

Chapter XXVII

Publishing an Internet E-Zine

Joseph E. Burns

Southeastern Louisiana University, USA

Dianna Laurent

Southeastern Louisiana University, USA

ABSTRACT

An e-zine is defined as an online version of a magazine most often offered to the audience of an existing Web site. E-zines should strive to follow the conventions of traditional magazines, being delivered to a subscriber base on a regular timetable and offering multiple articles per issue. Advertising should be minimal, and only those persons who sign up should receive the e-zine. Where an e-zine will differ from a traditional magazine is in its relationship with the Web site that offers it. Each issue should work in tandem with its Web site. The e-zine should not only offer new information, but should also act as a reminder to the reader to visit the parent Web site by offering links to recently updated pages and new information. E-zines are almost exclusively delivered to a subscriber base through e-mail. Therefore, the e-zine publisher must test content against e-mail spam filters to assure delivery.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to explore the implications of the e-zine format on computer-mediated communication. We offer a broad overview of the tools and techniques available for writing and publishing an e-zine as well as a description of the concepts, issues and topical trends in e-zine writing and publishing. In addition, we include general design tips and suggestions for organizational, business and individual e-zines.

BACKGROUND

In the late 1990s, the Internet generated a series of new words by prefixing the letter “E” to an existing word. The new “E” word denoted an electronic or cyberspace version of an existing concept. “E-mail,” arguably the first prefixed cyber-word, is a digital representation for the postal service. E-commerce was coined to represent online buying and selling. E-business expanded our vocabulary with the concept of e-tailing. E-

government brought an interactive Department of Motor Vehicles to the Web. The “E” prefix was even used to name businesses specifically designed for the Web. E-Trade and eBay are the best examples. As noted by Diamond (2005), Green (2002), and Anderson and Kamuka (2002), the practice was first used early in Internet history, long before the term “World Wide Web” became a household phrase.

The word “e-zine,” coined in the mid 1980s, represents an online version of a magazine. The Cult of the Dead Cow (cDc), a group of hackers, claims to have started the first e-zine in 1984 when the Bulletin Board System (BBS) was the main method of connecting one computer to another. A year later, a second hacker group, Phrack, began publishing what many believe was the first e-zine in 1985.¹ The difference between the Phrack e-zine and cDc’s e-zine was that the former offered multiple articles in one issue, much like a traditional magazine, while the cDc’s e-zine offered only one article per issue. More closely mirroring the traditional paper magazine allows the e-zine to be more easily defined in its current incarnation. This lends credence to the Phrack argument for being the first e-zine because it was more closely related to the traditional magazine format.

The Oxford English Dictionary (OED) offers this definition of an e-zine, “A magazine published in electronic form on a computer network, esp. the Internet.” The OED also provides an etymology, “Although most strongly associated with special-interest fanzines only available online, e-zine has been widely applied: to regularly updated general-interest web sites, to electronic counterparts of print titles (general and specialist), and to subscription-only e-mail newsletters.” The OED lists D.R. Noack’s use of the word in Online Access in Jan/Feb 1994 in this sentence: “Wacky e-zines are akin to the print version of the underground press.”²

Labovitz (1999) offers a history of his online directory of electronic magazines, which gives a definition of the first e-zines as not “... mainstream

publications – they generally do not contain advertisements (except, sometimes, advertisements for other “zines”), are not targeted towards a mass audience, and are generally not produced to make a profit” (The golden age section, ¶6). Clearly, these definitions have evolved as has the World Wide Web; the more commercial the World Wide Web becomes, the more advertising and design is added to the e-zine.

Conventions

An e-zine is often loosely defined as an electronic version of a traditional magazine format (Knight, 2005). A broader definition allows for the wide berth of newsletter and website formats all confident in calling themselves an e-zine. However, it is not format as much as adherence to the conventions of magazine publishing that correctly categorizes an online offering as an e-zine rather than a newsletter or a basic website.

The most prominent magazine convention an author must follow when undertaking an e-zine is keeping a strict periodic timetable and publishing on a set schedule. E-zines are generally published on a weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly basis. Following a timetable longer than a month between issues tests the memory of an Internet audience. Magazines are most often weekly or monthly publications, so publishers must ask themselves if the topic of a proposed e-zine warrants enough content for a multi-article edition a minimum of twelve times a year over a number of years. A weekly offering then means writing enough content to fill 52 separate issues each year (Knight, 2006; Krakoff, 2006).

Although using a search engine to find an e-zine is possible, both the Ultimate Magazine Database and the e-zine directory³ list current e-zines. Business, arts and entertainment, the Internet, health, and living are the most popular topics. These topics reflect ever-changing fields which allow for new information and opinion on a regular basis. Topics that have too narrow a focus

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