and *Cottage Life* staff suggestions. A list of candidates consisted of six novels including *King Leary* by Paul Quarrington, *The Help* by Kathryn Stockett, *Oryx and Crake* by Margaret Atwood, *Parrot and Olivier in America* by Peter Carey, *Light in August* by William Faulkner, and *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee. The poll was placed on the main page for a week, including Saturday and Sunday. There was a tie between *King Leary* and *The Help*, and as a Canadian publication *Cottage Life* selected the novel written by a Canadian.

Once titles had been selected the technical aspects of the user interface were considered. *Cottage Life* began to map the blog for ease of navigation online. Five navigation buttons were created: Home, Our Reading List, Reader Reviews, About the Club, and Contact Emma. Our Reading List was created so that readers could easily find relevant content, as the section featured each of the books with a short blurb about its content and links to its own individual page. Once readers went to individual book pages they were able to comment on different sections of the book to help ensure that spoilers were well hidden. This section also focused on the economic side of an online tool; in this case it also linked to the websites of each book’s publishers, so that readers could purchase directly from them. Under Reader Reviews a space was featured where readers could write about any book that they were reading and thereby keep active in the blog even if they were not interested in the novel that was assigned. About the Club and Contact Emma were created so that readers would be able to put a face to the person running the club, and *Cottage Life* would be able to greet newcomers to the club. A Twitter account, @CottageBook,

68 “*Come, Thou Tortoise*,” Random House Canada, accessed October 5, 2010, http://www.randomhouse.ca/catalog/results.pperl?searchBtn1.x=0&searchBtn1.y=0&title_subtitle_auth_isbn=Come+Thou+Tortoise.

69 “Past Winners,” Commonwealth Foundation, accessed October 20, 2010, <http://www.commonwealthfoundation.com/Howwedeliver/Prizes/CommonwealthWritersPrize/Pastwinners>.

was also created, where information about the club was shared, books were commented upon, and news from the publishing world was given to followers.

Next, more specific operational plans were developed. During the early stages of planning, *Cottage Life* mapped out a weekly plan for blog posts. Every Monday and Tuesday *Cottage Life* posted information about the novels being read and the magazine's opinions of the books, and posed questions to the readers. Monday was also chosen as the date for live chats as it allowed readers to have two cottage weekends to read each novel. Wednesdays became Winning Wednesdays where questions would be posed to online participants, sometimes about the book being read and other times about the reader's own book tastes and reading behaviours. On Winning Wednesdays the first five people to comment on a post would receive a copy of a book courtesy of Random House, again showing how to leverage partnerships in the development of a new online tool. Random House gave *Cottage Life* ten different titles, one for each week of the club, ranging from short stories to award-winning novels. Each Thursday, the blog provided a list of five books that fit a theme including great series, Canadiana, and books adapted to film. For the Thursday Recommendation series, other *Cottage Life* bloggers were asked to provide the book club with their recommendations for books that fit their blog theme; Caldwell chose books about the cottage, Zibauer chose books that featured food, and Bobechko chose books for families. Fridays became a day for a weekly wrap-up, as well as a push to get site visitors to keep reading over the weekend.

Once the Book Club had been established, a crucial core area of any online tool was focused on: measurements of success were needed. *Cottage Life* chose to look to the comments received and make use of Google Analytics for the blog. As stated above, the first book that was chosen for the club was *Outlander* by Diana Gabaldon. This title is the first in a well-known series that consists of seven books thus far, as well as a spin-off series.⁷⁰ The book itself was selected based on comments from *Cottage Life* readers prior to the establishment of the club. Many had said that they had planned to read the entire series over the summer while others commented on how much they had enjoyed these books when they had first read them. *Cottage Life* believed that this would be a good novel to choose to get readers interested immediately. In the first weeks, there was lots of response from people who had read the books before and were excited to be reading them again. The live chat for *Outlander* received the highest number of participants and created many conversations that continued later on the blog. In the coming weeks, there was an average of two comments a day with most comments being made about *Outlander*, *The Girl With the Dragon Tattoo*, and Winning Wednesday queries that focused on reading at the cottage.⁷¹ It became clear that *Cottage Life* readers were interested in reading the titles that were popular in the news and had been, or could be, found on the bestseller lists. This made it difficult to get readers interested in *Come, Thou Tortoise*

⁷⁰ "Diana Gabaldon and the *Outlander* novels," Diana Gabaldon, accessed October 5, 2010, <http://dianagabaldon.com/>.

⁷¹ Information from Google Analytics, accessed August 24, 2010.

and *The Slap*. With *Come, Thou Tortoise, Cottage Life* was able to draw traffic to the blog by commenting on the fact that the writer was Canadian and the story took place in Canada. Reviews were also posted from reputable newspapers that stated “*Come, Thou Tortoise* had me from Word One”⁷² and that it had “poignant insight and a captivating plot.”⁷³ *The Slap* was one of the last books read by the club and in the days before we began reading it, it was put on the longlist for the Man Booker Prize for Fiction.⁷⁴ This award nomination made it easier to get readers curious about the novel.

Throughout the ten weeks that the *Cottage Life* Summer Book Club ran, Google Analytics were checked each week to see how the club was faring in comparison with cottagelife.com. On August 24, 2010, averages for the blog were calculated. It was found that on average the blog received 36 visitors a day.⁷⁵ More hits came on Wednesdays, which was attributed in large part to Winning Wednesdays. Thursdays and Fridays also saw heightened traffic. On Mondays where a live chat was hosted, there were more hits on the homepage of the blog. Saturdays and Sundays saw a drop in visitors, which may have been because no new content was added on weekends. During one of the final weeks of the blog, new posts were not made. This allowed *Cottage Life* to see that the number of visits each day was affected by the amount of posting that was done; daily posts meant higher traffic. Readers tended to visit the site for an average of 3.27 minutes but those who came for specific information would spend up to 4.27 minutes on each individual page. At the end of the ten weeks over 4,000 unique visitors had viewed the book club blog.⁷⁶ With Google Analytics, the magazine also studied the ways readers found the book club. The majority of visitors came directly to the club with the rest coming from cottagelife.com, Google, Penny’s Blog, Twitter, and Facebook. When searching for the blog, most readers simply searched “*Cottage Life* book club.” Many others looked for “*Cottage Life* books,” “Cottage chat club,” “*Cottage Life* Book Club Winning Wednesdays,” and “*CottageLife*/bookclubs.”⁷⁷ These keyword searches made it clear that *Cottage Life* readers were drawn in specifically to the new online section rather than visiting the website as a whole, or visiting the main website for some other specific purpose.

If *Cottage Life* were to run the club again, it would be worthwhile to select novels found on the bestseller list, as readers appeared to enjoy these. Also, hosting live chats later in the day would have allowed for those not at the cottage to join in,

72 Diane Baker Mason, “Alice in Newfoundland a Terrific Tea Party,” *The Globe and Mail*, November 16, 2009, <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/arts/books/article1365347.ece>.

73 Jan Dutkiewicz, “*Come, Thou Tortoise*: Book Review,” *Quill and Quire*, March 2009, http://www.quillandquire.com/reviews/review.cfm?review_id=6389.

74 “Man Booker 2010 Longlist,” The Man Booker Prizes, accessed September 25, 2010, <http://www.themanbooker-prize.com/prize/thisyear/longlist>.

75 Information from Google Analytics, accessed August 24, 2010.

76 Ibid.

77 Ibid.

as well as those in provinces outside of Ontario. As with any new development, though, the online club needed to be viewed as an interactive process: the lessons and challenges from one time period (in this case, a season) needed to be integrated into the activities and plans of the next period.

The book club, in general, was a success. Visitors came to the blog and many commented on more than one post. Discussion was generated and readers stated that they enjoyed the club as a whole and that their summer reading list was made better by the book club's suggestions. *Cottage Life* was able to benefit from this book club as they were able to reach readers in a different way and in a different space. Perhaps most importantly, they learned valuable lessons as a publisher developing new online tools: to have a core purpose for the new development that harmonizes with the overall organization; to have a purpose that fits well with the skills offered by online tools; to engage both readers and staff in the adoption of the new tool; and to measure success and adapt accordingly. These same principles came into play again, as *Cottage Life* experimented with another web-based tool: an iPad application.

3.3: The iPad Application: Q&A

In late August 2010, Terry Sellwood, general manager of Quarto Communications, proposed a new project that would make use of a very recent web-based technology. He proposed the creation of an iPad application for *Cottage Life* that used past Q&A content. The principles on new online development outlined just above (3.2: The *Cottage Life* Book Club) were utilized here as well.

As mentioned earlier, *Cottage Life* began because Zikovitz purchased a cottage and had many questions about cottage ownership, care, and life. Moving those core questions on to a new technology that was proliferating rapidly – in this case, the iPad – using the content that was the basis for the *Cottage Life* brand made practical sense. Through this new technology, *Cottage Life* could help to reinforce their brand while attracting new readers, and readers would have a compiled list of Q&As and would have answers literally at their fingertips. The technological creation of the application was outsourced to a company in Toronto, leaving editorial work to be done in house.

Unlike the book club, this online development used a great deal of existing information. Thus, this example highlights the challenges encountered when attempting to integrate previously existing information into a publishing-focused online tool. A number of steps are outlined in this section, which helps to illustrate that, while the implementation of a new online technology might be attractive for a publisher, even tools that use a great deal of existing content can still require considerable staff time to prepare.

Before the application could be created, it needed to be determined how much Q&A text existed. Although *Cottage Life* has been writing the Q&A section since its inception in 1988, the servers only had content dating back to 2005. This information was

gathered in a single manuscript; there were more than 150 questions and responses from the past four years. To update the content, names, places, and prices were to be removed. Quotes were also removed and paraphrased so that contacting the original speaker would not be necessary. Checking the facts found in the responses was of the utmost importance and, therefore, researching the content and contacting specialists was required. Beginning with more than fifty pages of content, whole questions were cut and information that was no longer relevant was removed, which resulted in the creation of a much more manageable amount of text. Major edits then had to be made for radically trimmed questions to be comprehensible. The edited manuscript was passed on to Caldwell, who reviewed all changes and made edits of her own. Once these had been applied, another manuscript was created and divided amongst the *Cottage Life* editorial staff, who copy-edited the text.

Q&A could already be found on the *Cottage Life* website. There, questions had been divided into ten different categories, which included Tree Care, Pets & Kids, Winter Cottaging, and Maintenance & Repair. After reviewing each question, however, new categories for division were created: building, docks, health & safety, pumps & plumbing, to name only a few. The questions were all entered into as many categories as applied for ease of navigation for readers.

Aside from recognizing the sheer amount of work that goes into the development of an online publishing application, another lesson from the *Cottage Life* iPad tool focuses on integrating information technologically. Making the content worth the cost of the application required two things: keywords and links. The questions found on the server had been given several different keywords. Prior to submitting the final copy, this list was expanded. This was primarily because most of the information in the questions and responses had changed, and changes to the keywords needed to be made for accuracy. New keywords were added as well. Most links added led to government web pages that gave more information to certain laws and safety requirements. This was done primarily because laws are subject to change and *Cottage Life's* aim was to keep the Q&A up to date and relevant for as long as possible. Links were also added to give extra details to information found in responses including links to nature preserves and building codes.

The iPad application, compatible with other Apple products, now contains content useful to every cottager. Everything from laws to safety instructions are included in a single downloadable tool. It is easy to navigate and cottagers without internet at their cottages will be able to access the information due to the 3G network within the Apple product itself. By creating this application, *Cottage Life* has stepped into another space where their readers are: mobile and tablet readers. As noted above, *Cottage Life* will still need to carefully track and measure the usefulness of this new tool, just as it will need to continually visit the data it has gathered and amend the application as necessary.

4: CONCLUSIONS

As a niche publication, *Cottage Life* enjoys a dedicated readership, but also faces the pressure of finding an audience which is usually quite small, and offering those people a magazine that they will find both useful and indispensable. It therefore needs to be everywhere that its readers may be found, including everything from print to consumer shows to the web. This paper has focused on the last, as digital technological changes occurring now look only to become more widespread and in use by society, and thus the publishing world will need to constantly adapt to the web's developments and changes.

This report first reviewed developments in the digital world relevant to publishing, notably the web, mobile technology, and tablet devices. With the web, the report looked at the shift from a use that "pushed" information out to readers (albeit enhanced information, as in the case of multimedia platforms), to "Web 2.0," which brought a greater engagement of readership through online communities, discussion forums, and social media. Such developments benefit the reader by helping them get access to extended information about the content or the publication, while getting a chance to interact with other readers on the subject material. The developments also benefit the publication, which can enhance or attract new readership, while at the same time learning a great deal about preferences.

The other two web sections dealt with mobile technologies (such as smartphones) and tablet devices (such as the iPad). These technologies allow readers to access publishing content from a great variety of locations, but also present the challenge of requiring publications to adapt their technological offerings to new platforms. Such requirements can place constraints on publishing houses that already have limited budgets and staff resources.

After reviewing recent digital developments, the report then turned to the specific case study of *Cottage Life* magazine. It looked at a number of areas, including the history and staff resources of the organization, as well as at the print magazine, its brand, and online components. The online components investigated included the website, online communities, and the use of social media.

Each of the core areas of analysis in the *Cottage Life* case study brought different lessons to the surface. The organizational overview highlighted the importance of knowing one's core readership and having complementary, and similarly branded, products. The staff structure was typical for a small Canadian publishing house: relatively few staff resources for a considerable amount of work, with a very small number of those resources dedicated to web developments. Thus, any publishing house will face the challenge of how to find, and fund, the human resources for new web exploration.

Looking at the print magazine and brand, the report noted the importance of knowing and understanding the brand (in *Cottage Life's* case, the brand occupies a relatively small but strongly Canadian niche). The online developments brought

a myriad of lessons, from learning to build on the brand when branching out into digital initiatives, to learning how to best engage readers through blogs and social media.

The final chapter of the paper took an even closer look at the digital developments in the *Cottage Life* case study, focusing on recent explorations driven by a recent internship. Three initiatives were reviewed: writing for the web, development of an online “book club” community, and the creation of an iPad application. The section on writing for the web looked at how regular content from the print edition can still need a considerable amount of work to harmonize it not only with the technological tools, but with the publication’s brand and values as well.

The book club provided an in-depth look at a new online community-based development. Building on brand is important, just as doing a competitive scan to see what leading organizations are doing in a relevant area (in this case, running online components of book clubs). Providing a detailed plan and carefully working with staff to help ensure a carefully organized approach is important, as is developing ways to get buy-in from both readership and the organization’s staff. Also important is gathering data and measurements on the new initiative, and then using those for later review and improvement of the new development.

Finally, the creation of a new tablet-based application showed further lessons of new development, such as how a great deal of previously existing content can hinder as well as help the creation of a new tool. It also showed how publishing houses need to pay close attention to catering content while they approach readers “where they are.”

Overall, this report has provided one in-depth exploration of digital developments, using a strong national Canadian publishing house as a case study. There is still more to learn. Publishing houses of different size, scope, niche, and even location might face different challenges when exploring online developments. Others may have differing levels of organizational stability – *Cottage Life* being a relatively stable organization, financially and product-wise – that may help or hinder their web developments. Much more exploration needs to be completed, though this is a fascinating endeavour and one that is sure to have a continuing impact as the web world continues to grow and take prominence in our society.

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