Print is Dead. Long Live Print
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The World’s Best Independent Magazines

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Introduction
The print magazine as we once knew it is dead or dying. Since the early 1990s, we’ve said goodbye to many of the magazines that once defined the newsstands. The Face, Blender, Spin, Vox, Grafik, Sleazenation, BLITZ, Arena, Nuts, Front, Company, Easy Living, She, CosmoGirl, Bliss, Sugar, Teen, Just Seventeen and many more have closed. We’ve seen other publishing giants much reduced. New York magazine is now only printed fortnightly; Newsweek has closed and reopened at a fraction of its former print run. In the ultimate humiliation, Melody Maker was merged into its long-standing rival, NME. For those that remain intact, the question is no longer whether they will always be here, but how long they will hang on for. Will there always be a Vogue? The very fact that we think to ask that question shows how much things have changed.

Why has a previously thriving industry found itself so diminished? The obvious answer is that the rise of digital media has caused readerships to shrink. Back in the heyday of print we needed magazines for the information they provided. A teenager marooned in a countryside town needed The Face in order to connect to all that was cool and exciting in the world. Now that digital media pervades every aspect of our lives, print’s role as information giver is redundant. That provincial teenager? She has Tumblr now. Digital media provides information faster and more cheaply than printed paper can ever hope to. In trying to compete, once-mighty magazines have found themselves playing a losing game. The faster and cheaper they try to be, the more they devalue their product and the more readers they lose. But losing readers to digital is only half the story.

To truly understand the demise of print, we need to understand who its real customers are. Traditionally, magazines don’t make their money from the cover price – that’s just there to heighten the perceived value of the magazine. Magazines make their real money from selling advertising; to put it another way, they sell brands access to their readership. The magazine is not the product for sale – its readers are. Readers are not the customer – the advertisers are. The unspoken agreement between the publisher and the reader is that the readers get cheap content in return for looking at some adverts. Meanwhile, advertisers get access to readers in return for funding the magazine. The upshot of this is that even if a magazine maintains its readership, if advertisers can reach that readership somewhere else, somewhere cheaper, more direct and more measurable – like, say, online – then the magazine is in trouble. Digital attacks traditional magazines on two fronts: it erodes their readership and tempts away their advertisers. This double threat inevitably reduces revenue, which lowers budgets, which has an impact on quality, making it ever harder for mags to compete. Round and round this vicious cycle they go, until serious-looking people in suits arrive on the editorial floor and tell everyone to pack up and go home. Really, the only way things could be worse for print magazines would be if the Internet were also locking up journalists and closing down paper mills.

And yet, look at any newsstand and you will see shelves stacked with more magazines than ever before. Fewer magazines may be being bought in total, but the number of titles on offer has never been greater. While the old-school, advertising-reliant magazine industry is shrinking, business is booming for a new generation of independent mags, which tend to be niche, largely ad-free, ideas-led, design focused and reader funded. The chief problem in putting together a book about the best independent magazines in the world was not finding enough magazines to fill it, but figuring out which of the hundreds on offer to leave out. (The second problem was staying focused when surrounded by great towers of beautiful magazines in all their distracting glory.) Jeremy Leslie, of the brilliant magazine blog magCulture.com, says that on an average month he sees between ten and twenty new indie magazines launch. In comparison, he says it is difficult to recall the last big launch from a major publishing house.

Why are indies thriving while mass-market mags flounder? A look at the hallmarks of successful indie magazines reveals a lot. First, instead of moaning about the Internet moving their cheese, these magazines look for ways to use digital media to their advantage. As Omar Sosa of interiors magazine Apartamento (p. 140) says, ‘It seems that the Internet is helping independent publications as much as it is killing big publishing groups.’ Approached in the right way, technology removes barriers to magazine making. The fundamental tasks of putting a magazine together, such as finding suppliers, wooing contributors, getting it printed, connecting with retailers and collecting subscriptions, have all been made easier by the Internet. It can help even the most niche of magazines find readers – chances are if you are interested enough in a subject to make a magazine about it, there is an audience out there
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interested enough to read it. Magazines were once restricted by geography when it came to finding the right readers. Today, thanks to social and digital media, readers are only ever a few clicks, likes or shares away.

Makers of indie mags are also great at playing to the strengths of their medium. They recognize that the same characteristics that make digital media a foe can make it a friend, too. In delivering ever faster, ever cheaper, ever more disposable content, digital has created a demand for something slower and of higher value, something that stands the test of time. Producers of successful indie magazines don’t try to beat digital media at its game; they focus on the things only print can do. And they do them very, very well. They revel in the physicality of the magazine. They play with format. They mix paper stocks. They publish long, luxurious articles and photo-essays that take months to research and hours to read and absorb. They lovingly craft issues that are beautiful, collectable and timeless objects.

Many of the magazine makers interviewed for this book talked of their ‘magazine moment’, the time in their lives when they fell in love with print. For Becky Smith of Twin (p. 198) it was growing up in a small town and buying Vogue as her sole connection to a glamorous world she could otherwise only dream of. For Kai von Rabenau of mono.kultur (p. 22) it was reading the French music magazine Les Inrockuptibles that, for a teen living in provincial Germany, offered a window on to the wider world. For Cathy Olmedillas of Anorak (p. 144), magazines provided a constant in a childhood spent moving from place to place. Crucially, Smith, Rabenau and Olmedillas all started off as readers. Time and time again I heard indie publishers say they set out to make the magazine they wanted to read. What motivates them is a hunger to read, not some burning desire to be read. As readers first, publishers second, these creatives have a love of and a curiosity about magazines. This leads them to ask questions like: ‘What if children’s magazines weren’t so patronizing?’ (Anorak, p. 144); ‘What if fashion magazines reported on what people actually wear?’ (LAW, p. 186; Jocks & Nerds, p. 194); ‘What if rejected fiction had a platform?’ (McSweeney’s, p. 26); ‘What if women’s magazines made women feel good about themselves?’ (Oh Comely, p. 84); ‘What if cycling magazines didn’t feel like catalogues?’ (The Ride Journal, p. 128; Boneshaker, p. 134); ‘What if interiors magazines were more authentic?’ (Apartamento, p. 140); or even, ‘What if there were a fashion magazine in a Frisbee?’ (FreeStyleMagazine, p. 184). Others challenge conventions with genre combinations, like Noble Rot (p. 16), the magazine that mixes wine and music, or Cherry Bombe (p. 86), the women’s magazine about food, and Cat People (p. 18), the art and cats magazine.

Indie magazines are also defined by their fresh approach to advertising. Ads are either minimal, carefully curated, specially created or completely absent. Indie magazine makers reject advertising, first so as not to spoil the ‘flow’ of their magazine and to ensure they really do create each issue for the readers, and no one else. But it’s also because indie magazines have international readerships connected by interest, not geography. Meanwhile, advertisers have regional budgets and targets. There’s a fundamental disconnect between the two parties. Plus, few indie mag makers want to spend time selling ads, or money employing someone to do it for them. Rather than look to advertisers for funding, many indies rely on their cover price, with the sales from one issue paying for the production of the next. Others are financed through crowdfunding.

For some, publishing is a labour of love, undertaken as a creative but unprofitable counterpoint to an unsatisfying day job. For others, their magazine acts as a calling card, used to gain more lucrative side projects. But for a significant number, magazines are not hobby projects or portfolio pieces but proper, grown-up, rent-paying, person-employing, family-supporting businesses. It is disingenuous to dismiss indie mag makers as mere bedroom publishers. These magazine makers aren’t just creative – they are entrepreneurs, and they are reinventing an industry.

For this new generation of publishers, with their emphasis on high production values and original concepts and content, their curiosity and reader-first mentality, there is a new covenant at the heart of magazine making. Rather than magazines offering their readers cheap content in return for looking at adverts, indies offer their readers a unique product that will be treasured by their readers, for a modest fee. The magazine is no longer an expensive way to share information. Instead, it’s an affordable way to mass-produce a beautiful object. Tellingly, indie mags are not just sold on newsstands but also in clothing, interiors and concept stores.
These magazines are an affordable way to buy into a brand or lifestyle or to indulge a passion, much like a bottle of N°5 is an affordable way to take home some Chanel.

The new publisher–reader covenant fits into the old distribution model like a round peg in a square hole. Under the traditional model, a significant share of a magazine’s pages is given over to advertising. In the hope of reaching the maximum number of readers, as many copies are printed as is possible. These are shipped to as many retailers as possible. Then, once the issue is out of date, the retailer takes the remaining copies, tears off the covers and returns them to the publisher, to prove they weren’t sold. The common expectation is that a considerable percentage of issues will be pulped. These excess magazines don’t hurt the advertiser: the more copies printed and the wider the distribution, the more chance there is that people will see their ads. But they don’t serve the reader: the more money wasted on unnecessary printing and shipping, the less is invested in content and production. And the wastage certainly doesn’t serve the independent magazine maker, who must gamble on how many copies they will sell before the issue is out-of-date and then wait to get paid for those sales. Rob Orchard of Delayed Gratification (p. 166) says, ‘Unless you’re selling advertising – and most independent magazines aren’t – the sums just don’t add up. You send out a couple of thousand magazines; if half of them sell you’re doing really well. You can get the rest back, but they’re either dog-eared and difficult to sell, or they come back with the covers ripped off as proof that they didn’t sell, and you get maybe 45 or 50 per cent of the cover price around three to six months later. If you’re a tiny company really trying to manage cash flow and direct resources, the whole thing is barking mad.’

Many indie magazine publishers are frustrated with the old distribution model. For Adam Towle at The Green Soccer Journal (p. 124), it nearly meant the end for his magazine: ‘The biggest setback we faced came when we found ourselves mistreated by a distribution company, at a time when the magazine was still in its infancy. It quickly became apparent that the pointers we’d been given didn’t correspond to the magazine’s model. We found ourselves printing far more copies than was necessary, and struggling to place the magazine in stores that reflected our outlook.’ Jason McGlade of FreeStyleMagazine (p. 184) describes the advertisers on whom this model forced him to rely as ‘vampires’. Others expressed discomfort with the principle of pulping. Mike White at Boneshaker (p. 134) says, ‘Quite aside from the environmental implications, it seems wrong to put so much into making something beautiful that you’re proud of, then to have it pulped. We want to make things that last.’

This has led the indie press to look for alternative methods of distribution. Some are doing their own, personally dealing with and delivering to a selection of handpicked stores. Others are thinking laterally and using art book distributors, such as London’s Antenne Books, who are experienced in distributing high-end, timeless and collectable paper products and get what indie makers are trying to achieve. In 2008, editor and mag fan Steve Watson founded Stack, a subscription service that delivers a different indie magazine to your door every month – a totally new way to connect readers and magazines. Peter Bilak, founder of design mag Works That Work (p. 46), is experimenting with social distribution and getting readers to source and stock retailers as well as help with shipping. Many indies sidestep the problem of pulping out-of-date issues by cannily filling their magazines with timeless content that doesn’t date. As Jody Daunton of Another Escape (p. 148) says, they are aiming ‘for a life on the shelf, not a shelf life’.

Innovation, lateral thinking and a reader-first mentality inform every aspect of indie magazine making, from the magazines themselves to the ways they are funded and distributed. With their new business models, new distribution needs, new production approaches, new editorial values and new nimble ways of working, the new print is unrecognizable from yesterday’s. The mass-media magazine industry as we know it is gone or going. The indie industry springing up in its place is a revolution in terms of content, style, priorities and business. This is not a continuation, but a rebirth.

In this book you’ll find nearly 100 of the best print-reinventing indie magazines from around the world – every one of them a reason to declare: Print is Dead. Long Live Print. And maybe, just maybe, among them you’ll also find a reason to stop what you’re doing and start your own indie mag; there’s almost certainly an audience out there waiting for you. As Cara Livermore from Chickpea (p. 104) says, ‘It could be the hardest and most satisfying thing you ever do.’
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With its uncoated paper, diminutive size, commitment to illustration and timeless, collectable issues, Little White Lies represents an archetype of independent publishing. Published every two months, each issue is themed around a new film release, with leading illustrators and commentators giving their interpretation of the movie. The magazine’s winning formula of ideas-led editorial and retro illustration (courtesy of creative director Timba Smit) has spawned countless imitators and earned it some high-powered admirers, including Quentin Tarantino.

Little White Lies began as the degree project of founding editor Danny Miller. Today it is published by indie publishing company The Church of London, which also publishes its sister magazine, Huck, and is one of the success stories of the indie magazine revolution.

David Jenkins
Editor

‘My philosophy may be slightly different to that of past editors of Little White Lies, but one element of the magazine that has never really changed is our goal to prove that movie magazines don’t have to be formal academic journals or ultra-populist, blockbuster cheerleaders.

We have only 90 pages of editorial every two months, and it would be a shame to give them over to a bilious power-slamming of a movie, a star or a director. So we tend to keep the tone of the magazine quite upbeat and celebratory. But it’s not about positivity – it’s more honesty that I’m after in our writers and critics. I look for people who are able to write about movies and uncouple themselves from the blights of received wisdom or crass subjectivity.

It was only when I first met the original Little White Lies crew that I became aware of the different ways that magazines could function and be produced. I’d often thought of magazines as stringently templated, with regularity and familiarity breeding a returning audience. But Little White Lies taught me that you can stray from the path in wild and radical ways and still generate a meaningful readership. Our readers are insanely, almost pathologically engaged. Our social networking channels are our most direct route to our audience, and it’s surprising and enlivening how often our readers want to be involved in our crackpot schemes.’
In the early days of cinema, death sequences were more about a hand grabbing a body part and the actor pretending to die," says Fox. "It's evolved into a visual art where the audience want more action, more danger, so we have to bring it to the camera so the audience gets what they want."

"You need an authentic gun from the period," says Fox, "Spaghetti Westerns use cap-and-ball revolvers, which is correct for the early period. Your classic Hollywood Western tended to always use cartridge guns. You don't see automatic weapons in cowboy movies very often, but Sam Peckinpah's The Wild Bunch is very accurate because the US Cavalry had changed from the Colt six-shooter to the 1911 automatic pistol."

"Period guns do suffer from the gunpowder not liking moisture," says Fox. "In Ned Kelly, for example, you had Heath Ledger firing guns towards camera in pouring simulated rain. For that sequence where he's firing one gun in each hand towards camera, I used 12 guns. I'm actually just out of frame in my waterproof coat ready to hand Heath a replacement gun the second he gets a malfunction!"

"In actual fact, it's not realistic to see a lot of blood from a gunshot wound," explains Fox. "In most cases in reality, blood at the point of entry is very minimal. But in movies, the special-effect is where the bullet pierces the body. In Hollywood, you have to show a lot of blood."
Timba Smit’s art direction seeks to immerse the reader in each issue’s chosen movie by reinventing the magazine’s design for every edition.
Some wines are good with fish. Others are good with meat. But all wines are good with music. So, in a way, the only surprising thing about a magazine combining wine and music, as Noble Rot does, is that there aren’t more like it. This Kickstarter-funded, ad-free mag aims to demystify the world of wine tasting and show that a good wine can be just as exciting as a great tune. Without dumbing down, it decontaminates wine tasting, eliminating snobbery and jargon and replacing it with unashamed and infectious enthusiasm. Noble Rot was founded by Dan Keeling (the ex-A&R behind artists such as Coldplay, Lily Allen, Athlete and Bombay Bicycle Club) and wine buyer Mark Andrew, both of whom hold the respected Wine & Spirit Education Trust (WSET) Diploma.

Dan Keeling
Co-founder and Editor

‘The idea for Noble Rot occurred to us at the end of a particularly delicious bottle of Raveneau Chablis. A lot of our friends and contemporaries are still intimidated and confused by the overload of information posed by wine. We wanted to suggest to them that they might get as much of a visceral thrill from experiencing a Didier Daugeneau Sauvignon Blanc as from listening to the Sex Pistols’ Never Mind the Bollocks at full blast. We were tired with dull and stuffy wine and food journalism that we couldn’t relate to, so we set out to create a magazine that we ourselves would want to read.’
Cat People is an interview-based, bilingual (English and Japanese) annual featuring cat-owning artists, designers and writers. It was created by Melbourne-based cat lovers Jessica Lowe and Gavin Green after they noticed how many of their favourite creatives had feline friends. Cat People debuted at the 2013 Tokyo Art Book Fair, where pre-launch issues sold out. The remaining issues sold out within six months. Issue One boasted mixed papers, smaller-format inserts and original art photography. It featured interviews with artist Tanya Schultz, illustrator Mat Maitland, fashion designers Vivetta Ponti, Suzanne Clements and Inacio Ribeiro and a specially commissioned photo-essay by photographer Takashi Homma.

‘I grew up with Siamese cats, and Gavin and I now have two of our own. Cats have been constant companions in everything I’ve done, and all aspects of my career. I guess it was only natural that they filtered into my work.

The idea was inspired by our love of Japanese books and publishing. They often address very niche audiences, but complement a focus on narrow subject-matter with beautiful levels of production and ambition. We had noticed that many of the artists we admired also owned cats. The realization that cats could bring together our favourite people and be a way into their lives and work became the jumping-off point for Cat People.

At first we weren’t sure that our idea was very original at all. We assumed that cats and self-publishing must have crossed paths somewhere before, especially in Japan. While on holiday in Japan we searched many bookstores looking for a version of Cat People, but it didn’t exist.

We set out to make the magazine of our dreams – something that combined our interest in art, fashion and design with the curiosity of looking into people’s homes and studios. Using cats, we found a way to create a world where all the people featured in the magazine could be linked together. All our contributors are cat people, too.’
Since founding Vivetta in 2008, Vivi Ponti has drawn heavily on her love of animals – in particular, cats – to inflect her collections with a whimsical, and often surreal, sensibility. With cat faces appearing as pockets or inset into bodices, her designs richly translate the passion Vivi feels for her own cats. We first met during Paris Fashion Week in March - sharing a tea and gossiping about our kittens. This summer I reconnected with her just three days before she gave birth to her first child, a son named Otto.

Clockwise from top left: Collage work by artist Lucy James, who has a 2-year-old black cat named Marcel. Jessica Lowe says this photo-essay by her hero, the Japanese photographer Takashi Homma, was 'exactly the sort of thing I would have loved to find in a bookshop somewhere'. 

Cat People meets fashion designer Vivetta Ponti and her five cats for its debut issue.

Cat People features relaxed portraits of its interviewees at home and at work.
Fashion shoot showing Vivetta Ponti’s cat-inspired designs.
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Prestel

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