



AMERICAN MAGAZINE WINNERS AND LOSERS: 2001 TO 2010

David E. Sumner
Professor of Journalism
Ball State University
Muncie, Indiana, U.S.A.

Abstract

This paper examines the 20 largest special-interest magazine sectors in the U.S. and which were most and least affected by the challenges of technology and economic recessions between 2001 and 2010. Ten sectors were “winners” and ten were “losers.” From a study of 168 magazines, the biggest gains came from food, gardening, health and fitness magazines. Newsweeklies, entertainment and general interest magazines were the biggest losers. These results reflect a trend occurring for more than a century: a decline in general interest magazines and an increase in magazines aimed at a narrowly defined group of readers. Americans have turned increasingly towards “escapist” interests. They want magazines that personally benefit them—magazines that tell them how to cook, exercise, garden, dress, groom themselves, take care of their children, and pursue their hobbies. They less frequently read magazines that interpret the latest news, political and social topics, and latest developments in science or technology.

INTRODUCTION

“Food and fitness” describe Americans if they are measured by their magazine reading tastes. In a ten-year circulation trend study of 168 American magazines, 21 food, health and fitness magazines came out on top with gains averaging 23.9 percent between 2001 and 2010.

During the decade, these and other magazines catering to leisure personal interests were generally the “winners” and those appealing to general interest, news and intellectual topics were “losers.” Magazines geared toward women and the special interests of women grew slightly, while general interest, newsweeklies, and men’s magazines lost readers.

The purpose of this study is to determine which of the 20 largest special-interest magazine sectors in the U.S. were most and least affected by the challenges of technology and economic recessions that marked the beginning and end of the decade between 2001 and 2010. Magazines took hits from many sides beginning with the economic effects of September 11, 2001, followed by a two-year recession, continuing competition for readers and ad revenue from the Internet, another recession in 2008, and the introduction of the iPad and other digital media devices in 2009.

METHODOLOGY

A strict methodology was used so that no magazine was arbitrarily chosen for inclusion or exclusion. This study examined the 168 largest magazines with audited subscription and single copy sales of more than 300,000. The study was limited to magazines belonging to the Audit Bureau of Circulations (ABC), which make their circulation figures public. Magazines belonging to ABC pay membership fees to have their circulation figures audited so they can attract advertisers and maintain their rate base. The total number of ABC magazines declined from 740 in 2001 to 581 in 2010, which limited the number of magazines for which data was available. The magazines that ceased publishing during the decade used their 2001 circulation figures if they were greater than 300,000 and “zero” for 2010. New magazines launched during the decade included 2010 circulation if it was greater than 300,000 and “zero” for 2001.

Circulation data for this study was obtained from ABC figures in its printed annual *Magazine Trend Reports*, which include five-year circulation reports for member magazines. Some ABC data was obtained through the *Advertising Age Data Center* (www.adage.com/datacenter) and Standard Rate and Data Service (SRDS), which sells various types of magazine data to advertising agencies and advertisers. Many academic libraries subscribe to SRDS electronic databases, which were used in this study.

The 168 magazines were categorized according to the 20 largest SRDS categories or sectors. While there are more than 50 SRDS sectors, magazines in these 20 have the highest total circulation figures:

1. Association
2. Automotive
3. Business
4. Entertainment
5. Epicurean
6. Fashion
7. Fishing/hunting
8. Gardening
9. General editorial
10. Health/fitness
11. Hispanic
12. Home service
13. Men's
14. Music
15. News
16. Parenthood
17. Science
18. Sports
19. Travel
20. Women's

The primary limitation to this study is that it excludes the great majority of magazines that do not appeal to large readerships. Smaller-circulation magazines, which represent the majority of American magazines, generally do not join ABC because of its high membership costs. Therefore, this study represents only a “snapshot” of 6,000 American consumer magazines. The results, therefore, cannot be generalized to the mass market of American magazines with statistical certainty. However, according to Davis (2012), a circulation consultant and former circulation manager for Ziff-Davis Publishing, “Audited [ABC] magazines attract 80 to 85 percent of all advertising that goes into magazines. The thousands of other magazines out there carry relatively little advertising,” he said.



RESULTS

Ten sectors were “winners” and ten were “losers.” The biggest gains came from 13 food and cooking magazines assigned to the “Epicurean” category. These 13 magazines registered a net circulation gain of 3.3 million—an increase of 30 percent. The highest percentage circulation change, however, came from three gardening magazines, which gained 1,025,055 readers—a 71 percent increase. The epicurean magazines included: *Bon Appétit*, *Cooking Light*, *Dwell*, *Every Day with Rachael Ray*, *Everyday Food*, *Food & Wine*, *Food Network Magazine*, *Gourmet*, *Midwest Living*, *Saveur*, *Taste of Home*, *Taste of Home Healthy Cooking*, and *Wine Spectator*. The gardening magazines included: *Birds & Blooms*, *Gardening How-To*, and *Organic Gardening*.

These magazines were followed by eight health or fitness magazines that registered an increase of 1,477,499 readers—a 16 percent increase. These magazines included: *Arthritis Today*, *Diabetes Forecast*, *Fitness*, *Health*, *Muscle & Fitness*, *Prevention*, *Shape*, and *Women's Health*.

Rank	SECTOR	N=	2001 Circulation	2010 Circulation	Change
1	Gardening	3	1,425,326	2,440,387	71.2%
2	Epicurean/cooking	13	11,073,593	14,422,768	30.2%
3	Health and fitness	8	9,109,823	10,587,322	16.2%
4	Hispanic/Latino	3	1,355,484	1,532,119	13.0%
5	Fashion	8	6,530,726	7,285,599	11.6%
6	Parenting	3	4,704,472	5,123,630	8.9%
7	Music	2	1,808,740	1,953,450	8.0%
8	Travel	8	8,849,264	9,199,292	4.0%
9	Sports	12	11,523,208	11,939,676	3.6%
10	Women's	17	40,107,417	40,726,805	1.5%
11	Business	12	9,690,256	9,370,636	-3.3%
12	Home service	21	25,292,683	23,953,086	-5.3%
13	Automotive	5	4,747,679	4,370,558	-7.9%
14	Men's	10	12,251,259	11,253,292	-8.1%
15	Associations	6	7,170,902	6,360,549	-11.3%
16	Fishing/hunting	11	10,118,073	8,705,168	-14.0%
17	Science	3	3,279,575	2,488,145	-24.1%
18	Newsweeklies	6	10,392,157	6,811,130	-34.5%
19	General editorial	7	28,781,552	17,386,864	-39.6%
20	Entertainment	10	22,262,201	13,336,468	-40.1%
	TOTALS	168	230,474,390	209,246,944	-9.2%
Sources: Audit Bureau of Circulations, Standard Rate and Data Service, Advertising Age Data Center					

Two of the most successful launches of the decade were epicurean magazines: *Everyday with Rachel Ray* in 2006 and *Food Network Magazine* in 2008. By 2010, *Everyday with Rachel Ray's* circulation increased to 1,767,409 and *Food Network Magazine* went to 1,365,653. One major food magazine, *Gourmet*, ceased publishing in 2009. *Everyday with Rachel Ray* was launched by the Reader's Digest Association and *Food Network Magazine* was a joint venture of The Food Network and Hearst Magazine. *Gourmet*, however, was closed by Condé Nast in 2009 when it had a circulation of 950,000.

"Before we even put a test issue out, we did a lot of research and talked to consumers and viewers about the kind of magazine they wanted," Vicki Willington, publisher of *Food Network Magazine*, told *Folio* magazine (Parde, 2010). "What we learned was that people are passionate about entertaining, cooking and Food Network's personalities and they wanted the magazine to be an extension of what they loved about the network. And, as it turns out, the timing was just right for the launch as consumers are eating and entertaining more at home and looking for an approachable epicurean magazine."

Taken as a whole, these 168 magazines declined from 231 million to 210 million copies, resulting in a 9.2 percent decline. The biggest losing sectors were the newsweeklies, entertainment and “general editorial” magazines. Although the total loss of 21.2 million readers (9.2 percent) appears substantial, about 17.3 million of lost circulation occurred at three magazines: *Reader's Digest*, *National Geographic*, and *TV Guide*. If figures for those three magazines are subtracted, then the total loss at the remaining 165 magazines was two percent.

The “general editorial” sector magazines include: *Ebony*, *Guideposts*, *The New Yorker*, *Reader's Digest*, *Smithsonian*, and *Vanity Fair*. Three of these magazines—*The New Yorker*, *Vanity Fair*, and *Smithsonian*—had a circulation increase averaging eight percent each. The others incurred substantial losses. The most dramatic losses were incurred by *Reader's Digest* (7.0 million) and *National Geographic* (3.1 million). *Reader's Digest* and *National Geographic* share an audience defined as “general interest” in an era when niche titles continue to dominate the market.

While the Reader's Digest Association, Inc. filed for bankruptcy in 2009, the company's financial woes extended beyond its flagship title. Its purchase of 12 magazines from Reiman Publications for \$760 million in 2002 created a third of its debt, which reached \$2.2 billion when the company filed for bankruptcy. As of 2008, the Reader's Digest magazine and its 50 international versions comprised only 16 percent of the company's total revenue. (Streib, 2009).

With two exceptions, newsweeklies were big losers: These six titles included: *The Economist*, *New York Magazine*, *Newsweek*, *Time*, *U.S. News & World Report*, and *The Week*. *Newsweek's* circulation had declined so substantially that it was sold to a new owner for \$1 (U.S. currency) in 2008. *U.S. News & World Report*, which was founded in 1948, published its last print issue in December 2010. *Time* lost



800,000 readers during the decade. The two newsweekly winners were *The Economist*, which doubled its American readership to 833,667. *The Week*, which was launched in 2004 by UK publisher Felix Dennis, climbed to 519,307 by the end of the decade.

Entertainment magazines lost 40 percent of their subscribers. These included: *Entertainment Weekly*, *Globe*, *In Touch Weekly*, *National Enquirer*, *Ok Weekly*, *People*, *Soap Opera Digest*, *Star Magazine*, *TV Guide*, *Us Weekly*. Since 2001, *TV Guide*'s circulation declined from 9.1 million to two million as it faced considerable competition from free newspaper and online program guides. In 2005, the magazine cut its rate base and tried to reinvent itself as a celebrity and entertainment magazine focused on television. After losing \$20 million in a year, the ailing magazine and its debts were sold in October 2008 to a private equity firm, OpenGate Capital, for the sum of one dollar.

All magazines in this sector were hard-hit by competition from a proliferating number of movie, television and entertainment celebrity websites, iPads, and similar mobile devices. These various forms of digital media offered daily and hourly updates of celebrity gossip that weekly and monthly print magazines could not. They also reflect the declining number of television soap operas and increasing number of reality shows produced by American television networks.

Home service magazines, one of the five largest sectors in total circulation, have been hardest-hit by the recession that began in 2007. Three of the major closings of the decade were home service magazines: *Country Home* (2009), *House & Garden* (2007), and *Southern Accents* (2009). While advertising revenue for most magazines declined by about 25 percent between 2007 and 2009, advertising in the shelter magazines declined by about 40 percent. The dwindling shelter magazine market mirrors the decline in home sales and consumer spending on home improvements and redecorating.

Magazine	Circulation at closing	Date	Sector
<i>Business 2.0</i>	338,200	2007	Business
<i>Cosmo Girl</i>	694,200	2008	Women's
<i>Gourmet</i>	950,800	2009	Epicurean
<i>Southern Accents</i>	404,000	2009	Home service
<i>Country Home</i>	997,300	2009	Home service
<i>House & Garden</i>	756,800	2007	Home service

DISCUSSION

Taken as a whole, these results indicate that Americans have turned increasingly towards "escapist" interests in their print magazine reading habits. Americans want magazines that benefit them personally—magazines that tell them how to cook, exercise, garden, dress, groom themselves, take care of their children, and pursue their hobbies. They want magazines that offer tips on where to dine, travel and be entertained. They do not as frequently read magazines that interpret the latest news, debate political and social topics, or report the latest developments in science or technology.

These also reflect a trend occurring in the U.S. for more than a century: a decline in general interest magazines and an increase in magazines aimed at narrowly defined group of readers with a special interest in a particular subject.

The decline among the newsweeklies does not necessarily mean that Americans are less interested in the news, however. News has become a free commodity with plentiful sources on the Internet. With hundreds, if not thousands, of free news sites, no one has to pay for the news. Increases by *The Economist* and *The Week* could reflect the quality content of these magazines and a declining quality to the traditional "big three" newsweeklies—*Time*, *Newsweek* and *U.S. News*. Nevertheless, the news sector is among the hardest hit with a 34.5 percent circulation decline.

The decline in the entertainment sector also reflects a similar rise of digital media where entertainment news, photos and even movies and TV programs can be freely seen on computers and portable digital devices. Media consumers have less need to see photos of Lady Gaga in a magazine, for example, when they can watch her perform on a screen. The tabloid weeklies—*National Enquirer*, *Star*, and *Globe*—suffered the most dramatic declines in this sector declining total of four million circulation to 1.9 million.

The industry trend toward increased reliance on subscription sales and declining single copy sales began 50 years ago and has continued. In 1960, 67 percent of all magazine readers came from subscription sales while 33 percent came from single copy sales. Subscription sales reached 90 percent, a 50-year high, while single copy sales declined to 10 percent, a 50-year low.

	Subscriptions	Percent	Single Copy	Percent	Combined
2001	305,259,583	84%	56,096,430	16%	361,356,013
2002	305,438,345	85%	52,932,601	15%	358,370,946
2003	301,800,237	86%	50,800,854	14%	352,601,091
2004	311,818,667	86%	51,317,183	14%	363,135,850
2005	313,992,423	87%	48,289,137	13%	362,281,559
2006	321,644,445	87%	47,975,657	13%	369,620,102
2007	322,359,612	87%	47,433,976	13%	369,793,587
2008	324,818,012	88%	43,664,772	12%	368,363,773
2009	310,433,396	90%	36,138,517	10%	346,571,912
2010	292,237,864	90%	32,999,207	10%	325,237,070
Total Decline		4%		41%	10%

Source: Association of Magazine Media (2012). Retrieved from http://www.magazine.org/consumer_marketing/circ_trends/1318.aspx

The total number of ABC magazines in 2001 was 740, which declined to 581 in 2010. That means the average circulation per ABC member was 488,318 in 2001. The average circulation per ABC member increased to 559,788 in 2010.

These figures are troubling to the industry for many reasons. First, smaller circulation magazines are dropping out of the Audit Bureau because of its high cost. Second, single copy sales matter more to advertisers than subscription figures. During this 10-year period, single copy sales declined by 41 percent while subscription sales declined by four percent—a combined total ten percent decline.



Newsstand sales help bring in new readers and give advertisers a more immediate indication of consumer demand than subscriptions, where readers commit to a year or two at a time. Davis (2012) said, "Subscription circulation can be manipulated by publishers. Publishers can keep subscription levels pretty much where they want, depending on how much [promotion] money they want to spend to do that. On a newsstand, it's much purer. When you put your title out, it sells or it doesn't. Advertisers believe it's a much purer barometer of a magazine's health. And the newsstand is in the midst of a tremendous fall. The number of units sold has dropped 40 percent," he said in a telephone interview.

Nevertheless, American magazines survived the decade more successfully than newspapers, which made their own headlines with steady circulation declines, closings and staff layoffs. Total magazine circulation and advertising revenue surpassed that of newspapers in 2008 for the first time. *The Statistical Abstract of the U.S.* (2012), which is published annually by the U.S. government, reported that magazine industry revenue reached \$44.9 billion (US) in 2008 while newspaper revenue declined to \$43.9 billion. The figures offer little comfort to magazine publishers, however. During the five-year period 2005-2009, newspaper revenue declined 26 percent, magazine revenue declined nine percent, and Internet revenue increased by 108 percent. (see Table 4)

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	Change
Internet	9,378	11,510	15,035	17,760	19,504	108%
Newspapers	49,401	48,949	47,563	43,919	36,338	-26%
Magazines	42,778	44,757	46,003	44,985	39,060	-9%

Source: *Statistical Abstract of the U.S.* Retrieved from:
http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/cats/information_communications.html

According to the Association of Magazine Media (2012), the Internet now generates 25 percent of all new print magazine subscriptions, a figure that has doubled in the last five years. While exact figures are not yet available, many top consumer magazines have reported substantial gains in digital-only subscribers.

Cosmopolitan, for example, which has the highest newsstand circulation of any American magazine, was the first to reach a milestone: 100,000 paid digital subscriptions in March 2012. Condé Nast hit the 500,000 digital subscription mark (split among eight publications) in October 2011. *Cosmopolitan* is getting more money for a digital subscription than a print subscription. Cosmo's website offers print-only subscriptions for \$15 per year. Its digital-only subscriptions for the iPad and Zinio, by comparison, command \$19.99 per year. (Parekh, 2012)

"A couple of years ago, the big question was what's going to happen to magazines like Cosmo in the future," Kate White, the magazine's editor-in-chief, told *Ad Age*. "There was a little bit of anxiety. What this has done is say that our content will rule and will thrive. Women want our content, and they'll get it on a variety of platforms." (Parekh, 2012)

The selling point of print magazines to advertisers has always been the targeted nature of their audiences. Manufacturers of specialized products for business and leisure have been able to choose a magazine that targets their market audience. Magazines adapted and survived beyond the competition from radio in the 1920s and television in the 1950s because they offered access to these special interest audiences. The challenge to magazines created by the Internet is that it offers even more specialized niche audiences for a lower cost to advertisers. Therefore, Internet advertising continues to grow significantly. While magazine advertising has rebounded from recession-level figures of 2008, its overall growth remains shaky.

The print magazine industry will survive, but it will become smaller, leaner and more focused on specialized content for increasingly narrow audiences. According to Davis (2012), a circulation consultant and former circulation manager for Ziff-Davis Publishing, "What we're seeing, at least in the consumer arena, is that the Big four publishers, Time, Condé Nast, Hearst, Meredith, are growing significantly while the rest are shrinking. The small publishers are vulnerable, while those with brand recognition will weather this storm," he said.

It's not just the raw information that magazines give their readers, but the emotional bond they create that make them unique among mass media. Professor Samir Husni of the University of Mississippi called magazines the "comfort media." "Magazines reinforce the positive things that make you feel good about yourself," he said in an interview with this author (Sumner, 2010). "You will never see a magazine that makes you feel bad about yourself. Magazines were always positive agents of information as opposed to newspaper and TV, who were the bad news carriers."

Cathie Black, former president of Hearst Magazines, told this author (Sumner, 2010), "The connectivity that a reader feels with his or her magazine is one of the very unique and special attributes of a magazine. We hear that over and over. A magazine also may in fact become a respite, a retreat; a place to be yourself, be inspired, aspire to be; and give you creative ideas about your home, your clothing, your life."

REFERENCES

- Association of Magazine Media (2012). The Internet generates one in four of new magazine subscriptions, Magazine Media Factbook, 2011-2012. Retrieved from <http://www.magazine.org/advertising/magazine-media-factbook/88.html>
- Davis, B. (2012, Feb. 25). Telephone interview with David E. Sumner.
- Fitzgerald, T. (2009, Nov. 20). Hachette shuts Metropolitan Home; monthly is just the latest shelter title to close. Retrieved from <http://www.medialifemagazine.com>.
- Parde, T. (April 2010). Food Network Magazine. *Folio: The Magazine for Magazine Management*, 39 (4), 45.
- Husni, Samir (2011). *Samir Husni's guide to new magazines*, 26th ed. Oxford, Miss. Nautilus Publishing.
- Ives, N. (2009, Dec. 15). A guide to magazines that have ceased publication. *Advertising Age*. Retrieved from <http://adage.com/article/mediaworks/a-guide-magazines-ceased-publication/132779/>
- Parekh, R. (2012, Mar. 7). *Cosmopolitan* says it has 100,000 paid digital subscriptions, *Advertising Age*. Retrieved from <http://adage.com/article/mediaworks/cosmopolitan-100-000-paid-digital-subscriptions/233142/>
- Pew Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism (2011). *Magazines: a shake-out for news weeklies, the state of the news media 2011*. Retrieved from <http://stateofthemedias.org>.



International Conference on Communication, Media, Technology and Design
ICCMTD
09-11 May 2012
Istanbul - Turkey

Statistical Abstract of the U.S (2012). U.S. Government Census Bureau, Table 1134. Retrieved from <http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/2012/tables/12s1134.pdf>
 Streib, L. (2009, Aug. 17), Will Reader's Digest survive bankruptcy? Forbes.com. Retrieved from <http://www.forbes.com/2009/08/17/readers-digest-bankruptcy-business-media-readers-digest.html>
 Sumner, D.E. (2010). *The magazine century: American magazines since 1900*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing.

Appendix Magazine in this study			
Association American Legion Auxiliary American Legion Magazine The Lion Rotarian Scouting VFW Magazine	Fashion Allure Elle Harper's Bazaar Life & Style Weekly Lucky Marie Claire Vogue W	Hispanic Latina People en Español Siempre Mujer	Parenting Parenting Parents Working Mother
Automotive Automobile Magazine Car and Driver Hot Rod Magazine Motor Trend Road & Track	Fishing/Hunting American Hunter American Rifleman America's 1St Freedom Bassmaster Ducks Unlimited Field & Stream Game & Fish Magazine Guns & Ammo North American Fisherman North American Hunter Outdoor Life	Home Service Architectural Digest Better Homes and Gardens Coastal Living Country Country Living Country Sampler Elle Decor Family Handyman Handy, Handyman Club Of America Magazine House Beautiful Mother Earth News Southern Living Sunset This Old House Town & Country Traditional Home Veranda Midwest Living	Science Discover Popular Science Scientific American
Business Atlantic Economist Entrepreneur Fast Company Forbes Fortune Inc. Kiplinger's Personal Finance Money Smartmoney Wired	Gardening Birds & Blooms Gardening How-To Organic Gardening	Men's Details Esquire GQ Maxim Men's Fitness Men's Health Men's Journal Outside Playboy Popular Mechanics	Sports Bicycling ESPN The Magazine Golf Digest Golf Magazine Lindy's Football Annuals Runner's World Skiing Sports Afield Sporting News Sports Illustrated Tennis Magazine Ski Magazine
Entertainment Entertainment Weekly Globe In Touch Weekly National Enquirer Ok Weekly People Soap Opera Digest Star Magazine TV Guide Us Weekly	General editorial Ebony Guideposts National Geographic New Yorker Reader's Digest Smithsonian Vanity Fair	Music Rolling Stone Spin	Travel AAA Living AAA Via Arthur Frommer's Budget Travel Audubon Conde Nast Traveler Encompass National Geographic Traveler Travel + Leisure
Epicurean Bon Appetit Cooking Light Dwell Every Day with Rachael Ray Everyday Food Food & Wine Food Network Magazine Gourmet Midwest Living Saveur Taste of Home Taste of Home Healthy Cooking Wine Spectator	Health/Fitness Arthritis Today Diabetes Forecast Health Prevention Shape Women's Health Fitness Muscle & Fitness	Newsweeklies Economist (The) New York Newsweek Time U.S. News & World Report Week	Women's Cosmopolitan Family Circle First for Women Glamour Good Housekeeping InStyle Ladies' Home Journal Martha Stewart Living More O, The Oprah Magazine Real Simple Redbook Self Seventeen Weight Watchers Woman's Day Woman's World