

Crafting the cake beneath the frosting: The editor's role in city magazine redesigns

Introduction

As part of the current *Vox* magazine staff, it's hard to imagine a time when the publication didn't exist. But before *Vox* became what it is today, a small-city magazine that provides arts, culture, entertainment and important service features to residents in Columbia, someone had to take a risk in creating it. That person was Adam Purvis, a master's student in the journalism department in 1998. At the time, the *Missourian* was publishing two smaller tabloids, *Ideas*, which served as a Sunday magazine, and *Weekend*, which provided entertainment news. Purvis combined the two and carried the strengths of each into the new publication.

Sixteen years later, 2014 is again a time of change. This semester, *Vox* magazine's print product underwent both a visual and editorial redesign. This undertaking required collaboration, vision and dedication from the entire leadership staff who weighed in on these decisions.

As Editor of *Vox* during this period, the print relaunch provided an opportunity to explore and better understand the process of magazine redesign at other city publications. With the ultimate goal of learning the tips, tricks and trade of successful magazine redesigns, I examined the publications deemed the top five best redesigns in the 2013 CRMA awards, including *Birmingham, D, Philadelphia, San Antonio* and the *Washingtonian*, which all emphasized significant editorial changes in their entry forms.

In my comparison of old and new issues of each publication, I studied how the magazines transformed in large and small ways and then learned what happened behind-the-scenes through interviews with editors at each magazine. I uncovered some of the

driving forces behind city and regional magazine redesigns and gained an understanding of the standard and varying processes, the constraints of time and budget, the advantages and disadvantages of hiring an outside firm, and the different ways editors consider their audience or aim to a target demographic. The research questions I addressed included:

RQ1: What are the primary reasons that city and regional magazines opt to redesign today, and what do they want to accomplish through editorial changes?

RQ2: What does the process of editorial redesign look like at city and regional magazines? What are the primary considerations in making changes in content — How do staff members decide what to continue publishing, which sections need tweaks, and which will be completely revised?

Literature Review

Uses and gratifications theory.

A publication's redesign is not about the editorial staff members who might argue over how to rename a department section. It's not about the art director who spends hours building prototypes of the new logo, typography and recurring graphics. The purpose comes down to the audience, and how the publication can better serve its readership. A change in content might be an effort to reach a different demographic, create a fresh look that will catch people's eye on the newsstands, or craft a more useable product. In the words of Samir Husni, also known as Mr. Magazine, "The days of marketing magazines using the shotgun approach — where you just throw it out there and hope your audience will see it — are long gone" ("Samir husni: 'readers,' 2001).

The reader-centered objective has become even clearer with the onset of digital news as journalists attempt to find a design (and accompanying business model) that will

fight for readers' attention in the fragmented media world. As *Forbes* staff reporter Deborah Jacobs says in an excerpt from *The Forbes Model For Journalism in a Digital Age*, "You know what's changed for me at *Forbes*? I now write for my audience, not my editor" (DVorkin, 2012). At the forefront of *Vox*'s print redesign, I'll be keeping our audience in mind, and my interview questions will inquire how editors considered audience during their redesigns. In this instance, a consideration of the literature on audience research proves useful.

Producing audience-driven content requires understanding what attracts people to a publication in the first place. This concept is closely tied with an area of journalism and mass communications research called uses and gratifications theory, which focuses on the perspective of consumers and the pleasures they receive from media usage.

Dating back to 1940 in a series of studies about what radio meant in the lives of listeners, Herzog researched the reasons individuals tune into radio soap operas (Heath 2005). According to Heath, "This view of media theory reasons that audiences are active and attentive when media content serves some function they believe to be valuable" (2005). Herzog conducted a nationwide study using focused interviews with women. She identified three satisfactions or gratifications for listening to daytime serials: emotional release, wishful thinking and advice regarding listeners' own lives. Her findings were the basis for the phrase "uses and gratifications" (Heath 2005).

Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch developed five basic assumptions undergirding uses and gratifications research in 1974. The authors emphasize that audiences are not passive but active participants in media usage, people take initiative in what type of media to incorporate in their lives, and media compete against other sources of gratification for

users' attention. In addition, they argue audiences are aware of their motives and can explain why they use media, and only through studying audiences can true motives for media usage be understood. That is, while exploring audience motivations, researchers should suspend assumptions about media effects (Katz et. al, 1974).

In 1982, Bantz identified the major approaches applied to the theory of uses and gratifications at the time, which included research that explores why people use a specific medium, program or program type. The problem with these approaches, he points out, is that studies evaluating use of a single type of content do not control for an audience's use of the medium on which the content is produced. He also wanted to explore whether uses and gratifications research was replicable, due to the variations in methodologies among researchers.

Thus, Bantz made further contributions to the theory with his study about the dominant reasons driving television use. He completed two studies that both used two questionnaires, one that asked respondents about the medium (television) and one that asked them questions about their favorite television program. He found similar uses and gratifications emerged from the medium and program type studies, including surveillance, entertainment and voyeurism, but differences in how the audience prioritized these uses (Bantz, 1982).

Uses and gratifications theory has been applied to the Internet as well. In 2004, T. Stafford, M. Stafford and Lawrence used a questionnaire in which respondents ranked the importance of 45 "descriptive trait terms" that coincided with potential Internet gratifications (Stafford, Stafford & Schkade, 2004). Users ranked "friends,"

“interactivity” and “chatting” as important, which reinforced the notion that Internet consumers are looking for social gratifications (Stafford, Stafford & Schkade, 2004).

A few studies have applied the uses and gratifications theory to magazine audiences though this specific segment of research is sparse (Payne , Severn & Dozier, 1988). Payne, Severn and Dozier conducted research regarding the use of trade and consumer magazines (1988). The authors incorporated measures of surveillance, interaction and diversion applied in previous studies in their questionnaire. Their findings supported the hypotheses that readers of consumer magazines sought diversion, and readers of trade magazines were more inclined toward environmental surveillance and interaction. Towers’ study found the environmental interaction to be the largest predictor for magazine readership in general, with exceptions for newsmagazine readers, who were interested in surveillance, and consumer magazine readers, who also found the most satisfaction in diversion from reality (Towers, 1987).

In a report presented to the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication convention in 1985, Shoemaker and Inskip studied dental student’s motivation and uses for reading nine different dental magazines. The authors surveyed 504 students who ranked various uses. They found difference in reasoning between upper and lower classmen, which indicated that understanding audience behaviors should be an important part of editorial decision making. “Publishers, advertisers, and academic magazine researchers should be interested in the uses and gratifications theoretical approach because it can help publishers direct the editorial content of their publications to secure their base of readers ... “ (Shoemaker & Inskip, 1985).

No studies have specifically examined uses and gratifications with regard to city magazines though other research indicates city magazines could be used by readers in a variety of ways — for basic information about their environment, diversion, as well as surveillance purposes. *Vox* resembles an alt-weekly while performing many functionalities of a city magazine, including calendar event listings, a restaurant guide, and service stories. From analytics and knowledge of the magazine’s history, we know the publication provides practical information to readers who are often directed to our site via referrals from Google (the most visited page is the restaurant guide) or Facebook. Readers are also likely pick up the print copy for the sole purpose of scanning the calendar. The interview portion of my research will address how other magazine editors today incorporate audience feedback and general knowledge about their readership into their redesign processes.

Editors as gatekeepers.

During *Vox*’s magazine production cycle, there are dozens of people in the production assembly line who make decisions about how any given article will appear in its finished form. It begins with the department editors who make choices about who to contact to source a specific story idea. From there, the leadership team has the opportunity to reject a story entirely, ask the editor to find a new angle, significantly revise or accept the pitch. A reporter makes decisions about additional people to contact, how to report a story, and what information to keep or leave out. Then, another ten to fifteen people have the opportunity to tweak, reword and rework the copy before the story gets published. Each of these steps could be viewed as a channel or “gate”

controlled by a “gatekeeper,” who determines whether a story makes it to publication, and if so, the message it sends.

The concept of gatekeeping was first developed by social psychologist Lewin in 1947 in his post-WWII study that examined all the decisions that go into food consumption, from the farmer to the grocery store (as cited in White, 1950). Inspired by Lewin, White followed the editorial decision making of “Mr. Gates,” an experienced journalist who was then serving as a wire-editor, in his seminal 1950 study about the application of gatekeeping to the selection of news. White specifically analyzed the wire stories Mr. Gates decided to include and, more importantly, reject at a non-metropolitan newspaper as well as his reasoning for doing so. The study found that Mr. Gates’ own experiences and attitudes largely influenced his selection process, which revealed what White argues must be a larger phenomenon — the power of individual editors to control his or her metaphorical “gate” and thus define what constitutes news for the general public:

It is only when we study the reasons given by Mr. Gates for rejecting almost nine-tenths of the wire copy (in his search for the one-tenth for which he has space) that we begin to understand how highly subjective, how reliant upon value-judgments based on the “gate keeper’s” own set of experiences, attitudes and expectations the communication of ‘news’ really is.” (White, 1950).

Although White identified the personal bias present in the gatekeeping process, in 2001 Shoemaker et. al addressed the force of organizational routine in newspaper coverage of two Congressional sessions. The researchers administered a survey and questionnaire to newspaper editors and found homogeneity among editors’ definitions of a Congressional bill’s newsworthiness. This suggested the process of news selection was

more influenced by a routine consensus about newsworthiness than editors' individual opinions (Shoemaker, Eichholz, Eunyi & Wrigley, 2001).

Since White's study, researchers have also expanded gatekeeping theory to include the processes that define how a story is shaped, published and disseminated (Shoemaker, Eichholz, Eunyi & Wrigley, 2001). "In fact, gatekeeping in mass communication can be seen as the overall process through which the social reality transmitted by the news media is constructed, and is not just a series of "in" and "out" decisions" (Shoemaker, Eichholz, Eunyi & Wrigley, 2001). Soroka (2012) also suggests many of the biases in news selection are a result of organizational structure and breaks them into three categories: organization-level factors, which include administrative procedures and cost, story-level factors, such as a story's geographic proximity, and extra-organizational factors defined by journalistic norms and values that shape editors' definition of newsworthiness.

In addition to structural and personal influences, it's no secret that even our free press often faces pressure from advertisers, a problem that directly influences gatekeeping. This has been especially true in the magazine industry. In 1989, Kessler researched six major women's consumer magazines' advertising and editorial content. The analysis revealed that gatekeepers at these magazines avoided covering the dangers of smoking in order to prevent advertisers, namely companies owned by tobacco giants, from pulling funding, even though the magazines were dedicated to informing women about health issues (Kessler, as cited in Shoemaker & Vos, 2009). In the words of Shoemaker and Vos, "Even if the pressure is not direct, editorial gatekeepers make

decisions knowing that advertising is responsible for the financial health of their publication” (2009).

Just like an art director has control over the color, font and style before and after a redesign, an editor influences the decisions affecting stories at the macro and micro level, from the accept/reject moment to the final copy-editing tweak. An editorial redesign involves an evaluation of existing content, procedures, and mission followed by the implementation of change that could alter the gatekeeping process. In addition to studying how magazine editors consider audience during a redesign, the tenets of gatekeeping will inform my textual analysis and interviews as I analyze the editorial decisions behind a redesign, and whether a redesign signifies a modified gatekeeping process at city magazines. I’ll be looking for the types of stories editors chose to include, the language of these stories, and the alleged purpose they serve. My interviews will get at the heart of why editors made certain choices — to appease advertisers, keep up with changing times, better serve an audience or project their own personal taste.

History of city and regional magazines.

The beginning concepts of a city magazine cropped up in the late 19th century (Hynds, 1995). One study proposes New York City’s *Town Topics*, founded before 1900, was one of the first American magazines to feature local, lighthearted editorial content catered to a specific city audience (Moon qtd. in Hynds, 1995).

A publication more akin to the modern city magazine was created in 1925 — Harold Ross’ *The New Yorker*, which promised to reflect metropolitan life through sophisticated humor. (Moon, as cited in Hynds, 1995). Since the *New Yorker’s* genesis, it has evolved to feature literary and public affairs articles in addition to the humor pieces

while gaining popularity nationwide. Still, the magazine stays true to the city-magazine service features, including event listings and restaurant suggestions typically displayed by others of its kind (Hynds 1995).

In response to *The New Yorker's* success, a number of other city magazines in metropolitan areas such as Cleveland, Pittsburgh, Boston and New Orleans were produced in the following decades, but many lacked quality content and design and subsequently failed (Moon, as cited in Hynds, 1995). The city magazine “renaissance” truly began in the 1960s when people flocked to urban areas post-WWII. Social unrest and change defined the decade and created the perfect atmosphere for the city magazine, which served as an alternative voice and guide for citizens (Hynds, 1995). In 1967, *Business Week* reported that sixty city magazines had popped up in the year and described these publications as “slick, provocative, and aimed at an affluent audience” (Hynds, 1995).

The number of city and regionals grew throughout the 1970s and continued to cater to niche audiences, typically upper middle class, middle-aged and white (Hynds 1979). In the late '70s, city and regional magazines were the publishing industry's fastest growing market, largely due to readers' local pride, newspapers' failure to appeal to readers bored with traditional news, and the magazines' ability to attract a specialized, affluent readership (Hayes, 1981).

Selnow and Riley provide more insight into how some of these magazines began and operated. In 1991, the authors compiled a 400-page volume that profiles 20 different regional interest magazines, the earliest founded in 1868. With entries on *Boston*, *The Chicagoan* and *Arizona Highways* magazines to name a few, the book

describes the origins of each publication, its editorial goals, and even details such as its cost and cover artwork. A writer from each region wrote the individual entries to provide a more accurate depiction of the publications, and the book details some of the most prominent city and regionals throughout the 20th century as well as a few small successful titles that were new at the time of publication.

Hynds, who has written much of the scant literature regarding city and regionals, was curious whether city magazine editors were actually concerned with providing an alternate voice or if their main focus was event and restaurant listings. One of his studies in the late '70s found that only about half of city magazine editors believed they served as an alternative publication in their city, but almost all of them strove to address problems in their community (Hynds, 1979). The survey also showed many magazine editors at the time were beginning to see the use of new journalism, or long form, narrative pieces, to address local issues in-depth (Hynds, 1979).

Despite their rapid rise after the war, in the mid-'90s, city magazines still made up less than one percent of the nation's magazines (Hynds, 1995). Hynds suggests that at this time, only about a third of city magazine editors were "truly exploring their seemingly vast potential as agenda setters, investigative reporters and advocates of improved cities" (Hynds, 1995).

The FOLIO surveys over the past few years highlighted city and regional magazines' concentration on luxury lifestyle, tourism/travel, and at a lesser level, family, arts/entertainment, and food/drink coverage (Kinsman 2013). With this research in mind, Hynds' suggestion in the mid-'90s that city magazines capitalize on their agenda-setting potential, investigative reporting and commentary role has not materialized in

contemporary city and regionals on a grand scale, though some do focus on hard-hitting content. *Philadelphia*, for example, promises readers “topical, in-depth reports on crucial and controversial issues.” In many instances, city and regionals combine this content with lighter topics on culture and the arts.

Newspaper redesign.

Ron Reason, a Chicago-based newspaper designer and publication redesign consultant, outlines the steps of an editorial redesign on his website. He suggests editors articulate reasons and strategies for the change, assign specific tasks and define deadlines, but he emphasizes building a prototype as the “heart and soul” of a redesign (Reason, 2013b). Often a prototype includes three models and addresses details such as the page’s grid size, color, white space and other graphic design elements, but the prototype also provides an opportunity for editorial content updates, including the renaming of sections, reallocation of department pages and creation of new or revised content categories. Once the prototype is completed, the changes can be implemented and launched (Reason, 2013b).

One example is the successful remodeling of the Twin Cities’ *Star Tribune* (Gyllenhaal, 2006). Editors of the *Star Tribune* implemented concrete alterations to achieve abstract goals. The staff strove to engage readers in a “warmer, more personable way,” so the new design featured daily greetings in the nameplate and second person in headlines and text boxes (Gyllenhaal, 2006). Gyllenhaal encourages publications to involve the entire staff in the process, listen to ideas from everyone, and explain to readers, in detail, what changes are being made.

In 2012, *USA Today* implemented a major overhaul of its print and digital

products and even the iconic blurred globe logo. Partnering with digital design agency Fi, the staff took a methodological approach (“Usatoday.com: Redesigning one,” 2013). In the first phase, discovery, the team researched market trends and audience behavior to create a foundation for the design process. Knowing that users rarely started at the homepage of the website but rather come to the page via search or email forward, the design team created system that focused on individual articles, each with its own URL, which provided a streamlined experience for readers (“Usatoday.com: Redesigning one,” 2013). The new print product featured bolder colors as well as more photos and infographics with the idea of bringing “visual storytelling to the next level” (“USA today unveils,” 2012).

During the complex process of creating a newspaper or magazine, it’s easy to get stuck executing tasks in a convenient way, habits that serve the staff more than the readers (Gyllenhaal, 2006). “There are great advantages to questioning everything and reinventing it. One of the blessings of an ambitious redesign is the chance to stop, look at every element of the paper, and ask if it is still valuable” (Gyllenhaal, 2006). A shift in thinking — “We’re going to start publishing more investigative features” or “Our content must be more current” — takes time but can begin with a publication’s redesign (Gyllenhaal, 2006). He ends by emphasizing that official redesigns aren’t the only opportunity for change. In fact, improving a publication should be a “constant obsession” for editors, who should always consider their audience’s changing tastes and make upgrades accordingly. (Gyllenhaal, 2006).

In “Don’t Redesign, Rethink,” Ostendorf, who’s been involved in over 500 newspaper redesigns, discusses the importance of “comparing apples to apples,” which

involves pairing before and after shots of pages during the revamping process. (Ostendorf, 2011). A redesign is “an opportunity to rewrite headlines, show how some stories could have been written differently, or change the quality and display of photography,” he says (2011). He believes the worst mistake in a redesign is not creating enough prototypes. He also emphasizes maintaining publication frequency (ceasing publication encourages readers to give up on the newspaper entirely), being willing to take big risks, and rooting design elements in a publication’s history and location to ensure they aren’t generic (Ostendorf, 2011).

The motivation for implementing a redesign depends on the publication, but Reason says some common explanations in 2013 included new competition, an attempt to say “we’re back, and we have more” after several years of downsizing, tweaking to match an updated publishing strategy, and a change in ownership (Reason, 2013a). The past years have been popular times for both newspaper and magazine redesigns, which Reason partially attributes to the increasing stabilization of the industry. In his words, “printed publications are evolving, but they aren’t going away, nor will the desire, and need, for publishers and editors to redesign, rebrand, rediscover, and reinvent.” (Reason, 2013a).

Magazine redesign.

The cutthroat magazine industry is one of the most scrutinized forms of media (King, 2001). In a 2001 interview, Husni said that half of all new launches fail within their first year, and the chances of staying in business after 10 years is one out of 10 (“Samir husni: ‘readers,’ 2001). In 2006, what he calls the first year “death rate” had risen to about 63 percent, and survival has only become more difficult (“‘mr. magazine’

on,” 2006). In the words of King, “The ones who make it have a hard row to hoe — they face an uphill battle with advertisers, constant demand for image altercations to meet a still-undefined audience ... The old-timers, meanwhile, overhaul their images every few years to keep up, under the watchful eye of industry pundits and readers who holler every time a magazine changes its logo” (2001). Competition influences every decision in the industry, she says, and a magazine must beat out others in voice, character and depth to succeed. King notes that society’s emphasis on the visual leaves readers expecting eye candy every time they pick up a magazine, significantly more so than a newspaper (2001).

In a magazine redesign, King outlines the four F’s: format, formula, frame and function. Format refers to the reoccurring design choices in each issue, and the formula encompasses the editorial structure, including departments, word counts, and feature types. Frame deals with the folio information and margins. She presents *Real Simple* as an example of well-executed use of function — the magazine coordinates its message of living an elegant life with a streamlined, elegant design. A designer must manage these four factors simultaneously, with function being the most important, in order to balance creativity with creed (King, 2001).

What sets magazines apart from other media forms is their catering to niche audiences, King says. Twelve years after she wrote this, we now know that her assertion is even more relevant with today’s fragmented media platforms. However, a redesign brings special considerations to audience feedback. During the restructuring of content and graphics, the staff should evaluate audience responses over a few months, rather than make tweaks or drastic changes based on any immediate reader reactions. King highlights

Ron Sugar's Eleven Steps to a Successful Redesign, the last of which reads: "stick with the redesign once it's launched." He adds, "If you've done your research, the new design should be right on target and only minor changes should be necessary" (King, 2001).

Publication redesign in city and regional magazines.

In the city and regional world, print still rules. In 2006, FOLIO reported that "city and regional magazines have been one of the hottest magazine categories in recent years" while other magazines were struggling during the recession. The staff attributed this growth to successful print revenue, a clientele still dedicated to a print product, and a hunger for localized content. As recently as 2012, city and regionals garnered four to five times less digital revenue than consumer and b-to-b publications (Mickey, 2012), and in 2013, FOLIO once again reported city and regional's adherence to a print-centric outlook (Mickey, 2013). Whether readers are looking to cut out calendar events, flip through the physical pages or admire the glossy photos, it's important to realize readers still want the print copy — so it can't get lost in the shuffle.

Reason's consulting business, which currently thrives in the area of magazine print redesign, reaffirms this notion, and he doesn't see the product going away any time soon. "Despite lots of early enthusiasm for digital offerings (which are still an important area to explore), devotion to the print product remains quite high, among readers and equally important, among premium advertisers ... " (Reason, 2013).

Reason has worked on a number of city and regional magazine and alt-weekly redesigns, including *Hilton Head Monthly*, *Ottawa* and *Chicago Reader*. He offers his collection of magazine samples, prototypes and pages linked to case studies of his work online. For his work on the redesign of Atlanta's alt-weekly *Creative Loafing* in 2010, for

example, he details how he assisted the editors in coming up with a new department labeling system. He advocated for something more active and imperative, so instead of titles such as Contents, News, Editorials, Music and Listings, he suggested short, catchy words including THINK, START, LISTEN, and LOOK, all in caps with a bold typeface (Reason, 2010).

A redesign's content-first mindset.

An ambitious redesign signifies a magazine's renewal, an effort to reflect changing times. Equally important to rethinking the typography, color scheme and page layout is the editorial perspective, which involves an evaluation of existing content. In the words of Samir Husni (Mr. Magazine), "[Design] is the icing on the cake, and if you have a good cake, you better spend some time on the icing so it will be picked up. However, I am quick to add that good design with a bad cake will take you nowhere" (Husni qtd. in King, 2001). An effective design will attract readers' attention, he says, but quality content sells the magazine a second time.

In 1998, Mangan was frustrated by the newspaper industry's focus on updating graphic design. "I think we need to go after motivated readers and give them a newspaper they'd gladly pay for. That means reinventing it top to bottom and zeroing in on content that has tangible value in their daily lives" (Mangan, 1998). He argues readers are more inclined to read well-written feature stories and then offers several suggestions for a change in editorial thinking: cover crime and violence without sensationalizing it, focus less on conflict and more on investigative pieces, and advocate consumerism. "They'll be more apt to buy the paper if it gives them guidance on what to buy and what to avoid" (Mangan, 1998).

Jeanniey Mullen, Chief Growth Officer for digital magazine distribution service Zinio, also believes in the importance of putting content first (Mullen, 2013). She notes that in the ever-changing digital world, magazine publishers should be in tune with trends in technology, audience age and attention. But before publishers can strategize based on these statistics, the magazine's content must be well-crafted. "The content magazine publishers create is, and will continue to be, the one constant we can count on," she says. "After all, it is the high-quality content that creates the core of the magazine brand" (Mullen, 2013). Thus, editors shouldn't lose sight of content revision in the often-complicated process of graphic design overhaul.

Methodology

In order to better understand what prompts city magazine editors to implement a redesign and the process of executing it, I used a combination of interviews and textual analyses to study five city and regional magazines. I analyzed the top five entries of the 2013 CRMA print redesign category for a consistent sampling. This included *Birmingham*, the winner, *D*, *Philadelphia*, *San Antonio*, and *The Washingtonian*. For the 2014 awards competition, CRMA does not have a redesign category, so 2013 is the most recent grouping.

It's important to note that the CRMA magazine competitions are by nature subjective, as is the publishing world in general. Additionally, with the exception of the winner, the placing of the top five entries remains undisclosed, so this research was conducted without knowledge the awards order. However, in the hands of professional judges immersed in and familiar with the industry, the top five entries remain a valid and purposeful sampling.

I had access to print copies of each magazine before and after the redesign and was able to obtain copies of 2014 issues. These current copies allowed me to look at changes since the original redesign, after the staff had a chance to play around with the new layout and organization. I analyzed at least three copies of each of the five magazines. I was able to look at four copies of *D*, *The Washingtonian*, and *Birmingham* due to the editors' willingness to send multiple issues.

This research involved an in-depth examination of the magazines and how they compare from one issue to another. Qualitative textual analysis was appropriate in this context. German sociologist Siegfried Kracauer, known for his harsh criticism of quantitative research and as a proponent for humanistic methods, argued the meaning of a text must be analyzed as a whole, which inevitably involves a certain level of interpretation (Larsen, 1991). A holistic and interpretive reading more effectively unpacked the nuance, below-the-surface messages, and macro directional changes of these magazines.

Textual and content analyses have been applied to magazine research in the past to explore underlying messages, perpetuation or debunking of stereotypes and magazine branding. For example, Turner (2008) explored six consecutive issues of Britain's sole mainstream lesbian magazine, *Diva*, and using critical discourse analysis, examined the construction of "us" and "them," or a lesbian identity "heavily dependent on boundaries." The author pulled out specific sections of text, called extracts, and then provided a short interpretation of that extract which demonstrated how lesbian women were cast in a positive light, often at the cost of disparaging bisexual and heterosexual women.

Wisneski (2007), who researched the portrayal of masculinity in *Maxim* by analyzing emergent and repetitive themes, describes her textual analysis as a process that “formally and systematically engages with images and text as well as editorial and advertisement content.” She focused on gender relations, sex, sexuality and humor, and thus evaluated themes rather than specific sections of the magazine. She identified patterns of representation in *Maxim* over one year until she reached a point of data saturation (Wisneski, 2007).

During the textual analysis, Wisneski sought to “paint a picture of the magazine as a whole,” and she started by reading each issue cover to cover to pinpoint the basics, such as the general structure of the magazine. She then annotated each issue and highlighted images or text that related to her study. Based on the categories mentioned above, she coded the relevant information. The final step involved separating out various departments, such as the jokes section, to compare those directly.

McKee points out that though there can be multiple interpretations of any text, there aren't an infinite number of reasonable interpretations, so it's important to try and uncover those that are the most likely (McKee, 2003). In my analysis of the five magazines, I modeled after existing literature, and used a similar method to Wisneski. First, I read each issue from front to back to get a general idea of the layout. I documented changes that I saw in basic structure and formatting and begun understanding the scope of the redesign.

During the annotation process, I looked for relevant themes and categories based on the editorial goals outlined by each magazine in the CRMA Awards entry form, including:

- *Mission*: An evaluation of the magazine's general mission and how it changed or stayed the same during the redesign. For example, *Philadelphia* sought to better serve an affluent audience — what were the concrete changes that they took to complete this mission?
- *Department makeovers and additions*: Were departments renamed? Which were added? Repurposed? How do they function differently now? The entry forms indicate department changes were a large part of these CRMA redesigns.
- *Reallocation of space*: Which sections did the editors decide deserved more attention? Less? Why?
- *Usability*: How did the magazine emphasize service?

Additionally, after the textual analysis, I spoke with one person involved in the editorial redesign from each magazine to better inform my research questions. I contacted each magazine to find out who would be most knowledgeable about the editorial changes. I was able to talk to the editor-in-chief of four magazines, and in one case, the managing editor. All were closely involved in the redesign decision-making process. This is in part modeled after the project of *Vox* creator Adam Purvis, who conducted interviews with staff members involved in the redesign of Chicago's alt-weekly *NewCity* (2008), which gave him first-hand information about the process, including reasons for the changes implemented, how long it took, and how the staff considered audience.

Berger cites a number of advantages offered by an interview, including a transcript that can be later analyzed, and the ability to obtain information that can't be gathered any other way, such as events that happened in the past that weren't recorded (2000). The goal of my interviews was to explore my research questions both from an

audience (uses and gratifications) and editorial (gatekeeping) perspective while I dug into the systematic processes of redesign at city and regionals.

I used semi-structured interview format, defined by Berger as a scenario in which the interviewer has a list of set questions but maintains the level of informality often found in an unstructured interview. Because each magazine editor had specific knowledge pertinent to a set of questions, such as those concerning audience research or particulars that spoke to their editorial goals, I left room for on-the-spot follow up questions, also allowed in an unstructured interview (Berger, 2000).

Some of the standard prompts and questions I asked included:

1. Tell me about your role in the 2012 redesign.
2. Tell me about what prompted your redesign.
3. Which staff members were involved in the discussion?
4. Did a change in readership or desire to appeal to different demographic influence your redesign?
5. Did you experience a loss in circulation or advertising that prompted or drove the redesign?
6. Do you feel any pressure from advertisers to publish certain content? Did advertisers affect any portion of the redesign?
7. What did you hope to accomplish through the redesign editorially? What were the abstract goals and what concrete changes did you make to meet those goals?
8. On the design entry sheet, you mentioned a desire to (insert specific goal). Could you elaborate on how the magazine staff worked to accomplish that?
9. How did you consider your audience when defining these goals?

10. Did you conduct any reader or audience research prior to the redesign that contributed to the decisions made about what to revise and what to maintain?
11. Did you change your mission statement over the course of the redesign? How did you apply the mission statement, new or old, during the decision-making process?
12. Tell me about the process you went through to get to the final product.
13. How many prototypes did you craft?
14. How did you balance taking risk and making significant changes without losing essential components of your magazine brand?
15. Tell me about the discussions you had with other staff members about which sections to keep, eliminate, tweak or significantly revise.
16. Were there debates during these discussions? How did they get resolved? Who had the final say?
17. Did you inform readers of the changes before releasing the new design?
18. Did you make any changes after the redesign launch based on audience feedback?
19. How often does your magazine undergo redesign? Do you consider it an ongoing or distinct process?
20. Were any of the redesign decisions driven by the magazine's digital presence? For example, did you add more in-text referrals or try to better connect your print and digital products?
21. Any final lessons learned or things you would do differently looking back?

Findings

The editors of the top-five entries for 2013's CRMA redesign category had varying reasons for executing a relaunch of their print product in 2012. For *Birmingham*,

the first-place winner of the 2013 CRMA category, a specific mission of representing the city's progress drove the results. *D* and *Philadelphia* reevaluated the purpose and services of a print platform, which my research shows is still essential in the world of city magazines, and how content fit within a print-centric framework (Mickey, 2013). *San Antonio* targeted a new demographic, which relates to an audience-focused, uses and gratifications approach, and all simply felt it was time for a fresh look. *The Washingtonian* hadn't been redesigned in two decades, which was a special case.

Although some threads of continuity run between the processes the editors spoke about, each staff took a slightly different road to achieve the redesign. An in-depth look of the processes at each publication more thoroughly explains the main factors driving city magazine editors to implement a redesign and the steps they took to get there. A conclusion brings together the redesign process with magazine editors' roles as gatekeepers and the direct or implied understanding of their audience, a relationship that falls under the umbrella of uses and gratifications.

***Birmingham* magazine.**

Several factors prompted the editors at *Birmingham* magazine to pursue a redesign in 2012. Carla Jean Whitley, who served as managing editor at the time of the redesign and still does now, discussed a desire to more clearly delineate between advertising and editorial content, to create a modern look compared to their design that dated back to the early 2000s, and most significantly, the change in ownership from the Birmingham Chamber of Commerce to Birmingham News Multimedia Co. in 2011 that altered how *Birmingham* covered business (C.J. Whitley, personal communication, February 13, 2014).

There was also an overarching theme to better reflect the history of the town with an emphasis on its progress. The redesign was not implemented in response to a loss in circulation or advertising. Whitley says circulation has increased steadily over the past three years.

Birmingham's new mission: representing its city's progress.

A major goal with the 2012 redesign was to offer a “new way of looking at Birmingham,” as detailed by the President of Birmingham News Multimedia with her letter in the first issue of the relaunch (Siddall, 2012). The redesign coincided with the magazine’s 50th anniversary, so it represented both a celebration of the publication’s long run and the beginning of a new perspective highlighting the city’s future and progress. In a city with a troubling past, the magazine’s altered mission statement promised that the magazine would project “the culture and celebrate the soul of the region” as well as “provoke progress in everything we do” (C.J. Whitley, personal communication, February 17, 2014).

Although many departments feature the same type of content as before the redesign, an analysis of the issue three months after showed a significant effort to infuse the publication with stories about progress. One introduced readers to a blog called “Real Southern Men” created by a local filmmaker (Downing, 2012). The blog addresses topics such as racism and close-mindedness from what the blogger calls the “redneck realm.” The article portrays the blog as seeking the “full Southern image, challenges and all” (Downing, 2012). This type of story shows the magazine’s editorial judgment in confronting the city’s past, both the good and the bad, head on, as it moves forward with a bright future.

Another example is the magazine's approach to the post-redesign Men's Issue (March 2012), which promotes nontraditional gender roles throughout. The family matters section profiles Dad's who "do it all," including cooking and raising the kids (Smith, 2012). The feature well has a story about men who cook (Keith, 2012). It also includes a fashion story with a caption that reads, "Looking stylish is no longer just for the ladies" (Larussa, 2012). These stories represent nontraditional angles that present *Birmingham* through a progressive lens (See Appendix C, Figure 1, page 190, for example).

Drawing the line between advertising and editorial.

A comparison of the magazine's December 2011 issue to the one now demonstrates a better differentiation between advertisements and editorial content. The most obvious example is the 2011 cover that features a listing of the 533 Best Doctors in the city. This is a commonplace feature for city magazines. In this particularly issue, the cover is not labeled as advertising or advertorial content, so readers would likely assume the story to be unpaid content. But inside, the Best Docs section is labeled as a 50-page special advertising section. There are more feature-like doctor profiles throughout, but they include only chunked-out bios of the physicians (with no byline to indicate they were written in-house) and are interspersed next to regular ads.

Overall, it's a confusing mix of obvious ads and ads that appear to be editorial content. The post-redesign March 2012 issue has a similar listing for top attorneys, but the section is not featured on the cover. It also includes an editorialized introduction prior to the listing, evidenced by the author's byline. It falls under the umbrella of the "special advertising section" but provides editorial perspective in contrast to the 2012 top attorneys survey results (Putman, 2012).

A new approach to business coverage.

With regard to the change in ownership, Birmingham News Multimedia Co. wanted an updated look, and the upper-level editors at *Birmingham* were in agreement that it was time for a fresh vision both visually and editorially. No longer owned by the Chamber, *Birmingham* took a different approach to business coverage and ditched the monthly “who’s doing what” business listings called Marketplace, which was always outdated by the time *Birmingham* went to print. “It’s hard to do business at a monthly magazine,” Whitley explained in the interview. “One thing that I’ve pointed to some of our readers and some of the publicists we work with is that a business story does not necessarily have to be labeled ‘business story.’”

She mentions an upcoming issue in which the magazine features a film production company. This story could be categorized under business, but with the redesigned departments, it falls under *Birmingham*’s Arts section. Whitley sees this as more fitting for the city magazine’s readership, especially because the daily newspaper handles most of the comprehensive, straightforward business coverage, she says. Prior to the redesign, *Birmingham* had a recurring department called Savvy Business that featured entrepreneurs and profiles of local companies, a section that has since been eliminated. Now, business stories are interspersed throughout the Soul, Table and Thread departments.

Birmingham also hoped to change readers’ perception that Chamber members received more coverage due to their ownership of the magazine. Whitley says this criticism might have been true at one point though it was not at the time of sale. The first issue post-redesign was called “The New Issue” and had the word “new” written all over

in varying colors and typography. The idea was to drive the point home that Birmingham staff had completely revamped its product and to separate it from any confusion that the magazine had fallen to pressure from its owner (See Appendix C, Figure 2, page 191, for *Birmingham*'s relaunch issue cover).

Reorganization of departments and addition of Wellness and Technology.

Many departments were renamed or restructured, but much of the content's purpose remains the same post-redesign. Books and Music were previously combined into the "currents" sub-department and now have their own defined section under Thread, along with the Arts section. These instantly recognizable labels demonstrate a more obvious and straightforward approach to entertainment coverage. The change provides clarity to readers about these culturally driven service stories and what they offer at first glance.

In addition to the renaming of Arts, Books, and Music, there's now a recurring sub-department called Off the Field that covers sports in the community, including profiles of sports figures' lives outside of being an athlete. For example, the January 2012 issue featured a college basketball player who's also a musician and wants to eventually become a politician in Birmingham (Harvey, 2012). This was an important section to add to the list of recurring story types, Whitley says. Sports play a huge role in Birmingham's culture, and the city is the headquarters for the SEC. In this way, the section helps *Birmingham* to better represent the city it serves.

The largest addition with the redesign is the Well Beyond department, unprecedented by any content prior to the redesign. Immediately post-redesign, the department included Check Up, Discoveries, Technology, and Gadgets as recurring sub-

departments. This addition reflected an editorial goal to better reflect Birmingham's role as a major center for medical practice.

As time went on, however, this section was tweaked. The editors realized that the Discoveries category was far too broad, and none of them could define exactly what it was supposed to be. They also found technology and gadgets to be too similar, so they combined them both into Technology.

Whitley and the team of editors didn't have any trouble consistently creating content for Check Up, so as they evaluated the redesign, the section was kept. However, the staff still needed an outlet to cover medicine in a less clinical way. Thus, the third department Thrive was born, which is ambiguous enough to include different elements of fitness, nutrition and wellness but more clearly defined than Discoveries. For example, one Thrive story explored a local man who leads drum circle workshops for corporate team development to improve mental health, Whitley said in the interview. The current design includes Technology, Check Up, and Thrive all under Wellness.

The redesign process at Birmingham.

Birmingham's 2012 redesign process developed through a partnership with the feature editor of the local newspaper and a local ad agency in town. Whitley worked with then Editor-in-Chief Julie Keith to join forces with the agency. At the time, the creative director had just left, so freelancers handled all of the magazine's design work, and there were no in-house designers working on the relaunch.

The redesign discussions and disagreements revolved around renaming the departments. For example, Dinner Hour had been called Reservations in the past. One question that arose was whether the magazine could cover restaurants that didn't require

reservations, and if they did, whether it would confuse readers. As Dinner Hour, the section now allows for a broader range of dinner-related coverage, including drinks.

The circumstances of working with people outside of magazine industry gave the editors new perspective. It required Whitley and the Editor-in-Chief to be thoughtful with every decision and evaluate the necessity of each detail, such as department heads at the top of every page. Whitley says this allowed them to get away from the “everything is sacred mindset” and be critical of things that had become commonplace for them. This speaks to Gyllenhaal’s advice to “question everything” to avoid getting stuck in the convenient execution of tasks (2006).

The ad agency presented three prototypes to the magazine editors. Whitley says she wasn’t present for this meeting, only the “big dogs.” They pondered whether to show the rest of the staff all three prototypes, but everyone at the meeting agreed that one was far and away the best, so that’s the only prototype Whitley ever saw.

Fortunately, staff and audience feedback about the redesign was almost entirely positive after the prototype was selected. However, there were still challenges to overcome because the ad agency didn’t develop prototypes for every department section. The Scene section that features photos from parties around town and the back-of-book events still needed to be designed, and both departments have been tweaked since the launch.

***D* magazine.**

Tim Rogers, former Editor of *D* magazine who now holds the position of Editor at Large, says that redesigns at *D* are like rearranging the furniture in your house. Every once in awhile, you get sick of looking at the order of things as they are, and it’s time to

mix things up. If you're bored with the magazine layout, it's likely that your readers are, too, or they will be soon (T. Rogers, personal communication, February 6, 2014).

In that sense, the staff at *D* rarely decides to implement a redesign in reaction to anything, such as a loss in circulation or a survey of reader feedback. Instead, it's a gut-level choice that comes about via informal processes. The creative director, Todd Johnson, will generate ideas, either because it's been a few years since the last redesign or he just wants to freshen things up, and present them to the high-level editors. In 2012, Rogers worked closely with Johnson to brainstorm what they didn't like about the current publication and how they wanted to move forward.

What does the print reader really want?

One major change that came about during the redesign was the creation of longer front-of-book stories. Six or seven years ago, the magazine required at least four elements per page in this section, with the idea that readers wanted short and digestible pieces as they began reading the magazine. But over time, the staff and especially Rogers, who is an avid reader of *The New Yorker*, thought that perhaps this isn't really what the print reader hopes to find after all.

The new vision that drove *D* staff during the 2012 redesign was a reflection of how they felt on the Internet day-to-day —bombarded by constant updates, Facebook notifications, a busy Twitter feed, and the million other distractions of the Internet. They thought that those who have the time to read the print edition might want a break from the short and disposable flashy information that they are exposed to online. With that in mind, the staff decided that any story that was three inches or smaller was probably better suited for *D*'s website.

For example, the pre-redesign May 2012 issue features a two-page spread highlighting colorful wedge heels with vibrant photo illustrations and very little text: only a head, deck, and captions for the six shoe cutouts that inform readers where they can be purchased (Winter, 2012). The story falls under the front-of-book Pulse section and is labeled Style (See Appendix C, Figure 4, page 193, to view this page). The November 2012 issue, post-redesign, has its own Style department that includes a longer column from Sarah Hepola and a shopping section that, though concise at about 150 words, isn't a straight chunked-out guide, but profiles a vintage warehouse in a narrative format (Oliver, 2012). The changes to Pulse wouldn't appear obvious to the average reader, but a closer look shows subtle alterations to achieve the editor's new vision.

Embracing the sea of gray: D's new Talk section.

In addition to the longer front-of-book pieces, the staff added a Talk of the Town-inspired section called Talk, which falls directly behind Pulse (See Appendix C, Figure 3, page 192, for Talk example). This decision was again driven by a re-evaluation of the print product and how it could be simplified visually. Rogers and Johnson also wanted to create more flexibility with the departments leading up to the feature well in order to provide a coherent and consistent book throughout. With the departments as they were before the redesign, sometimes the magazine would have one story between front of book and the features, which Rogers thought seemed strange.

Talk created what Rogers calls an accordion, or content that could be flexible in length and wouldn't necessarily require art for each story. He discussed the standard conversations at staff meetings about art — “Another illustration? No, we can't do

another illustration, what about a photograph? But it's just going to be another boring white guy. A business guy with a tie," he said in the interview.

So Talk created a single avenue through which the magazine could publish stories without necessarily needing art for each component. As is seen in the November 2012 issue, articles can run in columns, much like a newspaper, with a photo for the first two vignettes in department and headlines for the rest. Rogers also liked the broad potential for subject matter and story length. Something interesting going on in the city could be recapped or reflected upon at 400 words, such as a guy trying to turn metered parking spaces into public service works, or an investigative piece about the money behind a high school football stadium, all without much packaging-related hassle and an emphasis on the writing itself (Hopkins, 2012).

The future of D beyond the 2012 redesign.

After the execution of the Talk section and shorter front-of-book pieces, the *D* staff is starting to rein in the switch to a grayer and text-heavy layout as they undergo yet another redesign. Rogers discusses that although he likes longer stories with a simplistic black and gray scheme, he understands why the vast market they are appealing to might be off put by 1,200 words on a page with no art, for example. Now, they're looking to find a balance between a choppy book and boring pages by adding a bit more color and flavor to the design with more art incorporated throughout.

Another major discussion during the current redesign is the integration of print and digital. Some staff members would like to match the print department names with the online website section titles. Based on readership data, Rogers thinks that it would be unnecessary because their print and digital audience are segregated — people who pick

up *D* on the newsstand are not the same readers who check out FrontBurner before they go to work, he says. The current print departments also have short names in order to fit within the square red boxes carried throughout the whole book, a branding device that is more effective than the potential synergy between platforms.

The redesign process at D.

Along with *Philadelphia*, *D* performed all of its redesign processes in-house, with Rogers and Johnson leading the way. Rogers is passionate about the advantages of developing and executing a redesign using the magazine's own resources and notes that not doing so can lead to more headache and financial woes in the long run, even if a redesign really stretches the bandwidth of a staff's time and energy.

His philosophy is that a redesign presents an opportunity dig into what's happening in your city at the time and making an effort to better reflect that, and chances are, an outside firm, especially one from a different city, will have a hard time tapping into the heart of what makes the city tick. He notes that *Los Angeles* magazine feels to him like Los Angeles, same with *Texas Monthly*, so your city and community always should be at the forefront of the redesign.

Philadelphia magazine.

Editor of *Philadelphia* magazine Tom McGrath sees a redesign as an opportunity to rethink every aspect of the publication. Although aesthetics are an integral part of the equation, for him the editorial changes have to be conceptualized before determining how content will be presented visually (T. McGrath, personal communication, March 7, 2014).

The major editorial undertakings for *Philadelphia* during the 2012 redesign included the repurposing of department content with a revived emphasis on food/restaurant listings, arts and entertainment coverage. New sections dedicated to service journalism indicate an effort to revamp *Philadelphia* as a better resource for readers. When asked about what prompted the redesign, McGrath says the editors simply felt it was time for a change, and the decisions they made were geared toward appealing to their already established upscale and affluent audience.

Scout, Ticket and Taste: a reader's guide to the city.

An analysis of the magazine demonstrates how McGrath and his staff carried out a reorganization of the book and editorial goals. One major change was the revised mission of the magazine's fashion and shopping coverage. After the redesign, *Philadelphia's* shopping section, formerly called Good Life, still features various subsections that each have a different theme, including What I Love, featuring a community member's favorite accessories, and Be Well Philly, which takes a wellness issue and tacks on related items that readers can purchase locally or online.

However, several new sections such as Buy This Now and Field Guide, both of which are direct resources for Philly shoppers, highlight the magazine's new service-oriented vision. The sections act as creatively packaged consumer directories and replace what had previously been cultural insight pieces. For example, the pre-redesigned issue's Good Life department had a story that highlighted a community member's personal workspace. In this piece, there were no pullouts that gave information about purchasable items on the page (Oberter, 2012). That type of article is now replaced with the likes of a story about the best bikes for hardcore cyclers versus city bikers. Numerous pullouts and

smaller illustrations of items that can be purchased locally bundle this piece as a guide in the April 2012 issue.

McGrath also mentioned the magazine's more consistent arts and entertainment coverage that was developed with the addition of Ticket. In the past, McGrath says the magazine used to include extensive event listings, but over time the staff drastically cut that content with the assumption that people would rather search for that information online.

With the redesign, McGrath saw an opportunity for a middle ground and notes that the print product's role with event listings is perhaps a curated take on the city's happenings. This new editorial approach is evident in the language of Ticket, which promises to include "what to do this month" and has a grid-formatted calendar labeled "What's Worth Seeing." Much like San Antonio's new events presentation, *Philadelphia's* Ticket section features a calendar filled with blurbs and photo cutouts surrounded by in-depth profiles of artists, musicians, performers, and community members in general (Fiorillo, 2012). McGrath mentioned that even if people never use the physical event guide to plan their weekend, the city magazine reader still wants to feel in-the-know about what's going on that month, and thus it's still an important service (See Appendix C, Figure 5, page 194, to view the event listing grid).

In addition to the revamped shopping, arts and entertainment departments, McGrath wanted to rethink the magazine's placement of food and restaurant coverage. Prior to the redesign, Taste had been buried in the far back of book, behind the feature well jump pages. Thinking that food and dining coverage were some of the main factors that drove the *Philadelphia* reader to subscribe or pick up the magazine, McGrath thought

this placement was counterintuitive and confusing. In the redesigned issues, Taste follows Ticket directly after the feature well, so the food, arts and entertainment coverage are all easily accessible (Sheehan, 2012).

Separation of print and digital platforms.

As journalists still try to figure out the best way to connect their print and digital platforms under the umbrella of a single brand, McGrath says that the 2012 redesign actually led to further separation of the print magazine and website. The new front-of-book section, Metropolis, was named The Philly Post prior to the redesign, which is also the name of *Philadelphia*'s blog. Labeling the two sections the same was an effort to create synergy between the two platforms, but McGrath thinks the connection actually confused people more than anything else.

McGrath is starting to see the print and digital components of the magazine as completely separate entities. He's not convinced that in-text referrals ever prompt a reader to leave the bound pages of the magazine to look up a multi-media component on the computer or consult his or her phone. One way the products do connect is through the use of the "P" logo, a new feature of the redesign that instantly creates brand recognition across platforms (See Appendix C, Figure 5, page 194, to view "P" logo). The various moving parts of the *Philadelphia* brand share much of the same "DNA," especially with regard to aesthetics, McGrath says, but it's probably a waste to think that editors can merge the two in such obvious ways as referrals.

The redesign process at Philadelphia.

Philadelphia is one of the two magazines in this analysis that conducted all processes related to the redesign in-house. McGrath and creative director Jesse

Southerland spearheaded the editorial and visual changes, but they both involved other staff members in many of the discussions and gathered their input. Southerland led a team of photo and art directors in brainstorming elements of different magazines that either inspired them or they wanted to avoid.

The redesign was not prompted by any reader feedback nor did the editors conduct any surveys post-redesign. McGrath was pleased with the first iteration of the new design that Southerland mocked up, so from there it was just a matter of smaller tweaks and nailing down the editorial execution. Two years later, McGrath doesn't see a need for major revisions made during the redesign. He thinks the staff thought through the graphics, content and organization simultaneously, and that's been the heart of the redesign's success.

San Antonio magazine

According to my interview with Editor-in-Chief Rebecca Fontenot, the 2012 redesign of *San Antonio* was driven by a change in ownership about a year and a half prior. Both the new publisher and the editing staff thought it was time for a redesign effort to increase circulation, advertising and brand recognition (R. Fontenot, personal communication, March 11, 2014).

Based on audience research and the revival of the city's downtown, which is a haven for young professionals in San Antonio, the magazine hoped to appeal to a younger, more urban readership. Previously, the magazine had been attracting older retirees on the outer edges of the city, Fontenot says, and the goal was to change that. The staff wanted to better serve those younger readers who were already in tune with the magazine but also make a conscious effort to attract that specific demographic.

The staff's mindset reflects Heath's explanation of audience-driven media theory, which reasons that audiences are engaged when an outlet provides what they perceive as a valuable function (2005). In order to understand what their readership found to be valuable, the magazine and its publisher conducted a readership study.

Audience feedback.

San Antonio's readership study led to the categorization of three different types of readers to whom the magazine was serving or hoped to better serve: Living to it, aspiring to it, and doing it. This breakdown identified people within each group. The "Living to it" crowd represented the older, more affluent individuals who were well-established with plenty of money to spend. Fontenot says the magazine was already appealing to this group. People within the "Aspiring to it" category were the young professionals without much disposable income who still wanted to be clued in on the best events and happenings in town. Finally, the "doing it" group included those people more advanced in their careers who had enough cash to go out to the newest restaurants, attend the best concerts and were more likely to go out on the town than the "Living to it" crowd. Fontenot says the magazine aimed to appeal to all three groups without leaving any single one behind, but they hoped to drastically increase their appeal to the "aspiring to it" and "living to it" groups.

Although this readership study provided baseline analytics for the redesign, Fontenot says it's something that's faded more into the background as time has gone on. She still considers it a loose framework to represent the varied sectors of *San Antonio's* readership, but it's not something she refers to with every story. Still, the desire to tap into the young professional crowd dominates the magazine's editorial decision-making.

Strategies for appealing to a younger demographic.

To appear more hip and give of a new fresh new vibe, *San Antonio* combined a number of co-dependent editorial and visual changes that Fontenot and her coworkers implemented with the redesign.

One way the editors did this was by including bite-sized and boldly presented information throughout with less emphasis on narrative text. Fontenot considered that the younger audience likely didn't have as much time to spend looking at the magazine, so she incorporated more sidebars and chunked-out pieces.

The revamped front-of-book section now includes far more photo cutouts, illustrations and dynamic typography. New sub-department You Tell Us, for example, is a short sidebar in the 2012 relaunch issue that features readers' opinions on where to get the best margarita in town (See Appendix C, Figure 6, page 195, to view the new front-of-book page). The section simply displays quotes in bold typography with margarita-inspired colors and a photo cutout to accompany the responses. Overall, the added section is digestible and fun.

The switch to smaller-pieced content can also be seen in the evolution of the Feedback section. The pre-redesign issue's Feedback was far less colorful and lively, and it took up two columns whereas now it only comprises one. Overall the section is less text-heavy with a mix of quotes, typographic fonts, big numbers and small photos. These kinds of changes are present throughout nearly every department in the redesigned magazine and also the feature well of the relaunch issue (See Appendix C, Figure 7, page 196, for a page from the feature).

Another redesign strategy was the creation of more flexible departments. Fontenot and her team went through several department prototypes, and in the end they decided to broaden the potential content for two of the departments. Style was changed to The Good Life to provide the option of nonfashion related stories, and Dining became Flavor. Flavor, however, happened to be the name of a department at the local alternative paper, which *San Antonio* was contacted about post-redesign. So after the relaunch, that section was subsequently renamed Eat & Drink. The idea was to allow for both food- and drink-related coverage.

Improving browsability,

San Antonio's CRMA entry sheet for the 2013 redesign category notes that the magazine hoped to create a more browsable product. Fontenot says this is most evident in *San Antonio*'s revised Datebook section, which is where the magazine provides calendar and event listings. The extensive 20-page listing was cut down to two pages of top to-dos and presented in a grid format toward the back of book. With this change, the staff has more editorial control in curating events (Zaragovia, 2012). The magazine assumes the authority of informing people about the best happenings in town that month, and there's now more space for Q-and-As or small profiles of individuals featured in the calendar (See Appendix C, Figure 8, page 197, for new Datebook example).

Although Fontenot sees event listings as an important service of a city magazine, the calendar was taking up far too much precious real estate that she felt could be better used. She pointed out that these days, many readers look for that type of information online, and during months when the magazine receives more ads, she'd rather dedicate

the space to real stories. As time has passed since the redesign, Fontenot is happy with the change.

A not-so-subtle branding strategy.

There's a time and place for understatement in a magazine design, but according to the publishers at *San Antonio*, the more obtrusive the branding, the better. This is evident with what Fontenot refers to as a bug, a recurring circular logo about the size of a penny that appears on the top outside corner of every department story page.

This feature allows readers to constantly be reminded of which magazine they're reading. Consciously or not, it's impossible not to view the Texas-inspired "SA" with a little star as you flip through the magazine (See Appendix C, Figure 6, page 195, to view the new "SA" logo).

The redesign process at San Antonio.

As Editor-in-Chief, Fontenot was responsible for the implementation of the redesign, but the publisher and former creative director were also actively involved. The magazine worked with an outside art director who had previously worked for *San Antonio*. The magazine underwent numerous prototypes, including at least a dozen iterations of its main logo.

Fontenot says it was a huge advantage that someone who was familiar with the city of San Antonio and the magazine was leading the visual revamp. Without him on board, it would have been much more difficult to implement their mantra, "Make it look like San Antonio."

Although 2012 was a time for major revisions at *San Antonio*, Fontenot says the magazine is currently undergoing what she calls a "refresh." With her fellow editors,

she's evaluating the original goals in the redesign and how well their goals have been achieved over the past two years. One of the main topics of discussion is how they can continue to broaden the range of content in The Good Life section to include nonfashion stories. Even so, Fontenot clearly distinguishes between the 2012 redesign, which she sees as a discrete event (one that the staff promoted with a relaunch party) and the editorial tweaks to improve the magazine month-to-month.

The Washingtonian

If there were a theme to *The Washingtonian's* 2012 redesign, it would be, "If it isn't broken, don't fix it." The magazine hadn't been officially redesigned for two decades, according to the CRMA entry sheet. Editor Garrett Graff further explains that no one on the current staff could remember the magazine undergoing a redesign, so he couldn't say for sure when the last one occurred (G. Graff, personal communication, February 26, 2014).

When Graff took the position in November 2009, revamping the magazine's organization and visual appeal was on his agenda, but the overall philosophy of the redesign was subtlety. Graff hoped to improve the magazine in a way that made sense to the staff without the readers noticing a huge difference. This is a much different approach than many other city magazine redesigns that are advertised in the community or celebrated with a re-launch party.

This doesn't mean that readers weren't considered during the redesign process. In fact, Garrett says, this philosophy stems from a reader-centric viewpoint. He says that many magazine redesigns are an effort to impress competition in the industry or to show-off in the design world, but in the end, the only person who matters is the reader. *The*

Washingtonian reader, the busy professional who reads plenty of dry content at his or her job, wants an easily navigable magazine that jumps off the page and is a far cry from boring. An understanding of this lead Garrett and the creative director, Tom White, with the help of a design firm in Atlanta, to achieve their main goals of better organized department content and increased visual intensity. With that, the next step was to find a way to execute those goals in the new version of the magazine.

An imprecise science: The scale of visual intensity.

Of all the processes mentioned by the editors who oversaw redesigns, Graff's scale of visual intensity crafted with his creative director was the most systemized method employed to implement change. The idea was to increase the graphic appeal of *The Washingtonian* by comparing it to other magazines. Using numbers one through 10, the scale ranked magazines by their aesthetic energy, with one being the least visual. There were no distinct criteria for each level; each one is based upon a general sense of color use, typography and gray space volume. The scale went as follows:

1. Academic journals and *The Economist*
2. *The New Yorker*
3. *The Atlantic*
4. Where Graff saw *The Washingtonian* in its current state, along with *AFAR* magazine
5. *Time, Fortune, Sports Illustrated*
6. *New York Daily Fair* and *Conde Naste Traveler*
7. *Bloomberg Businessweek, Budget Travel*
8. *GQ, Esquire*

9. *US Weekly, ESPN*

10. *Radar, Maxim or Wired*

Graff and the creative director wanted to boost the magazine's visual appeal from a level four to a five or six. Graff asked the design firm to present them with three different prototypes, one that ranked around a three, another that achieved six, and a third prototype that represented a nine on the scale. From there, the editorial team chose elements from each prototype that it liked best, and the firm in Atlanta took that information and presented them with a final prototype. Graff emphasized that the method was made up and imprecise, but it shows an effort to provide a sense of systemized order to something very qualitative by nature.

An analysis of the magazine immediately after the redesign compared to the March 2014 issue shows that certain sections have become more visually dynamic even since the first post-redesign issue. For example, the March 2014 Capital Comment section, which was a recurring department that offered snippets about cultural tidbits happening in the D.C. community, strays far from the narrative text plus rectangular picture combination that appears in the pre-redesigned issue. Now, it's a mix of photo cutouts, small chunks of texts, full-page photos and content that is divided by lines in a grid-like structure. These noticeable changes in one of the magazine's most recent issues speak to Graff's comment that *The Washingtonian* "continues to overall look better and have a sense of the type of execution we were trying to achieve."

Reorganization and department improvements.

An analysis of *The Washingtonian*'s 2011 edition features a TOC that's difficult to navigate. It's a mix of department names that are recurring, including Capital

Comment and Where & When (the event listings), but the other headers for each story appear specific to the content of that month (See Appendix C, Figure 9, page 198, for example of pre-redesigned TOC).

With the redesign, Graff created consistency between issues by adding four fairly broad recurring departments that each include two to four stories per month: IQ, which highlights innovation, politics, legislation and community profiles; Life, which includes fashion and style pieces; Taste, the food and drink section; and Home. These clearly delineated departments, which are red and underlined in the redesigned issues, allow readers to know right away what's a story and what's a department (See Appendix C, Figure 10, page 199, for post-redesigned TOC).

Graff says lack of consistent departments before the redesign often meant that the content was often jumbled, unclear and without sufficient art. Now, the staff can pitch and write stories with a directed vision, which allows for better planning. Before the redesign, departments had been an afterthought to the features and front-of-book sections, and the change instigated a thorough development and execution of each story.

The redesign process at The Washingtonian.

During the fall 2011, Graff experienced a failed attempt at redesigning *The Washingtonian*. He worked with an outside firm to execute the redesign, but unlike the 2012 relaunch, the magazine's creative director was not actively involved with the outside company's work. Graff says the firm simply didn't understand the magazine or what the staff was trying to accomplish, and eventually the whole process ended up falling apart. The magazine was never relaunched.

The second time around, Graff made sure that he and the creative director were the ones driving the redesign. The creative director spent two week-long periods in Atlanta to meet with the firm and oversee the development of ideas and prototypes. With this active involvement, Graff felt much better about the results.

Ideally, every magazine could implement a redesign completely in-house, but that means attempting to create prototypes and brainstorm in the midst of also being responsible for publishing the magazine. Besides the limitations of a small staff, Graff says there were some benefits to having nonmagazine industry perspective on the redesign. What seems obvious to the in-house staff might not be so clear to those who aren't involved with putting it together on a daily basis, and Graff believes this was an advantage during the redesign. Overall, Graff and his team at *The Washingtonian* found an effective balance between maintaining editorial control over the redesign and seeking external viewpoints, all without sacrificing the quality of their ongoing production cycle.

Conclusion

Using a sampling from the 2013 CRMA redesign category top five entries, this research set out to explore two major premises: why city magazine editors opt to redesign, and how they execute their goals. The official research questions were as follows:

RQ1: What are the primary reasons that city and regional magazines opt to redesign today, and what do they want to accomplish through editorial changes?

RQ2: What does the process of editorial redesign look like at city and regional magazines? What are the primary considerations in making changes in content — How do staff members decide what to continue publishing, which sections need tweaks, and

which will be completely revised?

Forces behind the redesign.

An exploration of part one of the first question (why city magazines choose to redesign at certain times) varied between editors with a few major themes emerging. For *D* and *Philadelphia*, the reasoning was instinct-based. Tim Rogers, editor of *D* during the redesign and now editor at large, emphasized a gut-level feeling that the magazine needed a fresh look. If the editors were getting tired of it, readers probably were, too, he said. He compared the redesign to rearranging the furniture in your house. Tom McGrath of *Philadelphia* answered this question in a similar way. In part, he, along with creative director Jesse Southerland, felt it was time for a change. McGrath said it had been several years since the last redesign.

Managerial turnover was another driving force for city magazine redesigns in 2012. For the editors at *Birmingham* and *San Antonio*, the redesign coincided with a change in ownership or publisher respectively, which resulted in mutual agreement between the magazine staff and the new management that the magazine was ripe for change. In these cases, magazine editors collaborated with the new owner, in the case of *Birmingham*, and new publisher, in the case of *San Antonio*, to meet concrete goals.

The Washingtonian was an outlier in that it hadn't been redesigned for more than two decades, or at least not during a time when anyone on the staff could remember it occurring, Editor Garrett Graff said. In that sense, it was simply due time for them to consider rethinking the book.

Editorial goals.

To recap, the main themes that drove city magazine editors to redesign included a desire to create a fresh look and reimagine content (this was true for all five but materialized in different ways as will be detailed below), change in management or a multiple decade gap since the last redesign occurred. Editorial goals accumulate over time and together can prompt a redesign, and they also fall within the umbrella of reimagining content. As the findings for this research came together, it's difficult to separate the editorial goals and execution. Thus, the findings will be analyzed based on how each magazine considered audience, followed by an evaluation of the four content categories (department makeovers and additions, mission, reallocation of space, and usability). Interspersed throughout the categories are explanations for how those goals were accomplished.

Consideration of audience.

One major goal that emerged as a trend was better serving an audience. Audience drove editorial goals most prominently at *San Antonio*, *Philadelphia*, *D* and *The Washingtonian*. *Birmingham*'s redesign, on the other hand, was largely mission-based, which will be discussed later.

For *San Antonio*, the editors decided they wanted to appeal to a younger demographic. This was in response to resurgence in the city's downtown, which has strong ties to young professionals in the area. With this in mind, and knowing that the magazine was currently attracting a lot of retirees, Editor Rebecca Fontenot and the magazine's publisher agreed the driving force of the redesign was to "Make it Look Like San Antonio," the idea being the city itself was younger and fresher than the magazine currently appeared.

McGrath at *Philadelphia* also incorporated readers' interests at the heart of the redesign. Keeping in mind the magazine's affluent audience, he and the creative director specifically aimed to create a more modern and upscale look in order to appeal to an already established wealthy demographic.

Although *The Washingtonian* hoped to implement a redesign that wouldn't jar readers, and thus the results were subtle, the magazine's audience was always at the forefront. Graff thought the overall layout had become static and the content too dry for a city full of business professionals and politicians, who are looking for a break from the documents they read at work. *D* took an interestingly opposite approach with the thinking that readers wanted a tame print product to escape from their busy and cluttered lives.

As is evident with these four magazines, audience was at the forefront of the redesign decision making. Uses and gratifications theory predicts and supports this view of audiences as active rather than passive — people who become engaged when content serves a valuable function to them (Heath 2005). Additionally, Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch discuss the competition between media to provide the content people want to incorporate into their lives (1979).

With the exception of *San Antonio*, staff members pursued this goal from a speculative standpoint rather than formal audience research. *San Antonio* took the most formal approach to knowing its audience with a survey that showed three categories of readers, which made the editors realize they wanted to up the magazine's appeal to audience members who are involved with the city's cultural events and happenings. With the goal of tapping into that crowd, the team pursued a revamped layout and color scheme, as well as an emphasis on shorter stories with lots of graphical elements. Editor

Rebecca Fontenot, only 27, was guiding the decisions from the perspective of the audience *San Antonio* hoped to reach.

Philadelphia, D, and *The Washingtonian* took a general idea of who they believed to be their audience, or in *The Washingtonian*'s case, the type of person who lives in D.C., and tried to create content to better fit their readers' lifestyle. *Philadelphia* improved the magazine as a shopping resource for its affluent and educated audience with a guide to items that could be purchased locally and upped the standard for local arts and entertainment coverage. *D* created a newspaper-column inspired section to provide a calming space for readers, and *The Washingtonian* elevated its graphic appeal with a systemized visual intensity scale. These examples were efforts executed to better serve an audience of a particular magazine without using formal research. Conversely, standardized research was perhaps more necessary at *San Antonio* than at the other three audience-driven redesigns because the editors weren't trying to maintain or better serve an established readership but rather branch out into new territory.

Changes in mission.

The interviews showed that none of the city magazine editors consciously considered mission except for *Birmingham*. In short, *D, Philadelphia, San Antonio* and *The Washingtonian* changed aspects of the magazine but not by looking at an established mission statement and revising it. The new directions of the magazines, such as *San Antonio* deciding to target a different audience, were organically implemented within the editorial decision making throughout the redesign. There was no active discussion about mission throughout the process.

Birmingham did tweak its mission, but the editors had been working on revising it since 2009, Whitley said in an email. A textual analysis demonstrated that the small tweaks that were made to *Birmingham*'s mission did reflect in the magazine's content, evidenced by a new dedication to the city's progress. The emphasis on progressive content creates a common thread and cohesive issue, one with a more tightly defined purpose of representing the spirit of Birmingham as new and enlightened. It shows that the editors, or gatekeepers of the magazine, are intentionally choosing stories that project that specific outlook. This was evident with the March 2012 Men's Issue that featured dads who "do it all" and stories that acknowledged the history's past of racial discrimination. The purpose behind this new outlook appears to be influenced directly by a new mission.

In addition to *Birmingham*'s mission to represent the city's progress, the new ownership prompted it to completely change the way the magazine covers business. The editors took on new and flexible approach to the topic, something that had been an ongoing goal. The revised philosophy provided room to stray from basic career listings (Whitley described it as "who's in what job") and provided opportunity to place business stories throughout the book in creative ways.

Additionally, *Birmingham* improved its delineation of editorial and advertising content. The literature demonstrated the potential for gatekeepers to be influenced by advertisers, but the new ownership, separation of ads and editorial, and revised business coverage philosophy demonstrates a departure from structural influences in *Birmingham*'s case (Kessler, as cited in Shoemaker & Vos, 2009).

Department makeovers and additions.

Reinventing departments, including relabeling and naming, was the most common redesign effort throughout the five magazines. All strove for better organization. *The Washingtonian* and *Birmingham* took similar approaches with creating clearly defined and labeled recurring departments. These sections help the editors come up with purposeful content each week instead of throwing together the stories as an afterthought.

During the department makeover process, editors consistently considered the highlights of their city to determine how they could represent its characteristics more effectively through the magazine. *Birmingham* added sections on wellness and technology to reflect the city as a center for medicine and a sports section, as they are the headquarters of the SEC. *Philadelphia's* Ticket section taps into the arts scene, and *The Washingtonian's* IQ is fitting for the business-driven D.C.

Between *San Antonio* and *D*, there were differing opinions about what readers seek in print. Tim Rogers of *D* was confident that in a digital age of flashing ads and multi-tasking, the print product thrives with longer articles and simpler design (thus, the addition of the gray-scale Talk), yet Rebecca Fontenot of *San Antonio* said the main editorial content change was a switch to bite-sized front-of-book content.

Of course, these editorial decisions depend on the city, the magazine, and the target audience, but they demonstrate two opposite editorial approaches. Rogers also discussed how the editors are adding more color back into the section in the process of *D's* current redesign. This exemplifies how a redesign can prompt editors to seek major change, but compromise prevails over time.

Usability.

During the redesign processes studied, attention to usability was closely tied with department reorganization, revamping and reallocation of space. Essentially, editors across the board wanted a magazine that readers could navigate easily. Redesigns provide an opportunity to spend some time thinking about the book's flow. In that sense, all the editors, with the exception of *The Washingtonian*, took on the mindset that Gyllenhaal suggests, which is to see the redesign as an opportunity to reinvent everything in order to question their current system (2006).

One trend was improving food and restaurant information as a more comprehensive and easily found service section. For example, *Philadelphia* moved its restaurant and dining listings much further up in the book. It had been previously buried in the back behind the feature jump, and thus one of the magazine's biggest selling points had been "as hard to find as possible," McGrath said. Both *Birmingham* and *San Antonio* expanded their dining coverage to include drinks and restaurants of all kinds. *Birmingham* ditched the title Reservations for this purpose, and *San Antonio* changed the dining guide name from Taste to Food and Drink. This trend shows that city magazines still emphasize food and dining coverage as important to readers. With that knowledge, these sections must be navigable and far-reaching.

Reallocation of space.

The primary trend with regard to reallocation of space in the 2012 redesigns was evident in the revised approaches to event listings, which are also a very resource-oriented feature. The interviews support previous research showing that print still dominates the magazine industry, particularly city magazines (Mickey, 2013). This print-centric notion appears to be at the forefront as the magazine editors re-evaluated the use

of precious real estate. Much of the discussion surrounding the redesign was about what exactly readers wanted from the hard copy of a city magazine. Editors at *Philadelphia* and *San Antonio* pondered, “Does our audience want full event listings? Do readers desire longer or shorter pieces of information?”

The general consensus seems to be moving away from the notion that city magazines need to provide comprehensive event listings in print. *San Antonio* cut the calendar real estate from 20 to two pages, which allows for a more creative presentation and makes the magazine an editorial guide rather than an extensive calendar.

Philadelphia had cut exhaustive event listings before the redesign, but Editor McGrath thought the staff had taken it too far and that the magazine could benefit from a limited list in the new arts and entertainment section. It’s true that people are turning to the Internet for this type of information, McGrath said. But he also thinks city magazines, even the print versions, are still expected to tell people what’s going on in the city. Even if readers don’t actually go to the events on the list, the average city magazine reader likes to feel hip and in-the-know. Thus, McGrath took a similar approach as *San Antonio* with the “what to do this month” grid that portrays the magazine as an authority on the best happenings of the city. Both of these changes indicate a move away from completeness and a new method of curation.

The redesign process at city magazines.

Brainstorming and prototypes.

The second research question investigated what the redesign process looks like at a city magazine. At each publication in this analysis, there was a primary brainstorming stage, but this part of the process involved varying groups of people depending on the

publication. At *Philadelphia* and *D*, this stage was completely in-house. At *Philadelphia*, it mostly involved collaboration between Editor Tom McGrath and Creative Director Jesse Southerland. Southerland also incorporated the ideas of the photo department and some art directors. *D*'s process was the least formal, with Rogers and Creative Director Todd Johnson bouncing ideas off each other. Johnson would often create mock-ups and gather Rogers' thoughts before moving forward. *Birmingham* hired an ad agency to craft the prototypes, and *The Washingtonian* hired a design firm in Atlanta. *San Antonio* was an outlier — the creative director who had recently left the magazine was the person who led the graphic overhaul, so it was an outside individual who still had in-house knowledge.

As articulated by Reason, who believes that prototypes serve a core function of a redesign at any publication, prototypes certainly played a key role at each of the magazines within this analysis (Reason 2013b). *Birmingham* and *The Washingtonian* critiqued samples crafted by an outside design firm or ad agency. *The Washingtonian* pulled together the best elements from three prototypes on different levels of visual intensity, and at *Birmingham*, only the top editor and art director saw the final prototypes created by the ad agency. The in-house prototypes at *D* and *Philadelphia* allowed for informal idea generation and, in the case of *Philadelphia*, a creative director who nailed down the core elements of the redesign with few iterations.

Editors had mixed feedback about the value of outsourcing some or all of a redesign's work. As evidenced by *The Washingtonian*'s failed launch in 2011 when the magazine consulted a design agency to execute the redesign and did not receive satisfactory results, there is certainly evidence that hiring a firm outside of the magazine

carries risk. The second time Graff started the redesign process, the creative director flew down to the firm to be there for two week-long periods during the prototype development. Having his input throughout the execution was a big advantage the second time around in getting the results the staff hoped for. Fontenot of *San Antonio* said that because so much of the redesign was centered on capturing the essence of the city, to have someone without knowledge of San Antonio, and thus the readership the staff aimed to reach, would have been a recipe for failure. Similarly, Whitley and the *Birmingham* editor-in-chief were closely involved with the ad agency's work.

There are a number of benefits to getting outside assistance with a redesign. One advantage by Whitley of *Birmingham* was the value of a fresh perspective. Both she and the editor in chief at the time found it advantageous to have some ideas flowing from people who weren't as close to the product. The nonindustry individuals could question aspects of the magazine that had become routine and commonplace to the editors.

In addition to perspective, of course, is the element of time. Some magazines, especially ones with small staffs, don't have the staff or ability to execute a redesign entirely in-house. On the other hand, Tim Rogers of *D* was most vocal about the value executing a redesign with in-house resources, and he thinks it's really the only reliable option.

Generally speaking, regardless of who was involved in the discussions at each publication, the decisions about what to revise, tweak or keep came from the upper-level editors and were generally discussed verbally. These choices often came back to a conversation about audience, the city, and the interaction between the two. A design team of some sort then mocked up a prototype with the ideas.

There weren't a whole lot of heated debates or disagreements across the board. However, in some cases, editorial goals sizzled out after editors made plans during the redesign, or they realized something didn't work after implementation. This happened with *San Antonio*'s conversation surrounding the expansion of the style section post-redesign (hence the new name, The Good Life) to nonfashion stories, but Fontenot mentioned that the staff has had a difficult time pitching outside that realm. Additionally, *D* is once again rethinking Talk, and *Birmingham* revised Wellness and Technology after testing the waters. In that sense, the tweaking process is often ongoing, but the redesign itself remains its own discrete event.

Ideas for future research.

Several possibilities for future research arose through my interviews. One was the relationship between platforms. The editors seemed to be moving away from the idea that the print and digital products need to connect via referrals or labeling. For example, *Philadelphia* used to title its front of book section in print the same as the magazine website's blog. McGrath thought that it was unlikely readers were making that connection, so he saw the redesign as an opportunity to come up with a new label. In general, the editors weren't confident that in-text referrals are effective and thus, they have been leaning away from inserting those.

Therefore, one interesting study would be a reader survey about in-text referrals. The survey would examine how frequently these types of prompts cause someone to leave the magazine to look at his or her phone, tablet or computer in order to check out an online component. Other reader surveys might address what readers in a particular city

hope to get out of a print magazine. This could be narrowed to specifically look at event listings: Do readers prefer a full calendar or a curated take?

As mentioned previously, another major gray area that emerged was in-house versus outsourcing. Both a quantitative and qualitative analysis could be appropriate methods for further research. The former could get at whether the majority of redesigns involve an outside firm, and a qualitative component could investigate more in-depth how city magazine editors combat the disadvantages of releasing some control to designers outside the magazine's staff.

Final Thoughts.

Although there are consistent processes, including brainstorming and prototype development, in the city magazine world, there are no hard fast rules to what makes a redesign work best for a particular magazine. Rather it's an ebb and flow of dialogue between staff members, and sometimes an outside firm, that often revolves around the audience and the city itself.

A redesign at a city magazine provides opportunity to look at the region the magazine serves. Many editors discussed this as part of their processes, but of all the redesigns, *Birmingham*, the first place winner, executed fundamental editorial changes that make the publication more representative of the city and its surrounding areas. It began at heart of the magazine's purpose: its mission. The publication's fresh dedication to progress drove a redesign tailored to not only *reflect* the city but also *encourage* a forward-thinking dialogue that would make the Birmingham a better place. That's part of what makes *Birmingham's* redesign so outstanding.

What can be taken away from *Birmingham*'s success is that the editors confronted their city and their audience realistically and head on. They acknowledged Birmingham's dark past while also putting it in the best possible light. At the start of a redesign, other magazine editors can ask: "What makes our city great? What are its struggles? How can we both tackle tough issues and also make our readers proud of where they live?"

Another resounding trend was seeing past the visual possibilities of a redesign to maintain a content-first mindset. The vast majority of visual changes were sparked by an editorial goal. *San Antonio*'s chunked-out and colorful front of book came from a desire to appeal to a younger audience. *D*'s toned-down Talk was also developed from a purposeful editorial idea that readers wanted a break from cluttered content. Other examples abound throughout this research, but these magazine editors, who focused on the "cake" before the embellishments, were all satisfied with the results of the redesign and ranked the highest at the 2013 CRMA awards.

Additionally, magazine editors should be aware that there can be mixed results with working in tandem with an outside firm. When choosing to hire a company for assistance, at least one member of the staff should be actively working with the firm, in person, to ensure the desired results and avoid wasting money. Those who choose to do everything in-house should think about the value of outside perspective that could be gained in other ways, such as audience or informal community feedback.

Magazine staffs should also understand that the first issue of the relaunch is not set in stone. It's important to do the prep work to get the main things right the first time, but there are always opportunities for tweaks and re-evaluation. Few magazine staffs have the time or financial capabilities to conduct thorough audience research,

conceptualize specific editorial goals based upon what they find, and execute it perfectly. In reality, the process is far more subjective and informal. In addition, readers typically aren't interested in the ins-and-outs of what was changed, so don't expect them to love the redesign or give a ton of thoughtful, industry-speak feedback — just hope that they will love the magazine. Magazine editors should aim to hold that first issue of the redesigned magazine at the end of the process and feel good about it. Often, that's the main measure of success.

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