

Company news

Watch for the third annual **Study of Media Planning & Buying** from the James G. Elliott Co., Inc. and Kantar Media SRDS, to be released in September.

This year, the Buyer Study will be followed by a new companion Study of Sellers; comparing the two studies will deliver important insights into differing perspectives and the disconnects that may be impeding the advertising sales process.

NEW CLIENTS

Marine Corps Association & Foundation:

- Leatherneck Magazine
- Marine Corps Gazette

Competitor Group Inc. (CGI)

- Competitor
- Women's Running
- Triathlete
- VeloNews



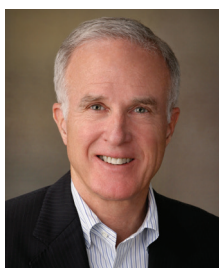
Follow us on Twitter:
[@adsandideas](https://twitter.com/adsandideas)

James G. Elliott Co., Inc.
626 Wilshire Blvd., #500
Los Angeles, CA 90017
tel: (213) 624-0900
fax: (213) 624-4389
email: j.elliott@jamesgelliott.com
www.jamesgelliott.com

Thoughts from Mr. Magazine™

President's Letter

My good friend Professor Samir Husni, Ph.D.—Mr. Magazine™—is well known in the magazine business for many reasons, including his tracking of new magazines, his leadership at the Magazine Innovation Center and the ACT Experience gatherings at the Meek School of Journalism at the University of Mississippi, and for his frequent interviews of prominent industry figures. We thought it would be interesting to turn the tables on Samir and interview him. He was kind enough to share some of his thoughts below, in conversation with me.



Jim Elliott: Samir, for years you have been interviewing the top people in the magazine world and you do a lot of consulting. What are the hot trends you've been hearing about recently: particularly, trends in editorial presentation and growth of magazine brands?

S.H.: There are three hot trends that have taken place over the last year. One is that major media companies have recognized that print is not dead and have been launching new magazines. Almost without exception, every major magazine publisher has launched a new magazine; from Hearst to Bauer, Condé Nast to Meredith; all of them have launched new magazines.

Another major trend has been the explosion of bookazines. We're no longer just in the business of selling and publishing magazines that have a regular frequency, but rather magazines that are either single topic or a collection of topics about a single issue. Bookazines are coming at almost the rate of 80% of all new magazines that are in the market.

And of course, the hottest trend of them all is the magazines that are reflecting "a digital lifestyle," whether it's the Food Network, HGTV, Dr. Oz The Good Life, Porter, Uber – if we look at what I call "a digital lifestyle," things that we're either seeing on TV or on the web or

engage with on our mobile phones; all of these entities are launching new magazines. And guess what? They're launching them in print. Why? Because the biggest recognition that took place last year was that you cannot be a multi-media company without being also in print.

To sum up, I'd say print is very much alive and kicking in 2016, regardless of anything else you might hear or read.

J.E.: What are the biggest concerns about the magazine industry over the next 12-24 months?

S.H.: I believe the concerns are going to continue to be the same as those of the past several decades. The major concerns are of course advertising, the economic business model of the magazine industry, and distribution. Almost every publisher I talk with, small or large, is facing the same concerns. How are we going to make money if the advertising market falls apart or we can't reach our audiences? The only two sources of revenue that we had and will continue to have are circulation and advertising; unless we find ways to handle those two items, we're going to continue to have problems.

Since I first studied this question for my dissertation in 1983, the major determinant for the success or failure of a magazine was the ability to create content that attracts a willing audience capable of paying both the price of the magazine and the price of the advertised goods within it. That is still the major issue.

Those things go hand-in-hand: the audience, the content and the advertising. The beauty of a magazine is that you can't separate those three. No one tears the ad pages from a magazine the minute that it reaches their hands and vows to only read the articles, the way that people do online when they hit that X to close an ad.

J.E.: Why are print magazines so important?

S.H.: A big development in magazines and print in general is the realization that we are much more than content; print is an experience. An experience that provides its readers and its advertisers with that "me" time. That time where they can sit back, relax, have a glass of wine and enjoy that print experience. To me this is the

biggest innovation that has taken place in the industry. We have finally recognized that we're much more than content; we're experience makers.

I shudder when I hear people call themselves a "content company." A magazine must be an experience that will activate and compel readers to react; something that they will enjoy and get lost in as they connect with the magazine. Digital is not a competitor, digital is not a replacement, nor is digital the be-all and end-all of ALL things content.

J.E.: What are some interesting innovations you have seen?

S.H.: Some innovations of course are the new technologies in terms of printing, from inkjet web printing, which companies such as Trend Offset and others have now, to all kinds of digital printing that can personalize the magazine reading experience singularly, such as *American Printer* magazine, which comes to me with my name on the cover: *Samir Husni's American Printer* magazine. The content is also personalized; the Letter From the Editor addresses the magazine reader by name.

Technology is helping to enhance the reading experience and help us to create a richer print that has more levels. We humans are tactile by nature, so the richer the print experience, the better quality and feel of the paper; the better the overall experience is for us all.

J.E.: You've often said that magazines are not broken, but the magazine industry is. What do you mean by that?

S.H.: When I say that I'm talking about the business model. We have a business model that always goes after the marginal reader and rewards that person, but penalizes the loyal customer. For example, we're always offering ridiculously low prices to new subscription customers - \$5 and you can get 6 issues. And then when renewal time rolls around, that new customer is now a seasoned vet and is hit with the whopping 6-issue price of \$29.95. So, once you've gotten used to receiving and enjoying the magazine, we're going to stick you with a costlier price. This is unlike any other industry I know of. I fly Delta, you fly American; the more you fly the more rewards you get. They don't give their highest frequent flier card to someone who just takes one trip a year.

That business model that's been almost 80% to 90% dependent on advertising went into a coma in 2008 when the economy crashed. When the economy is bad people stop buying. It's not just advertising; it's everything. With almost no exception everything on the checkout counters, including magazines, have been dropping in sales, from chewing gum to

candy bars. And that's also due in part to our changing habits. We haven't adjusted to that. Next time you're in line at the checkout counter, notice what other people are doing instead of shopping the impulse items next to the registers, including the magazines; people's eyes are glued to their mobile devices. We have to find new ways to grab their attention.



Photo Credit: Robert Jordan

And this is where I feel we've failed so far in trying to find new ways of putting magazines into the hands of customers at a fast enough speed that if people want it now, we can deliver it to them now. Amazon is able to do that with books, so we need to find a way that we can do that with magazines and ensure that relationship.

J.E.: What is your advice for publishers with a great new idea?

S.H.: Just do it. Make sure you have plenty of cash; the magazine business is a delayed gratification business. I tell all of my clients that they have to create a budget that will have zero revenue for the first year. Can you afford that? If you can't, then you're not made for this business. It's not for the faint of heart.

It's such a love affair and an ego trip, and the only business, in fact, that you can be editor and publisher with no professional background whatsoever or knowledge of the business. But you do need to know that the money that you make from the first issue will not publish issue two; that's the biggest myth in the industry. You have to have a lot of cash and very deep pockets until you establish that relationship with an audience who is willing to pay for your magazine. And that doesn't happen overnight, or with one single issue.

J.E.: What will the publishing landscape look like in 2020? How about 2025?

S.H.: There are only two people who can tell you the future, God and a fool—and I'm not God and hope never to be a fool. But I wrote an article for a German magazine some years back about where magazines would be 40 years from now. Rather than looking into the future, I looked at the past. And I looked at where magazines were 40 years before I wrote that article and in reality, I didn't see any difference. And I still don't today going forward.

A magazine is still a magazine. When I sit down and look at my collection of more than 30,000 magazines, there is really no difference over time. Maybe there is a bit more color or fonts, but a magazine is still a magazine. And the creation of the magazine is still the same.

If you look at a magazine like *Flair* from the 50s, all you can say even today is wow! The technologies that existed back then; all the types of paper, tissue paper to heavy stock, were used in that magazine. There is really nothing new on the face of the earth.

So, when I look ahead to 2020 or 2025; guess what? There will be magazines there as long as there are human beings around. And magazines will still be looking for that willing audience who's hungry for the experience they offer.

J.E.: Your life is about magazines. You always end your interviews with the question, "What keeps you up at night?" Let's conclude by asking you the same question.

S.H.: Nothing. It's amazing; if you showed up unexpectedly to my home one evening, you would find me on my couch, magazine in-hand, and the television on. My wife will tell you that I have no problem falling asleep watching TV with my magazine clutched in my hand. The minute the TV goes on, I go out. It's like my sleeping pill. I'm reading my magazine and fading out.

But when I do wake up at night, it's really when I'm thinking about different ways we can spread the gospel of print: ways to tell the world that print is alive and kicking. What bothers me more than anything else is all of the industry people who have lost faith in print. From media reporters to companies to publishers who have given up way too soon on print or those who took six or seven years to rediscover that print is not dead and digital-only is not the future. If these are some of the smartest people on the face of the earth, why did it take them so long to recognize that? So, I keep on pondering that and wondering what's next.

J.E.: Thank you, Samir. ■

Dr. Husni's website and blog can be found at: www.mrmagazine.me