

PUBLISHING TO INSPIRE:
THE ROLE OF PUBLICATIONS AT
ADVENTURE CYCLING ASSOCIATION

by

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A B S T R A C T

This report, drawing on an internship at *Adventure Cyclist* and other professional experiences in non-profit publishing, explores how non-profits may benefit their membership and actively forward their mission through their publications. *Adventure Cyclist* and its publisher, Adventure Cycling Association, are examined as a case study, and comparison is made with publications from other bike advocacy non-profits in the United States — namely the League of American Bicyclists' *American Bicyclist* and the Bicycle Transportation Alliance's *The Cycletter*. Recommendations are presented for non-profits that wish to use their publications more dynamically in the greater context of their organization.

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

Non-profits have rarely been the subjects of detailed studies, but they are an important part of our economy: in 2002 non-profits represented almost 6 percent of all organizations in the United States, included 7.1 percent of all paid and voluntary employment, and had combined revenues of \$665 billion.¹ Together with business and government, non-profits form a three-legged stool of democratic society, providing personal enrichment to citizens not provided by the other two. Between 2002 and 2004, employment at non-profits grew by 5 percent when private employment grew just 1 percent.² In the years between 2007 and 2010, as the private job sector shrunk in the face of an economic downturn, non-profit employment increased 5 percent.³ According to fundraising expert Kim Klein, the non-profit sector in the United States is the fifth largest in the world and the nation's largest industry, employing about 10 percent of the workforce and generating about 5 percent of the country's gross domestic product. In 2010, over 1.8 million organizations in the United States were listed on the Guidestar website, an online database that collects information about non-profits.⁴

These organizations produce an enormous number of publications in North America. Two types of non-profit publications appear to exist. First, publications that have non-profit status chiefly as a way to finance the organization's publishing activities (*Bitch Magazine*, for example). The second group includes the many more non-profit organizations that offer a publication in order to recruit and retain members by informing and engaging them. This report primarily intends to address these latter organizations.

1 Hines, Todd M. "Researching Specific Non-Profit Organizations: A Selective Bibliography." *Reference Services Review*, Volume 32, Issue 3, 2004, 302.

2 Tolbert, Samuel H., Gail D. Moore, Carol P. Wood. "Not-for-Profit Organizations and For-Profit Businesses: Perceptions and Reality." *Journal of Business and Economics Research*, Volume 8, Number 5, May 2010.

3 Salamon, Lester M., S. Wojciech Sokolowski, and Stephanie L. Geller. "Non-Profits Continue to Add Jobs in the Current Downturn, but Rate of Job Growth Falts: An Overview." *Johns Hopkins Non-Profit Economic Data Project Bulletin No. 377*, Johns Hopkins Center for Civil Society Studies. Accessed January 17, 2012, http://ccss.jhu.edu/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2011/09/NED_Bulletin37_2011.pdf.

4 Klein, Kim. *Fundraising for Social Change, Sixth Edition*. Jossey-Bass, 2011, 8.

One such non-profit, Adventure Cycling Association, offers its magazine *Adventure Cyclist* to over 43,000 members around the globe. In a market with an abundance of general bicycling magazines for consumers to purchase, few bike touring or bike travel publications exist, making *Adventure Cyclist* the top bicycle travel magazine in the United States.⁵ The magazine is unusual among non-profit publications in its approach, and remarkable in its popularity: members consistently rate the magazine as a top reason they belong to the organization. This report will examine the publication of *Adventure Cyclist* and the role the magazine plays in the organization as a whole. Editorial and design choices will be considered, and the role the magazine has in driving the non-profit's mission will be explored. Brief comparison will be made to publications at similar organizations — namely the League of American Bicyclists (Washington, District of Columbia) and a larger regional organization, the Bicycle Transportation Alliance (Portland, Oregon). These three bike advocacy organizations have annual incomes ranging from \$1.5 to \$3.5 million,⁶ making them more comparable than the hundreds of smaller organizations across the United States with far smaller budgets. Recommendations will be made for organizations of any size and budget that may wish to use their publications to drive the mission of their organization.

While a vast majority of non-profits create publications for members, staff members may have only a vague sense of how the organization's publications support their mission or operations. As lean financial times may lead to a non-profit's publishing program to be eliminated or significantly reduced, possibly in favor of digital communications, these often unexamined issues may be instrumental to consider. Examination of these questions in this report will ideally be valuable to non-profits seeking to make their publications a more dynamic piece of their organization's mission.

This report is primarily the product of the author's internship at Adventure Cycling Association from May to August 2011. The internship, which was required coursework for the Master of Publishing program at Simon Fraser University, allowed

⁵ Adventure Cycling Association. "Adventure Cycling Association Fact Sheet, 2011." Accessed January 17, 2012, http://www.adventurecycling.org/ACA_FACT_SHEET.pdf.

⁶ Adventure Cycling Association. "Adventure Cycling Association 990 Form for 2010." Accessed January 10, 2012, <http://www.guidestar.org/FinDocuments//2010/237/427/2010-237427629-073bf575-9.pdf>.

me to examine the inner workings of Adventure Cycling Association, exploring what makes the organization so successful, while also performing tasks to support the print and digital publishing activities of *Adventure Cyclist*. In addition the report is informed by a decade of previous experience with non-profit organizations, including work for the Bicycle Transportation Alliance, discussed in subsequent sections.

A D V E N T U R E C Y C L I S T : A C A S E S T U D Y

About Adventure Cycling Association

Adventure Cycling Association is the largest bicycling non-profit in the United States. Headquartered in Missoula, Montana, the non-profit's goal is to “inspire people of all ages to travel by bicycle...for fun, fitness, and self discovery.”⁷ Unlike many bike advocacy organizations that prioritize their efforts on a national level, including lobbying elected officials to set aside funding for more bicycle infrastructure, Adventure Cycling Association primarily advocates their cause on the personal level, cultivating cyclists to embark on long-distance travel, or touring, by bike. The organization began this advocacy in the early 1970s with a single event that introduced bike touring to a generation of environmentally minded young adults. As with many other non-profits the organization has significantly evolved from the time it began, growing from a full-time staff of just three, to over thirty.

While on an epic bike tour from Alaska to Argentina (the group dubbed their trip Hemistour), two young couples — Dan and Lys Burden, and Greg and June Siple — started dreaming of organizing a massive coast-to-coast bike ride. After *National Geographic* magazine ran an article by the Hemistour participants in their May 1973 issue, the couples leveraged their exposure to start organizing Bikecentennial, a national event that eventually grew to include over 4,000 participants.⁸ These riders were primarily young adults who had never used a bicycle as an adult, or considered undertaking a three-month bike tour over 2,000 miles long. The ride gained momentum as many young people at the time were embracing environmental consciousness in response to the suburban, car-centric culture in which they were raised. As historian David Herlihy has noted:

In the early 1970s, yet another bicycle boom erupted in the United States — but this time adults, not children, were the driving force behind it. And what they wanted were those European-style ten-speed bicycles...During the banner years from 1972 to 1974, Americans purchased a staggering forty million bicycles...When an energy crisis broke out in late 1973, the boom even received an

⁷ Adventure Cycling Association. “Mission and Programs.” Accessed January 9, 2012, <http://adventurecycling.org/whoweare/index.cfm>.

⁸ Adventure Cycling Association. “Our History in Brief.” Accessed January 17, 2012, <http://adventurecycling.org/whoweare/history.cfm>.

unexpected boost. The Arab oil embargo in the wake of the Yom Kippur War sent petroleum prices soaring and caused long lines of cars at the gas pumps, many citizens began to seriously consider using their bicycles for routine errands.⁹

The Bikecentennial founders were products of, and working within, this bicycle boom. They formulated their idea for a massive cross-country ride at a time when the popular culture was receptive. Eventually this led to major funding, increased exposure, and an enormously popular event. Countless non-profits start as the vision of a single person or small group and slowly grow over the course of many years, but not all of these see immediate success which then propels them forward.

After the conclusion of Hemistour the organization's headquarters was established in the small college town of Missoula, Montana, where the Burdens had chosen to purchase a home. Missoula was also a major town along the Bikecentennial route. Eventually this route — from Astoria, Oregon, to Yorktown, Virginia — would be known as Adventure Cycling Association's TransAmerica Trail, the backbone of their entire system of routes. Today, Missoula is the convergence point for many Adventure Cycling Association routes, and the organization welcomes visiting cyclists to their building by offering an assortment of amenities such as free refreshments, building tours, and internet access.

Organization was key to seeing 4,000 young cyclists across the country safely. Scores of volunteers helped to plan and execute the event, either from the Bikecentennial headquarters in Missoula and across the United States. Participants were organized into groups of around a dozen riders, with one leader specifically trained to lead the trip. Groups travelled in both directions across the country. Bikecentennial made pocket-sized guides for trip leaders that served as a training manual and reference for a variety of leadership issues, from managing the finances to handling emergencies. Today, the organization trains its trip leaders just as seriously: Adventure Cycling Association's annual three-day Leadership Training Course is just the first step required for potential tour leaders to be hired by the organization.

Bikecentennial was a runaway success, and even left the fledgling non-profit with extra money after the event was over. In post-Bikecentennial planning meetings, staff decided to develop new trails for bicycle tourists, publish guidebooks and maps, work on developing facilities along the original TransAmerica Trail, and continue

⁹ Herlihy, David V. *Bicycle: The History*. Yale Press, 2004, 363.

leading trips. Looking back on the organization's founding, current Membership Director Julie Huck recently outlined three key decisions that shaped the future of the organization. First, the founders applied for non-profit status from the beginning, legitimizing the Bikecentennial event and creating the ability to accept tax-deductible donations, which eventually included a major gift from bike manufacturer Huffy Bikes. Second, the membership model was created to financially support the organization. This decision, Huck claims, saved the organization in the period immediately after the Bikecentennial event, when the organization was planning events but not yet receiving income for them. It was during the two year period following Bikecentennial that membership dipped to 4600, and the organization struggled to keep operational. Finally, Huck cites the start of *BikeReport* — the newsletter that preceded the organization's magazine *Adventure Cyclist* — as an instrumental decision for the organization in communicating with cyclists regularly.¹⁰ In the two years after the initial Bikecentennial ride the organization encountered some bumps in the road, a phenomenon common to many non-profits. Sound financial planning, including a staff reduction, kept the organization afloat as they began diversifying its sources of income.

As the organization evolved it eventually outgrew the Bikecentennial name. A new generation of touring cyclists started discovering the organization, joining to support the cause rather than any nostalgia they might have for participation in the Bikecentennial ride. The organization changed its name in 1993 to Adventure Cycling Association and adopted an updated mission statement. (The current mission statement was crafted in 2002.) The member newsletter, originally called *BikeReport*, became *Adventure Cyclist* at the beginning of the following year, in tandem with a new direction for the publication.

Today the organization boasts 43,500 members.¹¹ These donors are primarily from the United States, with 3 percent of members living outside the country.¹² Adventure

¹⁰ Huck, Julie. "Forks in the Road," Presentation notes from Adventure Cycling Association Strategic Planning Retreat, July 14, 2011.

¹¹ Adventure Cycling Association. "Adventure Cycling Membership." Accessed January 20, 2012, <http://adventurecycling.org/membership/membership.cfm>.

¹² Adventure Cycling Association. "Adventure Cycling Association Members Percent by State" (Chart), Adventure Cycling Association, 2010.

Cycling Association has now mapped 40,974¹³ miles of official routes in the United States, represented on 92 maps. These maps range from the original TransAmerica Trail to the most recent Underground Railroad Route, which takes cyclists along key historical points in the United States' slavery-era Underground Railroad. The organization is seen as the primary resource for bicycle touring in the United States. If visitor traffic to Adventure Cycling Association's office is any guide, bicycle touring is experiencing a surge in popularity as a new class of urban cyclists expand their range past the city limits.

Adventure Cycling Association's financial strength lies in its diverse revenue streams. In order to serve its large membership base, the organization earns income through Cyclosource, a catalogue store offering quality gear specifically for touring cyclists; a tours department that leads cyclists on trips ranging from a short jaunt down the Oregon coast to a three-month TransAmerica ride; and a routes and mapping department that regularly revises and updates the organization's 92 maps as well as establishing new routes such as the upcoming Bicycle Route 66. Additionally, the organization receives private donations and foundation grants for advocacy activity such as working toward the United States Bicycle Route System, economic development in small towns along Adventure Cycling routes, and more. The organization is so financially strong in fact, that they own their headquarters building and are currently conducting the latest of several remodels in order to better accommodate the growing staff.

Adventure Cycling Association's publications include *Adventure Cyclist*, the magazine distributed to members; Cyclosource, a catalog offering quality gear specifically for touring bicyclists; an annual catalog of Adventure Cycling Association-organized tours; and more. The organization's digital presence currently includes several websites with more than one million visits per year; active social media sites; a blog, online forum, and content aggregator; the Cyclists' Yellow Pages, an online directory (formerly produced in print) for touring cyclists; and Bike Bits, a free email newsletter distributed to members and non-members alike.

Almost forty years after its beginning as a single event, Adventure Cycling Association has grown into a member organization with tens of thousands of members around

¹³ Adventure Cycling Association. "Routes and Maps." Accessed January 20, 2012, <http://adventurecycling.org/routes/index.cfm>.

the world. Known as one of the most authoritative resources for bike touring in the United States Adventure Cycling Association aims to expand to younger audiences than its current base of members, who are overwhelmingly forty to sixty years old. Family-friendly tours are being introduced on the 2012 tours docket, and the staff regularly strategizes about how to engage younger cyclists and cultivate them as future members of the organization. Current Executive Director Jim Sayer sums it up: “the organization has remained very focused on a clear mission to promote bicycle travel...the challenge now is how do you translate that mission into reaching new audiences?”¹⁴

About Adventure Cyclist

Adventure Cyclist is a controlled-circulation print magazine published nine times per year by Adventure Cycling Association and mailed to all current members of the organization. The magazine is full colour, printed on glossy paper, and ranges from 40 to 64 pages per month. Three double issues are printed each year: August/September, October/November, and December/January. Articles feature first-person accounts of domestic and global bike travel; columns by bike travel personalities; gear and bike reviews; classifieds; letters; and profiles of member cyclists.

Adventure Cycling Association’s publications department has a staff of four full-time employees, two who work primarily on the magazine and two who put together the majority of other printed materials for the organization such as the Cyclosource catalog, map sales brochures, seasonal books promoting the organization’s tours, fundraising materials, and more. The editor oversees the in-house staff as well as managing the many outside contractors who are involved with the magazine. Two staff members are graphic designers, and another staff member provides art direction. An independent ad sales rep works off-site, and a recently added position provides editorial assistance for both the magazine and the media program.

Members may submit material for publication, but the magazine is planned carefully in advance to include bike touring dispatches from unusual destinations, and writing that will inspire readers to engage in bike travel. Freelance writers are contracted

¹⁴ D’Ambrosio, Dan. “Thirty Years and Counting: A History of Adventure Cycling Association.” *Adventure Cyclist*, July 2006. Accessed January 10, 2012, http://adventurecycling.org/resources/DAmbrosio_Thirty_Years.pdf.

to produce most of the magazine's feature stories. Two regular columnists and in-house staff provide the rest of the content. Writers propose feature stories to the magazine's editor, who selects and contracts pieces, then programs the magazine based on a variety of factors including story location, ability of the writer, and photography opportunities.

Feature articles in *Adventure Cyclist* are intended to inspire the reader's thirst for travel. This often means highlight exotic destinations, but other features showcase easy-to-reach destinations ideal for a beginning bike traveler. Recent features have included writers who toured Cuba, Patagonia, Switzerland, Iceland, and Vietnam. For readers who are seriously interested, most stories have a sidebar called "Nuts and Bolts" that offers some important tips on re-creating the featured trip. When pitching the editor, a writer may have a story turned down if the location has been featured in a recent issue:

We try hard not to publish stories about a specific locale in each volume. This can be difficult. When a locale gets hot like New Zealand in the 1990s or the west coast of Southern America in the 2000s, a lot of good content gets generated about it. This means we have to pass on much of it or convince the writer/photographer to wait a year or two before we can publish.¹⁵

In addition to geographic location, the magazine also strives to maintain balance between the sexes in its bylines. Another approach in *Adventure Cyclist* feature articles is to highlight more common locations for bike touring, but from a unique perspective. Subjects of recent articles have included bike tours with young children, a city commuter new to touring, and tours undertaken from an unusual type of bicycle, including a trike or railbike.

Using writers who have honed their craft can make an enormous difference in the effect a story has on a reader, taking the magazine from mundane to highly inspiring. Feature articles in the magazine are written almost exclusively by freelancers experienced in outdoor writing, and often their writing conveys a sense of adventure. An exotic location combines with a gritty writing style to engage the reader in the opening sentences of this 2011 *Adventure Cyclist* story by Aaron Teasdale, for example:

"Why in God's name didn't I take the Alps more seriously?" I say to myself while desperately clenching the brakes as my bike careens down a snowfield high on a wind-blasted mountainside. It's the first week of October and my riding partner Crash and I are at 9,000 feet somewhere in the remote mountains along the Swiss-Italian border.

¹⁵ Personal correspondence with Michael Deme, January 25, 2012.

Everywhere there's snow and cliff and one monstrous mountain
after another plummeting into an uninhabited valley far below.¹⁶

Few non-profit magazines have the resources to contract knowledgeable adventure writers, but clearly the investment pays off in the form of evocative writing. Similarly, article titles in *Adventure Cyclist* often communicate a sense of escape from the world. The above excerpt is from “Underestimating the Alps,” a title that could instantly pique a reader’s curiosity. Other features in the same issue include “Lost in the Lone Star State” and “Vikings and Lakers,” a feature about touring in Iceland.

The use of professional and semi-professional writers serves the magazine well, and the quality of writing in *Adventure Cyclist* may improve as the result of a rise in cottage industry and blogpreneuers. Inspired by Timothy Ferriss’s *The 4-Hour Workweek*, some cyclists have been able to make their living over the past decade by bike touring and selling their writing and photographs. Russ Roca and Laura Crawford, for example, run PathLessPedaled.com, and finance their adventures on the road by providing stories to outdoor magazines. This includes *Adventure Cyclist*, which has featured several of their stories accompanied by professional photographs — both provided by the couple. Roca and Crawford’s partnership with *Adventure Cyclist* is mutually beneficial: *Adventure Cyclist* helps the couple increase their blog readership as the result of wider exposure, and in turn, the couple regularly covers Adventure Cycling Association on their blog.

Besides engaging readers through inspiring them to travel by bike, *Adventure Cyclist* also encourages readers to interact with the magazine. On the *Adventure Cyclist* FAQ on the organization’s website, they state “anyone can submit an article and/or photo(s) and possibly be selected for publication.”¹⁷ The downside for the department is that they receive a mountain of unsolicited material that does not follow the submission guidelines. Some readers submit the same story repeatedly; others send just a newspaper clipping. They may enclose dated photos or un compelling staged snapshots:

Many members think anything they submit should be published
regardless of how poorly written the article is or how terrible the
photos are. In reality, of the 1,000 submissions or queries we receive

16 Teasdale, Aaron. “Underestimating the Alps.” *Adventure Cyclist*, August/September 2011, 12.

17 Adventure Cycling Association. “*Adventure Cyclist* Frequently Asked Questions.” Accessed January 24, 2012, <http://adventurecycling.org/mag/faq.cfm>.

each year, only 10 percent are worth considering for publication and of those, only 20-25 percent get published.¹⁸

However, this material is sorted through for any potential gems or for use in other media, and then discarded. Additionally, included in the front matter for each issue of *Adventure Cyclist* is “Letters from Our Readers,” representing a selection of comments about stories in previous issues. Even the most negative feedback commonly sees print, such as a recent letter that complained about the magazine running a photo essay about Cuba that made the reader “more than a little upset” for political reasons.¹⁹

Adventure Cyclist's visual look and design is fairly typical of a high-end non-profit magazine, with a few distinct improvements — most notably in the use of photography. Large, breathtaking photographs are a key component of the magazine's design, and arguably do as much to inspire readers as the writing. A spread with full-bleed photos introduce most articles. When the best shot is not conducive to a two-page opening spread, the magazine will run a one-page photo with a well-designed text page opposite. *Adventure Cyclist* also often includes vivid photo essays from contributors' travels around the globe. Past issues have included the work of notable bicycle photographers such as Chuck Haney, Russ Roca, and Tom Robertson, but the magazine also frequently includes photos by everyday cycle tourists. Each year the organization holds a bicycle travel photo contest open to the public, and winners' work is often featured in the magazine as well as other Adventure Cycling Association media. Some members have claimed to enjoy the photos even if they regularly fail to read stories in the magazine.

Perhaps the most unusual use of photography in *Adventure Cyclist* is the foundation of the magazine's standing element, Open Road Gallery. Art director and co-founder Greg Siple has photographed bike-travelling visitors at Adventure Cycling Association headquarters since 1982, and Open Road Gallery features one photo and accompanying story in each issue. Siple's archive now exceed 3,500 photos, and the number increases exponentially each year as bike travel increases and bike travellers'

¹⁸ Personal Correspondence with Michael Deme, January 25, 2012.

¹⁹ Thiel, Matthew. “Letters From Our Readers,” *Adventure Cyclist*, August/September 2011, 5.

awareness of the organization rises.²⁰ The accompanying story, usually written by Sarah Raz, is crafted based on a release form and questionnaire the cyclist fills out at the time of the visit, as well as a follow-up questionnaire and further correspondence. This connects many bike travellers to the magazine in a very personal way — these stories inspire bike travelers to visit the Adventure Cycling Association office so that they may be photographed by the organization’s co-founder, but the stories often provide a human interest angle using just one large photograph and a paragraph of text.

Adventure Cyclist’s design aesthetic also puts emphasis on readability, utilizing fonts specifically for their visual clarity. Pages are laid out simply, without a busy collaged look that other magazines may use to convey a sense of visual excitement. (On a more practical level, simpler layouts likely also save staff time.) In addition to the magazine’s use of evocative photography in its feature articles, these pieces are usually accompanied by custom maps made in-house by Adventure Cycling Association’s routes and mapping department. The magazine also adds some fun visual elements to its pages. Art director Greg Siple occasionally provides custom artwork to accompany more abstract pieces, which may require unusual illustrations. For example, a recent column about a run-in with mosquitoes was accompanied by a Siple illustration of a rainbow-coloured mosquito wearing a bike helmet. In recent issues, the table of contents has featured a unique element cut out from a photo elsewhere in the issue. The idea seemed to have started as a space-filler, but continued as a way for Siple to insert fun into a relatively static layout. Images used in this way tend to break up text, also enhancing readability — either on the page, as an illustration, or between pages, as with advertisements.

Regular advertisers in *Adventure Cyclist* include companies providing cycle tourism, manufacturers of bikes and bike accessories, clothing, and the cycling-enthusiastic brewery New Belgium Brewing. The median income of *Adventure Cyclist* readers is \$80,000, the average reader’s age is fifty-six, and 79 percent of the audience is male, making the magazine attractive to advertisers seeking readers with a fair amount of disposable income. Ad rates are priced accordingly: in 2011 a single full-page ad in

²⁰ Andrews, Heather. “A Conversation with Greg Siple, Part 2: National Bicycle Touring Portrait Collection.” *Adventure Cycling Association Blog*. Accessed January 23, 2012, <http://blog.adventurecycling.org/2011/08/conversation-with-greg-siple-part-2.html>.

Adventure Cyclist was \$3,725,²¹ compared to \$1,995 for the same ad in *Momentum*, a for-profit bike magazine.²² While *Adventure Cyclist* has more advertisers than most non-profit bike magazines, as with for-profit bike magazines such as *Momentum* the organization struggles to book ads from major bike manufacturers, which have higher budgets to spend on advertising. A clear challenge in the industry, bike manufacturers appear to be the “holy grail” of advertisement, and attention has been focussed at *Adventure Cyclist* on what can be done to persuade these companies to advertise. A classifieds section in the back of the magazine offers smaller advertisers a space to promote their goods and services for as little as \$115.

Despite being dedicated to external content, *Adventure Cyclist* does include a limited amount of organizational information. Each issue contains a letter from the executive director, which occasionally mentions campaigns the organization is working on. The table of contents page states the Adventure Cycling Association mission as well as a short list of major campaigns currently underway. Ad space is sometimes reserved for other departments of the organization. A full-page advertisement on the front inside cover of the magazine often features a “Share the Joy” ad, a membership campaign motivating current members to recruit new members for the chance to win prizes. The tours department is allocated a back cover ad in many issues to attract tours participants and increase the organization’s income. If there is extra ad space in a particular issue, it will often be filled with an internal ad of some kind. *Adventure Cyclist* may not showcase the organization but it does reserve space for Adventure Cycling Association touch points, cultivating membership, donations, or member action.

Adventure Cyclist is only distributed to members of Adventure Cycling Association. As of 2011, total readership was 87,528 per issue, including a pass-along rate of .95.²³ There are no subscription sales outside of membership in the organization, although the non-profit has been experimenting with local newsstand sales at a single location. Since May 2011 the organization has stocked *Adventure Cyclist* at the Good Food Store, the local natural foods market in Missoula, and sells roughly ten copies there per month. While it is possible the organization could find new members through larger distribution of the magazine, it seems financially beneficial to avoid this model, for two reasons. First, it is equally likely that membership would fall

21 Adventure Cycling Association. *Adventure Cyclist 2011 Media Kit*, 2011.

22 Momentum Magazine. *Momentum 2011 Media Kit*, 2011.

23 Adventure Cyclist *2011 Media Kit*.

if members could receive the popular magazine as single issues rather than as the main attraction in a \$40 per year membership. Unless the newsstand price was more than \$3.50, membership would not be attractive as a cost savings — and consumers would consider that price high for a 40- to 64-page magazine. Second, newsstand distribution would require additional costs and staff time, whether it be handled in-house by additional staff or by a paid distribution vendor — raising the price to consumers even further.

Adventure Cycling Association actively leverages the magazine as a way of luring new members. According to staff, the magazine is a key element in new members deciding to join, and free issues are offered regularly to anyone expressing interest in the organization. A free issue of the magazine is offered to website visitors and potential members, and current members are encouraged to send the free issue to a friend. In 2011, 25,000 sample issues were distributed in this way.²⁴ The annual free issue is constructed purposely to highlight the best of the previous year's content, and is sent to potential members along with membership materials.

One enormous financial benefit Adventure Cycling Association has over publishers of other bike magazines is the lower mailing rates available to non-profit organizations. The magazine and other non-profits also take advantage of business partnerships and non-profit discounts in the course of producing their publications. The financial advantages of non-profits even caught the notice of trade book journal *Publishers Weekly* in 1989, when an article discussed publication pricing wars due to “preferential” tax treatment and said that special mailing rates had encouraged a rise in publishing operations by non-profit professional associations.²⁵ If *Adventure Cyclist* is any guide, though, non-profit publications budgets are tight and these magazines are unlikely to overthrow their for-profit counterparts. If *Adventure Cyclist* did produce more revenue, it would likely support departmental improvements such as computer upgrades, additional staff, or higher wages to freelance contributors. A comparison of the magazine with a successful for-profit competitor, *Bicycling*, suggests the for-profit magazine is in no danger of being overrun by its non-profit competition: *Bicycling* uses thicker glossy covers, each issue is at least twice the size of *Adventure Cyclist*, and the magazine attracts a bevy of high-end advertisers, including the bike manufacturers who seem to elude *Adventure Cyclist* and *Momentum*.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Weyr, T. “Professional Association Publishing.” *Publishers Weekly*, Volume 235, Issue 24, June 16, 1989. 34.

Evolution of Adventure Cyclist

Adventure Cycling Association's magazine, *Adventure Cyclist*, has evolved almost as much as the organization. The association's earliest publication *BikeReport* was a simple newsletter created to communicate with cyclists about the developments of the Bikecentennial ride. In 1979 the newsletter began to be published in newspaper format. In 1984 printing switched from tabloid to magazine format in order to provide a comparable experience to other cycling magazines. In the mid-1980s, the organization considered ending publication of the *BikeReport* magazine and replacing it with an externally produced magazine called *Cyclist*. Ultimately the organization decided against this measure, which was fortunate, as the magazine no longer exists. In 1987 the organization started accepting advertising in *BikeReport*.

In 1993 Bikecentennial became Adventure Cycling Association, and the magazine was rechristened *Adventure Cyclist* at the beginning of 1994. By this time a significantly different editorial approach was envisioned for the magazine. Under the wing of editor Dan D'Ambrosio, the magazine fully realized its place as a stand-alone publication. Rather than producing content steeped in the Bikecentennial event, tour group reunions, T-shirts, etc., for the first time the magazine focused on providing members with a quality magazine largely independent of the rest of the organization. A new approach to the magazine was needed, as filling an organizational magazine with content nine times a year was challenging. As current editor Michael Deme explains:

We decided [the magazine] didn't have to be a house organ and that it would be more beneficial for members/readers to be told stories that would inspire them to continue to travel by bike, or start traveling by bike. We figured if they remained inspired to ride, they'd remain inspired to help support the organization through membership. This school of thought became dominant in the late 1980s and the format soon followed. Because the magazine has remained a key component of why people join initially and then remain members, it hasn't caused much contention, although there has been a bit of hemming and hawing here and there, usually by new staff members who'd like to use the magazine to further their departmental goals.²⁶

This shift represented a significant piece of the magazine's evolution. Indeed, Adventure Cycling Association as a whole embraces mindful evolution, and allows staff to experiment with new ideas. Even if the idea is not a success, changes can be

²⁶ Personal Correspondence with Michael Deme, January 17, 2012.

made to improve the process, and evolution occurs. A new idea is not rushed into production or given a high-profile launch. A recent example can be found in one of the organization's newer websites, BikeOvernights.org. Intended as an online resource for people new to bicycle touring, the site went live in January 2011 without much fanfare. As the site's content expanded and improved over the subsequent year, the organization gradually increased its promotion of the site. By doing this, Adventure Cycling Association is promoting a staff culture where creativity and initiative are encouraged. This allows new ideas to have some time to fully develop rather than being shut down if not an overnight success. Additionally, this approach may encourage all staff members to present suggestions as part of the larger team — a positive dynamic for a non-profit, or any organization, to have.

New projects like BikeOvernights.org further the mission of Adventure Cycling Association by providing bike travel resources to anyone with internet access, whether or not they are members. On the surface these projects may seem purely benevolent, but they create a public touch point with the organization, and may even serve as a marketing funnel to gain new members. On the other hand, smaller non-profits may need to financially justify any new projects before staff is allowed to proceed. In the hallmark reference book *Fundraising for Social Change*, non-profit development guru Kim Klein stresses the importance of asking for donations at every opportunity, including in an organization's publications. She writes:

Many organizations produce brochures, reports, booklets, and even books. All of these should contain information about how and why to give. This information should be placed where a person would be likely to see it, usually at the front or back of the publication. Where appropriate, include return envelopes. Make sure it is easy to order these materials online, and if you have your own online gift store, add a donation line on the checkout page.²⁷

Kim Klein is one of relatively few experts writing practical advice for non-profit managers and her writings can heavily influence major decisions taken by an organization. Brita Johnson, former employee of the Bicycle Transportation Alliance notes of their member publication *The Cyclletter*:

As we grew our programs and fundraising needs, we worked to balance the functions of the newsletter, the newsletter being the means of informing our constituency and the public about the Bicycle Transportation Alliance's political/program work (i.e. communicating successes, soliciting engagement); the primary tool

²⁷ Klein 247.

for connection with our geographically dispersed constituency base; and a primary means for communicating the need for financial support.²⁸

As the bimonthly newsletter communicated the organization's ongoing financial needs, a form appeared on the newsletter encouraging members to make additional contributions. Adventure Cycling Association's approach then, appears to stray from this advice, but may actually be accomplishing the same end in a more skillful way.

Moving forward, the main strategic challenge under consideration for *Adventure Cyclist* is how to best bring the magazine into the digital age. The publications department is currently exploring how to better interweave the magazine with the organization's digital content, which has included some research into digital magazine vendors. As this develops, a digital-friendly *Adventure Cyclist* could include anything from a digital edition to call-outs in each issue designed to point readers to the Adventure Cycling Association website for bonus material. Member cyclists have requested digital editions in order to easily access *Adventure Cyclist* while on long bicycle tours when they may not have access to their postal mail, and over 69 percent of members regularly use an electronic device to read other communications from the organization.²⁹ While the current website allows for viewing of PDFs from the magazine, some mobile devices do not support this format.

Adventure Cyclist has proven to be lucrative for Adventure Cycling Association: in yearly member surveys, the magazine has consistently been rated one of the top reasons people join the organization. In 2011, 69 percent of members rated receiving *Adventure Cyclist* as the primary reason they belong to the organization — the second highest reason people maintained their membership, behind support for the organization's mission.³⁰ In those same surveys, members rate the quality of the magazine as “above average” or “excellent.”³¹ Adventure Cycling Association successfully maintains benefits for members outside of their advocacy work, one of which is the successful publication of *Adventure Cyclist*. Meanwhile, many other membership organizations struggle to find benefits beyond supporting an

²⁸ Personal correspondence with Brita Johnson, January 27, 2010.

²⁹ Zoomerang. “Adventure Cycling Association 2011 Annual Survey Results.” June 20, 2011, 4.

³⁰ Ibid 1.

³¹ Ibid 2.

organization's mission that are lucrative enough to keep members connected. The next section will briefly compare the approach to publications taken at similar non-profits.

COMPARISON OF ADVENTURE CYCLIST TO THE PUBLICATIONS OF SIMILAR ORGANIZATIONS

As discussed in the previous section, Adventure Cycling Association presents an engaging publication to its readers each month in *Adventure Cyclist*. How does *Adventure Cyclist* differ from approaches at other non-profits? Many bike advocacy organizations in the United States exist, but very few share the organization's national scope or are similar in budget to Adventure Cycling Association. Two organizations are appropriate for reasonable comparison: the League of American Bicyclists, a national organization; and the Bicycle Transportation Alliance, a larger regional organization with an annual budget close to the other two. Examining the publications of these comparable organizations will show that *Adventure Cyclist* is unique in their approach. The comparative organizations share a largely similar editorial approach: content seems to be at least relatively time-sensitive, addressing an audience primarily of advocates rather than inspiring everyday readers to bike more. However, these two organizations' publications vary greatly in format and budget, a difference that lends itself to conclusions that can be applied to a wider variety of non-profits.

League of American Bicyclists

The League of American Bicyclists is North America's oldest bike advocacy organization still in operation. Started as the League of American Wheelmen in 1880,³² the organization is based in Washington, DC, and has been lobbying for better conditions for cyclists since its inception as part of the Good Roads Movement. Their current mission is "to promote bicycling for fun, fitness, and transportation, and work through advocacy and education for a bicycle-friendly America."³³ Membership is roughly equivalent to Adventure Cycling Association (40,000),³⁴ with a

32 League of American Bicyclists. "About Us." Accessed January 14, 2012, <http://www.bikeleague.org/about/index.php>.

33 Ibid.

34 League of American Bicyclists. "Welcome Members." Accessed January 9, 2012, <http://www.bikeleague.org/members>.

budget of approximately \$2.1 million.³⁵ The organization lobbies on cycling issues at a federal level and operates the Bicycle Friendly Community program, which reviews and rates communities around the United States on a tiered scale. *American Bicyclist*, the member publication of the League of American Bicyclists, is produced every other month and distributed to members primarily in printed form, offering a few sample issues digitally online for prospective members to peruse. The publication started as an organizational newsletter in the 1920s, and was renamed *American Bicyclist* in 1939.³⁶

American Bicyclist “covers the latest in league, advocacy, policy, education, and club news.”³⁷ Current circulation is approximately 300,000, of which 25,700 copies go to members.³⁸ The publication shares the high production values of *Adventure Cyclist*: the magazine is printed in full colour on glossy paper, and at the same size. *American Bicyclist* is thinner, with just 32 pages per issue. Fewer ads appear in the magazine, and most full-page ads are dedicated to the organization and its programs. Advertisers are very similar to those who buy space in *Adventure Cyclist*, representing a fair number of bike tour operators and bike accessory manufacturers. Editorial content in *American Bicyclist* largely focuses on issues directly related to the activities of the organization. For example, feature stories from the September/October 2011 issue centre around bike sharing, creating bike-friendly businesses and governments, and the National Bike Summit — a major national lobbying event the non-profit organizes. One spread is dedicated to announcing the results of the organization’s annual Bicycle Friendly Community rankings.

Despite the organization’s mission of promoting bicycling for fun and fitness, the audience for *American Bicyclist* seems to be primarily those concerned with the latter half of their mission — political advocacy. Many feature articles are focused on advocacy concerns: for example, the article titled “Arizona’s Red Rock Road,” in the March/April 2011 issue, focuses on how community activists’ lobbying efforts

35 League of American Bicyclists. *League of American Bicyclists 990 Form for 2010*. Accessed January 10, 2012, <http://www.guidestar.org/FinDocuments//2010/366/206/2010-366206225-074dec93-9.pdf>.

36 Personal correspondence with Meaghan Cahill, June 2011.

37 League of American Bicyclists. “American Bicyclist Magazine.” Accessed January 23, 2012, <http://www.bikeleague.org/members/magazine.php>.

38 Ibid.

changed a specific road into “a well-designed multi-modal corridor.”³⁹ As with *Adventure Cyclist’s* photography, both the cover and the title page photo include a scenic natural area in the photograph’s background. However, the primary focus of the photograph in the foreground is a paved road — presumably the resulting transportation infrastructure the article discusses. The cyclists in the shot are too far away from the camera to convey a sense of fun or otherwise sell the non-advocacy aspects of the organization’s mission. While *American Bicyclist* does use a fair number of photos, two-page title spreads for features are absent. Many photos in the magazine are of lawmakers and other policy advocates who everyday members may not be familiar with or concerned about. Given the organization’s century-long life and major political power in the nation’s capital, one wonders whether the membership (and related lobbying power) could increase significantly if *American Bicyclist* were tailored more toward a general audience than one of professional advocates.

Tailoring the magazine’s content solely toward advocates is also seen in article authorship: the majority of the magazine’s articles are written by League of American Bicyclists staff members, steeped in the highly political culture of the nation’s capital. Staff members — particularly the communications director who writes most of the feature articles — have a fine journalistic sense of writing, but seem to sacrifice passion and excitement in the process, as seen in an article entitled “Enforcement: The Final Frontier”:

Following the rules of the road is a core principle of the League’s Smart Cycling program; it’s woven into every education program, brochure, curriculum, story we write, and presentation we give to any audience.⁴⁰

American Bicyclist readers are similar to those of *Adventure Cyclist* in that both have significant disposable income, but while the organization touts an 80 percent member readership rate, advertisers do not seem convinced. A full-page colour ad in the

39 Beane, Bob, Randy Victory, and Daniel Paduchowski. “Arizona’s Red Rock Road: How a Community and Bicycle Advocacy Achieved an Extreme Road Makeover.” *American Bicyclist*, March/April 2011, 11.

40 Cahill, Meaghan, and Andy Clarke. “Enforcement: the Final Frontier.” *American Bicyclist*, July/August 2011, 11.

magazine costs just \$2,000,⁴¹ significantly less than the same ad in *Adventure Cyclist*, and yet many full-page ads are occupied with organizational advertising.

The League of American Bicyclists' member publication, *American Bicyclist*, is very similar to *Adventure Cyclist* in format and reader demographics. However, *Adventure Cyclist* consciously avoids dedicating a large amount of space to promote its host organization's programs. Its content spotlights cyclists as they are out in the field on their bike, rather than lobbying. *Adventure Cyclist* also showcases a variety of perspectives rather than relying on one or two staff members for the bulk of the writing. Finally, *Adventure Cyclist* seems to assist Adventure Cycling Association in attracting and retaining more members compared to the League of American Bicyclists, given the comparatively short forty-year history of the former.

Bicycle Transportation Alliance

Similar to the League of American Bicyclists in its lobbying activities, the Bicycle Transportation Alliance has a much smaller regional focus, to “promote bicycling and improve bicycling conditions in Oregon.”⁴² Founded in Portland, Oregon, the organization was created in 1996 by a group of politically active citizens who wished to positively influence their city's treatment of cyclists. Since that time the organization has expanded its reach into other parts of Oregon and sometimes into southwest Washington, teaching bicycle safety education at elementary schools throughout Oregon; working with regional leaders to innovate transportation engineering; and providing tips and resources to encourage new bike commuters, such as organizing the annual Bike Commute Challenge. Despite Bike Commute Challenge participation of more than 12,000 people in 2011,⁴³ regular membership is roughly 3,000⁴⁴ — much smaller than either of the national colleagues discussed in this report. While the organization is not national in scope, its reputation, budget, and size compared to other local organizations across the United States make it

41 League of American Bicyclists. “*American Bicyclist* 2012 Advertising Rates and Information.” Accessed March 4, 2012, http://www.bikeleague.org/media/adinfo/pdf/rate_kit_american_bicyclist_2012.pdf, 3.

42 Bicycle Transportation Alliance. “Mission.” Accessed March 5, 2012, <http://btaoregon.org/about>.

43 Bicycle Transportation Alliance. “Bike Commute Challenge Results, 2011.” Accessed March 7, 2012, <http://www.bikecommutechallenge.com/results>.

44 Personal correspondence with Kristin Bott, January 23, 2012.

comparable to others in this report. However the organization's member publication differs quite significantly from *American Bicyclist* and *Adventure Cyclist*.

The Cycletter was the Bicycle Transportation Alliance's member publication, from the early days of the organization until production ceased in 2009. This newsletter was published every other month and sent to all members of the organization, as well as business colleagues and select political allies. As the Bicycle Transportation Alliance began at the grassroots level, the newsletter had an extremely low-budget format: it was printed black, double-sided, on dyed legal-size (8 1/2" x 14") paper. When it was in production, *The Cycletter* directly reported on the activities of the Bicycle Transportation Alliance succinctly, in a roughly journalistic format. These activities included bike- and walk-to-school programs around the region, updates on lobbying activities with regional lawmakers, opportunities for member involvement with the organization, and notices of fundraising events. The publication's design was provided *pro bono* by a supportive local business, and other vendors provided reduced-cost printing to the organization. Editorial responsibilities, which generally fell to one staff member who had dozens of other duties, included writing the bulk of the content, a situation that led to such descriptive yet unexciting headlines as "Sneak Peak at the BTA's 2009 Legislative Agenda."⁴⁵ The newsletter was difficult to plan in advance, as the content was usually quite timely. The editor also had to pursue appropriate photos to accompany the main stories, often in a rush and drawing from limited photography archives. Photos in *The Cycletter* were quite small, perhaps a few inches wide or tall, and printed in black and white on coloured paper using high-volume laser printers.

This format might have been quite appropriate for a small grassroots organization in the mid-1990s, but as the alliance grew, the publication did not grow with it. As is common in an organization with high employee turnover, perhaps the publication simply got ignored or taken for granted rather than strategically examined by management, or perhaps overworked staff members were reluctant to tax their days even further by continuing to develop the publication. A single-sheet black-and-white publication may have failed to grab readers' attention as it competed with more timely and dynamic offerings such as *Adventure Cyclist*. It is also possible the organization wished to represent a thrifty, environmentally responsible face to members — but the

⁴⁵ Bicycle Transportation Alliance. "Sneak Peak at the BTA's 2009 Legislative Agenda," *The Cycletter*, November/December 2008, 1.

format of *The Cycletter* did not present the successful advocacy organization that could have reaped additional donations.

In addition to using *The Cycletter* as a member communication tool, the Bicycle Transportation Alliance was attempting to use its publication for additional fundraising, as previously discussed. In the late 1990s when the organization had just a handful of full-time staff, many of them attended training sessions led by grassroots fundraising expert Kim Klein, who heavily influenced their work. In later years, high staff turnover, including strategic planning positions, may have contributed to the newsletter being neglected. During the same time, the internet rose in popularity, showing it could deliver timely organizational news faster and at a fraction of the cost. No ads appeared in *The Cycletter*, as the Bicycle Transportation Alliance considered the sidebar listing of its business members each month as a tactic sufficient to encourage more business contributions. Individuals were also subtly encouraged to donate in each issue as well — a printed donation form occupied a large amount of space in the layout.

The Cycletter was discontinued in 2009, when members of the Bicycle Transportation Alliance voted to cut production costs of the publication and instead receive content online. Metrics do not exist for readership of *The Cycletter*: before the aforementioned vote, the organization had not obtained readership data on a regular basis via its annual member survey. Shutting down *The Cycletter* was primarily budgetary, according to communications director Margaux Mennesson, who noted, “it can be daunting to face a publishing project with limited staff resources and a limited budget.”⁴⁶ However, the Bicycle Transportation Alliance still occasionally produces publications such as its annual report and other reports used specifically for lobbying lawmakers.

As the Bicycle Transportation Alliance evolved from a small grassroots organization into a formidable regional force, its member publication did not keep up with the organization’s growth, and staff eventually lost touch with its strategic purpose. Conceived as a way to build relationships with members and keep them donating *The Cycletter* was ultimately discontinued in favour of internet news rather than re-envisioning the publication. Although it was very different in format, the publication followed some of the same principles as *American Bicyclist*, reporting chiefly on organizational news in a journalistic format. Including *The Cycletter*’s low-budget

⁴⁶ Personal Correspondence with Margaux Mennesson, January 9, 2011.

format in this analysis may be quite beneficial in order to provide recommendations for non-profits in a variety of budget brackets.

Comparison to Adventure Cyclist

Adventure Cyclist is a successful part of Adventure Cycling Association's overall operations and an integral part of how they execute their mission. Therefore, other non-profits might examine what *Adventure Cyclist* shares with its colleagues and where it differs in its approach, and take examples to better execute their own publications. When *Adventure Cyclist* is compared to member publications at League of American Bicyclists and Bicycle Transportation Alliance, it appears that the magazine has a fundamentally different approach to its editorial content, design, and role in the organization as a whole.

Adventure Cyclist's editorial content is chiefly intended to inspire and motivate readers to embark on bike travel adventures. Rather than relying solely on staff members to write articles, the other publications can seek a variety of authors, feature more locations, and present different story angles. For example, *Adventure Cyclist* features have varied from association staff members exploring Spain by bike, to older rail-bike pioneers undertaking a journey through Patagonia. Diverse perspectives give the magazine a wider appeal, and quality writing provided by freelance writers (rather than staff members) evokes a stronger sense of excitement in readers. Geographic diversity engages readers, especially when certain locations are covered — perhaps their hometown, or a place they wish to visit. By highlighting inspirational content and limiting content about organizational activities, the magazine transcends the genre of a member magazine and becomes valuable content independent of, but complementary to, the advocacy activities of Adventure Cycling Association.

Adventure Cyclist also takes a different approach to design and graphic choices than other member publications. Many stories in *Adventure Cyclist* feature opening spreads with full-colour photographs of cyclists in scenic natural areas. One story from a bicycle tour in Cuba exclusively featured vivid photographs with colours that popped off the page and illustrated village life in a location not easily accessed by travellers from the United States. By comparison, *American Bicyclist* also contains spreads that include but aren't dominated by colour photos. However, some photographs appear staged and almost instructional, as in the opening pages of "Bikeshare Takes America

for a Ride,”⁴⁷ featuring a photo with heavily primed subjects proudly atop bicycles — without coats, bags, or helmets — demonstrating the emerging system discussed in the accompanying article.

A common question membership organizations like these may field from potential members is: What do I get for my membership dollars? Advocacy organizations attempt to primarily sell membership based on donation to their worthy cause. As another selling point, however, many membership organizations have built a member discount program — members who present a membership card at specific businesses, for example, are entitled to a discount on purchases. Adventure Cycling Association does offer a few discount deals to members, but the real value-add is the magazine. Because *Adventure Cyclist* and its content are so valuable to members, Adventure Cycling Association keeps the membership interested in continuing to contribute each year, as shown in yearly member surveys, which consistently rank *Adventure Cyclist* as the second reason donors maintain their membership, behind belief in the organization’s mission. Clearly members value the unique approach *Adventure Cyclist* offers compared to other non-profit magazines, and the content inspires readers to travel by bike, fulfilling the organization’s mission statement.

American Bicyclist is marketed to potential members as a membership benefit just as *Adventure Cyclist* is. However, the League of American Bicyclists also provides members with a subscription to *Bicycling*, a major for-profit publication published by Rodale Press. In addition to *American Bicyclist*, the League of American Bicyclists also offers a regular electronic newsletter, to both members and non-members, for more timely action alerts. The additional for-profit magazine offered to League of American Bicyclists members seems valuable, but it may do the organization a disservice by devaluing its own work and engaging members with the Rodale publication rather than the non-profit. Adventure Cycling Association almost made a similar move in the 1980s, when management considered replacing *BikeReport* with a subscription to the magazine *Cyclist*, produced externally. As that magazine no longer exists, and as members have such a high regard for *Adventure Cyclist*, clearly the organization made a wise decision. It’s unlikely *Bicycling* will fold in the foreseeable future, but the image the magazine presents as cyclists-as-superhuman-athletes may be at odds with the organization’s goal to create more everyday cyclists.

47 Cahill, Meaghan. “Bikeshare Takes America for a Ride.” *American Bicyclist*, September/October 2011, 10.

Given the Bicycle Transportation Alliance's news approach to their publications' editorial content, moving news communications to an all-digital format seems more logical than relying on print alone. News content can be time-sensitive, and digital delivery is much faster than the print production process. In the days of *The Cycletter*, if Bicycle Transportation Alliance staff was running behind schedule, news was likely dated by the time the publication hit members' mailboxes. Former executive director Scott Bricker has also pointed out there remains a need for print:

I think [printed publications] are still important but many people just download them, so you can print fewer copies. Since many people use the PDF versions...it transfers the printing costs from a non-governmental organization to the agency or group that wants to read it. It is important to have printed copies for key officials and at key meetings.⁴⁸

While the Bicycle Transportation Alliance chose to go all digital, it is worth examining whether or not print publication could still work for the organization. Arguably, the Bicycle Transportation Alliance could have re-envisioned their printed member publication into something that would keep members interested and engaged, possibly by sharing personal stories from those their programs had touched. Instead, the organization now lacks any publication specifically for members, reducing the likelihood of attracting and retaining their ideal audience.

Non-profits may consider budgetary matters a priority when working out their publications strategy. Finances were the primary reason behind eliminating the member publication in favour of all-digital news alerts at the Bicycle Transportation Alliance. However, revisiting an existing publication can yield important financial benefits, as seen in the development of *Adventure Cyclist* from a "house organ" to a stand-alone magazine that keeps readers engaged by providing inspiring content. The magazine furthers the mission of the organization not only by inspiring people to travel by bike as in the mission statement, but also by contributing to the organization's long-term financial health. Is it possible to apply lessons from the success of *Adventure Cyclist* to publications of other organizations, independent of budgetary concerns? The final section of this report presents suggestions that non-profits of all sizes may consider in shaping their publications to serve the organization's mission more effectively.

⁴⁸ Personal Correspondence with Scott Bricker, January 9, 2012.

C O N C L U S I O N S

Non-profits strive to make the most of every dollar, and the wisdom set forth by *Fundraising for Non-Profits* suggests that an organization's publications are a key way to leverage more donations and build relationships with donors. Traditional approaches to member publications are largely news-oriented, telling rather than showing how donations are being used. Presumably, the objective is to encourage readers to continue donating. This approach could also be seen as an attempt to justify the existence of the organization and its programs. This report has explored the variety of approaches an organization can take in using a publication to further its mission, although each non-profit's publication is unique to their circumstances and goals. This section summarizes what is unique about Adventure Cycling Association's use of *Adventure Cyclist* as a member publication, recommends a few options for continuing their success, then presents recommendations for any non-profit seeking to make its publication a more dynamic part of the organization.

Adventure Cyclist motivates its audience to travel by bicycle through inspiring tales of trips in far-off lands paired with compelling photography, whereas many contemporaries use their publications simply as a communications tool. While the idea may have evolved from a shortage of regular newsworthy material, Adventure Cycling Association consciously chose to change its magazine to provide members with valuable content and unusual perspectives, and to deliver it in a quality package. The editorial choices, quality of writing, and stunning photography make it desirable by bike tourists — so desirable, in fact, that the magazine is one of the main reasons members continue to donate to the organization. The magazine, in both its content and its sustenance of a large membership, serves to further the organization's mission to “inspire people of all ages to travel by bicycle.”⁴⁹ In doing so, the magazine in turn becomes a more valuable part of the organization's financial health.

If Adventure Cycling Association wished to expand its organization and diversify its revenue even further, one possibility is development of the *Adventure Cyclist* brand. As the magazine arguably stands on its own, the organization could create an *Adventure Cyclist* website to join their many other domains, including members-only access to a digital edition archive; it could sell branded gear; it could possibly even appropriate

⁴⁹ Adventure Cycling Association. “Mission and Programs.” Accessed January 9, 2012, <http://adventurecycling.org/whoware/index.cfm>.

the former Cyclosource gear store as the *Adventure Cyclist* store. The magazine's annual bicycle travel photo contest could be expanded into a special issue. A larger or more local magazine might build the photo contest into a larger event to announce the winners and raise funds for the organization, but Adventure Cycling Association's dispersed membership would likely not provide a return on the investment needed to produce such an event.

Recommendations for Other Non-profits

Non-profits come in a variety of sizes and budgets. When considering the largest bike advocacy organization in the United States as a case study to be emulated, smaller organizations may view their own budget size as an insurmountable barrier to the same success. A local organization with a few thousand members usually doesn't have the same budget as an organization with over 40,000 members around the globe. However, even if printing a 64-page, full-colour magazine is not possible for fiscal reasons, inexpensive options remain. Regardless of budget size, organizations of all sizes could benefit from adjusting their editorial approach, thinking forward, and a willingness to change and evolve from current practices.

First, the organization must examine its purpose and consider how the publication could better serve the mission. This could be as simple as a strategic planning discussion among staff members. It could involve conducting a regular member survey and using the results, and trends over several years, to drive the publication. Non-profits may even organize a focus group of members to engage them more fully in the re-envisioning of the publication. Ideally, the publication would be recognized as valuable outside of the department responsible for its production, and be one part of a larger strategic vision for the organization. At Adventure Cycling Association, it is apparent that the entire staff realize the value of the magazine to the organization as a whole. Members are surveyed annually about *Adventure Cyclist*, and the magazine is a key incentive to market the organization to new members.

Editorial changes can be one of the least expensive ways to change the focus of a non-profit's publication. Rather than using their publication simply to relay organizational news to members and other stakeholders, even a smaller non-profit can experiment with its editorial choices. Instead of telling members about an organization's activities in journalistic reportage, writers could use storytelling

techniques to engage readers emotionally. A factual story about a legislative update might be replaced by the story of how a widower is championing her husband's untimely death by working to pass a new law. The editors might add first-person accounts of how a given organization is creating change in the world, in order to motivate other members to join the effort. If the publication is in magazine format, offering content that is of service to readers, such as how-to articles, may be seen to add value as well: building a relationship with a member does not require continuous attempts to justify the organization's existence. This could change a member's response from asking what they get for their membership dollars, to feeling excitement about renewing each year simply to continue receiving a valuable publication.

In *Five Good Ideas: Practical Strategies for Non-Profit Success*, media professional Carol Goar suggests to those running non-profits: "when telling your story to the media, talk about the difference you're making in people's lives, not about who you are or how your organization functions."⁵⁰ In other words, showing rather than telling why the organization is important may compel readers to engage more fully in the publication. Even when non-profits have learned this lesson in pitching story ideas to their local newspaper, they may not be applying it to their in-house media. Member response may be difficult to gauge, as unsolicited member response tends to be reactionary and specific: readers who are delighted are less likely to proactively contact a publication. Another recommendation based on Adventure Cycling Association is for non-profits to solicit reader feedback more actively and use it strategically to inform future choices. Space dedicated to printing members' letters could engage readers more, or editors could create and administer surveys through online companies such as SurveyMonkey, which offers its basic service for free.

Another recommendation is to always be thinking ahead. According to David Neff and Randal Moss, two tech-savvy non-profit managers, organizations must constantly change and stay ahead of their constituents:

To be supremely effective, organizations must actually change and evolve before society and their constituencies change. Yes, the best non-profits really do change in advance of their core constituencies

⁵⁰ Broadbent, Alan, and Ratna Omidvar, Editors. *Five Good Ideas: Practical Strategies for Non-Profit Success*. Coach House Books, 2011, 171.

and in anticipation of the reality that will be the new operating environment. However, that is a very rare thing.⁵¹

Adventure Cycling Association has cultivated an organizational culture of evolution, even if they are not forging ahead at the breakneck pace of the hottest tech companies. Changes are always being examined or tested in a low-profile method. As the ideas are more fully developed, the organization increases its promotion. The organizational culture encourages staff to try new things, even if those ideas do not all meet with great success. As Neff and Moss note it is rare for a non-profit to be so forward thinking. Thinking ahead in terms of publications, particularly as the for-profit world forges ahead in digital publication technology, is just one small way a non-profit could be utilizing the advice.

As the digital revolution continues, smaller organizations may arguably have an edge over higher-budget publications such as *Adventure Cyclist*. As publications enter the digital age, smaller organizations such as the Bicycle Transportation Alliance are moving to a digital-only format, with less costly distribution and a potentially faster production time. The organizational culture at Adventure Cycling Association encourages forward movement even if the result is soon outdated, and *Adventure Cyclist* has had a slow digital evolution. Currently the organization is exploring options to provide its magazine digitally for readers who may be on the road and unable to receive their mail in a timely fashion. Given the magazine is currently not a digital-first publication, this involves additional expenses, as external vendors are contracted for digital edition conversion and hosting. Smaller non-profits that have eschewed print publications for all-digital communications may see significantly decreased costs, but potentially at a price: not all readers prefer screen reading, and mass emails are more likely to be filtered as spam, unopened for ages, or deleted without opening. Making emails and other digital communications graphically engaging incurs additional cost if the publisher is to remain competitive with print counterparts. Digital does have its drawbacks, and perhaps this is why many print magazines continue to survive, and even thrive.

Because publishing is not the main activity of non-profits, staff who oversee publications usually also serve in other roles in the organization. As well as staff time, financial resources are limited. As non-profits constantly attempt to maximize their resources, a deliberate choice to increase production values or start a new publication

⁵¹ Neff, David J., and Randal C. Moss. *The Future of Non-Profits: Innovate and Thrive in the Digital Age*. Wiley, 2011, 3.

may be prohibitively expensive, particularly in an uncertain economic climate. Very little dialogue exists in writing to assist organizations with these kinds of day-to-day struggles. It is often during a budget shortfall that individual components of a non-profit's operations are examined. The organization that examines the purpose of its publishing activities, and strives to make them not only relevant but financially and spiritually vital to the organization at large, is the organization that will benefit greatly, as can be seen in the excellent examples set by *Adventure Cyclist*.

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