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All You Need is Love (and Money, and Audience Research)

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Book Review: All You Need is Love (and Money, and Audience Research)

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Magazine Production (Second Edition). Jason Whittaker. Routledge, 2017. 185 pp. \$39.95 paperback.

A rather slim volume, *Magazine Production* is a concise study of the art and business of making magazines. Its author, Jason Whittaker, directs the School of English and Journalism at the University of Lincoln in the UK. Because this is the book's second edition, it includes rich and relevant updates on the role of social media, apps, and digital platforms.

Chapter one traces magazines' past: from their earliest beginnings, when they comprised a few pages of "densely printed text with few illustrations" (p. 7), through the rise of the glossies, to today's "media aggregators such as Flipboard and LinkedIn Pulse, which bring together content from a variety of online sources" (p. 20). It also contains a short "careers in magazines" section—and while the advice in it is cursory, Whittaker takes a deeper dive into the roles and responsibilities of a typical magazine staff in later chapters.

Chapter two, about the business of magazine publishing, offers a nuanced explanation of a publisher's responsibilities. For students who have their sights set on editorial positions, understanding that "the publisher's role ... is not to manage the writing, photography, layout and design of a magazine, but more to ensure that editorial principles are in line with the overall intentions and functions of a title and publishing company" (p. 36) provides a helpful distinction between the business and creative sides of the house.

In chapter three, Whittaker examines "how circulation has traditionally worked in the magazine industry" and "the impact of new systems of digital distribution, particularly for mobile platforms" (p. 56). He provides an interesting analysis of Apple's Newsstand, noting that magazines' resulting loss in revenue was "less important than the strict terms imposed on publishers," limiting their ability to market to readers or collect information about them. Here, Whittaker also examines the effects of the "digital revolution." While recognizing the many advantages of social, mobile, and other digital platforms, he also offers an excellent reminder of the foundations of magazine journalism:

A story should obviously be appealing to most of the audience and worth sharing with friends and family. For any chance of it being spread, of course it needs to be on a platform ... that allows easy sharing, and the ability to write tight and compelling headlines is as important as ever. It goes without saying that the content should be of good quality: clickbait (which, in the end, is what the more disreputable viral marketers offer) provides short-term success at best. If you mislead your readers with a false title and then fail to deliver, they are unlikely to trust you again. (p. 72–73)

In chapter four, Whittaker outlines the editorial process, explains the roles of various editors on a magazine staff, and offers insight into the challenges of ad placement. It is here that he also tackles the various types of magazine articles: from news stories that “should be well crafted and also provide an angle” (p. 85), to features “marked only by their variety” (p. 89), to reviews. At times, he seems to offer a tutorial on how to write each type of article, but his intent, I believe, is to give a detailed overview of the entire magazine production process.

Designing for print and digital is covered in chapters five and six. Only a few small black-and-white images are included in these design chapters, which could benefit from larger, full-color images with detailed captions. Chapter five offers standard print design advice; six is more of a catchall of considerations for digital magazines (blogs, multimedia, social media). Here, Whittaker notes that web analytics “can be extremely useful for uncovering patterns of usage” (p. 147), but do not reveal “why an individual clicked on a web site in the first place, or why they left. Many journalists complain, rightly, that this obsession with data results in a devaluing of their practice” (p. 147).

Though Whittaker works in the UK, he includes examples from both the U.S. and the UK. Figures are in British pounds, of course, but shouldn’t trip up most students. Readers in the States may be confused by a few terms, such as “sub-editor,” who would be a copy editor at a U.S.-based magazine. Most important, though, if you teach in the States, is the need to identify supplementary materials specific to U.S. practice and regulations in place of Whittaker’s chapter seven, legal and ethical issues, which reflects UK policy and law.

Overall, *Magazine Production* offers an easily digestible explanation of the whole of magazine publishing. It is a solid choice for an undergraduate magazine publishing course, and could be useful as a supplementary reading for an undergraduate media studies course. Because Whittaker tasks himself with covering the broad scope of magazine production, the lack of a deep dive into any one topic makes this text unsuitable for graduate-level courses. While most topics receive sufficient coverage, some sections and paragraphs pack too much information. Nonetheless, the text makes a useful resource for magazine educators.