RESPECT & REMUNERATION:
Attitudes about editorial working conditions in the Canadian magazine industry.

A report prepared by Impresa Communications Limited
for the Professional Writers Association of Canada

SPRING, 2009
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“I’d like to see a comprehensive code of ethics for magazine editors and publishers, specifying such things as: adherence to the principles of advertising/editorial separation; dedication to quality and accuracy of content; and fairness to contributors. Not that it could be enforced easily, but some kind of Hippocratic Oath would help instill a set of common principles.”
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
As the starting point for developing guidelines for best practices in the Canadian magazine industry, a working group of magazine associations – the Professional Writers Association of Canada (PWAC), Magazines Canada and the Canadian Society of Magazine Editors (CSME) – commissioned a study of attitudes and expectations among people working on the content side of the industry, management, staff and freelancers.

An online questionnaire was conducted, to which 459 individuals responded in whole or in part. Some follow-up interviews were conducted, and this report is a summary of what was heard about relationships and working conditions in the industry. (Selected comments are included at the end as an appendix, in order of numbered sections in the body of the report.)
Among the items worth noting:

➔ Thirty-eight per cent (38%) of all respondents felt that working conditions in the industry have deteriorated over the time they’ve been working in it.

➔ Almost half (47%) of freelancers felt this way, as did more than a quarter of magazine staff (29%) and management (27%).

➔ Respondents felt the industry allowed them to create work of real value; 87% of freelancers and 91% of staffers expressed satisfaction about that.

➔ Yet only 67% of freelancers and 72% of staffers felt they were treated with respect.

➔ There was agreement on several important issues, including:
  • Separation of advertising and editorial content
  • Compensation — how to pay a living wage to freelancers and staffers
  • Fair protection of copyrights and
  • Strengths and weaknesses of the industry as a whole.
Primary concerns for both staff and freelancers were:
- Reliable delivery and meeting deadlines
- Achieving consistent and predictable editorial quality
- Payment (for freelance contributions and/or for salaries/benefits) and
- (Surprisingly) keeping editorial costs down.

Respondents felt that the magazine industry was strong in providing:
- Quality of writing
- Diversity of voices and perspectives
- Visual presentation and design
- Reasonably priced magazines
- Breadth of political and social views.

They felt that the industry’s weaknesses included:
- Magazines paying too little
- U.S. magazine domination of newsstands
- Lack of respect for skills
- Failure to protect copyrights
- Lack of government support
- Failure to address competition from other media.

Fewer than a third of staff respondents (31%) felt that relationships between editors and publishers were excellent or good.
Among the things that respondents would change in the industry were (in no particular order):

- Working conditions, salaries and fees
- Industry consolidation
- Greater openness, transparency and teamwork, as between editors and contributors, editorial and advertising, publishers, editors and freelancers
- The general level of respect shown at all levels throughout the industry
- Ease of entry into the industry.

Among the things that respondents would definitely keep were (again, in no particular order):

- Relationships with professional, experienced editors
- High quality of form and content
- Wide range of quality magazines
- Collegiality, creativity, opportunity.

Among the organizations considered to be doing best in serving the interests of the magazine industry were Masthead magazine, Magazines Canada, PWAC, the Canadian Magazines blog¹ and the Canadian Society of Magazine Editors. It should be noted that in almost all cases, fewer than half of respondents said that these organizations were doing “very well” or “well.”

¹ Disclosure: the author of this report runs the Canadian Magazines blog.
The report recommends that the results of this research be widely published and its results integrated as much as possible with other parallel research, including the PWAC study of freelance income and the forthcoming Mercer national compensation study.

Based on the responses and using the data gathered here as a starting point, it is also recommended that a series of facilitated conversations or focus groups be held across the country, a cross-section of editors, staff, managers and freelancers. These groups would be expected to develop a consensus on a series of initiatives that could be taken to improve understanding and working conditions in the industry. These initiatives could possibly be undertaken in collaboration with industry association(s) and perhaps keyed to annual industry events such as MagNet, regional magazine seminars such as BCAMP’s Magazines West, or events such as AMPA’s magazine conference.

It is further suggested that working groups be struck to implement the recommended initiatives and report back to the industry at a time and place to be determined. Of particular importance is developing a means of measuring the success of such initiatives. The results of all of these activities should be published and widely disseminated.
OVERVIEW

Introduction
Methodology
Characteristics of Respondents
Three key organizations in the Canadian magazine industry – the Professional Writers Association of Canada (PWAC), the Canadian Society of Magazine Editors (CSME) and Magazines Canada – decided to embark on a research project with the assistance of funding from the Department of Canadian Heritage. The intention was to explore perceptions and prevailing attitudes, particularly on the content-generation side of the industry, with the aim of fostering greater understanding and better working conditions for the entire industry.

A request for participation was made to the Canadian Business Press, which represents business-to-business publications, but it declined to participate. In addition, the availability of the questionnaire was made known through various industry publications, including Masthead magazine and the Canadian Magazines blog. E-mail alerts were sent to a private list of individuals in the business. A link was provided to the online questionnaire and data was compiled. For those who were unable to access the questionnaire online, faxed or mailed copies were provided.

Respondents included freelance writers, freelance and staff editors, and senior management. Opportunities were provided for respondents to give open-ended responses to many of the questions or to amplify their answers with written responses.

The questionnaire was fairly long and required some time to complete; not all respondents completed the entire survey form, although in total there were 459 full or partial responses. In all, 355 individuals (77%) completed the entire questionnaire. As the various lists used were not merged and purged (for privacy reasons), it is not known how much overlap there was [people who received multiple requests to participate] and how big the potential universe was, but the response is considered very good, based on similar research projects.

Because it was felt important to get people to express their views candidly, responses were anonymous. Since a large number of open-ended responses were received, we have tried to select representative examples and include them where appropriate.

“I used to earn 100% of my income from magazine writing. Now I earn less than $10,000 per year writing for magazines, but upwards of $50,000 per year doing corporate work.”

The outcome of this research will be the first part of a more inclusive process that will lay the foundation for further discussion. There is remarkably little qualitative or quantitative data about the Canadian magazine industry as a place for meaningful work. We hope that people who participated in this research and those who read it will find that the data and comments provide insights into the sector.

A planned series of roundtable discussions across the country could then drill down into these results and compile a list of agreed “best practices” that will enhance the industry’s strengths and provide a framework for addressing specific problem areas.
CHARACTERISTICS OF RESPONDENTS

Location
The proportion of respondents by location was as follows:

- Newfoundland: 4% (4 respondents)
- Nova Scotia: 9.3% (9 respondents)
- New Brunswick: 2% (6 respondents)
- Quebec: 5% (17 respondents)
- Ontario: 62% (208 respondents)
- Manitoba: 3% (10 respondents)
- Saskatchewan: 1% (5 respondents)
- Alberta: 9% (30 respondents)
- BC: 13% (43 respondents)
- Territories: 1% (2 respondents)
- Total: 100% (334 respondents)

Occupation
Respondents included people who were self-described as:

- Freelancers: 60% (201 respondents)
- Writers: 48% (160 respondents)
- Editors: 30% (94 respondents)
- Magazine staff members: 26% (86 respondents)
- Editorial: 22% (74 respondents)
- Photographers: 11% (37 respondents)
- Publishers: 9% (30 respondents)
- CEO’s: 2.4% (9 respondents)

Time in the business
How long have you been working in and for Canadian Magazines?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Working Time</th>
<th>INCOME</th>
<th>VOLUNTEER ACTIVITY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 10%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Up to 25%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Up to 50%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Up to 75%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 50%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- 87% of freelancers spend all of their working time in the magazine industry.
- 90% of staffers spend all of their working time in the magazine industry.
- 83% of freelancers earn all of their income from the magazine industry.
- 87% of staffers earn all of their income from the magazine industry.

It is noteworthy that a significant number of people said they spend at least part of their work time in pursuits other than magazine work; as will be seen from later comments, this may be an outcome of the perceived necessity to pursue corporate work and other income sources.
SELECTED COMMENTS

• The magazine sector is getting nastier and more cut-throat: e.g. a lack of loyalty to freelancers who have worked with a publication for years; a lack of knowledge of what once constituted professional practice; a lack of respect for freelancers’ time [e.g. total wild goose chases at the editor’s request for which a freelancer is not compensated]; and some shocking examples of mean-spiritedness and cliquishness.

• I would love to expand my experience, and income, by writing freelance pieces on a different subject than I cover day to day, but working full time on a magazine doesn’t leave me with much free time or energy to do this. Basically, I would like to be more involved with the industry but find it a challenge.

• I am doing far more corporate work for several reasons: It pays better; it pays upon receipt it is too much hassle chasing magazine editors to get a response to my inquiries. Despite the fact that I am an award-winning writer with 25+ years experience, editors tend to ignore those of us who don’t live in Toronto. Some editors also seem to favour new writers because they can pay them less... forgetting the fact that they may have to spend considerable time editing a newbie’s work. The old saying, “You get what you pay for” rings so true! I’ve gone well beyond writing simply for the thrill of seeing my name in print in a magazine. Writing is my living, not my hobby, so I want to see my name in print on a pay cheque!

“IT’S MOSTLY A LABOUR OF LOVE. EVEN THOUGH I GET A SMALL HONORARIUM, I PUT IN COUNTLESS MORE HOURS, SO THAT I CONSIDER IT LARGELY VOLUNTARY!”

• It took nine years to get to the mid $20,000 mark. Prior to that, I made about mid-teens for three years and prior to that I only made between $2,000 and $4,000 per year.

• About $85,000 (including performance bonus and/or profit-sharing, which is an inappropriate mechanism for rewarding editorial staff) in my last three staff jobs, over the past 10 years. Like most freelancers, my current earnings are a blend of higher and lower paying work as a development and consulting editor and freelance writer, respectively.

### Income

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Income Range</th>
<th>For Freelance Work</th>
<th>For Staff Work</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More than $100,000</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Up to $100,000</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Up to $75,000</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Up to $50,000</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Up to $40,000</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Up to $30,000</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Up to $20,000</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than $10,000</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than $30,000</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decline to say</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Percentages may not add up since some respondents do both staff and freelance work.
3

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS
There are also misunderstandings about the relationships between senior management and the freelancers who make what they sell. If our business is selling access to readers in an editorial environment they trust, then thoughtful publishers will find the comments and attitudes cause for concern. At some point – a so-called “tipping point” – the gap in understanding, particularly between the freelance community and publishers, may become so great that quality of writing and service to readers will suffer. Some people seem to feel that such a line has already been crossed.

As one very senior and experienced freelance writer (and former consumer magazine editor) put it:

“Crummy freelance rates are a problem that everyone talks about and no-one does much about. The result is that fewer writers can afford to devote themselves full-time to magazine writing, which means that editors find it tougher to find experienced, professional writers to assign to, which means those same editors end up spending hours doing surgery on third-rate or dashed-off (‘cause you’re not paying enough) drafts. Publishers don’t necessarily see the financial impact of this because those editors rarely get paid overtime. And that unpaid overtime in turn contributes to staffers feeling like they’re not paid enough. Here’s a solution: Pay your freelancers well and your staffers won’t have to work as hard and everyone will be happier!”
If the people who write and edit the content are feeling as they are, it can’t help but have a long-term impact on content quality. There are those who disagree with this view. Some publishers and managers believe that this is simply an issue of supply and demand, there being so many eager, talented aspirants, and therefore always someone to step up and create acceptable content. As a result, fees are held down. Others feel that staffers and freelancers have failed to invest the time in understanding the economics of the magazine business, the intense competitive environment and the fact that current compensation and staffing levels are pragmatic reflections of that reality. Small (and shrinking) staff cohorts and a freelance field that is short of devoted one-draft veterans and dominated by young hopefuls seem to disturb some and not concern others at all.

As one experienced western Canadian publisher put it: “I think you could pretty well transpose [these views] across any business. I’m not sure this is specific to magazines. However, I do think we clearly do a poor job of helping people inside the business understand the economic imperatives of this kind of industry. And that, for me, has been a very compelling message that has been brought home to me over the last little while with my own staff and with people who apply for the jobs. When you have somebody who has actually zero magazine experience, a recent grad, some small writing experience, apply for an associate editor’s position and ask for $85,000 a year? You know that they don’t really understand the business... at all. Or even, well, life. It’s interesting to me to see how few people actually understand, whether you’re in the business or external to the business, truly understand the economic imperatives of a magazine... I absolutely value [staff and freelancers] and I struggle with how much you can pay them, but it’s not capricious and it’s not like I’m sitting on a big pot of cash that I’m keeping for myself and keeping it away from freelancers. This is the economic model and the only one that makes this business make any kind of sense at all.... For commercial publications, this is a business. A business has imperatives – stability, profitability. The margins are slim. We’re not sharing that information enough. I’ve started to become very clear, very transparent with my staff about what it costs to make magazines and they’re mostly appalled. They’re amazed. Often their comment is “Why do you do this?” Why, indeed, it’s not for the money.”
While this report is about the editorial side of the industry as a whole, inevitably the various stakeholders see things through their own particular lenses. The slow deterioration of conditions for freelance contributors is not well understood by those who do not earn their livings as freelancers; even though they say they understand the problems of freelancers, their answers tend to come with a shrug, betraying either complacency or mute acceptance.

Freelancers, meanwhile, are becoming more and more unhappy and concerned about their future. They ask why, among all the suppliers of a magazine (from the printer to Canada Post), they have not seen an increase in fees for years. While a hopeful freelance community is a precious resource, a despairing one is leading the best and the brightest to drift away into corporate work or out of the trade altogether.

Two recent developments indicate that the freelance community is fed up with waiting for the magazines that employ them to pay a living wage: one, the work in progress to create a freelance union; and two, the plans afoot for a literary agency to represent writers in their negotiations with magazines. Whether either of these initiatives succeeds remains to be seen, but if ever there were signals that all levels within the business need to strive for better working conditions and clarity, these would be the signs.

Yet the amount of change required to put things right is not that great. Freelancers are not asking to live in luxury, merely to make a decent living in a business that respects their contribution. Magazine management is not expecting freelancers or staff to take on their burdens, merely to understand the economics of the business in a changing world. Staff members expect to work hard and want a reasonable opportunity to build a career.

We hasten to add that the principal reason for doing this research was not to campaign for higher freelance fees. But it is difficult to avoid the depth of feeling on both sides on the subject of money when that is the way that most people in this business keep score.

Aside from money, however, there is a great commonality of interest, particularly between editors and freelance writers. Issues they both think are important include copyright issues and advertising-editorial conflicts.

We have made every effort to emphasize the positive as well as the negative results in reporting on the research.
RESPONSES
1 MOST IMPORTANT ISSUES.

The top five most important issues for all respondents were:

- Insufficient pay for freelance work
- Advertising/editorial conflicts
- Copyright issues and control of rights
- High cost of delivering and selling magazines
- Insufficient salary and benefit levels for staff work

Top issues for freelancers:
Insufficient rates of pay for freelance work: 91%
Copyright issues and control of rights: 52%
Advertising/editorial conflicts: 48%

Top issues for staff:
Insufficient rates of pay for freelance work: 64%
Insufficient salary and benefit levels for staff work: 64%
Advertising/editorial conflicts: 58%

Advertising-editorial conflicts was chosen as a top issue by...

- 51% of all respondents
- 58% of magazine staff
- 48% of freelancers
- 46% of magazine management

“...taking care of content is paying off for The New Yorker and Harper’s. It could do the same in Canada.”

Most important issues (%)

- Insufficient rates of pay for freelance work: 78%
- Advertising/editorial conflict: 51%
- Copyright issues and control of rights: 44%
- High cost of delivering and selling magazines: 37%
- Insufficient salary and benefit level for staff work: 36%
- Freelance contributions not valued enough: 32%
- Loss of audience to other media: 31%
- Consolidation of magazine companies: 30%
- Magazine undervalued by reading public: 25%
- Shrinking audience: 22%
- Payment methods: 20%
- Shortage of well-trained mid-level editors: 20%
- Lack of quality, first-draft writers: 19%
- Magazines journalism not sufficiently respected: 15%
- Lack of professional training opportunities: 15%
- Lack of respect between magazine staffers and freelancers: 13%
- Magazines published as part of non-magazine groups (e.g., printers): 10%
- Changing public tastes: 7.5%
- Proliferation of niche publications: 6.7%
- Too many freelancers: 5.9%

1 Those who self-selected as some combination of Chief Executive Officer, publisher, executive managers, managers or administrators, executive or managing editor
2. THERE IS A SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCE OF OPINION ABOUT HOW GOOD WORKING RELATIONSHIPS ARE IN THE MAGAZINE BUSINESS.

a) Publishers and managers felt that their working relationships with staff editors, staff writers and freelancers were overwhelmingly (87%) excellent or good.

b) 29% of respondents (staff 50%, freelancers 27%) said that they perceived the relationship of editors with publishers as only fair or poor.

c) 23% of editors felt that their working relationship with their publishers was only fair or poor.

d) 26% of magazine staffers said the relationship between editors and staff was only fair or poor; 17.5% of freelancers agreed.

e) 50% of staff (and 27% of freelancers) perceived the relationship of editors with publishers as only fair or poor.

f) In general, more than twice as many respondents said that conditions had deteriorated as the number who felt that they had improved; and more felt they had deteriorated than stayed the same.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Magazine working conditions (%) have...</th>
<th>13%</th>
<th>38%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>...deteriorated substantially or somewhat?</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...deteriorated substantially?</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...stayed pretty much as they have always been?</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...improved substantially or somewhat?</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...improved substantially?</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

38% say conditions have deteriorated

14% of respondents say conditions have improved
3 A SIGNIFICANT NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS FELT THAT WORKING CONDITIONS IN THE MAGAZINE INDUSTRY HAVE DETERIORATED OVER THE TIME THEY HAVE WORKED IN THE MAGAZINE BUSINESS.

- a) 38% of all respondents
- b) 47% of freelancers (30% somewhat, 17% substantially)
- c) 29% of magazine staff
- d) 27% of magazine management

The perception is that the amount of work is increasing steadily for staff (the same amount or more work, done by fewer people), although this is not reflected in pay. Both staff and freelancers feel that time demands are much greater. And while article lengths are decreasing, there is no recognition that it takes almost as long to research a 2,000-word piece as a 4,000-word article. Both staff and freelancers feel that more is being asked for the same or less compensation; for freelancers, this is exacerbated by what they perceive as “rights grabs” by magazines that want online use as well as print rights for what they previously paid for print alone.

“Budget restrictions for Canadian magazines seem to be an ongoing issue affecting editorial content and its value. Multiple mergers make dealings with publications less and less personalized.”
4 SATISFACTION ABOUT WORKING WITH, IN OR FOR MAGAZINES IS MIXED.

Staff and freelancers consistently said that it is difficult to live comfortably on what magazines pay them.

Cross-tabulation results:

**Being able to create work of real value**
87% of freelancers said they found it very satisfying or satisfying to work with, in or for magazines.
91% of staffers felt it was very satisfying or satisfying.

**Being paid enough to live comfortably**
20% of freelancers felt it was very satisfying or satisfying to work with, in or for magazines.
41% of staffers felt it was very satisfying or satisfying to work with, in or for magazines.

**Being treated with respect**
67% of freelancers
72% of staffers

**Developing my skills or body of work**
80% of freelancers
89% of staffers

**Making new connections**
75% of freelancers
89% of staffers

**Establishing good working relationships**
83% of freelancers
92% of staffers

**Receiving timely payment**
54% of freelancers
81% of staffers

**Reaching a larger audience**
70% of freelancers
78% of staffers

“I am grossly underpaid for what I do but I love what I do. I love the contacts I have made. I love that readers are intensely loyal, though their numbers are few.”
5 PRIMARY CONCERNS ARE WIDELY SHARED BETWEEN MAGAZINE STAFF AND FREELANCE CONTRIBUTORS.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How important are the following concerns when it comes to magazine STAFF?</th>
<th>Primary concern</th>
<th>Minor concern</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reliable delivery and meeting deadlines</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achieving consistent and predictable quality</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keeping editorial costs down</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salaries and benefits</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fact-checking</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separation of advertising and editorial</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Payment for content</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discovering new talent and new voices</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintaining a long-term relationship</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career and professional development</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Copyright and rights issues generally</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal issues (e.g. libel)</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reliable data about the industry</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How important are the following concerns when it comes to magazine CONTRIBUTORS?</th>
<th>Primary concern</th>
<th>Minor concern</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reliable delivery and meeting deadlines</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achieving consistent and predictable quality</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keeping editorial costs down</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salaries and benefits</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fact-checking</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separation of advertising and editorial</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Payment for content</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discovering new talent and new voices</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintaining a long-term relationship</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career and professional development</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Copyright and rights issues generally</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal issues (e.g. libel)</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reliable data about the industry</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Perception is that primary concerns are:

**For magazine staff**
- Reliable delivery and meeting deadlines
- Achieving consistent and predictable quality
- Keeping editorial costs down
- Salaries and benefits

**For contributors**
- Reliable delivery and meeting deadlines
- Achieving consistent and predictable quality
- Payment for content
- Keeping editorial costs down

Aside from the issue of compensation, the general perceptions of what’s most important to both contributors and staff would appear to be the same. However...

- Of the people who self-identified as publishers or management, 93% said they felt that relationships between staff editors and staff writers were excellent or good, with freelance contributors, 89%.
- Of the people who self-identified as contributors, only 77% said they felt their relationship with their editor or art director was excellent or good, and magazines’ relationships with contributors, 60%.
- Of people who self-identified as editors, only 65% felt their relationship with their publishers was excellent or good, and with their contributors, 86%.

Clearly there is a disconnect, at least on the level of perception, not only between freelance contributors and paid staff of magazines, but within the staffs of magazines about how well working relationships are doing. Some of this is undoubtedly the result of the natural friction of a employer/employee relationship. But a good deal of it seems to come from an imperfect understanding of what others inside this relatively small industry⁶ are thinking and doing.

---

⁶ According to the latest Statscan data (2003-04), there are approximately 7,500 full- and part-time magazine employees, an average of slightly over three employees per title. Freelance contributors are not counted, but estimates place the number at between 5,000 and 12,000.
6 MAGAZINES ARE PERCEIVED TO HAVE GOOD RELATIONSHIPS WITH THEIR READERS, BUT NOT NECESSARILY WITH THEIR CONTRIBUTORS OR STAFFERS.

We asked all respondents to rate various kinds of relationships within the industry and the results were as follows.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>EXCELLENT</th>
<th>GOOD</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Magazines with readers</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>221</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magazine editors with freelance writers</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>197</td>
<td>226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Editors with their full- and part-time staffers</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art directors with freelance contributors</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magazines with their freelance contributors</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Editors with publishers</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publishers with editors</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magazines with advertisers and advertising agencies</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magazines with funding agencies</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>FAIR</th>
<th>POOR</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Art directors with freelance contributors</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Editors with their full- and part-time staffers</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magazines with funding agencies</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magazines with readers</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magazines with advertisers and advertising agencies</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magazine editors with freelance writers</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Editors with publishers</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publishers with editors</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magazines with their freelance contributors</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>220</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Results do not add up to 100% as some respondents said they didn’t now or couldn’t say; the numbers and percentages above represent only those whose response was to select excellent, good, fair or poor.

Perception is that more than half (54%) of respondents felt relationships between magazines and their freelance contributors were only FAIR or POOR. Between editors and freelance writers, however, the relationship was considered EXCELLENT or GOOD (56%). As was consistent throughout this research, most respondents felt that the relationship between magazines and their readers was excellent/good (57%).

Self-identified staffers gave equally definite responses about the various relationships, particularly the perception of relationships between editors and publishers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STAFF PERCEPTIONS</th>
<th>EXCELLENT/GOOD</th>
<th>FAIR/ POOR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Magazines with readers</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Editors with their full- and part-time staffers</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magazine editors with freelance writers</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magazines with their freelance contributors</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art directors with freelance contributors</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publishers with editors</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Editors with publishers</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magazines with advertisers and advertising agencies</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magazines with funding agencies</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: a significant proportion of respondents simply didn’t know or couldn’t say how good the relationship was between editors and publishers, possibly because, as freelancers, they don’t have insight into the day-to-day workings of magazines.
The entire industry is restructuring. We, as professionals who should be considering the public good as much as our own viability, have a responsibility to ensure that the emerging industry structure supports the public good.
TOLD THAT STATSCAN DATA SHOW AVERAGE SPENDING ON CONTENT AT ABOUT 15% OF REVENUE, THE MAJORITY OF RESPONDENTS SAID THEY THOUGHT IT WAS QUITE LOW.

View of spending on content

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>LOW</th>
<th>ABOUT RIGHT</th>
<th>HIGH</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Freelancers</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staffers</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Respondents were told Statcan data showed 15% of revenue is spent on content; they were asked to say how their own view aligned with this statistic.

MOST RESPONDENTS, INCLUDING STAFFERS, FELT THAT FREELANCERS SHOULD BE PAID MORE FOR CONTENT.

View about payment of freelancers

- I think all magazines should pay more. 56%
- I think those figures are accurate and bad news for the industry. 56%
- It is their choice to be freelancers. 21%
- I’m not sure those figures are correct. 10%
- I think this is reasonable, considering the size and circumstances of the industry. 5.9%
- I don’t know / can’t say. 5.6%
- I think those figures are too pessimistic. 4.5%

Respondents were asked their view of data showing freelancers earned an average of $24,000 annually or about $15 an hour.

“Many of the top writers I know are leaving magazine writing to do more corporate work, and that’s a shame – the quality of magazine writing can only suffer as a result. And then they wonder why we lose readers!”
“I guess that most magazine staff I know are paid poorly in comparison to these numbers. I think that if someone is making this much money plus benefits, then they should be doing all right. And I do think they deserve to make this much, because if you live in a centre like Toronto you need at least this much to live.”
Respondents were clearly split on how well the traditional per-word payment for magazine content worked and could be made better.

### How well does per-word payment work?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How well does per-word payment work?</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not at all well</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not very well</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reasonably well</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very well</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### How should content payment be made for Canadian magazines?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How should content payment be made for Canadian magazines?</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pay by the published word</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negotiate every fee</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pay bonuses for excellence</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pay a flat fee per article from a published schedule</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use a standard freelance contract for the industry</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negotiate fees collectively (e.g. a union)</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pay by the published page</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“The whole process should be more transparent, so that everyone is spared the onerous task of negotiating over a few pennies, and can focus on turning out the best possible publications that we can. Then we would see readership increase, advertising increase, and the industry have a hope of getting out of its current death spiral.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>PAY BY PUBLISHED WORD</th>
<th>PAY BONUSES FOR EXCELLENCE</th>
<th>NEGOTIATE EVERY FEE</th>
<th>USE STANDARD CONTRACT</th>
<th>PAY A FLAT FEE PER ARTICLE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Freelancers</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There is little difference between staff and freelance views about the current system of payment for content.
EDITORIAL QUALITY, DIVERSITY AND BREADTH OF VIEWS ARE CONSIDERED MAJOR STRENGTHS OF THE INDUSTRY.

Among the highest-scoring strengths, there are still significant differences between magazine staff and freelancers, particularly on diversity of voices. All are generally agreed on the high quality of content.

“Freelancing in any industry can be tricky, but it’s especially hard for writing and/or editing because it is so unregulated.”

It’s interesting to see what scores low on the list of strength attributes:

- Ease of entry into business
- Market stability
- Reasonable working conditions for freelancers
- Good opportunities for personal and career growth
- Good relationship between editorial and management
Perceived WEAKNESS of the industry

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weakness</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Magazines pay too little</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S. magazine domination of newsstand</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slow payment</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of respect for skills</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failure to protect copyrights</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of government support</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competition from other media</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shrinking markets</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty entering profession</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of working capital</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of loyalty</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty getting ad support</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of professionalism</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too much competition</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of training &amp; development</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff turnover</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost of finding audience</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public/reader indifference</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of clear direction</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shortage of capable people</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decline in single copy sales</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of a clear career path</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing deadlines</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicating clearly</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of necessary skills</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resistance about subscription prices</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content costs too much</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too much specialization</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Once again, there is considerable variance of views among staff, freelancers and managers. Note particularly the “lack of respect for skills” and “slow payment.”

“Loyalty is key – if your company won’t even pay you a decent wage, why should you put in the extra effort it takes to make a magazine spectacular?”
14 IT'S CLEAR THAT SOME ORGANIZATIONS AND SUPPORTS ARE MORE IMPORTANT THAN OTHERS.

How well are the following serving the interests of the magazine industry?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Very well</th>
<th>Well</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Masthead magazine</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magazines Canada</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Writers Association of Canada</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canadian Magazines blog</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canadian Society of Magazine Editors</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional magazine association</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community colleges</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Universities</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada Council</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department of Canadian Heritage</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provincial arts councils</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canadian Business Press</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canadian Church Press</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent Publishers Association of Ontario</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It should be noted that both PWAC and Magazines Canada membership were specifically targeted for the online survey. Note that the highest score (56%) went to the industry trade publication Masthead magazine.

“As a new graduate, I’m still learning about a lot of these representative bodies. But I think those groups definitely need to reach out to students and new professionals.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SERVING INTERESTS BEST (VERY WELL + WELL)</th>
<th>ALL RESPONDENTS</th>
<th>STAFF</th>
<th>FREELANCERS</th>
<th>MANAGEMENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Masthead magazine</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magazines Canada</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Writers Association of Canada</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canadian Magazines blog</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canadian Society of Mag Editors</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional magazine associations</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional magazine associations</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is clear that respondents’ perceptions are coloured by how important the various organizations are to their own working life. Thus, staff rate Masthead much higher than freelancers do. And management and staff tend to rely heavily on Magazines Canada as the principal trade association, while freelancers do not so much; the lower results for regional magazine associations are the result of serving only some segments of the country.

7 At the time of the completion of this report, Masthead announced that it was going out of business, effective November 2008.
8 This does not include people who said they don’t know or can’t say.
15 **THINGS RESPONDENTS WOULD DEFINITELY CHANGE IN THE INDUSTRY**
(ONE THING THEY WOULD DEFINITELY CHANGE).

- Lack of respect and good communications between editors and writers
- Eliminating use of unpaid interns
- Low salaries and fees
- Consolidation of the industry into large publishing houses
- Difficulty with entry into the business
- More openness from editors
- More teamwork
- More respect for creative side by management

16 **THINGS RESPONDENTS WOULD DEFINITELY KEEP IN THE INDUSTRY**
(ONE THING THEY WOULD DEFINITELY KEEP).

- Excellent training programs
- Separation of church and state (advertising and editorial)
- Overall sense of professionalism
- Diversity and specialization in magazines
- Good editors and loyalty to quality writers
- Magazines Canada
- Collegiality, working together
- Ease of access to editors
- Respectfulness

“I would like to see more regional training programs, more programs that address the concerns of small publications, and more government funding opportunities for small publications.”
There are many different perspectives – and some shared values – when it comes to improving working conditions and relationships in the Canadian magazine industry.

- Time to invest in content and content creators
- Code of ethics for magazine editors and publishers
- Government has to realize it is time to subsidize the industry
- End cliquishness
- Develop magazine exports
- Introduce standards and accountability for magazine management and freelancers

“Make a magazine that reaches beyond – in style, in ideas, in story choice – and you’ll find readers who get excited. Bring back some courage!”
5

RECOMMENDATIONS
RECOMMENDATIONS

1) Widely publish and circulate the results of this study so that its results are known not only to those who responded but to everyone in the business, and create some sort of feedback mechanism (probably online) whereby people could respond and give their reactions to the compiled results and the recommendations that have flowed from them.

2) Make the raw data available to anyone who wants to do their own analysis.

3) Integrate the results of this study with other work that has been done or will be done, such as the Professional Writers Association of Canada study on freelance pay and the forthcoming national compensation study being done for Magazines Canada by Mercer Limited with the support of the Cultural Human Resources Council (CHRC), as well as data gathered over the last few years by the Department of Canadian Heritage in applications for the Canada Magazine Fund.

4) Hold a series of small-scale roundtables across Canada, perhaps 5 or 6 in a variety of places coast to coast and involving a cross-section of editors, staff, managers and freelancers in a facilitated conversation. While they would start with a briefing from the data gleaned in this study, the conversations would be expected to obtain consensus on a series of initiatives that could be taken for improving understanding and working conditions in the industry. These could possibly be done in collaboration with industry association(s) and perhaps keyed to industry events, such as MagNet, or regional magazine seminars, such as Magazines West or AMPA’s magazine conference.

5) Strike working groups to implement the recommended initiatives, and set a timetable to report back to the industry at a time and place to be determined. Of particular importance is developing some means of measuring the success of such initiatives. Publish and widely disseminate (again, probably online) the results of the work done by the working groups.

6) Present an action plan to:
   a. Member publishers of all trade associations
   b. Major publishing groups (Transcontinental Media, Rogers Publishing, Quebecor Media, St. Joseph Media, etc.)
   c. All funders at the national, regional or municipal level
6

CONCLUSION
CONCLUSION

The paradox of the Canadian magazine industry is that it is complex and yet, in some ways, relatively easy to understand. That understanding comes from asking simple questions and standing back. Everyone, it seems, has an opinion and from those opinions, we can get a pretty fair summation of the commonalities, issues and controversies within the field. This working paper is the outcome of the first phase of what is intended to be a longer research project into attitudes, conditions and best practices in the Canadian magazine industry.

Based on the results of an online questionnaire and individual interviews, we have found that there are many things that people in magazines have in common.

Generally, they are in the magazine field by preference and, given their druthers, most of the respondents want to stay in the business, unless they are driven out by circumstances (these are often people who say that they feel the business has left them, rather than the other way around). Many respondents feel that working conditions in magazines have stayed much the same as they have always been; others say they feel conditions have deteriorated over time.

Another thing we found is that most people pay real attention to issues of editorial integrity, no matter where they are in the hierarchy.

There are also significant differences of opinion, gulfs that may be difficult to bridge. And there are many areas where custom and practice may be open to much-needed change, if only a way can be found to get the conversation going.

There are no magical answers to problems, mind you. And there is no unanimity about solutions, or even about the definition of the problems. But the outcome of this stage of the research provides lots of opportunities to take a thoughtful conversation further and deeper.

As will have been noted particularly from the selected comments (see appendix), there are some common themes, not all [but many] of which centre on compensation. Writers want to be paid and many editors would like to be in a position to pay more, but as much as a matter of professionalism and a reflection of real value as for the dollars themselves. And, of equal importance, both editors and writers want to work in an environment where skills and motivation are respected. Many managers and publishers continue to feel that freelancers just don’t understand the fiscal realities with which they are dealing. But it seems clear from the responses to this research that freelancers do understand, but don’t accept that these realities are immutable. This is something that can probably be improved by negotiation and better communication, ironic in an industry that communicates for a living.

Many respondents speak in terms of distinctive voices, Canadian voices, a diversity of voices. This approach indicates a strong thread of professional and national pride that runs through the industry. While the word wasn’t used very much, there came through in the comments a hunger for collegiality and understanding, an opportunity to positively affect the future of the Canadian magazine business. That can probably only come from some plain speaking face-to-face, which is the principal recommendation growing out of this first stage of research: There is a clear need for a series of small-scale facilitated conversations among editors, staffers, freelancers and management working for a range of Canadian magazines in a variety of places across the country, representing magazines large and small, consumer and trade. The jumping-off point would be the data and comments from this study, but it is hoped that it would only be a starting point and that the conversations would lead to some specific initiatives that would address the concerns expressed by people working in this small creative industry.
APPENDIX

Selected comments, by numbered section

The following comments have been selected as representative of a much larger number of comments received (the entire file is available to anyone who wishes to read all 88 pages). The number beside each heading corresponds to the section numbering in the main body of the report.
1 MOST IMPORTANT ISSUE

- Publishing training is done by people who may be too old and outdated.

- I think magazines are doing fine economically, judging by the number of start-ups. I think the proliferation of niche publications is a good thing. However, pressure from advertisers is a serious threat to editorial integrity. Freelance pay rates, copyright issues and control of rights are making it impossible to make a living as a freelance writer.

- There is hardly any good public interest journalism in Canada. This is a big problem for the country, and it’s not the result of insufficient demand. There are too few magazines doing this kind of work, and those that do don’t pay nearly enough. A dollar a word translates to a truly insulting amount to pay a qualified professional to do serious work. Magazines are destroying the only resource they have: social capital. Potentially brilliant journalists are looking elsewhere for financial and professional respect.

- The prevalence of “payment on publication” versus payment on acceptance for freelancers, combined with publishers’ reluctance to reimburse expenses for undertaking interviews and capturing photographs, leaves freelancers effectively financing the publishers for several months and absorbing such costs as mileage to photo sites, long distance telephone charges, etc.

- My only complaint would be lack of opportunities for freelancers who haven’t worked with an editor before. They often just stay with their usual stable of writers, especially in the higher-paying publications. That said, this doesn’t apply to all editors.

- Prime concern is for the inflated power of the ad sales departments over editorial, and that publishers are harvested from these ad sales departments with little to no editorial mind... and in turn these same publishers are dictating editorial. Publishers and advertising sales need to support the work of the editor-in-chief... not dictate.

- As noted above, freelancers are invariably the ones asked to sacrifice “for the good of the magazine” and to be grateful for “exposure” regardless of rates of pay. I have a Masters in journalism and have been an editor, etc. etc. I don’t need “exposure.” This kind of expectation is an insult to any professional - the line about the brain surgeon comes to mind. “When I retire I’m going to take up writing [unpaid].” How appalling is that???? And who else does that? Try that with the co-op engineering students at U of Waterloo.

- There is too much “recycling” of material between publications and not enough “fresh” material generated by writers OR freelancers. Publications are too reluctant to pay good cash to have new, original intellectual properties generated by competent researchers and writers. A lot of copy in the popular magazines is drivel, and old drivel at that.

“It’s not the editors who are the problem – usually they were writers too and so want to pay you for your work. It’s the publishers/big bosses who keep squeezing budgets so that editors are forced to cut pay, give out less work, or just write the articles themselves.”

- Copyright and control of rights, along with undervaluing of the content of a magazine (which plays into advertising/editorial conflicts and lack of pay), feed into some of the other problems. Taking care of content is paying off for The New Yorker and Harper’s. It could do the same in Canada.

- I was tempted to check all of them except “too many freelancers.” To me, the core issues are the challenging economic realities of magazine publishing, which have in turn contributed to consolidation, which in turn pushes down rates/salaries and hands enormous power to a few owners. Welcome to the joys of oligopoly publishing.
• I had to laugh at “lack of quality first-draft writers.” I count myself as one of these, but I have only so much work time I can put into magazine writing, because the freelance contributor is so little valued. Periodicals have been saving money over many years by treating their freelancers like disposable products, not paying appropriate rates and stealing all our copyrights. Then they bitch that freelance contributions have lost quality. Well, of course they have, because the good people are all too busy doing corporate work, teaching, anything to earn a wage, rather than throwing away their talents on magazines that don’t appreciate and support them. Then the readers bitch because their magazines just aren’t good reads anymore. Then the magazines lose more money, which they try to adjust for by, guess what, cutting back on freelance pay and contributions. For heaven’s sake, try to look at the big picture for once.

• As an association/trade magazine, we may be somewhat insulated from issues faced by other publications, but we are being asked to cut costs constantly while being expected to produce more and better publications. The rate we pay freelancers has been stagnant for five years.

• Internship programs: I think the industry’s reliance on interns is abhorrent. Many internships are for too long and for too little money (if any), and in many cases are probably illegal as far as labour regulations go. There’s a real lack of opportunity.

• There’s also a shift among a younger demographic (my sense at least) away from print media and towards reading/getting information online. This has forced traditional print publications to offer a parallel publication online (in effect to produce two publications instead of one). In fact, the print versions of things like my local paper and the Globe & Mail are looking more and more like websites!

• This is specific to the not-for-profit sector, where succession issues are complicated by the fact that fewer and fewer men and women are able, economically, or inclined, for other reasons, to devote a substantial share of their working lives to volunteerism.

• I can certainly see a freelancer checking off “Freelance contributions not valued enough,” for example, but the rate a freelancer commands reflects his value and scarcity in the marketplace. Why is that an issue?

3 A SIGNIFICANT NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS FEEL THAT WORKING CONDITIONS IN THE MAGAZINE INDUSTRY HAVE DETERIORATED OVER THE TIME THEY HAVE WORKED IN THE MAGAZINE BUSINESS.

• Long-term use of contract employees erodes the “team feel” that contributes to brand ownership / pride / promotion. Relatively low pay to freelance fact-checkers and copy editors new to the business takes advantage of their situation and makes their work unsustainable, driving them out of our industry.

• The budgetary pressures to do more with less money have restricted the choices (subject, scope, writers, etc.) that editors can make. Also, the concentration of ownership in large, printing companies has removed a lot of the risk-taking in editorial choices. My own experience with one such company suggested there was a real lack of interest in quality standards — there was an assumption that readers (and advertisers) don’t care all that much about content.

• Even for someone on staff, the environment has changed. There’s been more consolidation, more competition for ad dollars and more emphasis on improved profitability by trying to contain ever increasing costs for salaries, circulation, distribution, print and paper. The majority of magazines don’t make a profit, and of the few that do, the margin is very low.

• Many new start-ups begin and they don’t know what they’re doing. The editors make ridiculous requests. I’ve been asked to send the editor the book once I’m done reviewing it. I’ve had an editor ask me to distribute magazines for her. I’ve been asked to work for free — even though the publication sold ads. I’ve been expected to source photos for no extra pay.

• There have always been haves and have-nots. We all start (and still do) at just enough to get by. Some earn a little bit more and some earn a lot more. That’s as true today as it was when I started.
• Editors working to deadline never have much spare time, but in my experience editors today are even more stressed than in the 1990s and unable to respond to the volume of e-mails they receive every day, asked to produce more work for the same pay, and charged with extra duties along the way. Writers are similarly asked to produce more work and/or rewrites for the same pay—or less.

• More tasks piled on fewer shoulders. There’s only so much you can expect people to handle and still do capable jobs, and people are being asked to handle way more than that these days. Hence, lousy jobs being done. Poor product as a result. Circulation’s based on content; inferior content is bound to translate poorly in circ numbers.

• As with every form of publication (books, magazines, newspapers, etc.) the bottom line has become all-important. I believe that if many publishers could get those proverbial thousand monkeys to work for them for free, they would deep-six the rest of us.

• Editorial is slowly being pushed more and more toward advertorial; talk is only about the bottom line and cutting budgets. This is great in the short term—for the bottom line, of course—but creatively speaking, it’s killing morale. And the people pushing for this—they’ll be retiring soon to their cottages and European vacations. The solution?? I’m not sure. I know magazines are businesses, but there has to be a middle road somewhere.”

• I am an army of one...I hire freelancers...I did work at two other magazines, the conditions were fairly good, but there is nothing like being on your own...the freedom is incredible

• I’m finding the staff counts are going down and editorial staff are expected to do a lot more with fewer resources.

• Budget restrictions for Canadian magazines seem to be an ongoing issue affecting editorial content and its value. Multiple mergers make dealings with publications less and less personalized.

• Payment rates have stayed the same for about the past 10 years or more; every other bill the publisher pays without question—heat, electricity, water, rent, paper, computer resources, clerical staff. Writers are always the ones to hear “We don’t have much money, but...” Try telling that to Bell Canada, see if they would “negotiate” their rates. Staffers make a living wage, freelancers are always the ones who are asked to “support the magazine, give us a break on your rates...” Ten to 25 cents per word is no wage at all. Starbucks would pay better.

• The amount of fluff that passes off as a valid national discourse is quite frankly staggering and it’s getting worse. Also, there seem to be real cliques in the industry that are hard to break into from a small province.

• Expectation of quicker turn-around times (can’t tell you how many times I’ve been asked to do a fix on a piece with a turn-around time of a day or two).

• Long hours, low pay, no bonuses, high stress, little incentive, paltry vacation time. We are constantly pushed to do more and more and the creative process is lost. Instead, it becomes rote, just trying to pull good content and imagery together while meeting timelines that become tighter and tighter.

• I do have to say, though, that the editor I’ve been dealing with in the past couple of years is much more communicative and supportive than any other editors I’ve come across before. But a responsible editor seems to be the exception.
Satisfaction about working with, in or for magazines is mixed.

- I am grossly underpaid for what I do but I love what I do. I love the contacts I have made. I love that readers are intensely loyal, though their numbers are few. I work my own hours and follow my own instincts in tracking down stories and am not weighed down with an editorial board. That said, I do have some editorial consultants that I can check with if I’m unsure of the validity of a story.

- Many publishers have no respect for editorial staff, particularly writers. They know that they can get “good enough” editorial content, without spending extra money to get quality work.

- “Being treated with respect” - editors are generally great, but they cannot improve abysmally low rates or ridiculous contract clauses without buy-in from publishers. Those low rates and poor contracts are forms of disrespect and will continue to chase freelance writers away from periodical work and towards writing for businesses.

- With regards to establishing good working relationships, this happens with a select group of editors and magazines that I write for regularly. Within this group I’m treated with respect. But there are many magazines that have shown disrespect through bad, rights-grabbing contracts, under-valuing my contribution as a writer, disrespecting my moral rights, etc. I generally don’t work with such editors very long, especially if I have tried to negotiate or make my position clear and get nowhere.

- I have excellent relationships with editors of magazines in Atlantic Canada. Unfortunately, I don’t write for them as often as I would like as the payment is so poor and is always on publication instead of on submission.

- Canadian magazines simply ignore you completely... even the one that lists me as its Manitoba correspondent!

- The magazines I work for vary from very small to very large. I couldn’t possibly generalize. I have fantastic working relationships with some editors who pay me well, offer respect for my skills and improve my writing with their careful editing. Others treat freelancers like kindergarten students and expect multiple rewrites for little money. You get what you pay for (and how you treat others).

- There is very little opportunity for creating work of real value (depending how you define it, of course). Most of the industry is dominated by product-driven consumer magazines, which are the most viable choice for those who want to earn a living from magazines. But of course, some people find writing for fashion pubs, for example, to be of real value. So it’s a strange criterion.

“Like most freelancers I’ve known, I became more disillusioned with magazine work as the years passed, primarily the low pay. I consciously looked for better ways to make money through teaching and writing/editing for the public sector.”

- I don’t even know what to say except that I’m incredibly disappointed by the opportunities that have been available to me in Canadian magazine writing – and how fleeting some of those opportunities have been. I was also shocked by the bullying I have experienced by an editor who was powerful enough to have me banned from a major consumer show at her whim. I have had an extremely successful writing career (books, online writing, U.S. magazine writing, etc.) and a few Canadian magazines have welcomed my features/columns over the years, but it still feels like a closed shop, despite my 17 years of industry experience.

- I also hate all games that are involved in staying on the “good freelancer” list. You can’t complain if the editor changes the nature of the assignment three times after she’s assigned it to you – and all your research and writing time up until that point is lost. NOT IF YOU WANT TO WRITE FOR THAT PUBLICATION AGAIN. And as for requesting extra pay. As if. Not these days, you can’t.

- These answers are generalized as I don’t work for just one magazine. I find direct clients respect me more than people at publishing companies that I work with. I find it difficult to do good work with the structure of some publishing companies.
“The publisher I work for seems to have no respect for the cost of creating valuable work – always pinching pennies. For example, he has many “full-time freelancers” like myself, who work in the office as full-time employees but have none of the benefits. He also offers measly raises, plus very limited opportunities to innovate how things are done within the company. Direct managers seem reluctant to allow me to develop my interests and abilities beyond my current position, particularly when those interests involve another department.”

- I earn more now as a freelancer than I did when I started 20+ years ago because I get a small-ish premium from some magazines for my experience, but mostly because I simply produce more, more efficiently. To be frank, I’m looking for the exit door. I expect to be out of freelance writing in the next three to five years. On the respect front: I’ve made a conscious decision to work only with clients who respect my work and effort, and I have great relationships with those steady clients. The problem is that the pool of potential magazine clients is small – and the standards of professionalism seem to be slipping. [Younger editors with little training/support who make changes to copy without clearing them with you, push copy through without allowing writers to sign off – I can’t really blame them as they’re under enormous pressure and have apparently been raised by wolves. And this is happening at large consumer titles that should have the staff and cash to know better.]

- In my particular company, profits are valued over people. Sales people are number one while editors and art directors struggle for power. The company is structured as a sales organization, not a publishing company. Editors aren’t given fair due for the integral role each plays in developing a product that’s “saleable” when it comes to advertising.

- I love everything about my job except for the lousy salary.

- My full-time job pays pennies. I have many friends in the field and they say my salary is laughable. It’s not so funny to me, and I am looking for other work. This is a shame as I really enjoy the content of my magazine. I suppose it’s a trade-off, one I’m not willing to live with.

- Editorial staff sizes have shrunk considerably, as have many editorial budgets. Being asked to do more with less means quality suffers. Editorial conditions have downgraded, as have freelance conditions. As a freelancer, doing more work to make the same amount of money as five years ago, because stories are shorter yet still info-packed, so the per-word rate suffers.

- Ironically, often my best experiences have been with small publications. Some of the largest have such terrible contracts, demanding moral rights, etc., that I can no longer work with them. Also, one large publication refused to honour the kill fee promised in the contract.

- Further, there is a general disrespect for writers and editors arising from the consolidation of magazine and newspaper ownership and resulting content-sharing among various print publications, along with the ease of self-publishing on the Internet. Everybody’s a writer and/or editor.

- Being treated with respect? That varies. Most of the people I work with (editors) are fabulous people; if you’re not, I don’t work for you again. [It’s not like I’m paid enough to take your crap.] But as adults working in a field that pays about the same as a teenager receives for doing a fast food gig as far as respect goes? Please. Just stop.

- Not quite sure what you’re getting at with the “Reaching a larger audience” question. But if you actually believe that “exposure” – that’s what newbies get offered, am I right? – is in any way a substitute for a decent pay-cheque, you’re the funniest bunch of guys.
6 MAGAZINES ARE PERCEIVED TO HAVE GOOD RELATIONSHIPS WITH THEIR READERS, BUT NOT NECESSARILY WITH THEIR CONTRIBUTORS OR WITH THEIR STAFFERS.

- Working in a large magazine’s editorial department and freelancing for others (before and since), I’ve found editors shockingly oblivious to how much power they have over writers; how they routinely fail to respond to pitches with care and punctuality; and how poorly they treat writers (generally freelancers) in countless other ways. I continue to be amazed at editors’ smugness and disappointment in writers. Editors are the ones with stable jobs, not the ones being paid a pathetic pittance. No wonder writers try to game the system – it’s tilted against them in every way.

- Most editors are great to work with except for the $ issue, which they lie about. They are in a tough spot but when they outright say they can’t pay you more but pay everyone else more, who do they think they’re fooling?

- As an editor, I feel I am so time-pressured that I do not get the opportunity to develop very good relationships with my freelance writers. Many of them require additional coaching that I simply don’t have time to offer, and they resent that I have to re-write their work myself when I am under the gun to meet a deadline. Also, the good ones always seem to get snapped up by another magazine eventually, so I never really get to work with someone for very long – there is a lot of turnover.

- Editors and art directors will tell you that their relationships with their freelance contributors are great and freelancers will tell you that though they personally like the people who hire them, they feel underappreciated and underpaid.

- My “good” rating is an average; all of my regular editors (I’m freelance) I would rate “excellent.” What brings down the average is the attitude of just a few editors.

- Again, the experience varies so widely from one magazine to another that it’s difficult to say. It all averages out to “fair,” it seems.

- It’s not exactly a two-way street. Editors and art directors are somewhat better at providing feedback, but quite frankly, they could learn a lot from CBC producers about cultivating and working with freelancers.

- I have worked with several editors who have apologized to me for the poor pay, delay in payment, etc... explaining that it is the publisher who sets the rates and their hands are tied. Editors WANT to treat writers more fairly but publishers don’t seem to care.

- As an intern, I feel that I have a great relationship with my editors and associate editor. I have been very happy with my experience but I know how lucky I am because not every intern has such a great experience and relationship with their fellow staff.

“I’ve worked with amazing editors at terrible magazines and terrible editors at amazing magazines. There’s a wide range of people in this industry.”

- The struggle to maintain readership is always a struggle and seems to depend not only (not even primarily) on editorial quality. The not-for-profits could not build readership without the support of the CMF, now threatened, but there’s also just the general decline of reading. The tension in the relationship between editors and staff members is not to do with personality but with the difficulty of retaining the services of those you train when salaries are low or positions are paid through the revolving door of subsidized internships, etc.

- My primary work is with a magazine that relies on substantial federal funding. The primary funder has unrealistic expectations about magazine publishing. Initially, they wanted our publication to become self-supporting within five years, even though they acknowledge that our readership is a small group with limited income... therefore uninteresting to advertisers. The other issue is that the Canadian Magazine Fund also operates under very limited assumptions about what magazines are or can do – we have never applied for funding because the scope of what they support is not connected to what we do.

- The relationships are completely dependent on the environment in which you work and the people you work with. Typically, the bigger the company, the more likely the answers to this section veer into the “fair” and “poor” range.
This is a very difficult question, since it turns on personality as well as current practices. I’ve rated magazine editors’ relationships with freelancers as fair, but of course some editors are better to work for than others. I do believe that many editors who have helped strip writers of their residual rights have done so while holding their nose, which is a reflection of their relationships with their publishers.

So much of this depends on the specific magazines and cannot really be said of the industry as a whole. Some magazines are good and are good to their staff, freelancers and readers. Others, not so much.

“The reason for poor relationships with contributors is a lack of money to pay them. I don’t think that any editors are being cheap, I know advertisers are paying less and the industry is generally doing poorly, but I don’t think the problem is any more complicated than that. Bad pay equals bad relationships and bad writing. Nothing will ever improve in Canada’s writing industry until there is more money for freelance writers. I have given up on Canada’s magazine industry, am planning to make some money through business writing in Toronto, and [move] to another country where writers are paid better.”

7 VARIOUS GROUPS LACK EMPATHY FOR OR INFORMATION ABOUT OTHER GROUPS WITHIN THE CANADIAN MAGAZINE INDUSTRY.

“I’ve been an intern with a lot of access to editors and I’ve freelanced and I know other freelancers. Generally, those without power tend to understand those with power far better than the other way around. Based on my work on staff and as a freelancer, I have found that editors have a poor understanding of the real challenges facing freelancers.

It’s tough for everybody — a competitive and challenging business. The entire industry is restructuring. We, as professionals who should be considering the public good as much as our own viability, have a responsibility to ensure that the emerging industry structure supports the public good.

Editors-in-chiefs’ needs are the least understood in the industry.

“I understand the challenges because I have been an editor, assistant editor, associate editor, photographer, staff writer and have had employees reporting to me, including staff writers, part-timers, freelancers, photographers.”

I’d like to add this: I, and many writers I know, don’t really care about problems with the Canadian magazine industry’s business model any longer. It’s not working for us, and I could give a whit about the dilemmas facing publishers. We’re beyond that conversation now. The status quo has to change, and if that means a publisher or editor won’t be able to make the lease on her new Bimmer, well, that certainly is a tragedy, but I’ll learn to sleep at night.
9 MOST RESPONDENTS, INCLUDING STAFFERS, FELT THAT FREELANCERS SHOULD BE PAID MORE FOR CONTENT.

- While $24,000 a year is a pittance these days, it is difficult for small magazines to pay a decent rate. I would like to see good freelancers paid more so they have the opportunity to turn into great freelancers.

- Many magazines (including ours) pay more than $1 a word, depending on the type of assignment and, even more, on the quality of the writer. We just don’t broadcast that fact, lest the B-level writers want to be paid A-level rates. But in general, I think all rates should go up. We are losing too many good or promising writers to other industries.

- It’s scandalous and prefigures the disappearance of the good freelance writer. $24,000! This is meant to be an intellectually challenging (and rewarding) profession. Yet experienced practitioners are expected to devote their lives to mostly shit service journalism, with the occasional bit of meaningful work, for that kind of money? It’s a joke! Far more valuable to society, and remunerative, to drive a bus. Magazines should start paying editors the same amount – $15 an hour – and see how great that works.

- I think that the money paid freelancers is a disgrace – and I say this as an editor who also freelances. Many publications pay much less than this. Suffice it to say, a freelancer has to have another job to supplement this pathetic income.

“Advertising revenue has gone up significantly since the 1980s, yet writers are only paid 1980s rates? This is short-sighted greed on the part of publishers. The heart and soul of a magazine is the writers. Canada will never have a rich, vibrant, engaging culture if it doesn’t support its writers.”

- All the freelancers I know in Vancouver are making a lot more. I make about $100,000 a year with no business cards and no website. It’s word of mouth and I am booked until 2010. I write articles, briefs and submissions, fact sheets, manuals, technical documentation – even a ghost column for an ethicist. So anyone making $15 [an hour] must be a retired newbie or someone really young. If you work on it 50 hours a week, you will make a lot more.

- There are many publications out there that are only paying 15 CENTS per word and a paltry $10 per photograph. This is reflected in the quality of their content, which in turn may be reflected in dwindling subscription or store sales eventually. Although sometimes I think the public wouldn’t recognize good writing if it came gift-wrapped in their hands.

- The figures sound reasonable given the lack of major publishing centres in Canada. As an urban writer with experience writing for many smaller publications, I currently target a per-word rate of 50 cents, and should think hourly rates of $20 and annual revenues of $35,000 would be closer to an average liveable freelance wage.

- Many of the top writers I know are leaving magazine writing to do more corporate work, and that’s a shame – the quality of magazine writing can only suffer as a result. And then they wonder why we lose readers!

- That survey, if it’s the PWAC one, and that is the PWAC number (gross, not net), includes hobbyists and wannabes as survey respondents. I suspect if solid, full-time freelancers were singled out and surveyed, the salary reflected would be higher.

- I would say that there is a lot of glamour attached to being a writer and an increasing pool of young wannabes who feel it’s their right to be a writer and are willing to do so for pennies. I’m constantly ranting at writers who work for free – I think that contributes to the devaluation of our work. This applies specifically to consumer publications (Rogers, St. Joseph) and not to smaller niche publications. It’s one thing to write for free/pennies for, say, Spacing but another to do so for Toronto Life (not that they don’t pay, just that the pay scales at consumer pubs for both freelancers and staff are a major problem since clearly those companies aren’t suffering for profits...).

- This is the reality of the industry, but it is not reasonable. Especially when the people who bring in the ads (that surround these experienced freelancers’ stories) make four times as much.
10  **SIMILARLY, AND NOT SURPRISINGLY, MOST RESPONDENTS SAID THAT THEY FOUND STAFF PAY LOW.**

- Again, appalling. When I worked at St. Joseph, I became keenly aware that there is a high proportion of very young staff there. I think one of the reasons is that the hours and salary are so low that people can’t afford to stay there once they start wanting a family, a house, etc.

- My pay from farm publications doesn’t justify such a narrow margin between the wages. And both are $10,000 to $15,000 above what I received as a staff writer five years ago for a weekly business paper (which also publishes trade magazines, whose rates haven’t increased).

- I guess that most magazine staff I know are paid poorly in comparison to these numbers. I think that if someone is making this much money plus benefits, then they should be doing all right. And I do think they deserve to make this much, because if you live in a centre like Toronto you need at least this much to live.

- This average is somewhat low and an unhappy reality, but acceptable.

- The pay is still too low – but consider the fact that it is twice as high as the pay for a freelance writer. Remember that the writer is the creator. Without the words, the editor has nothing to edit. It’s time we stopped putting writers at the bottom of the food chain.

- That’s reasonable pay. Indeed, that would be reasonable for freelancers too. Based on sheer competence, freelancers deserve as much as full-time staffers – but particularly because freelancers don’t have pension and benefit plans.

- I’m actually slightly below the average! Am I surprised? Nope.

- Should be higher for some, but staff in entry positions shouldn’t expect CEO-type salaries. My view is that 20-somethings in the industry need to understand the business much better before they are promoted. There seem to be a lot of under-qualified associate editors.

- Most full-time staffers are quite junior. The pay reflects and causes this situation. Many publications are not willing to pay an experienced staffer and many writers and editors move on to other industries because of the low pay.

- In my experience, full-time staff of trade publications do not make $44,850, and the salary is closer to $34,000 to $38,000. But maybe that’s just Manitoba.

- As senior editor of a large-circ magazine in the mid-eighties, I earned $50,000 a year and have since earned much more. I find it deplorable that the average salary for a full-time staff member is less today and wonder how people are surviving.

“I think magazine editors are woefully underpaid given the amount of work they do – and the talents the job requires. I also think that the discrepancy between staff members on the editorial side of the business and the advertising sales side is appalling. I question my choices almost every day because when I consider this discrepancy, I can’t help but conclude that my work and skills simply aren’t valued. Yet how would there be a publication in which to sell ads, without them?”
Respondents were clearly split on how well the traditional per-word payment for magazine content worked and could be made better.

- Payment should not be based on the length of the story, but on the amount of work involved in the research and the credentials of the writer.
- Like democracy, it’s the worst system except for all the others.
- I’m not sure I agree that most magazines pay by the word (but I’m not a freelancer, so what do I know?). But the per-word rate at least gives you a method of comparison.
- The HIGHEST paying publication on the East Coast is 40 cents a word. Most pay much less. Yet it costs as much for research and the time invested to interview and write a story for 25 cents a word as it does for $2 a word. Although I’ve written for higher paying markets like Imperial Oil Review and Canadian Gardening, I’ve yet to find a magazine that pays $2 word! Again, I love writing for local and regional magazines but cannot do it as often as I would like. It’s financial suicide.
- You get what you pay for!
- While I agree with the pay-per-word system, it isn’t an indication of a writer’s talent or aptitude as a writer. In many cases, getting the higher-paying gigs is about having a personal relationship with an editor. In my experience, as an editor moves to larger magazines (that traditionally pay more) they provide opportunities for writers with whom they already have an established relationship, regardless of how well those writers work in a different market.
- Per-word rates create unfair comparisons between long-form magazines and super-short-form publications. It sounds great to pay writers $1/word but that is strongly undercut if a magazine’s average story length is 400 words. Compare that to a magazine with average story lengths of 1,500 words, for example. The latter sounds cheap by comparison. A second point: the difference between a writer’s preparations to write 400 words or 1,500 words is not significant. The difference between writing 1,500 and 5,000 words is much greater, and yet per-word remuneration rates diminish greatly for pieces over 1,500 words. In the end, most pieces are worth $300 to $500, regardless of length commissioned. Instead of obsessing over per-word rates, freelancers should focus on two separate statistics: average story length and average payment.
- Absolutely no reflection on the quality of writing expected. Arbitrary and frustrating.
- It works quite well for my magazine because the majority of our freelancers do about 80% corporate work so only rely on magazine work for a small percentage of their total income.

“This low rate is going to destroy freelance writing as a viable occupation for people with talent and without independent wealth. And it will worsen magazines, turning off the public. It’s a major part of a vicious circle.”

- It’s not a perfect system, but no system is perfect. This system rewards a combination of thoroughness and skill.
- Supply and demand. Everyone is a writer and it’s a desirable job so the pay scale is low. Unfortunately it is still tough to find good writers and we probably don’t value the written word highly enough, but the market determines the pay scale.
- I think as long as the rate is established and both the editor and writer agree to the rate and the length of the article before the writer has submitted the article, this is fine. But I think a lot of young writers aren’t aware that some magazines pay better, and it makes earning a living more difficult for those writers.
Contributors should be paid based on the difficulty and time commitment of the assignment, not by the word. There should be a fair rate for various assignments that enables the contributor to devote the time, expertise and craft to delivering something that readers will want (and that will enable the magazine to remain in business). Paying by the word tends to put the emphasis on quantity as opposed to quality. It is often far more difficult to write 500 words than 1,500 words.

I’ve always been dismayed by the “per-word” scale, as if we were buying bananas at a greengrocer’s. It makes much more sense to me to negotiate the pay for any given article based on a) The work involved in the story (a 500-word story can take days of research which is not reflected even at a $2-per-word rate) and b) The quality of the writing and skill/talent of the writer (much more important than the amount of experience; I’ve known lots of much-published “writers” who couldn’t scriven their way out of a Baggie.) If I/my staff have to spend days rewriting and re-researching it means my ultimate “per-word” cost is about $5.

It’s not because of the WAY we’re paid; it’s the amount.

Enough of bullying individual writers into signing contracts they feel they have no power to negotiate. I had to hire a lawyer to go over my last contract…. I was the only writer to challenge any of the truly objectionable language. If we’re too afraid to stand up for our rights one by one, we will continue to be slaughtered at the negotiating table.

The whole process should be more transparent, so that everyone is spared the onerous task of negotiating over a few pennies, and can focus on turning out the best possible publications that we can. Then we would see readership increase, advertising increase, and the industry have a hope of getting out of its current death spiral.

True artists stand out. I appreciate that a collective best practice would be good. Putting all in the same category pays poor writers the same as excellent ones (including research skills) and that, I believe, would be a sad reflection on such an independent and individual exhibit of skills.

Not sure what the solution is, but I think good, consistent writers who are on time and can write a decent query and come up with an original idea and execute it should be paid more or be given a bonus. Sometimes editors have to rely on mediocre writers to simply get the job done because of tight deadlines etc. When the writer comes up with the story angle, they certainly get more respect from me.

I think a union is really the only way forward. If the problem hasn’t been fixed by now, I see no other solution. But I like your distinction of the “published” word. Too often I’ve been asked to deliver X words. Then I’m asked to expand sections in a second draft. Then I’m paid the original amount, based on X, despite the fact that the final piece was longer.

“I think the level of payment must, necessarily, vary from publication to publication depending on their resources and the type of work published, whether or not it was solicited, etc. But I do think it behooves a publication to publish its rate schedule. At my magazine, we pay bonuses for excellence in the form of submitting work for prizes (at the magazine’s expense). Also we ask for first Canadian rights only, which means the copyright remains with the writer, who can publish the same piece for additional remuneration internationally or in collections. So rights requested should be another factor in payment schedules.”
12 EDITORIAL QUALITY, DIVERSITY AND BREADTH OF VIEWS ARE CONSIDERED MAJOR STRENGTHS OF THE INDUSTRY.

- Many U.S. magazines have found themselves caught in a downward spiral they cannot escape, caused by rate cutting. Since we serve a distinct market, many Canadian publications have been able to avoid that fate.
- This is a bottom-heavy industry. There are not a lot of senior-level positions. Many of these questions depend on specific magazines and are difficult to rate for the industry.

“Freelancing in any industry can be tricky, but it’s especially hard for writing and/or editing because it is so unregulated. Every magazine has a different set of rules for everything. Almost like “the flavour of the day” or “soupe du jour.”. There’s also no rhyme or reason. And I’m sure there are enough internal and external controls that you can shake a stick at. I also don’t think the magazine industry gets enough support or respect from either the governments (provincial and federal) or people in general.”

13 PERCEIVED WEAKNESSES ARE TOPPED BY CONCERNS ABOUT LOW OR SLOW PAYMENT, LACK OF RESPECT FOR SKILLS AND THE COMPETITIVE ENVIRONMENT.

- Too many people think they can write. Writers ARE paid too little, but we must realize that the good ones are paid much better than the hacks and the hacks tend to be the ones doing the loudest complaining. There are, in this sense, two relationships to discuss...editors and real writers (who have a better relationship than we’re led to believe) and editors and self-styled writers who want to be paid top rate before they’ve learned their craft. Yes, let’s pay writers more, but within a range.
- Why should the government support the magazine industry? The magazines are largely just a waste of paper and killing trees. I hardly ever buy magazines even if I write for them. I don’t like to have them in the house and only read them at the gym. Otherwise I read them online. Many people know you can get much information that you are looking for online and you can get past the ads really easily, compared to a magazine.
- To engage readers, you need strong content, for which you need strong writers and editorial staff. Loyalty is key – if your company won’t even pay you a decent wage, why should you put in the extra effort it takes to make a magazine spectacular? Talk about status quo.
- To me, it appears that there are more advertorials being sold and the separation between advertising and editorial is getting blurry. Sales reps say that potential clients say that “X magazine will give me a page of editorial for every ad I buy...” These editors lack integrity and make it more difficult for legit magazines that refuse to play the game. Strong product = strong ad sales. Believe it!!!
- Too much specialization: magazines rely too much on specific types of advertisers and are unable to print information or articles that consumers really should or want to read.
“I think it is too easy for magazine publishers to blame a shrinking market, competition with other media, and reader indifference for their problems. The truth is that the majority of Canadian magazines do not properly respect their talent and therefore turn out a shoddy product. The quality of content has decreased incredibly in the past couple of decades. The TV and movie industries have stronger unions and better working conditions for their talent. This is why they are doing better. Magazines have to learn to respect their talent, stop whining, and compete. On that note, any success that Canadian magazines enjoy today has largely been earned off the backs of underpaid editors, writers, photographers, etc. For sure, the market is more competitive than it used to be. But with proper pay rates for top editors, writers, photographers and illustrators, the energy and creativity would be there to compete with other media.”

“14 IT’S CLEAR THAT SOME ORGANIZATIONS AND SUPPORTS ARE MORE IMPORTANT THAN OTHERS.

- I am very concerned about how some huge media corporations suck most of the money from the Canadian Magazine Fund. This game is finally being exposed and I hope it ends. The big guys don’t need the money – the little guys do. The cut off should be at $5 million – if you have revenues of over $5 million, you don’t need government grants.

- I don’t think colleges and universities are preparing students for the realities of working in magazines in the 21st century. I think they give them a lot of great knowledge but I am concerned with how well they prepare them for what is truly happening out there in magazine land. I have presented to a number of students and find the information I am giving them is vastly different from what they’ve been fed.

- I say Magazines Canada is not serving well because few services are available for small magazines (e.g. circ. approx. 2,000) in Winnipeg, which is where we are. We don’t have a lot of money for professional development, even though we could use it.

- Just because an organization’s name is well recognized, it doesn’t mean that it does well. As well, a lot of the organizations either have no presence in the west or they say they do things but upon closer inspection they really don’t do anything or what they do isn’t worth mentioning. For the most part, what I notice is everything that is based in Ontario is basically for people in Ontario and not for people in the west. It’s almost like we belong to a different country!

“It’s all talk and bluster. Nothing ever gets done. No one cares about the plight of freelancers because there’s always some keener in the wings willing to work for diddly just for a byline and magazine editors know it...”
The industry has so many different needs that it is pretty much impossible for a national association to address all of them. The national association is important to address larger big-picture issues, but in terms of serving the practical needs of individual, especially independent publishers, the regionals are better suited for this activity. Specific trade/art associations can also better serve their streams of magazines, but all of the associations should work together to form a more cohesive industry. It would help if the associations didn’t replicate each other’s work/offerings, but instead coordinated who would do what to make sure more areas are being covered effectively. The magazines should not be pitted against each other since they sometimes have opposing needs (different distribution models). Instead, we need to find where we can align and work together on those issues.

As a new graduate, I’m still learning about a lot of these representative bodies. But I think those groups definitely need to reach out to students and new professionals. I know I can’t currently afford to be a member of the Professional Writers Association of Canada – with bills and student loans, the fees are too high. Perhaps these organizations could have lower fees for new grads—maybe for writers who have graduated in the last three years?

As an Alberta-based editor, there is a regional bias toward delivering services and events to the Toronto and Vancouver communities. This is a geographic inevitability, but it makes it even more costly for magazine professionals from other parts of Canada to take part fully in what is currently offered.

As far as teaching the necessary skills to the next generation of Canadian magazine professionals, while Ryerson does a great job, the local colleges here tend to be run by people who have never really worked successfully [or as innovators] in the industry. We’d probably do better to follow the art college model (ACAD) and find a way to enable working editors and writers to work with students (perhaps giving full-day workshops, etc., similar to the SFU model).

As a regional magazine outside of Toronto, usually I’m appalled by how much of my member fees are used to support programming in Toronto. This is true across the board (EAC, CSME, etc.). Masthead similarly seems to cover mostly Toronto events. That seems to have become their mandate and then they wonder why the rest of us don’t care.

15 THINGS RESPONDENTS WOULD DEFINITELY CHANGE IN THE INDUSTRY.

- A greater recognition that freelancers provide the bulk of the content that publications exist to sell.
- I would like to see more regional training programs, more programs that address the concerns of small publications, and more government funding opportunities for small publications.
- The imbalance among staff salaries across the country and across types of magazines.
- We should not encourage inexperienced and undercapitalized companies to start magazines – poor magazines that usually fail hurt the credibility of the entire industry.
- The unwritten rule that editorial and sales should not collaborate. Magazines should look at themselves more as a team, with different players holding different strengths and objectives. There’s no reason why editorial and sales shouldn’t be able to share advice and ideas without compromising editorial integrity. The only way to win is to act as a team working toward a common interest – building a great magazine.

“Copyright laws/editorial and advertorial balance and the creation of a union for writers.”

- Eliminate the use of unpaid interns.
- Low salaries.
- I’d raise writers’ fees and staff salaries.
- Better pay for editors and writers (staff and freelance).
- Basic pay rates.
- Remove indemnity clauses from freelance contracts.
- The lack of importance that magazine publishers give to freelancers and independent voices.
- Consolidation of too many publications under one publishing house.
- I would like to see payment rates for freelancers increase. I would like to see magazines offer fair rates for electronic/Internet rights or else let the writer retain those rights.
• I think magazines should relearn the value of freelancers and stop being so damned greedy.
• Greater level of respect between publications and contributors.
• Decent pay for professional, experienced writers.
• The fact that Canadian magazines represent those with financial backing rather than the diversity of reader interests.
• U.S. newsstand dominance.
• Insularity, content standards.

“Entry into the industry is incredibly difficult, from unpaid internships offering few opportunities, to very few paid entry-level positions for young up-and-coming editors. And needless to say, breaking into the freelance industry is difficult with many editors seeming unwilling to take a chance on new writers, unless you know someone.”

• Increased respect and communication between editors and querying writers.
• Better communication and understanding. Do publishers really understand what it’s like to live on $24,000 a year and that the products SUFFER because of pathetic payment for WORDS?
• Canada’s magazine publishers and distributors need to take more rack space from U.S. magazines.
• More teamwork between freelancers, especially writers and photographers.
• Aim for national content, writers and prime supermarket space.
• More new voices and different voices on magazine pages. Please don’t slide into fluff and muck.

• I wish editors were more open to suggestions from new writers. It’s hard to expand horizons and opportunities when you don’t even get the courtesy of a reply.
• More protection for writers and editors when it comes to issues with advertisers. There needs to be a clearer divide between editorial content and advertiser pressure. My publisher definitely tries to keep church and state divided, but I am aware that this is not always the case.
• Better pay for freelancers; better protection of freelancers’ copyright.
• More B-to-B publication training opportunities: there seems to be a lot of support for consumer publications.
• Higher salaries.
• The ability for people to speak out. It seems all voices are heard by each other – just not by the publishers and bean-counters. So I would try to change that.
• Teach editors how to be great managers, too.
• The lack of respect for the creative types by management and corporate. They have to realize that while ads may pay for magazines, people don’t read magazines for the ads.
• Magazines need to value their freelancers and be more willing to increase pay rates.
• More work-life flexibility; allow employees to work from home once in a while.
• I would like more transparency and cooperation between editorial, sales and publishing teams. I would also change the intern policy. An industry standard would be great, like a minimum period of time and a general job description. Maybe there should be a quasi-union, more like a professional association of magazine staffers and contributors similar to ACTRA.
• Fragmentation of the industry – all magazines should stick together.
• I would like to see publishing companies such as Rogers and St. Joseph Media look beyond their walls when hiring for new positions. Too often they favour previous interns for mid-level editorial jobs instead of a better qualified outsider.
• Business models more focused around readers, less ad-driven, and creating content that’s worth buying.
• Improve working conditions in terms of salary and benefits.
16 THINGS THEY WOULD DEFINITELY KEEP.

- Proliferation of excellent training programs (non day school)
- A clearly defined separation of church and state (advertising and editorial). And fact-checking.
- Organizations such as Magazines Canada, the diversity of magazines in Canada, co-operation between people working in the magazine industry.
- Overall sense of professionalism among editors (and most other magazine staff).
- Magazine awards.
- Editorial independence for editors.
- High quality of content and form.
- Good editors and loyalty to quality writers.
- Diversity and specialization in publications.
- Relationships with editors.
- Professional, experienced editors.

“I’m a fan of Magazines Canada and its various programs re lobbying the government on issues of concern to its members, providing professional development opportunities, general helpfulness.”

- Government support of the Canadian magazine publishing industry (even though it’s not enough).
- It is exciting to have such a wide-range of quality magazines in Canada.
- A dynamic bond between editor and art director.
- High production values (good paper quality, good photos, great design); it’s what separates us from the Internet.
- Using editors to drive ideas (work in tandem with publishers to maintain editorial integrity)
- The passion and commitment of all staff in all segments.
- The diversity of Canadian magazines.
- Magazines Canada. They do so much for the industry, in every way.

“Editors who deal respectfully and professionally with freelance writers who approach their work in the same way.”

- Relationship with my editor.
- High quality of magazines, considering Canada’s small population.
- The creative freedom!
- Some of the great editors in the business.
- Competition – we’re all getting better for it!
- Independent voices, diversity, reading culture.
- The creativity and diversity of content.
- A firewall between editorial and advertising.
- Internships as an entry point into the industry.
- Friendly editors who help writers when the story takes an unexpected turn and are open to helping you work through problems.
- Canadian content.
- Ease of access to editors.
- Independent voices, diversity, reading culture.
- My steady market.
- Information sharing, standards.
- Current relationships with magazine staff, contributors, readers.
- The collegiality of working together to produce great magazines.
THERE ARE MANY DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES – AND SOME SHARED VALUES – WHEN IT COMES TO IMPROVING WORKING CONDITIONS AND RELATIONSHIPS IN THE CANADIAN MAGAZINE INDUSTRY.

- It’s all about the money, it seems. Readers don’t get the content they need (especially in business/trade publications) because publishers don’t invest enough in content, instead opting to pay as little as possible to fill editorial pages with whatever content is available cheaply. There are a few exceptions, but this is generally the rule in Canada.
- The title seems to suggest that conditions and relations need improving. Certainly freelancers should stop believing that publishers are getting rich off their efforts, and publishers need to understand that repositioning content is not the same as offering timely and relevant information to people who live in an information age.
- At this point, there should be a basic acceptance of respectful contracts and compensation for writers. This would involve some benchmarks and standard contracts supported by both writers’ groups such as PWAC and the magazine industry. And publishers that don’t support good contracts should have all government funding pulled.

“It’s time to invest in content and our content creators. That means a fair and transparent approach to rights, better remuneration, particularly for freelance writing, fact-checking and copy editing. We need to make these people our partners so they will bring us innovative, high-quality work. We also have to be firm about the advertising/editorial divide. We can’t afford to trade off readers’ trust for short-term ad revenue. I think we need to look beyond one-year forecasts and develop long-term business plans so that our publications can reflect the minds of the diverse Canadian readership of tomorrow.”

- I don’t understand how publishers allow talented writers to leave the business or reduce their output because of the criminally low rates for freelancers. It’s short-sighted and will bite them. It’s getting very expensive to live in Toronto. The exodus will be greater in the days ahead. How do they sleep?
- The government has to realize that it needs to subsidize the industry.
- Export Canada needs to do a lot more to develop Canadian magazines as an export product. They are an ideal vehicle for high-quality work and unique perspectives on the world. Canadian publishers might stand a chance of competing with American publishers if there was more help with foreign postal rates and other hurdles. The present infrastructure effectively makes it impossible to be Canadian, publish in a foreign market as your goal, and still receive government funding. There needs to be recognition that to succeed outside our own borders is a worthy goal for Canadian culture – and not a reason to penalize such outward-looking publishers.
- Pay fairly. That applies to pay rates and being prepared to pay extra if your in-house editorial team scraps your initial idea and heads off in a new direction. The freelancer shouldn’t have to pay [via time invested] for your team’s initial indecision. Respect the freelancer’s time just as you want him/her to respect yours.
• Cut the cliquishness. The industry has never been as cliquish as it is today (and I’ve been in the industry for a long time). Is Canada really so small that editors have to hire their friends every time they get a new gig? Why be so closed to newcomers and so quick to ditch long-term contributors, just because you’re the new editor in town?

• Don’t cancel stories that have been assigned. Not that long ago, I had a top magazine “take back” an assignment six months after the fact. How unprofessional. Imagine how upset the magazine would have been if I’d called back six months after committing to a story and told the editor, “You know what? I’ve changed my mind about the feature you’ve pencilled in for me for July. I don’t want to do it any more.” That’s exactly what the magazine did to me – the week before Christmas.

• I have given up. I no longer write for magazines, and it would take a HUGE increase in $$ to entice me to ever write for a magazine again. People get to a point in their working lives when they see on one hand they could work for some magazine for a week and make a lousy $500, and on the other hand they could work for a day for some other market and make $500. Which path would you pick? In general, magazine editors are professional and well-meaning, but their hands are tied by their publishers, who give them a dinky editorial budget and ask them to stretch it across a whole year. If the government were to invest a few million dollars into this sector and leash the ravenous hounds of Canada Post, I honestly believe we would see a renaissance of Canadian culture and an exciting spurt of new cultural development.

• Information is now free, courtesy of the Internet...but readers still want to be able to turn off the computer and relax/be entertained/informed with a magazine. The fact that information is now free on the Web means that magazines have to work 10 times as hard to create something of value. There is immense pressure on magazines, but there doesn’t need to be. You just have to decide where you want to be.

I believe this business is going to separate into two distinct camps:
1) the really big;
2) the really small.

• Medium-sized magazines with full-time staffs, rent and fairly large overheads and big print bills are not small enough to handle economic downturns. Conversely, they are not big enough to take on the giants. The mushy middle is not where you want to be right now – it’s way too turbulent.

• Really small is really the new big. This means an home office, freelance designers/writers and photographers. It means extremely low overhead – low print runs but you hit an audience of rabid fans. It also means that we don’t try and move out of this zone... because moving from small to medium-sized might result in the death of the magazine. Harsh, I know... but I can’t see it going any other way.

“I’d like to see a comprehensive code of ethics for magazine editors and publishers, specifying such things as: adherence to the principles of advertising/editorial separation; dedication to quality and accuracy of content; and fairness to contributors. Not that it could be enforced easily, but some kind of Hippocratic Oath would help instill a set of common principles.”

• Then I’d like to see more done to educate readers, the general public and advertisers about what magazines do and how we work. We don’t sell editorial to advertisers; when we recommend something, it’s because we genuinely like the product; our content is fact-checked so it’s as accurate as we can make it. Most people have no idea what editors or art directors actually do. It would be lovely if people understood that better.
People talk about new media and online interactive stuff as a big competitor. Well, magazines can use these media as well; it just takes some doing. But when everyone is preoccupied about how many pennies a word some story is costing and how ad revenues are shrinking, and how to pay the printer and the mailer, their minds are not on the "big picture." Very few people are talking about the future of this sector; many, like myself, have given up on it. Others are expecting a miracle to drop from the heavens. If we want to have a Canada, we need Canadian voices. The voices are out there, they are just being stifled by economic forces. The role of a national government is to promote pride in the nation. If our leaders are not doing that, what kind of leaders are they anyway? Why bother having a country?

“I think the key to improving working conditions and relationships in the Canadian magazine industry is to introduce some regulations, especially for pay, and to hold magazines and freelancers accountable for their behaviour. For example, set certain standards and enforce them.”

I have seen a change in the way editing works over the last 14 years. Increasingly, editing is a factory process, innovation in style and craft is trounced in favour of homogeneity. There is such enormous fear about "pleasing the reader" – which I think is an imaginary construction that forgets the important aspirational quality of magazines. Make a magazine that reaches beyond – in style, in ideas, in story choice – and you’ll find readers who get excited. Bring back some courage!! (And pay writers more to be courageous!!)

I wish magazine publishers understood what they lose when they concentrate the content of their magazines on what they think readers want (service, quick hits, etc.) Increasingly, they will attract mediocre writers and the quality of magazines will go down, until readers feel that magazines are products they don’t need.

I think generally people need to think more positively and long-term about their work in magazines. Too many people work in bubbles and only work to improve their specific magazine without any consideration for the industry at large – there needs to be more camaraderie among various publishers and professionalism (i.e. standards for both publishers and creators). People should not be able to just enter the industry with zero training or business preparation, especially if we want to maintain magazines as journalistically sound media, and in lieu of the fact there is no regulatory board for magazines. Also, the environment (i.e. paper, ink and energy for printing) is a huge issue that needs to be addressed collectively, ASAP.

Low writing fees contribute to a race to the bottom. Good writers are unwilling to work for peanuts, sign away their rights, and produce the bloodless drivel that editors seem to want: tame advertorials and shallow features – the same stuff that is clogging the Internet. As the fire and passion drains from our magazines, distracted readers find it easier and easier to stop buying.
In an industry and country as large as ours, we need to have some sort of association or union that binds us together with common goals. Newbies starting out are encouraged to work for free to gain bylines, while veterans are up in arms because freelance rates haven’t gone up in 30 years. We are often working at cross purposes, and there has to be a better way. For too long, publishers and money men have held control over the industry, but like any creative endeavour, without the talent, there is no industry. It’s time for a change.

“It would be nice if writers and photographers were brought in on the planning stages of future issues...I suppose this happens to some extent with magazines that I have ongoing relationships with, but to somehow know what editors wanted for their line-ups in advance would help with my pitches.”

Freelancers should ask for money and should be worth what they ask for. Editors should clearly communicate what they can and cannot do for writers. Both should approach the relationship as professionals, not friends, therapists, etc.

As I have hinted above and as an editor of a large magazine, I completely support higher rates for freelance writers, perhaps through standard contracts. However, to credibly implement same, organizations such as PWAC need to work out more stringent guidelines for membership and representation so that editors are more assured that they’ll get what they pay for.

All that said, we have excellent relationships (I think) with our long-term freelance contributors.

MISCELLANEOUS COMMENTS

It’s time to invest in content and our content creators. That means a fair and transparent approach to rights, better remuneration, particularly for freelance writing, fact-checking and copy editing. We need to make these people our partners so they will bring us innovative, high-quality work. We also have to be firm about the advertising/editorial divide. We can’t afford to trade off readers’ trust for short-term ad revenue. I think we need to look beyond one-year forecasts and develop long-term business plans so that our publications can reflect the minds of the diverse Canadian readership of tomorrow.

It’s all about the money, it seems. Readers don’t get the content they need (especially in business/trade publications) because publishers don’t invest enough in content, instead opting to pay as little as possible to fill editorial pages with whatever content is available cheaply. There are a few exceptions, but this is generally the rule in Canada.

Editors are under extreme pressure to keep costs down. The only leeway is with wages. Editors are not consistent with the amount paid, and should, with freelancers, continue to raise their wages the more an individual writes for them. Freelancers are treated extremely poorly in this country.

At this point, there should be a basic acceptance of respectful contracts and compensation for writers. This would involve some benchmarks and standard contracts supported by both writers’ groups such as PWAC and the magazine industry. And publishers that don’t support good contracts should have all government funding pulled.

“Media convergence is killing the freelancer. We have fewer and fewer markets to which to sell our work. And the big ones are the most unfair re contract terms, etc.”

I think there needs to be more dialogue between editors, writers and PUBLISHERS. I often have editors who would be willing to pay me more money but they cannot do so as the publisher will not raise the rates. I’ve actually had an editor go to bat for me but no luck. It’s also disheartening to have a story bumped because of advertising. This happened to me recently. I was paid for my work, but would have been happier to see the story published.
NOTES
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