

## 20 IS YOUNG FOR A SALESPERSON, BUT NOT FOR A SALES COMPANY

By Jim Elliott

In November, 1984, I voluntarily left one of the best jobs a car enthusiast could have in publishing (*Road & Track*) to hang up my own shingle. Lots of my associates thought I had lost my mind, leaving a job where you could drive a different automobile every day, to start my own rep business. My first client was in the outdoor category.

Passing the 20-year milestone is a good time to pause and reflect. The numbers:

- \$350 million in advertising
- approximately 150 media properties
- 50 consulting assignments

These are the numbers, but they don't really tell the story. We have handled both big and small magazines, several newspaper Sunday magazines, some Internet sites, a large number of association and trade magazines, one research company, and an assortment of other media-related projects. We have sold display advertising in every market in the country and Canada. We've handled mail order and classified selling. And, through it all, we're still in business.

Over the last 20 years, we have had to reinvent our business repeatedly to stay contemporary in the marketplace and keep up with its dramatic changes. Personal relationships used to be key. Now the main factors in a buy may be partnerships or, sometimes, nothing more than "the numbers."

We used to sell just the client and the agency; today, a buying service is often involved. The audience of a magazine or newspaper used to be the most important issue to the buyer; today, all many buyers seem to care about is price. We now find ourselves in a more transactional selling mode than ever before, and rely more on numbers that were better generated and understood 20 years ago.

In the next three issues of ADS & IDEAS, I will examine three areas of change in the business. The first relates to the type of people

who sell and run magazines compared to those who did so 20 years ago and will conclude with my prediction of what that side of the business will look like 10 years from now.

The second item will be an examination of the buyers and the changes in that world over the last 20 years. I will be aided by a study that the James G. Elliott Company is doing of media buyers, and may include a prediction or two, as well.

The last article will be one on the changing degree and focus of marketing in magazines and newspapers. I hope that you will find this series of articles useful and of interest to you.

## WHY DO WE STILL HAVE STOVES AFTER THE MICROWAVE? WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR E-PUBS?

By Danial Kim

What's the future of electronic publications? What does it mean for advertisers? For readers? Is it just a passing fad that smart folks can ignore, or are we at a point in history when we are transitioning away from print? Or is it something in between? And what does any of this have to do with microwave ovens?

First, let me distinguish between web sites and e-pubs. Web sites are passive means of communicating. They wait for visitors. When visitors arrive, folks usually know what they are looking for and just need to find it. By contrast, e-pubs are an active form of communicating. Like magazines, they are sent to readers. And readers don't already know what they are looking for — instead, they read e-publications because they want to learn something new.

But how should e-pubs fit into the mix, if at all? How important are they — now or in the future? Predicting the future can be hard. But we can look to the past to give us some insight. In thinking about how we have dealt with the onset of new technology in the past, I have come up with three potential futures...

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## THE PUBLISHING PARADOX: PROMOTE OR PERISH

By Celia Currin

It is the eternal paradox of print media: How can so many publications — themselves vibrant platforms for promotion — place so little emphasis on their own marketing initiatives?

What was once only a harmless, perhaps humorous quirk of the business now threatens to turn into a serious, if not fatal, error. The fact is, as advertisers everywhere continue to view magazines and newspapers more as marketing partners than marketing platforms, the ability of publications to market *themselves* is becoming increasingly important.

Publications must display marketing savvy in their own efforts or risk being surpassed by rivals who demonstrate greater sophistication in both strategy and presentation.

The success of targeted, special-interest publications, custom publishing and the constant improvement of online opportunities have converged to place greater pressure on traditional print publications.

Today, it is more crucial than ever for publications to distinguish themselves from the competition by communicating the strongest value-proposition in the clearest possible way and keeping that message in the marketplace without pause.

All of which raises the question of impact.

For those of you who are looking to get the biggest bang for your own marketing buck, here are some solid strategies:

**Communicate something of value immediately** — Compelling case studies, fresh research, relevant statistics, catchy quotes, reviews, calendars . . . these are all creative ways to inform and inspire while you influence. By making yourself useful right up front, you increase your chance of making it past the trash and into the briefcase for the commute home. And by giving clients an excuse to keep your communica-

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## STOVES AFTER THE MICROWAVE?

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**Future No. 1:** New Technology Displaces Old — An example of this would be the typewriter being displaced by the personal computer. Under this scenario, electronic publications would displace print.

**Future No. 2:** New Technology Doesn't Stay — This is the case when the new thing turns out to be a fad or simply fails. An example of this might be instant coffee. (I know it's still around, but who actually drinks it anymore?) Under this potential future, electronic pubs don't catch on.

**Future No. 3:** Old and New Co-Exist — Here are three examples that show different ways this might work:

**Radio and Television.** Before television came along, radio was the dominant form of entertainment. Many predicted radio's downfall as television became more popular. However, instead of fading away, radio adapted. It changed the kind of programming it offered and found a new purpose that allows it to be a powerful medium even today.

**The Microwave Oven and the Stove.** Virtually every home, condo and apartment today has both a conventional stove and oven along with a microwave oven. The stove didn't adapt — instead, the old technology co-exists with the new because each has different strengths. A conventional oven is great for baking and fixing big meals. A microwave is well-suited for quickly heating food (even if it's just to heat up a cup of coffee).

**The Furnace and the Fireplace.** Why do we still have fireplaces? We get heat from a furnace and cook food on our stoves (or microwave ovens). Yet virtually all of us have one or more fireplaces in our homes. It can even affect the resale value if you don't have one. My thought here is that there is something essential and right about a fireplace. It may relate back to our cave dweller past when fire meant survival. At any rate, sometimes an old technology has some essential 'rightness' to it, so that even if rendered obsolete, it survives in the face of new technology.

So where are we and where are we headed? I don't think it's Future No. 1 where e-pubs will displace print. Magazines and newspapers are enjoyable to read, handy to carry around and, in the case of magazines, can be beautiful as well as interesting to spend time with.

I also don't think e-pubs are a fad, Future No. 2. The ABA Journal eReport has over 230,000 readers and our research shows the

next generation of members are even more open to e-pubs than that. I think e-pubs are here to stay and will become an even more integral part of our world.

So Future No. 3 is where I think we're headed. I think we'll see some adaptation, where print and e-pubs will play to their own strengths. While I don't know that magazines have the kind of 'essential rightness' that fire does, there is something natural about being able to hold a magazine in your hands, flip through pages and be engaged with art and words. At the same time, e-pubs can provide a timeliness that is impossible with print. Electronic publications can engage a reader while they're in the office setting, while they're making decisions about their professional lives.

But in order to co-exist with magazines, e-pubs will need to be truly valuable to readers. I do not believe that any electronic publication will survive unless it provides unique, interesting and useful information. An e-pub can't be merely a regurgitation of a print publication. Readers will need to find the publication relevant and worth their time. In other words, Content is King. Doesn't matter if it's in electronic form, print form, or (who knows what's next) a projected holographic image.

If electronic publications have this kind of valuable, relevant information, I believe that they will not just co-exist with print publications, I believe they will thrive.

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## PUBLISHING PARADOX

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tions close at hand, you raise the likelihood that you'll get that call one day — or, at the least, they'll pick up the phone when you call them.

**Keep all audiences in mind at all times** — Every promotion you execute (however small or large) will inevitably impact many audiences. It's simply unavoidable. To take the simplest example, a circulation promotion is bound to land in the hands of an advertiser somewhere, so make sure that your message to subscribers is in harmony with your ad-sales strategy. In the end, the value-proposition you present to subscribers will either support or undermine your message to advertisers. When it comes to marketing, every publication serves many masters—readers, advertisers, media buyers and even the sales staff. It is absolutely essential that the same message be sent to each of them (albeit in different ways).

**You're a communications vehicle . . . so communicate already!** — In today's competi-

tive marketplace, dialogue is the key to the kingdom. One-way communication is a dead-end. By engaging your clients in a dialogue you reinforce the idea that your publication has an ongoing dialogue with its readers as well.

So how do you get the conversation going?

Conduct regular surveys on topics of interest with your audience and distribute the results; Package relevant letters-to-the-editor that your publication has received; Publish letters or notes from your advertising customers; Run contests. The overall idea is to create a true community around your publication. The more you know your clients, the more involved they will be with you. So stage small events to which clients can invite guests — spouses, significant others, children, parents — events where you get to know them, and they get to know you. So . . .

**Start spreading the news** — Find opportunities to tell them good news — to support their successes and share your own. Inform the entire "family" of the start of a new campaign, or welcome a new advertiser to the book, announce the arrival of a new salesperson or a new writer. Make sure your advertisers know the people behind the bylines — it builds their involvement with the paper. Put together a "face book" of interviews with a dozen readers — and refresh it every year. Let these reader-profiles bring the advertising effort to life by putting a human face on the numbers. And, finally . . .

**Maintain a strong underlying message** — Craft your strongest marketing message each year and stick with it. Pick a theme for your sales year or your publication and build a family of communications around that theme, reinforcing your message at every client touchpoint. This discipline gives you the opportunity to get creative in your own communications, while adding some interest in the process for everyone.

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