

Reflective Commentary
Creating a Magazine

When I first decided to apply for this internship, I knew very little about the process of putting together a magazine. Though I was not involved with every aspect of the magazine, I was able to observe what was happening around me. I also interviewed several staff members to find out exactly what they did. This gave me a better understanding of both the technical aspects of creating a magazine and the relationships between the various departments.

One of the first tasks in creating each monthly magazine is developing a theme. Nearly a year in advance, the editors, in conjunction with the sales department, come up with themes for each month. Next, the staff members come together for brainstorming meetings to provide article ideas. Staff members present their researched ideas, and the senior editor presents any article queries received from outside writers. The editors weed through the ideas and settle on several. They then make contracts with freelance authors for each piece. These tasks are done far in advance of each issue, so at all times they are working on several magazines at the same time. This also helps the sales department sell space for topic-specific ads.

The obvious aspects of creating a magazine happen in the month and a half before an issue is ready for publishing. This is when articles come in for editing, when the graphic designer lays out ads, when stories are fact-checked, and when the entire magazine is laid out. Every staff member has a specific role, from the editors who edit and decide content to the layout designers who put together the ads and articles into a magazine. The weeks right before “boards” (when the complete magazine is reviewed) are very busy with last minute editing and layout. After boards, the magazine is finally sent off to the publisher and distributor.

From observing and participating in this process, I have discovered many of the details that had previously been lacking in my idea of publishing a magazine. I have learned much about the publishing process so that in the future I can be more knowledgeable in the event that I ever go into a related field.

However, I have also learned many things about business in general. First, I now know the importance of having frequent staff meetings. Although most of the magazine staff work within 20 feet of each other, there is still sometimes a lack of communication when everyone is working on their own part of the magazine. Despite emails and conversations, status meetings

are very helpful in putting everyone on the same page. Brainstorming meetings are also important because they serve as a forum for thinking collectively about the magazine. At the same time, they allow the managing editor an opportunity to give the staff guidelines she receives from her superior. By attending these meetings, I have been able to see the importance of a well-directed all-staff conference. I was also able to gain more self-confidence in presenting my ideas and commenting on others'.

The second thing I have learned about business is the relationship between a company and its sales department. Often, it seems that a company or organization would work very differently if it did not have to worry about money. With this magazine, the staff has to brainstorm for articles ideas that would be sellable. In other words, the topic has to be something relevant to other companies who might wish to advertise with the magazine. While not every article must meet this standard, the staff has to balance the non-sellable ideas with sellable ones. Whether they like it or not, part of the magazine's content is dictated by sales. I would assume that this same phenomenon takes place in other companies as well, whether they must cater to their consumers or their advertisers. Thus, it has been enlightening for me to see the relationship, and I believe it has made me more aware of how most companies must operate.