Print Lives

Gerry Boyle
At a time when technology is changing our homes, our work, our language, our lives, who would have thought that communication via a stapled stack of paper would not only survive but thrive?

National magazines are experiencing an unprecedented boom as Internet and new-tech companies turn to the traditional monthlies to deliver their message. Colby talked to alumni working for a variety of magazines and found that the business is a natural for bright liberal arts graduates with inquiring minds. “If you know how to think and you know how to write, you can pretty much do anything with it,” said Jennifer Pierce Barr ’89, deputy editor of Harper’s Bazaar. Proof is in the stories of more than a half dozen Colby grads making magazine news . . .

By Gerry Boyle ’78
In his office in the Time & Life Building at Rockefeller Center in New York City, Michael Federle '81 was sitting pretty.

The publisher of Fortune, Federle has seen his magazine reach one goal after another. A redesign five years ago resulted in increased circulation. With the stock market on a record roll, readers were hot for Fortune's investment news. The advent of the Internet and a new focus on technology had created a seemingly insatiable thirst for stories on this new generation of business. Time Inc., parent company of Fortune (and subsidiary of AOL-Time Warner), had just launched a new magazine called E Company Now about Internet business. "It's funny because a few years ago everybody said, of course with the advent of the Internet, it would be the end of the magazine business," Federle said. "All it has been to date has been a source of a lot of money coming into the magazine business."

From 1995 to 1999 advertising income for consumer magazines nearly doubled, from $9 billion to almost $16 billion. Magazines are so stuffed with advertising pages (Fortune broke its own record with a 630-page issue in April) that a recent story in The New York Times reported that one executive gauges the financial health of his magazine by the thud it makes when dropped on his desk. "The great thing about the tech companies is they're all being run by baby boomers or younger," Federle said, "and they're all big believers in marketing. We're seeing some large budgets. They're not afraid to spend money."

making the money for "the book"

Federle moved to Waterville in high school and came to Colby from his home a half mile away on Mayflower Hill Drive. After graduation he took a job with a Camden-based publisher of canoeing and kayaking magazines. Then the company launched a magazine called The Color Computer, for users of Tandy Radio Shack computers. The new computer magazine was scooped up by Ziff Davis, the national publisher, which scooped Federle up, too. He moved to Time Inc., marketed People magazine on the West Coast and came back to New York to work on Life magazine. Married, with two children, Federle came to Fortune five years ago, just in time for the technology-Internet explosion. "I've been blessed by my timing in my career," he said.

The technology boom has meant big bucks for Fortune. Some of that money comes from circulation—subscription and newsstand. Federle is in charge of bringing in all of the rest: advertising, marketing, sales, new development—and he oversees more than 100 sales staff worldwide. "They're out calling on clients and customers who are using Fortune as their advertising vehicle to senior executives inside companies, the business audience in general," Federle said. "That's where most of our revenue comes from—driving advertising pages into the magazine."

With a circulation of 950,000 worldwide—2.5 million with a Fortune supplement in Latin America—that's a lot of pages. But print is just part of the equation. More and more, magazines are part of what Federle calls "integrated packages" that allow advertisers to coordinate their messages through an array of different media. "So for the big companies, like a Time Inc. and an AOL-Time Warner, the more resources we can bring to bear to these advertisers and marketers—they, we can put packages together that include a CNN and a Fortune and an on-line component on Fortune.com or CNN.com, an advertiser's Web site. And those kind of capabilities are going to increase as you see consolidation of the publishing-entertainment industries."

Also on the way? Headlines delivered to your Palm Pilot; a Fortune-generated tradeable Internet stock index, "the e-50." "You hear 'ubiquitous computing' everywhere," Federle said. "We call it 'ubiquitous Fortune.'"

a "dialogue" with 4 million women

When she was interviewed last summer, Jennifer Barr was eight days into her new job as deputy editor at Harper's Bazaar and already she was working on a
redesign of the front part of the magazine, looking for ways to reinforce the magazine's new voice in the marketplace. Brought in from competitor Elle, where she had been managing editor, Barr brought a fresh eye to Bazaar—and the ability to push the design and content of the magazine to the next level. That's what Barr did at Elle: revamped the front section, brought in new writers, injected new "attitude" into the magazine's voice. "The goal of the section was to tap into the Zeitgeist and present it to the Elle reader in a way that made them excited about what was happening," Barr said. "How do you make all those topics come together in a really interesting, smart way and present them to people who have so much going on in their lives? That's the challenge."

She talks about the relationship between the magazine and its readers, the "dialogue" that goes on every month. At Elle Barr and the magazine chatted with about a million subscribers, which figures out to be somewhere around 4 million readers. Bazaar has slightly fewer but—with Vogue—is still one of the big three fashion magazines. "Vogue is the fantasy," Barr said. "Elle is the reality and Bazaar is somewhere in between."

Most women, she believes, choose the magazine they think most resembles them and that can divine—and define—their interests. For much of her career, Barr's specialty was film and the arts. She interviewed actors and directors, popped in at screenings and art openings. She hit the Sundance Film Festival and traveled from New York to L.A. to keep tabs on what was emerging in Hollywood. Barr still takes pride in discovering actor Tobey McGuire (The Cider House Rules). "We did Tobey McGuire before Vanity Fair did," she said. "It sounds trivial but we were really excited."

But her magazines have done more than discover new talent, Barr said. Her position carries tremendous responsibility because the magazine has to cull so much information. When it's a health issue or a story about turmoil in a war-torn country, decisions on what will be featured—and what will not—are not taken lightly.

An English major and fiction writer at Colby, she said the love for good writing that was engendered in college has served her well. She still reads constantly, loves good writing and enjoys "meeting writers who have smart ideas, trying to discover stories that are fresh and interesting."

Barr has a recent interest that may find its way into the magazine. In January she and her husband, Edward Barr '88, had their first child, a daughter, Hadley. "I'm definitely more interested in strong women now," Barr said. "I'd like to see more stories like that, women who are juggling careers, trying to find that balance."

**pondering the circulation puzzle**

Magazines aren't beamed to homes and newsstands. At Hearst Magazines, the complex task of bringing magazines to the readers belongs to Terrence "Terry" Day '78. Day, vice president, circulation director for Hearst, has helped devise circulation strategies for magazines such as Harper's Bazaar, Esquire, Good Housekeeping, Marie Claire, Country Living and most recently O: The Oprah Magazine. Oprah's latest venture already appears to be a success. With a million-copy first run, Hearst went back for a second printing. Day said. "This is a huge launch" in terms of public awareness, he said. "There have been very few, if any, that have been like this."

The initial success of the magazine is testimony to Oprah Winfrey's connection to her audience and the apparent appetite for her inspirational message. For Day and others at Hearst, the new magazine's success raised some interesting questions. How big is the untapped consumer demand for the magazine? "I think it's substantial," Day said.

O sold more Internet subscriptions in its launch than all of Hearst's other magazines combined. In three issues, the advertising rate increased (based on anticipated circulation), jumping from 500,000 to a conservative 900,000, but Day and Hearst were focusing on the magazine's long-term growth. "I look at it as a marathon. It's not a sprint," Day said. "You want to build it smartly."
Ezra Dyer '99 had to do was ask.

A former writer for the Echo, Dyer was painting houses in Maine when he saw an ad in The Boston Globe for a job opening at The Improper Bostonian, an 80,000-circulation free magazine for 20-somethings. "I applied to be features editor or something like that that I had no shot of getting," Dyer said. "But I sent in a bunch of Colby Echo articles and I got a call from the publisher and I went in to see him and he said, 'I didn't want you to come in to talk about the features editor position because, honestly, you're right out of school and you've never even done anything like that.' But he said, 'What would you ideally like to do down the road?' I said, 'Well, I'd like to do what I have been doing, basically what I was doing for the Echo, have a column like that.' He said, 'Okay, I'll give you a column.'

Done.

Dyer has been a columnis t since October 1999, combining that writing job with a staff position at CE Pro, a Wayland, Mass.-based magazine for people who install custom electronics, another of his interests. When he isn't writing about plasma screens and outdoor speakers (he did wangle an interview with Dave Barry on "smart" appliances), Dyer is turning his experiences into prose.

From his perch on Beacon Hill, where he lives with two Colby roommates, Dyer pecks out his bi-weekly column, occasionally injecting literary references ("I'll bet you don't know much about the constructions of femininity in the texts of Edith Wharton and Henry James, now do you?") or something like that. "I had no shot of getting," Dyer said. "But I sent in a bunch of articles and I got a call from the publisher and I went in to see him and he said, 'I didn't want you to come in to talk about the features editor position because, honestly, you're right out of school and you've never even done anything like that.' But he said, 'What would you ideally like to do down the road?' I said, 'Well, I'd like to do what I have been doing, basically what I was doing for the Echo, have a column like that.' He said, 'Okay, I'll give you a column.'"

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Some journalists work for years before they get their own column. All Ezra Dyer '99 had to do was ask.

finding your voice

One such recent grad is Lauren Iannotti '96, an assistant editor at Esquire (a Hearst magazine) in Manhattan, who broke away from her cubicle and jangling telephone to chat in a conference room—under the watchful gaze of George Clooney. A blow-up of an Esquire cover featuring the red-hot actor was propped against the wall in the room, but that month (July) there would be no celeb on the magazine's cover. The July Esquire cover was a mocked-up fireman to accompany a lengthy feature on the Worcester, Mass., warehouse blaze that claimed the lives of six firefighters. There was considerable debate over the cover, Iannotti said, with the newsstand sales faction saying the fireman was a downer, not sexy. "It's really interesting to listen to the guys talk about it because they're sort of completely split," she said. "No, our readers are too smart. We don't have to pander."

And she laughed. Iannotti knows which side she's on. And though she considers herself a feminist, and still recalls hating herself for buying Seventeen at prom time, she also accepts the realities of the marketplace. But she also said she likes being a woman at Esquire, which is "Man at his Best" and "The Information," a compendium of arts, music, restaurants, openings, had to be assembled. Iannotti was focusing on September: "It's a matter of contacting everybody you know who's representing anybody else, kind of what's coming up."

"How do you get a handle on all of it?" she was asked.

"I don't know that we ever do. What we do is just talk to people. And we have writers who are linked. We have a restaurant writer who has been doing it for so long that anytime anything opens anywhere he's on top of it. We read The New York Times every day. That's a major source for about everything for us. We read our British version, which is sometimes ahead of us on stuff."

"Do you have to be hip to work here?"
"No," Iannotti said, laughing. "You have to be dorky like me. Are you kidding? I came from the suburbs. If you have good ideas and you can write, it doesn’t matter how cool you are. If it did, I wouldn’t have made it. We had VH1. That was my source for everything."

Iannotti’s route from the suburbs (Barrington, R.I.) to Esquire was a circuitous one. Before graduation from Colby she did an internship at the Providence Journal. Her mentor there routed her to journalism school at Syracuse University. Master’s degree in hand, she contacted alumni in New York, including one at Self magazine. “She said, ‘I don’t need anybody but my boyfriend needs an assistant at Esquire,’” Iannotti said. She started as an editorial assistant in 1998 and was recently promoted to assistant editor. “I probably could be higher up at another magazine,” she said. “But I’m proud of what we do. I want to be someplace where I can be proud of the product. I’m on the slow elevator up, I guess.

Or maybe not so slow. Iannotti has a studio apartment (about the size of a Colby double) on the Upper West Side. She freelances for various magazines and recently had a piece in Sports Illustrated for Women. At 25, she’s working on not being too much of “a softie” when writers don’t make deadline. In fact, after the interview and tour of the Esquire offices—lots of cubicles, lots of people working—Iannotti was hoping there would be a message waiting from a writer whose computer had eaten his story just as he was about to catch a train to Boston. “He was going to write it longhand and fax it to me when he gets there,” Iannotti said skeptically.

But she still took the time to walk her visitor to the foyer, where celebrities stare from framed Esquire covers: Nicole Kidman, Mr. Rogers, David Letterman, Helen Hunt, Denzel Washington, Nicholas Cage. Does she meet the celebs? Not really.

Iannotti said most of them are photographed elsewhere, though Bill Murray strolls through the offices regularly to visit Esquire editor David Granger. “I met [Murray] at a party once,” Iannotti said. “I said, ‘Hi, how are you?’ He said, ‘Fine. How are you?’ He was perfectly pleasant.”

**“no models, either.”**

So does everybody get to meet celebrities at magazines?

“Not generally,” said Alyssa Giacobbe ’98, an associate features editor at Elle who, in August, was about to make the jump to Harper’s Bazaar. “Not through the office. There’s no models, either. Which is always the next question.”

Giacobbe worked at Elle for the managing editor, Jennifer Barr, before Barr moved to Harper’s as deputy editor. It was Barr who helped Giacobbe get an internship at Elle after her junior year. Weeks before graduation, Giacobbe was offered a job with the magazine’s features editor. She graduated May 24 and started work June 1 in Manhattan, just up Broadway from Times Square. By this June she was living alone in the East Village but was about to move in with friends on the Lower East Side. Giacobbe, who is from Rhode Island, isn’t into the club scene and eats out most of the time. One of the perks is that her cubicle has a view of the Statue of Liberty. Another is that working at Elle, with invitations to screenings and premieres, she doesn’t have to pay to go to the movies.

But most of the time Giacobbe works.

“I have pages of my own,” she said. “We have a section called ‘Firsts.’ It’s a lot of small pieces. A lot of arts and entertainment, pop culture-type stuff. And I work a lot on that. I have a couple columns that I’m in charge of editing. And usually each month I’ll take an entire page that will be just mine to see through the whole process. For August, I did page four.”

That page included a “trend” on the vacation spot Bikini Island and short pieces on food and politics. For the June issue Giacobbe wrote a small piece on the “Sound of Music Sing-a-long,” the audience participation version of the movie, which was coming to New York. “I’m really excited for it.”

For liberal arts graduates who spend four years writing 3,000-word papers,
Step into the editorial offices of the country's biggest magazines and you'll hear—very little. Putting out a magazine is both creative and painstaking work, and the hush in the offices is the sound of staffs on task. At lower left, Lauren Iannotti '96, an assistant editor at Esquire, confers with colleagues and pauses in the magazine's hall of covers. Above, Catharine Long '90 scans slides and photos of models who hope to make it into the pages of Jane magazine, where Long is bookings editor and fashion feature writer.

Giacobbe's 300-word limit might seem a snap. In fact, a short piece may be more work when you know your 300 words will appear in 900,000 magazines. "I've been here long enough now that I feel like I'm doing something," Giacobbe said. "I'm actually responsible for a lot, and I can look at a page and say, 'Nobody knows that I did this and it looks really great.' Of course, too, seeing your name in there . . ."

Giacobbe described Elle as very nurturing, not at all intimidating or catty. A few blocks downtown, Catharine Long '90 said the same about her magazine, Jane: "No diva thing going on here," she said.

"editorial girls" in for a "go see"

Long, 32, is bookings editor/fashion feature writer at Jane, a lifestyle magazine for women in their 20s. "We don't take ourselves, at least we try not to take ourselves too seriously, which is what I really love about it," she said. "It's told in a humorous way. Lighthearted and irreverent. Even with fashion, we try to do things a little differently." She held up a Jane fashion spread. "You wouldn't see this in Bazaar."

The feature, titled "Southern Fiction," showed models in gingham dresses and aprons, clothes shot in the boonies in Georgia. Long—who the day she was interviewed was wearing jeans, a long-sleeved black top and black heels with square toes—wrote the text. She booked the models, too, and they don't look like models at all. More like characters in a Carson McCullers story. "There are some models who are right for some things, some models who are right for other things," Long said. "There are some girls that an agency won't show me because they know I'll never use them."
A cork board on the front of Long's cubicle is layered with Polaroids, mugshots of "girls" who have caught her eye during a "go see" (as the models' rounds are called) at Jane. These are the models who have made the cut from the stacks of portfolios that fill the floor under Long's desk. If the models are among the very few who make the magazine, they'll earn $225 a day, which is working gratis compared to what they'll earn doing advertising jobs. The Jane gig is for exposure, something to propel their careers. But the models on the board "have got a couple of more stops," she said. "They've got to make it through the photographer and stylist."

Long made a few stops on her way to 600,000-circulation Jane. Growing up in Chevy Chase, Md., she asked for a subscription to Vogue for her 13th birthday. At Colby, she majored in studio art and generally followed her parents' advice: that you go to college to learn how to learn, not to pursue a career. After graduation, she made a headline for New York, breaking in as a rover ("kind of a horrifying job") jumping from assignment to assignment at different magazines at Condé Nast, the magazine publisher. Long was assigned to Allure, where she stopped roving and found she had a talent for picking out up-and-coming models. From Allure Long moved to do bookings at Marie Claire. Four years ago she came to Jane. "Since the first issue," she said. "I'm the start-up queen."

But she's settled in now, married to Steven Masur '88, a Manhattan attorney, living downtown and hanging out with a group of friends, several of whom went to Colby. At Jane she is the casting director, looking for the right woman, the right face. That afternoon, yet another "girl" was scheduled to stop by for "a go see," and there was copy to write, a studio to book for a shoot the following week. And of course, the inescapable budgets, bills and other administrative stuff, "which is really a drag," Long said.

"if you ever wonder who decides . . ."

But the administrative stuff is inescapable in the magazine business, especially when you're breaking in. Ask Erika Blauch '99, who as assistant to the editor of Boston magazine goes through mail, answers phones when the editor, Craig Unger, is out, keeps tabs on travel and other expenses, maintains a computer file of "a million Boston magazine contacts" and does all the other things that make an assistant indispensable to the rest of the staff. "I often feel like I'm the mom," Blauch said. "It's a weird thing because I'm also the youngest."

At 23, she already is a veteran of book publishing (Oxford University Press in New York) and is gradually getting bigger and better assignments. In fact, she interrupted this interview to run though the writing she was doing: table of contents, press releases, 300-word news items, shorts on arts and entertainment. Blauch was doing research and writing for August's annual "Best of Boston" issue ("If you ever wonder who decides what the best is, it's me") and was excited about writing a 500-1,000-word sidebar for a July article about ski areas that have gone four season: "I really played up the whole 'Hey, I went to school in Maine. I know lots of people who ski.'"

Five hundred words might not seem like much, not for someone like Blauch, who crafted short stories as a creative writing/English major and wrote thousands of words for a paper called "Women, Men and Chivalry in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight." But writing in college and writing for your livelihood are very different things. At her cubicle in the magazine's offices in the former Horticultural Hall, across from Symphony Hall, Blauch said she thinks she now knows what she wants to do: be a regular contributor or editor for a national magazine. And that is no small realization. "That I could actually have a career out of writing," Blauch said. "I don't think I really believed."

When Erika Blauch '99, assistant to the editor of Boston magazine, learned of the magazines and alumni included in this feature story, her reaction was spontaneous: "Oh, contacts!"

Contacts, Colby-affiliated and otherwise, are an accepted and effective way to break into the magazine business. It isn't only who you know—if you don't have the requisite abilities and motivation, don't bother—but a connection can at least get you through the door.

Some anecdotal advice:

Jennifer Pierce Barr '89, deputy editor, Harper's Bazaar: "I think always the best thing to do is to start out as an intern. Even if it's JanPlan the senior year, do an internship because it can really show you what's out there. Most of the people I look at, as résumés come across my desk, they've all done internships. If you haven't, you're definitely at a disadvantage."

Blauch at Boston: "There was a job for an entirely administrative position that opened here. I sent in my résumé for it. Thank god they didn't call me but they kept my résumé on file. They called me when this job opened up."

"I would say you can't expect to send in a résumé and a cover letter and have that person call you. I guess that's true for any job, but in this case I'm the person who gets that résumé and cover letter and then it stays in my inbox for about five weeks and then I say, 'Oh, I have to bring that downstairs to our office manager to put in her file.'

"You don't need clips necessarily but you need to prove that you can write. And that you want to write and you can learn. And call places and keep calling them because they don't know who you are. Work your connections. And don't be shy."

Alyssa Giacobbe '88, at Elle and Harper's Bazaar: "I had actually interned the summer before [graduation]. I found the job through Jennifer Barr [89]. She called me when a position opened up. I think it's very hard to get a job in magazines without an internship because so many people do [intern], or they know somebody."

Lauren Iannotti '96, at Esquire: "After Colby, I received a master's degree in journalism from Syracuse University. When I was done I wanted to find out where the jobs were and I knew they were in New York so I started calling [Syracuse] alumni. I called a woman at Self magazine and she said, 'I don't need anybody but my boyfriend needs an assistant at Esquire. So I interviewed with him and he took me on and we've been working together ever since."

"The greatest thing about it, for all the students who read this, there are so many idiots in this business in New York right now. I know that sounds obnoxious, but evidently there must be because most of the editors I've written for have been really impressed by the smallest amount of effort and intelligence. I found you've got to keep your feet in and then you're off. There are a million jobs in this business in New York."

Terry Day '78, senior group vice president, circulation director at Hearst Magazines: "You can't be afraid of numbers but you do not have to be a mathematician or a statistician or anything. You just have to have an interest. I don't think it's that hard to get into this business. If you want to get into this side [of the business], you need to just contact some people who do it. We tend to hire a lot of smart, recent grads. You just have to start writing letters."

Kathleen Bolick '95, at The Atlantic Unbound, the on-line version of The Atlantic Monthly: Bolick was considering applying for an internship at The Atlantic Monthly in 1996. Instead she talked to a Colby graduate who was leaving the magazine. "He said, 'My job is opening up right now. Why don't you apply for this?'. Bolick did and was hired.