

University of Mississippi

eGrove

---

Electronic Theses and Dissertations

Graduate School

---

2010

## Alternative weekly and city magazine under one roof: Contemporary Media, Inc.'s "Memphis Flyer" and "Memphis" magazine

Cory Taylor Cox

Follow this and additional works at: <https://egrove.olemiss.edu/etd>



Part of the [Journalism Studies Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Cox, Cory Taylor, "Alternative weekly and city magazine under one roof: Contemporary Media, Inc.'s "Memphis Flyer" and "Memphis" magazine" (2010). *Electronic Theses and Dissertations*. 85.  
<https://egrove.olemiss.edu/etd/85>

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at eGrove. It has been accepted for inclusion in Electronic Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of eGrove. For more information, please contact [egrove@olemiss.edu](mailto:egrove@olemiss.edu).

**ALTERNATIVE WEEKLY AND CITY MAGAZINE UNDER ONE ROOF:**

**Contemporary Media, Inc.'s *Memphis Flyer* and *Memphis Magazine***

Cory Taylor Cox

Master of Arts

School of Journalism

December 2010

**Copyright**

The student, Cory Taylor Cox, claims full ownership of this master's thesis manuscript submitted to the University of Mississippi, December 2010. Any other reference material has been properly attributed to the original author.

**Alternative-Weekly and City Magazine Under One Roof:  
Contemporary Media, Inc.'s *Memphis Flyer* and *Memphis Magazine***

**Abstract**

This thesis studies the media of alternative weekly publications through a case study of the *Memphis Flyer* and its relationship with sister publication *Memphis* magazine, both under the umbrella of Contemporary Media, Inc. History of the publications, targeted demographics and business models will be taken into account to answer proposed research questions. The publications prominence in local media as well as their relationship to the traditional city paper, *The Commercial Appeal*, is recognized, along with the company's plans for adaptation to new trends in online journalism.

### **Dedication**

This thesis is dedicated to everyone at Contemporary Media, Inc. for their time, enthusiasm,  
and contributions to the city of Memphis.

**Table of Contents**

Copyright .....	ii
Abstract .....	iii
Dedication .....	iv
Introduction.....	1
Research Questions .....	2
Methodology .....	3
Literature Review .....	4
Findings .....	21
Analysis.....	61
Conclusion .....	74
Suggestions for Future Research .....	75
Works Cited .....	76
VITA .....	79

## **Introduction**

For as long as my parents have allowed me to attend concerts in cities like Memphis or Nashville, I have always picked up and diligently studied every page of those bigger cities' alternative newspapers. I was always interested in what bands were playing where, what restaurant had the best pizza, or what independent film might be playing in a nearby theater; these newspapers, from Seattle to New York, in my experience, have provided this information for me, information that I, as a teenager and now a twenty-something care about. Even my small hometown of Tupelo, Mississippi, now has the Tupelo "Scene", advertising and critiquing all the cultural happenings that it can fit on its tiny one page supplement to the traditional publication of the area The Daily Journal.

The increasing popularity and expansion of these alternative newspapers has recognized them as a new and prosperous force in the world of journalism. With the current worry of print media extinction due to advancing technologies and the mass appeal of blogging and other online or digital news content, the increase in number and circulation of printed alternative newspapers is a thought-provoking issue, one worthy of study. The fact that most of these alternative papers are distributed without charge to readers is also an interesting element of their survival in a troubled economic time where many traditional newspapers are being forced either to publish only online content or close their doors completely.

The importance of localism and the influence of community-based relationships are important to the alternative press as they are also foundational to the practice of journalism as

a whole. The field of alternative publications deserves increased research and much can be gained from its study.

### **Research Questions**

To explore this phenomenon of the business model of Contemporary Media Inc.'s alternative *Memphis Flyer*, I pose the following research questions:

RQ 1: What is the relationship between *Memphis* magazine and the alternative *Memphis Flyer*? How does their content differ and why? Is there an overlap in content or staff? How do their readership demographics differ? What is the impact of the difference in each publication's distribution method, financially and in the popularity of the medium?

RQ 2: How does the city's daily newspaper, *The Commercial Appeal*, and its weekly entertainment and arts supplement, *GoMemphis*, affect the *Memphis Flyer*? How do the two Compare?

RQ 3: How is the ever-increasing move to online media by patrons and other publications affecting the journalism of Contemporary Media, Inc.?

RQ 4: Is Contemporary Media's concentration as a company dominantly focused on its local market a key factor of stability as an alternative newsweekly?



## Methodology

To study the selected Memphis publications, including the alternative *Memphis Flyer*, a case study methodology will be utilized. This method can be defined as an exploration of a system bounded by time and place through detailed data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context (Creswell, 1998). For this study that time period is the beginning of Contemporary Media's publications to the present, and the place is the primary distribution area of Memphis, Tenn.

First, a review of the history of Contemporary Media Inc. will be completed including background of the *Memphis Flyer* and its predecessor *Memphis Magazine*.

Then using email contacts made available through Contemporary Media's websites, the researcher will arrange appointments to interview reporters, editors, and other employees of *Memphis Flyer*, *Memphis magazine*, *The Commercial Appeal*, *The Commercial Appeal's* arts and entertainment supplement, *GoMemphis*. In preparation for these interviews the interviewer will construct a relevant body of questions tailored to each person to be interviewed individually. In-person interviews will be conducted and recorded for future reference. When in-person interviews are not able to be carried out in a convenient fashion for the interviewee, a series of questions through email will serve as a substitution.

When all interviews have been conducted and the need for follow-up questions have been satisfied the findings will be compiled and then analyzed by comparison to fulfill the requirements of this thesis.

## Literature Review

### What is Alternative Press?

Donna Ladd, editor in chief and also co-founder of the alternative weekly newspaper The Jackson Free Press of Jackson, Miss. defines “alternative” as simply something different from the existing media (Ladd, 2009). Throughout the years, “alternative” or “underground” press had taken on many forms and served many purposes. Whether seditious and revolutionary pamphlets, minority and foreign language publications, feminist and gay-press, or punk-rock fanzines, the agenda of the alternative press has and will always be that of giving an outlet to the voices that might not be heard in the mainstream press; providing social, political, and cultural issues of interest to the community. This does not necessarily mean any alternative news source will be extremist or drastically liberal; Ladd said that she knew of some alternative newspapers that are even more conservative in ideology than traditional newspapers in the same region (Ladd, 2009).

Most alternative weekly papers are owned by independent companies, not subsidiaries of traditional publications, and are printed in tabloid-size editions and distributed within a single metropolitan area (Benson, 2003).

The targeted audience of today’s alternative weeklies stays somewhat from the previous subculture demographic of the advocacy-empowered underground press. *Editor & Publisher* estimates that larger alternative newspapers reach about 30 percent of the coveted Baby Boomer and Generation X generational reader categories (Hernandez, 1994). Punks, hipsters, hippies, and the plethora of other socio-cultural categories are still representative of

the readership of alternative papers however, today alternative weeklies' commercial appeal is their ability to efficiently communicate with and entice affluent, college-educated, 18 to 34-year-old urban singles with plenty of disposable income. This gives the publications more allure to advertisers. Almost all alternative weekly papers receive the majority of their funding from advertising and are distributed free of charge (Benson, 2003).

The content of alternative weekly newspapers is heavy in the arts and generally filled with local articles and feature stories. Theater reviews, art gallery openings, and concert listings are what one would find within the pages of an alt-weekly. But these newspapers are more than just a guide to the city's best dining and entertainment. In his book *Alternative Media*, Chris Atton quotes researcher Patricia Glass Schuman; "the alternative press –in whatever format –is our modern pamphleteer." He goes on to say that alternative media embodies activist philosophy of creating "information for action" with the dissemination and discourse of emerging issues at heart. The activist nature of the alternative press strives to respond to emerging social issues that impact its readers (Atton, 2002).

The issue of censorship is an emerging debate regarding alternative newspapers. Many of the writers employed by these papers often incorporate what some might view as obscene language into their articles. Alternative papers do not always feel the same pressures as traditional newspapers to filter out profanity in their publications. Some view the use of abrasive language in alternative publications as frank, poetic, personal, free-form, and ultimately creative (Bartlette, 2008). However, many alternative newspapers see the use of

profanity as a poor reflection of their professionalism and try to uphold a different ethical standard.

Another topic alternative weeklies are currently discussing, and in some cases revoking their traditional stance, is that of soliciting adult advertisements. Historically, alternative press has relied on the “sex sells” paradigm to generate revenue for their publications by selling advertisement space to buyers from pornographers to prostitutes. Not only did the adult content financially support the underground periodicals, but was condoned by the attitude of freedom of expression through underground sexuality, a taboo subject that traditional newspapers dare not explore ((Armstrong, 1981). However, recent studies have shown that alternative newspapers are abandoning their adult-oriented bedfellows in hopes to prevent the loss of traditional advertisers and some of their reading audiences. Publishers say that the offensive ads tarnish their papers and their trade and are turning a critical eye to the publications that have not yet revised their business model with regards to adult content. Bruce VanWyngarden, editor of the alternative *Memphis Flyer*, said a decade ago his paper "was pretty much open to whatever," but over the years the paper has started to refuse ads from some potential clients and monitor more strictly the content that they do publish. VanWyngarden said the paper still includes advertisements for topless bars, as long as there aren't actual topless women in the ads. Also, he adds that all adult advertising has to come from "legally licensed businesses (Schaffer, 2003)."

### **Parent Publications of Alternative Weeklies**

The specific format of the modern alternative weekly is relatively new to the world of printed media. Alt-weeklies have evolved from a long line of several different types of publication, and not all are radical underground press. Reporting on the community and local happenings has always been a goal for alternative papers, community newspapers and city-specific magazines have lead to the creation of these papers.

In author David Shaw's book, *Journalism Today: A Changing Press for a Changing America*, both of these precursors are discussed. In regards to community newspapers, he explains, the reader's appetite for news of his community –high school football stories, coverage of municipal controversies, civic clubs, and social affairs –is being satisfied by these local papers. One small community might not be especially interested in detailed news of other small communities unless that news involves issues of mass significance, community specific newspapers allow for the delegation of local news that is most important to their readers. He quotes one publisher to say community newspapers are “a remarkable sociological phenomenon.” Shaw goes on to discuss how many sociologists perceive a detachment of citizens from their community, a growing sense of alienation and anonymity. The traditional sense of community is being undermined, making it increasingly difficult to encourage readership of community newspapers to people who are not interested in their own community (Shaw, 1977).

There is a joke among critics: when is the *Los Angeles Times* going to open up a bureau in Los Angeles? Due to trends in globalization, some area newspapers cater more to a national audience instead of readers in the radius of their base cities. From an economic perspective,

community-based publications can aid in stimulating the local economy not only by publishing advertisements, but also by highlighting local businesses in a positive light for feature stories. Community newspapers and alternative weeklies are filling the local news void that traditional newspapers, now more regional newsmagazines, are leaving out (Shaw, 1977).

One journalist's advice for community journalism is "to make sure you print the name of every person in the community at least once a year (Shaw, 1977)." The newspaper staff needs to be out in the community every day, where readers can see and talk to them and hold them personally responsible for what they print (Shaw, 1977). Donna Ladd of the Jackson Free Press encourages journalists to connect with the people they are writing for and writing about. If you take the time not only to interview a person for an article, but actually get to know them as a person and let them grow comfortable with you, the interviewer, you will reap far greater material to write about (Ladd, 2009). For journalists, knowing their beat, or geographically or topically coverage area, allows for them to be a part of the community for which they write. This builds a comradery between the publication and its readership.

Speaking more about the content of community newspapers and city magazines, Shaw states, after the 1960s, people realized that they weren't going to save the entire world after all, instead they decided the next-best thing was to try to make the most of their own lives and communities (Shaw, 1977). Reading where to find the best pizza in a town isn't going to end any wars, but it does attempt to make life a little better on the home-front, this is what community publications, including one priority of alternative weeklies, set their sights on.

Conversely to community newspapers and magazines, the underground press does actually intend to save the world however the definition of “saving the world” does vary between viewpoints of each publication. These publications are a grassroots, hands-on participatory medium; an advocacy press unashamed of its own biases that wishes to persuade the reader to agree and to act through subjectivity and obvious propaganda (Armstrong, 1981). Politically charged and activist press can be traced back in American history as far back as 1700s when Sam and John Adams contributed to the *Boston Gazette*, a paper that had a life spanning from 1719 to 1798 and effectively campaigned for the repeal of the hated Stamp Act. According to legend, the demonstrators at the Boston Tea Party used the *Gazette* office to put on their Indian disguises (Armstrong, 1981). Questioning or mounting opposition to authority is an action of journalism; alternative weeklies use the methods of the craft against the pretenses of mainstream journalism (Menand, 2009).

With the advancement of technology and more convenient methods of printing the frequency of underground alternative press materials greatly rose. The market for opinionated press became increasingly saturated and less and less socially responsible as publications strayed into topics of sex, drugs, and rock and roll as opposed to revolution; even the idea of sexual revolution lost its purity. While an invasion of advertisements from prostitutes and pornographers helped pay the bills, sex was no longer being presented as the free medium of exchange that founding radicals had envisioned, but instead underground papers were pedaling sex as a commodity being sold for the profit of a few. These digressions initiated a retort, spawning another branch of underground press entirely, feminist media (Armstrong, 1981).

Many feminists found an outlet to be heard through what have commonly come to be known as zines, short for punk-zine or fan-zine. These small, self-published, countercultural artifacts, dealing mostly with only one subject, such as works of literature, art, music, or cultural activities (Atton, 2002), were produced in many different shapes and sizes and usually distributed to very local areas, sometimes ranges only as small as a high school population. The creator of *The Meat Hook*, a strongly feminist influenced zine, said that as a woman she felt exploited in many ways and was always troubled by gender perceptions in the media. In 1987, when she was 20 years old, she began putting out newsletters to encourage other women and to raise social awareness of feminist issues. She had never even heard of zines (Vale, 1996), but ultimately contributed to the catalog of the medium through publishing material that she was passionate about. Passion, a mandatory element to fuel not-for-profit publications such as zines, encourages evidence that founders of such publications are not only a part of their own audience by being cultural consumers but also cultural producers (Atton, 2002).

### **The Village Voice**

Journalists behind alternative weekly newspapers must have that same passion; passion for the issues being addressed and also passion for their community. One community that first inaugurated the modern alternative weekly newspaper was Greenwich Village in New York.

One of the most successful enterprises in American journalism, the *Village Voice* was founded in 1955. By 1967, *the Village Voice* was America's best-selling weekly newspaper. However, in academia, the *Village Voice* is given far less coverage than it deserves, illustrating



the need of this research and other research in the field of the alternative press (Menand, 2009).

Some may deny that the *Village Voice* was a true alternative weekly because of its prime objective, to make money. The Voice was not an “underground” or countercultural paper; to its founders it was a business. Barely escaping the industry category of “shopper,” the typical issue was 80 pages, two-thirds of which were advertisements. However the paper earned the distinction of an alternative paper by reviewing art, film, theater, and eventually movies. Its tenaciously local stories promised an unadulterated combination of alcohol, music, sex, and highbrow conversation (Menand, 2009).

The *Voice* changed journalism by changing the idea of what it was to be a journalist. Co-founder Dan Wolf said, “The Village Voice was originally conceived as a living, breathing attempt to demolish the notion that one needs to be a professional to accomplish something in a field as purportedly technical as journalism (Menand, 2009).” One does not necessarily need a college degree or license to be a journalist, so the need for enough credentials to maintain a professional identity is even more prevalent. True, honest expressions were these credentials. *Voice* columnists were often very personal, sometimes even attacking reports of other columnists working for the same publication. But this was acceptable by the standards of the *Voice*, because the paper was not a single voice, but instead the expression and advocate of a community. The *Voice* also helped to boost the attractiveness of the journalistic vocation; it made journalism a calling, a means of self-expression, a creative medium (Menand, 2009).

The *Village Voice* was a model for future alternative papers. Between 1965 and 1969 the number of underground newspapers grew from only an official half of a dozen to five hundred, according to the Underground Press Syndicate, with a readership ascending into the millions (Menand, 2009). But in the 1970s when mainstream publications discovered that there was a market for the coverage of “youth culture,” alternative papers began to die out due to the competition within its niche (Menand, 2009).

The Village Voice expanded its empire through Village Voice Media, acquiring other alternative newspapers, still published in their respective markets but under the Village Voice umbrella. These publications include: *City Pages* in Minneapolis, *Cleveland Scene*, *Dallas Observer*, *Houston Press*, *LA Weekly*, *Miami New Times*, *Nashville Scene*, *News Times Broward-Palm Beach* in Florida, *OC Weekly* of Costa Mesa, California, *Phoenix New Times*, *The Pitch* in Kansas City, St. Louis’s *Riverfront Times*, *Seattle Weekly*, *SF [San Francisco] Weekly*, *Westword* in Denver, and the flagship *Village Voice* in New York (Fitzgerald, Chain Reaction Hits 'Alternative World', 2007).

### **Creative Loafing Media**

Creative Loafing Media is another alternative chain noted in the business of acquisitions. This pie-of-many-slices media group is also a significant predecessor of modern alt-weeklies. In 1972 Deborah and Elton “Chick” Eason put into motion *Creative Loafing Atlanta*, the first of several papers containing the surname. *Creative Loafing Charlotte* followed in 1987, and not far behind in 1988 came *Creative Loafing Tampa*, where the company’s base of operations is presently located (Creative Loafing's New Generation, 2008).

Before graduating from Yale in 1986, Ben Eason, heir to the *Creative Loafing* empire, started the student-operated campus newspaper, *Yale Creative Loafing* with friend Scott Brown. In 1987 the duo recognized Charlotte, North Carolina as a city in need of alternative journalism and started *Creative Loafing Charlotte* with seed-money from Eason's parents. Only a year later, Eason expand his reach to Florida with *Creative Loafing Tampa* (Creative Loafing's New Generation, 2008).

Unsettled with "some of the plain anti-establishment stuff" that alternatives were known for, young Eason wanted to try something different with his papers; stepping back and examining the traditions of alternative journalism, Eason concluded "a newspaper could be a catalyst for change, not just a mean-spirited rag (Creative Loafing's New Generation, 2008)."

In 1993 Eason bought the Tampa and Charlotte papers from his parents, renaming the Tampa paper the *Planet*, and attempted to reinvent the model: "Through the 90s we experimented a lot with civic journalism and played a strong role in our community, we built a nice publication (Creative Loafing's New Generation, 2008)."

Just one year after Creative Loafing changed hands, Eason's "nice publication" produced combined revenues of \$10 million and a weekly circulation of 250,000 newspapers (Hernandez, 1994).

Further elaborating on his idea of the alternative world's bigger picture, Eason told the American Society of Newspaper Editors, "the three basic things running through alternative newspapers are: a shared heritage of the counterculture of the sixties, a custom tailoring of newspapers to fit the lifestyles of these baby boomers, and a shared sense of passion and

commitment in the writing. (Hernandez, 1994).” Historically speaking, Eason went on to characterize the nature of the medium:

Alternative and underground newspapers expressed the language of ‘do your thing,’ and the ideals of love, self-fulfillment, accommodation and freedom, while your newspapers spoke the language of order, structure and caution... You may find this to be a trivial point, but this generation looks carefully at the language to discern authenticity and commitment to the passion of the ‘60s (Hernandez, 1994).

To help buy the remaining assets from his parents and other Creative Loafing shareholders, Eason relied on Cox Newspapers, which gained a 25 percent portion of the company in 2000 (Creative Loafing's New Generation, 2008). This created a collective four newspapers across the Southeast; later stretching outside of the region the company bought the *Chicago Reader*, which also owned the *Washington City Paper* (Hau, 2007).

The *Reader's* editor since 1994, Alison True, admitted the basic challenge, “The paper was engineered for a particular moment in Chicago’s, and journalism’s, history.” A challenge that all akin to it were also faced with, “Alternative weeklies are expected to be eternally youthful (McClelland, 2008).”

Unable to cope with classified ad-revenues looted by Craigslist, a free-to-post website, the *Chicago Reader's* founding owners defended their concession, “That’s the problem with being hip for one generation: you’re dated for the next,” while acknowledging their buyer’s leverage, “We’ve had a great ride. Now we’re happily handing the keys to a new generation (McClelland, 2008).”

These alternatives attempted to apply a style of writing that would connect to its readers, an “advocacy and passion that is characteristic of the editorial content (Hernandez, 1994).” Eason pointed out the difference in their technique and those of traditional journalism:

We publish newspapers in free form and haven’t built boxes in our heads that prevent our movement. What I have come to realize through conversations with editors of daily newspapers is the tremendous self-imposed constraints that modern-day journalists have placed on themselves (Hernandez, 1994).

Caroline Fortis, a music reviewer for *Creative Loafing’s Chicago Reader*, provided evidence of this freedom from constraints, “at the *Reader*, you could write about anything, at any length in any style (McClelland, 2008).”

### **Identity Crisis: Expected Problems with Alternative Conglomerates**

To narrow the alternative market in North Carolina, *The Independent Weekly* purchased *Creative Loafing’s Spectator Weekly* in 2002 (Dyrness, 2002). *Creative Loafing’s* own Neil Skene, editor and publisher of the *Spectator* at the time of the transition, justified the sale, “not splitting this market can produce a really fine newspaper, it was really a question of who was going to give up first (Dyrness, 2002).”

Responding, Steven Schewl, who founded the *Independent* in 1983, said, “there will be one less voice out there. However, the reality is, there was no way two distributed papers, sitting side by side on the news racks, could survive. That’s just a hard reality (Dyrness, 2002).”

In regards to the *Creative Loafing* portfolio, Schewl also reported, “In the top 30 markets 25 papers are chain-owned (Dyrness, 2002).”

Many fundamental alt-weekly followers expressed the concern that with thinly spread media moguls like Creative Loafing or Village Voice Media controlling so many of these “chain-owned” publications, their stick-it-to-the-man alternatives would lose potency or worse yet abandon their most attractive quality of reporting on what was local. Creative Loafing’s Eason assured:

“I encourage our editors to ‘out local’ everybody else. I’m not tampering with local decision-making, what stories need to run, how the *Reader* covers Chicago... There’s not a soul on the staff who’s going to give up on being a Chicagoan (Creative Loafing's New Generation, 2008).”

Village Voice Media has also faced complaints that each of their papers have become uniform with watered-down content lacking the staunch opinions that alternatives are known to express. However, Village Voice Media executive Mike Lacey makes no concessions for the publication’s preferential shift to hard news, breaking the stereotype of pretentiousness; “We say, ‘Do your thinking after you’ve done your research...’ Our writers are encouraged to write with a point of view and an attitude once they earned that right (Fitzgerald, Chain Reaction Hits 'Alternative World', 2007).”

Not only do readers have a hard time initially digesting the fact that their cherished alternative shares a syndicated column with other newspapers, publications are also faced with new challenges brought about by the new business model.

The partnership with Creative Loafing’s previously mentioned investor Cox Enterprises was a questionable move from the start, and with due cause. At the time, Cox had interest in 17 daily newspapers, including the *Atlanta-Journal Constitution*, and almost two dozen

weeklies, as well as a separate communications firm with numerous television and Internet assets (Iwan, 2000). Initially, Eason consoled doubters, "They're a minority investor," the alternative's owner said. "That doesn't give them any rights to do anything but make money off the deal... Creative Loafing is the watchdog of the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*. If we don't perform that duty, our paper's going to suffer (Iwan, 2000)."

Cox felt a similar detachment, but lacked the conviction of duty to justify their objectivity. In 2004, the two entities severed their ties after a strenuous four-year relationship (Hundley, 2004).

The feather that broke the camel's back for Creative Loafing Inc. touched down in April 2003 when Cox-owned *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* launched *AccessAtlanta*, a free entertainment weekly dispensed by the traditional daily of the city, in direct competition with the *Creative Loafing Atlanta* weekly paper (Hundley, 2004). In his *Creative Loafing* column, senior editor John Sugg called the new tabloid "a genetically flawed clone of *CL* [*Creative Loafing*], short on stature and with little to say (Creative Loafing goes to battle with AJC, 2003)."

In the fall of 2008, Creative Loafing filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy due to the debt amassing from their ill-timed take over of the *Chicago Reader* and the economic downturn (Moynihan, 2010). But Creative Loafing's Eason finds his bankrupt business to be liberating in a way; comparing bankrupt newspapers to canaries in the industry coal mine. The shelter that bankruptcy provides "exposes the deteriorating underside of the business (Fitzgerald, Ready for Takeoff?, 2009)."

Eason explains, “The old business models are done, broken, and must be replaced by a strategy based on the realistic value of the company (Fitzgerald, Ready for Takeoff?, 2009).”

Only a year later, the company’s biggest creditor, Atalaya Capital Management, a private equity company located in New York, nearly doubled Eason’s \$2.3 million bid to gain ownership of Creative Loafing (Moynihan, 2010). Obtaining six weekly newspapers and several web sites in the settlement, Atalaya planned to continue operations of the chain (Sasso, 2009). Atalaya partner Michael Bogdan confirmed, “We look forward to adding resources and continuing to build this business and move forward (Scott, 2009).”

Some may lament that going corporate betrays the roots and very ethos of alternative newspapers, however with more capital at a publication’s disposal, more connections in its rolodex, a parent company under fitting leadership, may allow more help than harm for the alternative voice.

### **Previous Studies of Alternative Weeklies**

#### **Content Gap Between Alternative and Mainstream Newspapers**

With modern alternative press now competing in the same markets as traditional print media, there is much cause for the study of these publications.

In a master’s thesis, University of Arkansas student DeLani Bartlette compared the content between a local daily newspaper to that of a local alternative weekly newspaper to see what the alt-weekly paper offered that the mainstream daily lacked. The author hypothesized that alternative weeklies occupy a specific and necessary niche in the news spectrum that



cannot be duplicated by traditional daily newspapers. Readers desire relevant, community-building news and no one else is reporting on these overlooked issues from the same local perspective as alternative weeklies (Bartlette, 2008).

Through a content analysis Bartlette concluded that traditional and alternative papers did indeed differ in content. As expected the alt-weekly devoted more time to local-issue analysis and arts and entertainment. While the traditional daily paper in this study also had some coverage of the arts and local issues, the alternative paper's articles contained analysis of local issues by local citizens, confirming the hypothesis that alternative weeklies offer viewpoints on issues that are not expressed in mainstream dailies. Modern alt-weeklies are continuing the legacy of being somewhere that those who have been left out of mainstream media can have their concerns addressed and voices heard (Bartlette, 2008).

### **Mobilizing Information**

Another study by Stanfield and Lemert examines a very specific type of content included in alternative newspapers and some mainstream publications. Mobilizing information is any kind of information "that helps people act on the attitudes they already have (Stanfield & Lemert, 1987)." Basic instincts would lead one to believe that this sort of information would be liberally included in activist or partisan press, i.e. alternative newspapers. Publishing opportunities to act, for instance a specific street address where a demonstration will take place makes traditional reporters feel vulnerable to accusations of bias when a story is about a controversial public issue. But alt-weeklies need not fear this pressure, they embrace bias

while attempting to maintain credibility; some would even go as far as to bestow the responsibility of publishing available mobilizing information to the alternative press.

In this particular study two modern alternative newspapers were analyzed. One of these papers had an activist orientation and its masthead claimed “News You Can Use,” while the other newspaper was relatively issue-centered. Results showed that 40 percent of the activist publication contained mobilizing information, but surprisingly the issue-centered alternative contained even less mobilizing information, 7.5 percent, than area mainstream daily publications, 13.3 percent and 17.3 percent, (Stanfield & Lemert, 1987).

In the defense of the publication, editor of the issue-centered paper, Ron Buell, said, “You hope people will act on the information you give them... We were not writing to create direct action... Journalism should be concerned with ‘why’ of issues... Asking ‘why’ is not the same thing as saying when the next stupid city council meeting is... the basic thing is to have *informed* participation (Stanfield & Lemert, 1987).”

The researchers concluded that one alternative newspaper assumed readers would act on their own if it merely informed them about an issue. But in opposition, the activist alternative assumed that its readers would be “empowered” to act more effectively when the newspaper supplemented its articles with mobilizing information (Stanfield & Lemert, 1987).

The authors added that some cautions were in order responding to their results and that interviewing journalists may be a more effective method to researching the concerns that reporting mobilizing information would cause journalists to be perceived as biased (Stanfield & Lemert, 1987).

Future research of alternative weekly publications is likely to call for both methods mentioned by Stanfield and Lemert. Interviews and surveys of both the journalists behind the publications and also of the readership or general public could help to grasp a further understanding of the audiences' perception of the publications.

## **Findings**

### **Brief Background of Contemporary Media**

Contemporary Media is home to four main publications *Memphis Parent*, *Memphis Business Quarterly: MBQ*, and the two most discussed in this thesis, alt-weekly: *Memphis Flyer* and city-magazine: *Memphis Magazine*. The business also pairs with the city chamber of commerce or other regional organizations on occasion to design, contribute content, and/or publish limited "one-off" publications (Murtaugh, 2010).

With a small staff many duties are shared between each publication. In a 2006 *Commercial Appeal* article unveiling the first pressing of *MBQ*, the report states that Contemporary Media will control the editorial content of the business magazine by using staff from both *Memphis Magazine* and the *Memphis Flyer* to contribute stories (Roberts, 2006).

### **City of Memphis Magazine**

Newspaperman and entrepreneur Bob Towery founded *City of Memphis Magazine*, the original title, in 1976. Towery Press also owned and operated a Mississippi suburb of Memphis publication, *Southaven Press* at the time (Neill, 2010).

In 1984 *Memphis* magazine became the smallest-circulation magazine to date to be honored with Society of Professional Journalists' Public Service Award (Memphis Magazine Wins Three National Awards).

As a member of the City and Regional Magazine Association, *Memphis* magazine won the CRMA General Excellence award in 2008 and 2009 (City and Regional Magazine Association , 2010)

### **Overview of Memphis Flyer**

Before long, Contemporary Media realized that the initial readers of the *Memphis* magazine were getting older; the media conglomerate decided it needed a breath of fresh air to enlist new readers in a changing demographic. With a much-needed new product to appeal to the alternative niche on February 16, 1989, the first edition of the *Memphis Flyer* was launched (AAN, 2009).

Providing the greater Memphis area with its most inclusive list of entertainment and arts events, the *Flyer* is classified as an urban newsweekly with columns and coverage ranging from hard news to features, politics, music, sports, and art. In spite of what some might consider "irreverent" perspectives, the *Flyer* is known for breaking tough stories and taking a fresh look at a city with a debatable reputation (AAN, 2009).

Further stamping the mark of approval on the *Flyer's* good name, the newspaper has received multiple awards throughout the years from both the Association of Alternative Newsweeklies and the Society of Professional Journalists, including the esteemed Green Eyeshade award from Atlanta's SPJ chapter (AAN, 2009).

## By the Numbers

A 2003 study by The Media Audit shows that Memphis Flyers largest percentage of readers at that time were between the ages 35 and 54, 43.3 percent, with the next largest being the 55 and above demographic, 37.5 percent. The 18-to-34 year old range came in at the third most popular with 19.4 percent (AAN, 2009).

According to a 2011 media kit compiled by *Memphis* magazine, the average age of its reader is 54.3 years. The kit also reports that 63.9 percent of the magazine's readers are married and the average household income of a *Memphis* magazine reader amounts to \$203,000 with 92.6 percent being homeowners. On the level of education received on average by *Memphis* magazine readers, 70.1 percent graduated from college with 27.8 percent going on to pursue a postgraduate degree. (Memphis: The City Magazine 2011 Media Kit, 2011). The college graduation rate for *Memphis Flyer* readers was 37.8 percent in 2003; the household income of *Flyer* readers averaged \$53,044 (AAN, 2009).

## Interviews

In order to obtain further knowledge of the subject at hand, interviews were conducted with several members of various positions from Contemporary Media, Inc. as well as interviews with a columnist for *The Commercial Appeal* and *GoMemphis*, and one freelance Memphis Journalist. After cross-referencing these personal accounts, the information obtained led to the discovery of common themes between some of the interviews. These themes are discussed in more detail during the analysis section to follow, and the evidence attained contributes a wealth of insight to the research questions of this paper.

**Kenneth Neill**

Kenneth Neill, the publisher and chief executive officer of Contemporary Media, Inc., has been associated with *Memphis* magazine since 1978, predating the formation of the Contemporary Media parent company. He joined the publication as associate editor and then served as editor of the magazine from 1980 until he became publisher in 1986 (C.V. for Kenneth Neill, 2007).

A native of Boston, Neill graduated from Yale University and received his Master's of Education degree from Trinity College in Dublin, Ireland, where he taught high school for seven years and authored textbooks on world history (C.V. for Kenneth Neill, 2007).

Now calling Memphis home, in addition to his publishing duties at Contemporary Media, Neill is locally involved as recording secretary of the Memphis chapter of the International Wine and Food Society, and Maitre of the Memphis chapter of the Commanderie de Bordeaux. "We [*Memphis Flyer*] are a local publication, and you can't write about a community you're not a part of... We're here to be locally owned and connected (Neill, 2010)."

Neill's articles have also been published in such publications as *Esquire*, *The Sporting News*, and *The Irish Times*, sometimes under the pseudonym John O'Leary (C.V. for Kenneth Neill, 2007).

Neill described the founder of the magazine, Bob Towery, as a visionary, a dreamer and schemer. Speaking highly of Towery's ability to select fitting staff, Neill recounts that the initial group of employees were small, only numbering six, but talented (Neill, 2010).

Among the six was art director Fred Woodward, who at the time requested an incomplete grade but was denied when a professor “flunked” him from art class at the University of Memphis because he was so busy contributing his time to *Memphis* magazine. Woodward went on to become the art director for *D Magazine* and *Texas Monthly* and currently resides in New York working for *Rolling Stone* and *Gentleman’s Quarterly: GQ*, as the highest paid print art director in the country (Neill, 2010).

In 1985 Towery Press moved to Contemporary Media’s present location with an employee count of over two hundred. The company was spread thin between magazines in Austin and Miami in addition to Memphis and also a string of real-estate advertisement publications. By this time *Memphis* magazine had taken a backseat and was only a tiny piece of a crashing company (Neill, 2010).

A local group of “civic-minded people” decided to step in and save the magazine by purchasing it from Towery. Some of the members within this six person committee included Jack Bells, the owner of the Peabody Hotel, Mort Archer, owner of a well established ad-agency, and Henry Turley, the man credited with the rebirth of downtown Memphis. This group of investors selected Neill to be promoted from his current position of editor to the title he presently holds as publisher in the summer of 1985 (Neill, 2010).

After extensive traveling, Neill was very taken by the alt-weeklies of the time; he names the *Village Voice* and *San Francisco Bay Guardian* as examples. “I thought, if we don’t start one [an alternative in Memphis], someone else will (Neill, 2010).”

Contemporary Media, Inc., formed in 1985, had a financial blessing in the ability to reinvest capital into the launching of new products. This allowed for Neill to create the *Memphis Flyer*, first published in 1989 (Neill, 2010). Today over thirty years later, the *Flyer* is still considered “a fixture in the community (C.V. for Kenneth Neill, 2007).”

Originally titled *Delta Flyer* the paper was initially intended for release in the fall of 1988. Neill explained that the Dixie Flyer was the name of a train that ran East to West from Nashville to Memphis; in an earlier attempt to give the city an alternative weekly, a handful of students from the university, then known as Memphis State, published around ten issues of their *Dixie Flyer* newspaper. “It was truly counterculture. They didn’t have a schedule, whenever they got enough money together to publish an issue they did. And I admired it (Neill, 2010).”

Thinking the word “Dixie” to be too “pejorative” for a masthead, Neill still wanted to honor the independent ambition of the students. First substituting “Delta” but eventually dropped that prefix by the time of the first issue, the alternative *Memphis Flyer* was born. Neill added, Randy Hasbo, who contributes to the back page rant for the *Memphis Flyer*, had been involved with the first *Dixie Flyer* (Neill, 2010).

At that time, the company, Contemporary Media, thought that the *Flyer* was a significant investment. “That was pre-Internet, and there was nothing like it in Memphis,” Neill said affirming the company’s investment by adding, “once we hit the break-even point, we haven’t looked back since (Neill, 2010).”



Neill accredits a lot of the *Flyer's* initial success to the publication's first ad-sales representative, Jerry Swift. Swift had been a club owner in Memphis and his relationships with the other clubs and entertainment venues in the city made him an "indispensable" member of the team. Swift was able to convince enough of these venues to advertise within the pages of the *Flyer* building a clientele and generating enough revenue for the paper to survive (Neill, 2010).

Neill invited the owner of the alternative paper the *Chicago Reader*, Bob Roth, to speak to the staff of the *Flyer* in its adolescent years. After the lecture, Roth offered seasoned advice to Neill at the Memphis bar P & H Café:

You can only control 10 percent of your destiny as a paper, the other 90 percent is just coming out consistently every week for 3 years, if you can do that, you will make it (Neill, 2010).

Proving the previous quote, Neill said the *Flyer* actually started turning things around, like clockwork, after 3 years (Neill, 2010).

Neill is a former president of the Association of Alternative Newsweeklies, AAN. This organization in which Neill said the *Flyer* still plays very active role (Neill, 2010), contains over 100 North American Newspapers (C.V. for Kenneth Neill, 2007).

The only man to date that can claim a duality of presidential titles, for his work with *Memphis* magazine Neill also served as president of the City and Regional Magazine Association, CRMA, from 1992 to 1994. The organization's "Lifetime Achievement Award" was bestowed upon Neill in 2007 (C.V. for Kenneth Neill, 2007). Neill said, "Being president of both

trade organizations is a distinction I don't think anyone else will take away from me (Neill, 2010)."

Neill described the conglomeration of *Memphis*, the city magazine, and the urban newsweekly, *Memphis Flyer*, both under one corporate and physical roof as "very unusual. To his knowledge there is only one other company that parallels Contemporary Media's offspring publications and that is in Columbus, OH, another market, like Memphis, where the city magazine and alternative newsweekly are housed together and not in direct competition with each other (Neill, 2010).

The hardest thing for the company when the *Flyer* came out was to figure out exactly what each publication was. *Memphis* magazine had been playing the roll of an alt-newsweekly. We suffered from an identity crisis from '89 to '94 before both [publications] got comfortable in what they were (Neill, 2010).

Neill admits that in the early years there were cover stories that were published in the *Flyer* that would have been a better fit for *Memphis* magazine and vice versa. The challenge is to do things in the magazine that can only be done in magazines, Neill said. For example, visually, magazines are a better fit for art that pops off of the page, illustrations and photographs that lose luster and appeal in newsprint. Also, long form journalism is generally better suited for magazine-type publications, he explained, as long as the content is suiting for the specific publication. One example express was a 7,000-word article on former Memphis mayor, Willie Herrington. Neill describes the article as a "beautiful piece" with "fantastic visuals," and agrees that the *Flyer* readers would probably have enjoyed the piece but there was simply no room to fit the article in its entirety into the newsweekly but it was a perfect fit

for *Memphis* magazine, an exposé of local appeal. “It’s taken us the best part of 20 years to figure out what works in one and not in the other (Neill, 2010).”

The difference in publication schedule also plays a factor in the decision to include what types of content. Since the *Flyer* is a weekly publication, “we feel like we have the tendency to put any newsy content in it,” Neill said, as opposed to the monthly-published *Memphis* magazine (Neill, 2010).

“The staffs do overlap although they’re pretty distinctive,” Neill said referring to Contemporary Media employees who work with multiple publications. Giving the example of *Memphis Business Quarterly* editor, Greg Akers who also handles the company’s special publications, is a movie reviewer for the *Flyer*, and contributes to the Sing-All-Kinds blog online, Neill said, “everybody’s ambidextrous (Neill, 2010).”

Neill refers to the system of sharing duties between different publications as a “fire drill grid;” if one publication is planning an issue that needs more attention, for example the *Flyer*’s *Best of Memphis* issue, then any of Contemporary Media’s 18 editorial employees available will help out where they are needed (Neill, 2010).

The financial and business models do differ slightly from editorial. There are five divisions of Contemporary Media, Inc., the four publications and then the custom publishing division. For accounting purposes, each of the five has its own balance sheet; however each division takes up a percentage and “shares overhead on the proportion of revenue.” The individual balance sheets simply make keeping track of raw costs easier. The *Flyer*’s and the magazine’s balances ebb and flow; “if one is suffering the others will pull it along (Neill, 2010).”

Neill believes in Contemporary Media's business model of having multiple publications, or products, concentrated in one geographic area; a "horizontal" configuration, not a chain. "When you've got a lot of products in one place that's where the economy of scale is (Neill, 2010)."

I don't understand these people who have bought papers in Nashville and Louisville and acquire other properties. You know I'd rather just own a bunch of stuff in one town, I think that model works better, especially now... Each of our four publications has 'Memphis' in the title; I think the model makes perfect sense (Neill, 2010).

"The fun part about having company where you have all these products is you become a creative energy source for the city." Neill goes on to explain how the creative energy source that Contemporary Media has harnessed attracts both patrons and employees. "People want to work here, nobody ever leaves." Neill said that he has been astonished during the last few years of economic deprivation staff members have remained true even through salary cutbacks (Neill, 2010).

Explaining how Contemporary Media, Inc. competes in the capitalism game, Neill said, "When you have a small company like ours that has no real assets, we're not mining gold, all we have is the brain-power of the people you have with you. We're dependent on creative energy; always cherish that...Our CPA said in 2009 to break even in this economy is a victory. Just to keep 50 people employed is a huge victory (Neill, 2010)."

Alluding to the troubled economy of recent years, Neill said that Contemporary Media's position now is to make enough to "keep body and soul together."

"We do good work, and we all eat, with 50 people employed here, that's a public good in itself (Neill, 2010)."

“We obviously can’t project revenue growth, but we can project sustainability,” Neill said foreshadowing the future of the company and the industry. He also predicts that one day media like that of the *Flyer* and *Memphis* magazine will be publically supported or converted to not-for-profit companies, giving the example of Tupelo, Mississippi’s *Daily Journal*, backed by the George Mclean-created Community Foundation, making the publication a non-profit paper. Neill noted the Tupelo paper to be one of the few. “That maybe the model that’s going to happen. Journalism when it depends on one person being benevolent, it’s a risky thing (Neill, 2010).”

Neill said Contemporary Media peaked in revenue in 2007 but then fell 25 percent in following years due to the recession. The company was not hit quite as hard as many other business during the economic downturn; Neill confirmed that Contemporary Media was recovering however growth was slow. “It’s hard to tell how much of that change is the economy or the popularity of the web; at first everybody thought the Internet could cure cancer (Neill, 2010).”

Expressing how endurance is a key factor in the survival of a publication, similar to Roth’s advice, Neill reminds readers how long it takes for something new to “sink in” with consumers. It’s almost impossible to launch a print product anymore; but at the same time it is hard to gain traction online alone. Especially difficult for regional publications, there is difficulty in launching a web-only product because enough critical mass cannot be attained in one geographic region to sustain the fledgling-site, “you just don’t have enough eyeballs (Neill, 2010).”

Previously established brands are more valuable now than ever, Neill said expressing the challenge of launching a new brand. “Web is great for protecting your brand, but its hard now to build a brand on the web only... People who are going to survive now are those who take care of their brand online and off (Neill, 2010).”

Contemporary Media’s websites do not bring in a lot of money as far as online ad-revenue, but they are necessary. The *Flyer’s* website is especially well received, due to the regional nature of the entity, because there is nothing else like it in the city, nothing is as broad (Neill, 2010).

When the online renaissance surged, startling every outlet of traditional media, Neill told his employees that he had good news and bad news: the good news was that everyone still had a job, the bad news was that now everyone had two jobs (Neill, 2010). Those two jobs were now the employees’ regular duties regarding the print publications and additionally the newly added tasks of maintaining an online presence. Neill said, “People in our line of work have to adapt, I’ve never worked harder in my life. But that’s what you do if you believe in what you do (Neill, 2010).”

“To me, there’s no substitute to reading,” Neill said. “The *New York Times* is my homepage I spend at least half an hour on the website everyday. But when I pick up the paper to read in an airplane, I always discovering something I didn’t know, something that I would’ve overlooked online (Neill, 2010).”

Summarizing the point he wished to make, Neill said, “The web can tell you more about what you already know you’re looking for, but it cannot expand your mind. It can’t do what an issue of *Vanity Fare* will do (Neill, 2010).”

The eccentric entertainer, Lady Gaga, was given as an example. “I’m a little old, a little out of touch,” the veteran publisher said. “I wouldn’t normally have gone out of my way online to read about Lady Gaga, but sitting there reading *Vanity Fare* I now know all about her (Neill, 2010).”

Breaking down the extinction of print scare, Neill explains that what the web is controlling is the distribution of direct information, breaking news for example; information delivery is “100 percent moving to the web.” The print products that are dying are those that are completely focused on information delivery. “Raw information, reflective stuff, like in a magazine or even business to business, long form journalism, there is a place for that (Neill, 2010).”

Confident in the print engine, Neill said, “Print is going to be there in some way. And the beauty of it is, if you still have a quality print product that will still bring eyeballs to the page, advertisers will recognize that it is still an efficient way to reach customers. So you still have an economic model that works (Neill, 2010).”

Neill said this model is what has helped the *Flyer* survive, “the realization of local businesses that ads in it are the most cost-efficient way to reach consumers (Neill, 2010).”

Equating the Memphis newsweekly with online colossus *Huffington Post*, Neill said both accounted for roughly \$7 million in ad-revenue for 2009, “Just a diddly little company in Memphis, Tennessee bringing in that much money (Neill, 2010).”

A self-sustaining newspaper today must have both, web and print. The challenge is maintaining your readership as well as keeping your name fresh for new, younger audiences; the *Flyer* does this through their website (Neill, 2010).

The core readership of the *Flyer* is not so much young people now, but those same types of young people from when we started in the 90s that have been reading it for 20 years (Neill, 2010).

Categorizing the readership of the *Flyer*, Neill explained that the paper was more or less divided into two main sections of interest. The first half of the *Flyer* was the contemplative half and the second half is the “out-and-about” version of the *Flyer*, which includes information about festivals, eating, movies, etc. Noting that some readers only pick up the paper for one half, Neill sees this not as half of the paper being neglected, but as a great strength of the paper because in that fashion it has a diverse relationship with consumers (Neill, 2010).

Comparing Contemporary Media’s other flagship publication, Neill said, “the magazine [*Memphis*] is more sedate; with it we try to do more reader service like weekend getaways, rating things, a lot of fashion. The *Top Docs* issue, which profiles top medical personalities in the area, and the magazine’s *City Guide* are financially the two best issues of the year for us (Neill, 2010).”

Yes, the demographic for *Memphis* magazine is older, but the age and gap in readers between the *Flyer* and *Memphis* magazine is narrower than most would think. However there



are some reasons for keeping the populations of readers and their media of choice separate; Neil explains, “Each one [publication] you have to protect what they do, *MBQ* doesn’t exist to do exposes on corporate CEO’s, that’s what *Flyer* is for. We don’t go out of our way to hide the links between publications, but we don’t necessarily think you need to know that the same people putting out the *Flyer* are putting out *MBQ* and *Memphis* magazine, and that is simply to protect those brands (Neill, 2010).”

The *Memphis Flyer* division of Contemporary Media recently went through a massive distribution overhaul to find out exactly where each paper was dropped off and where the most were being picked up. Neill said, out of over 50,000 papers printed and distributed each week, the *Flyer* has a 96 percent pick up rate. “We share with our advertisers the idea that every paper picked up is a consumer decision (Neill, 2010).”

One privileged location that the *Flyer* can be picked up in is the Memphis International Airport. According to Neill, the newsweekly has been in newsstands in the airport for over five years, moving 3,000 papers each week and is the only alt-weekly in America in airport boxes. “Lucky for us, the head of the airport authority is a big fan of the paper, so we try to be nice (Neill, 2010).”

### **Bianca Phillips**

A photojournalism graduate from Arkansas State, in her hometown of Jonesboro, Bianca Phillips said she had never even heard of alt-weekly newspapers before a professor suggested she applied for an internship at the *Memphis Flyer*. After staying on as an intern in 2002 Phillips became a full-time staff writer for the paper in 2004. Phillips also gained the position of

entertainment editor for *Memphis* magazine; she said this title dominantly involves the composition of each issue's entertainment calendar (Phillips, 2010).

Phillips said she chose to stay on at the *Flyer* because she liked the paper's liberal viewpoint, and because it was a locally owned and independent company, as opposed to a corporate paper (Phillips, 2010).

In the eight years that Phillips has been employed by Contemporary Media, she said one obvious change is the lower page-count in the printed *Flyer*, due to ad-revenue loss. But the biggest changes have been online. The *Flyer's* website has been redesigned to be more interactive, mimicking popular movements in social media networking. There is additional content on the web that is not always included in the hard copy of the paper. The reasons for this extra content balance on either side of a spectrum: 1. Additional web-content is added because a topic is so important that breaking news requires immediate delivery, a situation where the punctuality of the Internet is of the utmost value; and then the contrasting 2. If a story lacks the authority to earn paper-space, it is added to the website so not to be completely thrown by the wayside (Phillips, 2010).

Also, because of the move to online content, each staff writer is required to contribute to at least one online blog. Phillips is key-holder to two, *Bianca Knows Best* and the gay and lesbian blog titled *Memphis Gaydar* (Phillips, 2010).

In addition to gay and lesbian news, Phillips also reports on crime in Memphis for the *Flyer*, however she added that if another staff member shows an interest in reporting on a particular crime article the story is up for grabs on a first come basis. She explained that

reporters at the paper do not necessarily have a standard “beat” or focus that they are prescribed to cover, the six staff writers select what material to cover more by “interest areas (Phillips, 2010).”

Phillips gave an insider’s view of story selection at the *Flyer*; she said the staff held weekly meetings to discuss story ideas. Most writers would generally submit six ideas each week and then usually write on two of those. For Phillips a portion of her articles are reserved for the *Fly-By* section within the first few pages of the newsweekly. At these meetings the staff also brainstorms together to decide on a cover story for the following week’s issue (Phillips, 2010).

Besides the content generated by staff writers some material included in the paper is freelanced, Phillips confirmed that the art and travel sections are often written by freelance contributors as well as some of photography. Because of her academic background and the equipment at her disposal Phillips often supplements her articles with photos of her own, adding that other staff writers take part in the same practice (Phillips, 2010).

In the matter of syndicated material, Phillips said that instead of pulling articles from a wire service like the Associated Press, the *Flyer* uses the Association of Alternative Newsweeklies’ reports. However, Phillips can only recall a very limited number of instances when the paper used this resource, only when a story of national interest was involved or if the paper had difficulty completing a story with limited information available to the writer. The only regularly syndicated sections of the paper are the horoscopes and cartoons (Phillips, 2010).

Because of the intervals each publication is released, Phillips said the monthlies, *Memphis* magazine or *MBQ*, are more likely to repeat stories already mentioned in the weekly *Flyer*. These cases of overlap can occur because sometimes different writers for each publication are simply unaware that certain stories are set to run in others (Phillips, 2010).

Regarding the readerships of each publication, Phillips said the readers of the *Flyer* were younger ranging a guess of 18 – 40 years of age. “But, that’s not to say someone my age wouldn’t be interested in reading *Memphis* magazine, it just depends on their interests (Phillips, 2010).”

She said the bigger difference between the two publications was not in the readership but in the types of advertisers that buy space in each. *Memphis Flyer* ads are mostly geared toward entertainment and nightlife while *Memphis* magazine’s advertisers tend to be focused on more upscale clientele like those who would be interested in a fine jeweler. Even though *Memphis* magazine is subscription based both Contemporary Media products heavily depend on advertising revenue (Phillips, 2010).

Since its start in 1989 the *Flyer*’s brand is still very recognizable in the midtown and downtown districts of Memphis. Phillips said the traditional daily paper of Memphis, *The Commercial Appeal*, is mostly competition for the newsweekly in the advertising market instead of a rival for news:

*The Commercial Appeal* has an advantage because it’s a daily and we’re a weekly, so it can get news out faster. By the time the next Thursday rolls around for us, it’s not news anymore (Phillips, 2010).

Phillips said that the *Flyer* does not see *The Commercial Appeal's GoMemphis*, as competition really because it is dominantly only arts and entertainment; and the *Flyer's* brand is so recognizable throughout the area that the paper is not concerned about being “trumped (Phillips, 2010).”

As far as other free, local publications go, the City's Business Bureau, or CBB publishes the *Downtowner* monthly. Phillips said she actively uses the CBB as a resource for events to add to the entertainment calendar:

When you're listing 100 events each week some get lost in the shuffle, and it's good to have an annual, all-encompassing calendar to double check. Like Cooper-Young Fest didn't send the *Flyer* a press release, that would've been a monumental upset not to include it [the festival in the calendar] (Phillips, 2010).

Phillips said she enjoys working at the *Flyer* because she can go to a concert or festival and still technically be working. The rewarding part about working at the paper is getting the chance to write interesting stories, stories that get the word out about a worthy cause or event. One example that Phillips gave involved a story she composed about the House of Mews, a cat orphanage in the Cooper-Young district of Memphis (Phillips, *Hearding Cats*, 2010). The owner was planning on selling her home in order to keep the business open, a donor read Phillip's story and was so moved that he offered to pay rent for House of Mews for the next 3 years (Phillips, *House of Mews Gets Adopted*, 2010). To express their gratitude, the house displayed a sign in the window that read “Thank you *Memphis Flyer*.” “Stories that have an impact and make a difference are why I work here instead of the *Commercial Appeal* even if I would have better pay and benefits there (Phillips, 2010).”

**Chris Davis**

A 10-year staff writer at the *Flyer*, Chris Davis started with the company in the mid-90s when the entire marketing department, consisting of only two people at the time, went on congruent maternity leave. While working as a temporary employee on the business side of Contemporary Media, Davis was responsible for creating the real-estate section of the classified pages for the paper, assumed the role of sales administrator, and also wrote a few free-lance articles for the newspaper that the editor liked “a great deal.” Eventually a position came open for a staff writer, Davis changed departments and has been on the editorial side since (Davis, 2010).

Having spent time as a member of both departments, Davis confirmed that there is a “solid, invisible wall” between sales and editorial sides of the *Flyer*:

The Job of every sales manager in every publication around the country is to figure out a way to monetize every word printed. And everybody else’s job is to figure out a way to keep that from happening (Davis, 2010).

Davis continued by saying that a lot more “ad-vitorial” journalism was evident in the magazine world as opposed to in newspapers, but there was “no question” on this matter of ethics for Contemporary Media’s publications (Davis, 2010).

While Davis was working in the sales dept, a media kit from *The Commercial Appeal* came into Contemporary Media’s possession. This media kit showed *The Commercial Appeal’s* sales people how to directly sell against *the Flyer*. Davis said this showed that *The Commercial Appeal* viewed the *Flyer* not so much as competition because “everyone is competing for everything, competing for dollars,” but possibly saw the *Flyer* as a threat (Davis, 2010).

“The way we always sold was you were just shaving off a little bit, we were a really good buy and advertisers would reach a nice demographic. Don’t give up your media mix (Davis, 2010).”

“It was shocking to see that there was this very aggressive attitude at least in the sales department,” Davis said regarding the media kit evidence. But to compensate, Davis assured that there is a lot of friendly, good-natured rivalry between the reporters of the two companies (Davis, 2010).

With the ground changing so fast under everybody’s feet, it’s a strange rivalry. The dailies and the weeklies have different functions and I think the places where you have a good daily and a good weekly they prop each other up in a lot of ways. The idea that there is anything other than a friendly competition isn’t good for anybody (Davis, 2010).

*The Commercial Appeal’s* arts and entertainment supplement, now called *GoMemphis*, was at one time known as the *Playbook*. At that time the insert was published once each week and could only be found within the pages of the regular newspaper. “If anything, the *Flyer* responded to the need to fill a niche early; we can do just that, be a better *Playbook* (Davis, 2010).”

One development, not just in Memphis, but all over the country, was the newspapers that did *Playbook* style inserts were trying to groom them to be stand-alones as well, they’d put stands on the street. That was the only change that was clearly changed as going head to head (Davis, 2010).

Essentially, *Playbook* only changed its name and design and remained the thin arts and entertainment supplement as *GoMemphis*, but other papers went even further adding news and political content as a deliberate attempt to create their own alt-weeklies (Davis, 2010).

*The Commercial Appeal* also brought in *Skirt*, a franchise “aimed at the stereotype and mixed with local content.” *Skirt* exists all over, in many different cities, *The Commercial Appeal* is only the local publisher; a huge amount of the content is created elsewhere, only some is

unique to Memphis. Davis said *Skirt* lacks a sense of regional flavor. “It seems to be saying, if you’re a woman, you need to find your inner muse. It’s really strange (Davis, 2010).”

There was a period at the dawn of publishing on the web, markets were changing, but publishers were still confined by an old model, in denial that the business was changing. “They had regularly dismissed that they were going to be displaced.” While trying to figure out how to develop niche publications, “they were throwing all this stuff against the wall to see what would stick (Davis, 2010).”

“Before there was an internet, before people were accustomed to getting free content, alternative weeklies were that free content.” Alternative weeklies have always been available and have always been free, Davis said. Readers get basic news and a flavor of what is happening in the city (Davis, 2010).

The *Flyer* is what the [*Memphis*] magazine used to be. It’s funny, All the covers are up on the wall and if you start at the beginning and work your way forward, its remarkable that in the 70s the covers and the stories, the content and the focus was much more like what we do in the *Flyer* now. That would never be allowed on the cover of the magazine today, it’d completely shock the ladies in east Memphis and we’d get phone calls and we’d never hear the end of it (Davis, 2010).

The magazine used to be even surprisingly edgy, sometimes even edgier than the *Flyer* is now, Davis said, but after 1989, a steady evolution of the equilibrium each publication has reached now can be seen. The magazine has become less news-heavy, less politics-heavy and has transformed into the life-style magazine it is today (Davis, 2010).

Davis was responsible for compiling the bar-guide for *Memphis* magazine in previous years, in one situation he recalls being pinned by a former editor for writing everything like it



was “for an 18 year old kid,” and the “average age of a magazine reader was 55.” He contested, “if you keep up that attitude your average demographic will be a coffin. This is a bar guide, in it you have saloons, hipster bars, gay discos, you have all this stuff, my writing can’t be all fern and chardonnay (Davis, 2010).”

To much relief, Davis said the current magazine editor, Mary Helen Randall, has a much more diverse and interesting idea of what a city magazine can be. Admitting that *Memphis* is still hamstrung by the economics of magazine publishing that gives strong control to the advertising side. This does not necessarily control what is said in the content but the relationship does determine that there will be “X-number of travel issues and X-number of shelter stories (Davis, 2010).”

Many are shocked to find the demographic of the *Flyer* is generally older than they expect, and that it is dispersed to the far corners of the city instead of concentrated in one or two specific areas. Davis said, Sixty-year-old conservatives, who live in Covington, have read the *Flyer* every week since it first came out; they have picked it up religiously, but if you ask them who reads the *Flyer* they would say “nobody but a bunch of midtown, liberal hippies.” There is a strange dichotomy that even loyal readers are under the impression of that the *Flyer* is “very young, very lefty, very isolated in midtown;” but in actuality the median age is fairly middle aged and the distribution and readers are spread out across the city (Davis, 2010).

As the economic climate has changed, staff members across the board have pitched in where needed at Contemporary Media. “I feel like Contemporary Media is one, united company more now that it has been in the past (Davis, 2010).”

The editors and publishers have picked out some of the best talent in the city, Davis said, and in hard time essentially put them on retainer by maintaining staff positions. “Cherry-picking those people has a lot to do with the longevity and success of the publication (Davis, 2010).”

People like Jackson Baker, a great example of an extraordinary writer that knows his beat better than anyone: Memphis, Tennessee, and regional politics, I don’t know how old jack is, close to 70, but he has the capacity for openness like an 18 year old, astonishing intellect (Davis, 2010).

John Branston, even as a young man, was the example of a great agrarian. He could firmly hold one belief and argue soundly against it. His belief is that a columnist’s job is never to be right but to be informed and to be able to start a conversation, and still be anything but contentious. Provocative is probably a better way of saying it (Davis, 2010).

Challenged by mentor-writers, the goal is to become more of a barometer as a writer instead of a thermometer. Davis said, readers judge a relative position by an article not a skewed extreme (Davis, 2010).

The “step-child beat” is what Davis called his concentration at the *Flyer*, covering a wide array of subjects. He manages a majority of the arts and entertainment coverage, specializing in performing arts due to his background as an actor and director but has also written extensively about politics. Online, Davis contributes to *Hungry Memphis*: a food blog, *Sing All Kinds*: music, film, and popular culture, and his primary blog of choice, *Intermission Impossible*: the performing arts blog. As far as Contemporary Media’s publications, the only division of the building Davis has not yet written for is *Memphis Parent*. Outside of his home base, day-job, Davis has written for other publications such as *Maxim* magazine and *Details*. He said Contemporary Media’s freelance policy was “really nice,” as long as the editor knows that a

writer is working on a piece for another publication and that piece does not conflict with a Contemporary Media interest, it is fair game. However the company would frown upon writing for papers like the *Downtowner* or especially *The Commercial Appeal*, but for a larger market, regional or national, additional freelance work is acceptable (Davis, 2010).

For his work at Contemporary Media, Davis has been awarded by the AAN for superior investigative journalism and also recognized by SPJ [Society of Professional Journalists] for his coverage and follow-up stories on disaster recovery in the Gulf Coast after Hurricane Katrina (Davis, 2010).

### **Penelope Houston Baer**

Penelope Houston Baer began working at Contemporary Media, Inc. in 1990 in the accounting department and as a receptionist. She was quickly moved to classified advertisements manager when the woman who previously held the position left her job in mid-phone-call. "I must say that this was during the peak of the "personal ad" phenomenon, so the call was probably from someone who was looking for a naked maid, or to be spanked, etc. It was a strange time (Baer, 2010)."

It did not take long for Baer to learn two important lessons about the world of personal advertisements: 1. To have thick skin about the personal perversions of people and 2. The crazier the ad the more money it was likely to make. So she positioned the paper to make as much money as possible by hosting monthly "personal" parties, psychic teas, and singles mixers. "We helped dozens of people find love and hundreds, if not thousands, find well, just about everything else (Baer, 2010)."

By the end of the 1990's personal ads were not producing the same amount of revenues as before. "Most everyone who was serious about looking for love, or naked housekeepers, had discovered the internet." Luckily for Baer she had developed other skills along the way that she attributes to working with "some really smart people in Memphis." Those same people allowed her to share what she had learned with others around the country, including *The Stranger* in Seattle, WA, *CS INDY* in Colorado Springs, and *The Fort Worth Weekly* in Texas (Baer, 2010).

Consulting on classified advertising ultimately brought Baer to her next career move, the *Santa Barbara Independent* in California.

I started at the *Independent* in 1999 as classified manager, became director of new media, and was working as advertising director in 2006 when we decided to move our little family back to the south and I took a job as a liaison in corporate relations at St. Jude Children's Research Hospital. It was hugely rewarding – the numbers were big and the mission even bigger. But the travel was excruciatingly hard on my family – so, when Ken Neill asked me to come back – I ran, back to the place that taught me not to judge a book by its cover, or a person by their personal ad. Back to the place that taught me that most people don't read typos, but that it is better to admit one than let a client find it (Davis, 2010).

Baer has since been the advertising director for all Contemporary Media publications. She is responsible for creating and driving the strategy used to maintain the company's advertising based revenue stream. This requires creating programs to grow and develop new business, resolving problems with accounts and staff, and making sure everyone is happily moving toward an end goal while each individual goal rolls into the larger strategy (Baer, 2010).

As the director for her division on all publications at the company, Baer said she devotes the most time to the *Flyer* and *Memphis* magazine. Seasonally she may shift her focus to

another publication, but the two largest take the most overall time. The same production staff is shared for all publications, Baer said, “they are super talented and super busy.” Also some sales-staff cross-sell between publications, but each is responsible for a “numero uno,” primary publication. “Making everything fit into the number of hours and pages we have to work with is an intricate puzzle some days. I am so lucky to work with the most talented sellers and production people and somehow they all make it happen.” Even some advertisers buy space in multiple publications, “we have very diverse audiences with some core crossover.” From a business perspective, Baer said the company is lucky to be able to share resources among publications, human and otherwise. In order to keep track of balances Baer explained that resources are indeed pooled but each individual publication is accountable for gains and losses: “Each publication has a very clearly defined budget. We are one company, but we do track each publication individually (Baer, 2010).

By learning about the readers of Contemporary Media publications, the company adds an advantage to selling to advertisers. Because the company has invested in external audits of their readers and the habits of those readers, Baer said Contemporary Media is very knowledgeable about the 260,000 readers of the *Flyer* or the 60,000 readers of *Memphis* magazine. The business targets its readers and knows that they are diverse, learning how many readers shop at Kroger, how many dine out frequently, or go to concerts; confident in their data, knowing how many readers are over 54 and under 21 and everywhere in between. “We help our advertisers speak to our readers – end of story. When we sell any of our products, we are simply facilitating a conversation between the advertiser and our readers (Baer, 2010).”

When asked about the differences between distribution methods of products published by Contemporary Media Baer said there are strengths to both. The *Flyer* is “free non-forced distribution.” The benefits include a quick and accurate barometer of product desire: if the box is empty the product has been picked-up; if the product has been picked-up it will be read. “You just don’t go to the effort of picking up a rack-distributed product if you don’t want it.” If a paper doesn’t move the conclusion can be made that something in the equation is off, the cover, content, or even the weather. Averaging a 96 percent pick-up rate, the company knows that a good pick-up means people like and want the product (Baer, 2010).

*Memphis* magazine is driven by “paid circulation.” The bulk of copies go to individual homes that have subscribed for the magazine to be especially delivered. This kind of circulation equates to a longer read, longer hold times, and often, more value placed on the product (Baer, 2010).

“The internet was in its infancy when I came to work at the *Flyer* – technology is the major game-changer.” Many now get their news and information in smaller doses; they are generally impatient with waiting for news to be delivered or with the rigors of scouring through sections of a larger product to find the info they need and desire. In the microwave generation, readers want their news delivered and presented in a way that fits their lifestyle (Baer, 2010).

The *Flyer* used to be what your RSS [Really Simply Syndication] feeder was a few years ago – we picked out the best parts of what you needed to know and delivered it. As we grow, as we evolve, we have to be more. We have to inspire the conversation, curate the responses, and provide a room for the discussion (Baer, 2010).

Daily print newspapers are finding the transition to a new economy difficult, Baer said.

The corporate papers were very reliant on classified advertising as a main revenue source;

those streams have moved online. “We are lucky to have built our systems that aren’t as heavily dependent on classified and insert revenue, although the shift hurts us a bit too. We all need to rethink revenue strategy. It isn’t as simple as it once was (Baer, 2010).”

Finally, Baer expressed why she believes the Contemporary Media engine has been effective, sustainable, and inspiring: “I believe in local. We are the only truly local magazine and newspaper. I wouldn’t feel right selling for a corporate entity. I believe in keeping our local dollars, talents, and energies here. I believe in what we give back (Baer, 2010).”

### **Frank Murtaugh**

Frank Murtaugh started at the Contemporary Media, Inc. in 1992 as assistant to the publisher. He has since graduated to the role he plays today as managing editor for *Memphis* magazine. In addition to making sure the magazine is ready for publication on its scheduled due date, principle duties of the managing editor include making sure the sales, art, and editorial departments are working in sync for a common deadline, as well as laying the magazine out and determining the number of pages for each issue with the publisher, based on reported sales (Murtaugh, 2010).

The largest line item in expenses is the actual printing process and physical product, Murtaugh reported. One more aspect of his job requires taking bids and offers from other print sources, examining invoices, and ultimately spending money on paper. A decision to change the “glossy UV” finish of the magazine’s paper quality to a dull finish for the 30th anniversary issue 4 years ago is still in place today. That change was part of the most comprehensive

redesign in the existence of the magazine, even changing the front-page logo. Murtaugh said the makeover “breathed new life into the magazine (Murtaugh, 2010).”

“My hands get dirty in production, but what I really enjoy is after-hours finding time to write.” Supplementing his main cost and quality control duties, Murtaugh writes on any number of topics for *Memphis* magazine. Involved with other publications as well, Murtaugh writes for the *Memphis Flyer* sports section and also coordinates production for *Memphis Parent* (Murtaugh, 2010).

The uniqueness of each title is a virtue each carries despite being put together by the same people, cross-pollinating. A versatile staff is critical, Murtaugh said. “If you’re a one-trick pony it’s going to be tough. You better be very talented at that one trick (Murtaugh, 2010).”

I’ve done a lot of sports writing for the *Flyer*, but I wouldn’t want to be classified as only a sports writer. It’s really stimulating to have that variety of canvases on which to apply your work. Our photographers here are the same way, they may be shooting a business cover story one month and then may be doing something on hard crime the next. It keeps us going (Murtaugh, 2010).

With resources intermingled, Murtaugh said in all reality most stories delegated for the magazine could also work for the *Flyer*. He recalled one issue that featured the University of Memphis’ football quarterback on the cover of the magazine; that was in September when football season was beginning to wind up so the *Flyer* also had a football preview section. “So boom! Boom! Football in both.” But Murtaugh said that close of a direct overlap is rare (Murtaugh, 2010).

The difference in publication schedule for Contemporary Media’s top publications also is a factor for inconstancy between the two. There is a little more leeway as far as time and



structure are concerned for the magazine because a new issue is released only once each month; with a weekly, like the *Flyer*, the structure is tighter because the cycle is shorter and the margin for error is less. Murtaugh said in the end a publication can only be as structured as its editor though; in contrast to the previously mentioned weekly sessions for Phillips and the *Flyer*, *Memphis* magazine has few formal gatherings but each employee involved stays on the same page through email correspondence (Murtaugh, 2010).

Each publication claims strong, unique sections nonetheless. The *After Dark* section is a unique franchise to the *Flyer*. Where the dining listing in *Memphis* magazine is unique to the magazine and is still the most comprehensive one-stop shop for where to eat in the city. To categorize the magazine, Murtaugh said he never cared for the term “general interest.” Instead he proposed “variety interest” as a better description for the magazine’s all-in-one package containing music, books, dining, politics, and more (Murtaugh, 2010).

Speaking on the magazine’s sister publication, Murtaugh said the *Memphis Flyer* started in 1989; 13 years after *Memphis* magazine first hit the streets:

Ken [Neill] and his colleges’ vision at the time was where it need to be. A free weekly newspaper, but the generated revenue was based on ad sales. It doesn’t seem so visionary now because so many are doing it, but at the time it was carrying its own weight. The *Flyer* brought new life, adding new readers, a new demographic, new advertisers that would be interested in advertising in the *Flyer*; advertisers that would not have considered *Memphis* magazine (Murtaugh, 2010).

This addition essentially doubled Contemporary Media’s advertising clientele, entertaining markets that the magazine was not in a position to approach. Murtaugh said, *Memphis* magazine readers are not the people living in two-room apartments; they are affluent

and advertisers are savvy, recognizing that this readership is made up of people who have the buying power to give the most business to high-end retailers like furniture stores. Where advertisers in the *Flyer* recognize there are more people on Beale Street, more people are going out for entertainment and nightlife (Murtaugh, 2010).

Comparing the advertising sales of the *Flyer* and *The Commercial Appeal* and other area publications, Murtaugh said, “The daily paper does what they do and every advertiser they have we want and if they’re honest they’d tell you the same (Murtaugh, 2010).”

Contemporary Media does however offer advertising package deals and contracts with discount incentives for frequent advertisements. Murtaugh said there are advertisers that can be seen in all four publications. On behalf of Contemporary Media’s quarterly business magazine, Murtaugh said, “We’ve been surprised that *MBQ*’s cross section of advertising, verses *Memphis* magazine is so unique, we’re lucky because we don’t want to cannibalize advertising between publications, just move parts around (Murtaugh, 2010).”

*MBQ* is 4 years old and has graduated from a quarterly publication to bi-monthly. *MBQ Power-Players* is a new enterprise, an annual guide profiling 400 CEO’s in Memphis business.

“We hope it’ll grow into a franchise as a must-buy for advertisers (Murtaugh, 2010).”

Our publisher Ken Neill uses phrase “pot-holes” in a publisher’s calendar. We’re in a cyclical business and you get to the part of the year when you need work and try to fill in those gaps. *MBQ* has proven to be a successful pot-hole filler and there are some others that come and go (Murtaugh, 2010).

Murtaugh gave another example from Contemporary Media’s special-pubs department, a one-off for the Mississippi River Corridor: a guide to attractions along the Mississippi River.

He said hopefully these types of opportunities are renewable and help to supplement the bottom line of the company (Murtaugh, 2010).

A *Memphis* magazine subscription sells for \$15 per year. Murtaugh said the revenue from subscriptions alone cannot pay the salaries of employees. "It's part of our revenue stream but very similar to the *Flyer*, the magazine makes its money through advertising." Yet still, the subscription-based model is used and needed to maintain and protect the loyal readership. "We're on newsstands, that's where we are and where we're moving, and we keep that method efficient as well. But the magazine will always be subscriber driven (Murtaugh, 2010)."

Sales reports show that more issues of *Memphis* magazine are purchased in major bookstores like Borders or Barnes & Noble than in Walgreens, Krogers, and Wal-Marts combined. Murtaugh said that is due to the matter of who is shopping at each location:

If people are going to a bookstore they are going there to read and typically have an idea of what they want to read, we want them to buy the magazine in the bookstore only once because we want them to go home and subscribe, they are moving month after month at the major bookstores because there you've got a reading shopper (Murtaugh, 2010).

Contemporary Media entered into a contract with Kroger grocery stores 6 months ago to sell *Memphis* magazines on the stores' newsstands. The *Memphis Flyer* is also in newspaper boxes outside of the stores. "I wouldn't considered our newsstand visibility or viability threatened by the *Flyer* presence, we like to think you'd pick them both up and use them for different reasons (Murtaugh, 2010)."

When asked about expanding the geographic boundaries of *Memphis* magazine's distribution, Murtaugh said the company had experimented with placing the magazine in the

“hinterland” of middle Tennessee. With efficiency as a goal this trial did not yield the results Contemporary Media hoped (Murtaugh, 2010).

You can almost make the argument if you find the right bookstore in Boston *Memphis* magazine might sell there because you’ve got curious people. If you’re putting something interesting out there, if you put Elvis Presley on the cover of *Memphis* magazine, someone in San Francisco or Tokyo would buy it. But that doesn’t mean that we can provide a monthly presence that far away (Murtaugh, 2010).

The model that *Memphis* magazine has is efficient though. The average reader of the magazine is 54, one goal the publication has is acknowledging the need to make sure the readers that are 34 or 44 are growing into the next generation of magazine readers. The second goal is to expand and maintain readership, not necessarily to expand geographically. Murtaugh said being a local operation is one of the magazine’s greatest strengths: “Our competition isn’t *Time*, *Newsweek*, or *Esquire*, we’re relentlessly local. There can be 200 titles at a newsstand and there are only two or three titles up there specifically about Memphis, and we think we’re the best (Murtaugh, 2010).”

Switching the discussion to focus to Contemporary Media’s other flagship publication, Murtaugh said the *Memphis Flyer’s* distribution plan recently underwent an intense evaluation and makeover to follow. The company investigated drivers, drop-points, and corresponding pick-up frequencies. People in Collierville and Germantown need to be made aware that the paper is available in those suburbs, Murtaugh said. The paper is labeled as a midtown/downtown establishment, but with the pressing of approximately 52,000 papers each week, the *Flyer’s* reach stretches much further:

You have to pay to print everyone of those papers, balance the accounting line to establish how many we can print and distribute at the percentage we want to, to satisfy readers and advertisers and how much we can afford (Murtaugh, 2010).

Expressing his thoughts on online media movements, Murtaugh said, “it’s a new world now.” The news cycle now is not even 24 hours. Murtaugh gave the example of picking up the morning newspaper in his driveway, “if you had been online 6 or 12 hours earlier you’d already know the headlines, the newspaper’s news is already old.” Contemporary Media does the best it can in publishing what might be called “an old-fashioned media source” for readers who are still engaged in that form of reading, browsing and information gathering (Murtaugh, 2010).

It still exists beyond the sound-byte culture that we see, whether watching television or getting news on the Internet. Printed literature can still supplement that. When television came out it didn’t kill cinema. They still co-exist (Murtaugh, 2010).

### **Shara Clark**

While still a journalism student at the University of Memphis, Shara Clark began working for Contemporary Media, Inc. in January of 2008. She had previously worked jobs unrelated to her college major including Starbucks Coffee, Trilogy Tattoos and Piercings, and BB King’s Blues Club. She held one journalism internship before going to write at the *Memphis Flyer*, reviewing CD’s and live concerts for a now non-operational website (Clark, 2010).

Clark maintained an editorial internship position at the *Flyer* until 2009. Contemporary Media was hiring advertising sales representatives; having no prior experience in advertising, Clark decided to pursue the position to ensure a more permanent occupation with the company. She has been working in the advertising department from January 2009 to present (Clark, 2010).

Entrusted with the title of account executive, Clark handles both print and online advertising accounts. This applies to both call-ins looking to place ads and "cold calls," in which Clark calls local businesses to see if they would be interested in advertising. She writes proposals for local and national businesses and advertising agencies, keeping in touch and up-to-date with several hundred accounts and business owners or agency representatives. "I help grow and maintain relationships between the *Memphis Flyer* and local businesses (Clark, 2010)."

Because her expertise strictly deals with the *Memphis Flyer's* accounts, Clark said her knowledge of the company's other publications is limited. She was aware that *MBQ* and *Memphis* magazine's ad-costs are higher than those for the *Flyer*(Clark, 2010).

We are all in-tune with the various publications that come out of the CMI offices, but we each have our individual focus. We sometimes work together to put together advertising packages that extend across several publications (Clark, 2010).

Factoring in a new comparison between the *Flyer* and *The Commercial Appeal*, Clark emphasized that the *Flyer* is "hyper-local." Explaining that the paper tends to focus more on local news, business, events and people; where in addition to local news, *The Commercial Appeal* is concerned just as much with national and world news. The "immediate obvious" difference between the way each paper works Clark said was the difference in daily verses weekly print schedules. "Our print news turnaround isn't quite as instantaneous as the daily. However, our site is updated throughout the day with breaking news, if applicable (Clark, 2010)."

Clark said the *Flyer* has done a lot of work to "hype up" its online presence in response to the need to adjust to an ever-changing market. This includes the publications attractive and

user-friendly website [www.memphisflyer.com](http://www.memphisflyer.com) and social media networks like Facebook, MySpace, and Twitter. “The *Flyer* has created a greater blogosphere presence via our site, which now features nearly 20 blogs, including news, food, fashion, sports, entertainment, and politics blogs (Clark, 2010).”

Seeing the rise in online newsgathering as more of a companion than a threat to traditional media, Clark said she believed that “real” news blogs produced by journalists are a great accompaniment to hardcopies, allowing for comments and discussion. Also blogs are a resource for expanding upon and adding supplemental content to articles that may have been published in print editions (Clark, 2010).

People who read newspapers will always appreciate a physical paper, produced by real reporters. And like Internet content, our paper remains free and easily accessible to everyone (Clark, 2010).

#### **J.D. Reagar**

J.D. Reagar is a freelance writer in Memphis, TN. Some media sources that Reagar’s work has been published by include the *Memphis Flyer*, *Dateline Memphis*, *Crossroads: Greater Memphis Chamber*, *Tigersportsreport.com*, and *MTV.com*. Reagar’s primary beat is local Memphis music, but he has also written about national music acts and some stand-up comedy. Aside from the realm of performing arts, in the past Reagar has written business profiles and several sports pieces (Reagar, 2010).

When asked about his views toward the *Memphis Flyer*, Reagar said:

It’s a pretty good liberal-progressive-artsy weekly paper. Well put together, for the most part. I respect and enjoy reading most of the writers on staff. In particular, I think

Chris Herrington is a genius basketball [Grizzlies] writer - very analytical and intelligent (Reagar, 2010).

Comparing *The Commercial Appeal* and its entertainment supplement *GoMemphis* to the afore mentioned *Flyer*, Reagar called the publications “obviously more broad” and “safe.” But with that said, Reagar began to boast on the writing staff of the traditional paper of the city:

Bob Mehr and Mark Jordan are both great music writers and try really hard to cover as much cool stuff as possible. Jennifer Biggs is a good food writer. Beifuss is a fine film critic, I actually prefer him over some of the writers at other publications (Reagar, 2010).

One example Reagar noted was that from a musician’s perspective, he believes it is much better to be written about, featured in, or even just have a photograph in the *Flyer* than in a *Commercial Appeal* publication. The reason for this being the readership demographic for each publication, *Commercial Appeal* readers are less likely to attend late night shows at the Hi-Tone midtown music venue, even if a band is the cover story, Reagar said (Reagar, 2010).

Acknowledging that Contemporary Media’s urban-newsweekly, the *Memphis Flyer*, and city magazine, *Memphis*, dual situation is an “uncommon” one. There is good reason why these cases are few and far between; the publications may have conflicting interests. However Reagar said this does not hinder the Memphis publication. “Speaking as somewhat of an insider, I don't think the content of the *Flyer* by is affected by Contemporary Media's association with *Memphis* magazine (Reagar, 2010).”

Contributing to online-blogs is a steady source of work for Reagar as a freelance writer. When asked about the effects of online media on journalism Reagar said he saw the change in models as an opportunity for writers like himself (Reagar, 2010).



I find it harder to write 'blog posts' than I would have expected. I find myself overthinking and generally spending too much time on them, considering the pay scale and, shall we say, lowered expectations inherent in the format. But from my vantage point, smartly-written content is the breadwinner (Reagar, 2010).

### **Michael Donahue**

A columnist for the city's traditional daily newspaper, *The Commercial Appeal*, Michael Donahue contributes most extensively to Tuesday's *Party Line* column and other arts and entertainment sectors. In *Party Line* Donahue writes about events he attended the previous week including weekend parties. "We generally stick to charity events and benefits, and try to stray away from church events and birthday parties because there are just too many." One exception to the rule Donahue hopes to make is Jerry Lee Lewis's 75th birthday party. "My goal is to get a photo of 'the killer' on the front page (Donahue, 2010)."

There is always a place for entertainment journalism especially the kind that is spawned from local and regional happenings; validating *Party Line*, Donahue said, "It's a way to get local people in the paper without them murdering anybody (Donahue, 2010)."

Sharing some back-story on *The Commercial Appeal's* arts and entertainment section, Donahue said the section was first known as *Playbook*. A successful enterprise in its own right, *Playbook* was made over as *GoMemphis* three years ago to bring the magazine into maturity as a stand-alone paper and as an online entity. Donahue said, "*GoMemphis* is stuff you can go to. We don't just write about a band, the band has to be performing close so readers can go out and see them (Donahue, 2010)."

Donahue's steady columns in *GoMemphis* include parallel page articles *Best-Bets* and *Meet the Chef*, where he tells a narrative about a single food item at a local restaurant and provides a 12 question Q & A with a local chef, respectively (Donahue, 2010).

In tune with the multimedia aspect of new journalism, Donahue mans the helm as primary photographer and videographer for his contributions to *The Commercial Appeal's* pages and online sites. *Listen Up* an online column highlighting local bands is another section of Donahue's; more of a passion than an occupation, he often puts in extra hours to make music videos for the bands to be posted in *GoMemphis's* stream. Donahue said, "The videos I put online average around 2000 hits, that tells me that number represents our viewers in Memphis, those who are interested in what we're doing (Donahue, 2010)."

Similar to Reagar's comments about the medium, Donahue also said the online world provides new opportunities for journalists and readers. "Online isn't going to abolish print journalism. People never said there aren't going to be books any more (Donahue, 2010)."

The difference in *The Commercial Appeal* and the *Memphis Flyer* is with the different time intervals of issues; that changes what is news for each, Donahue said. The early edition can trump the late edition, so weekly publications like the *Flyer* and *GoMemphis* must give more than just headlines to readers, each must develop content that takes time to digest, thought-provoking, pensive content (Donahue, 2010).

In 2009 Donahue was featured in nearly every photograph included in *The Commercial Appeal's* special publication *Memphis Most*, as a guide to the best of everything from bars and restaurants to car dealerships and florists in Memphis (Memphis Most 2009, 2009). This special

publication is *The Commercial Appeal's* answer to the *Memphis Flyer's* popular *Best of Memphis* issue. In the 2010 *Memphis Flyer, Best of Memphis* issue Donahue claimed third place in the "Best Newspaper Columnist" race; in fact, the top three best columnists in the *Flyer's* poll write for *The Commercial Appeal* (The Real Best of Memphis 2010, 2010).

## **Analysis**

To answer the research question involving the relationship between the *Memphis Flyer* and *Memphis* magazine, and the subsidiary questions attached: Contemporary Media, Inc.'s publisher Kenneth Neill admitted that housing a city's alternative, urban newsweekly newspaper and the city magazine under one corporate and physical roof is "very unusual (Neill, 2010)." Freelance writer J.D. Reagar also acknowledged this "uncommon" relationship, noting other instances of similar relationships abandoned due to conflicting interests of the publications (Reagar, 2010). Affirming the security of the relationship, Neill said the housed-together publications are not in direct competition with each other to which Reagar agrees the publications are not negatively affected by their associations with one another.

For further proof, look to the numbers: advertising director, Penelope Houston Baer confirmed an audit of the publications to reveal approximately 60,000 regular *Memphis* magazine readers and 260,000 *Memphis Flyer* readers (Baer, 2010).

The company also knows that these thousands of readers are diverse; diverse within each publication but also diverse between the different publications. The largest percentage of readers of the *Memphis Flyer* in 2003 were 35 years and older with 18 to 34 coming in third place in the sample totaling 19.4 percent (AAN, 2009). As for *Memphis* magazine, the average

reader age at 54.3 mirrors the top portion of the *Flyer's* results (Memphis: The City Magazine 2011 Media Kit, 2011).

Neill explained that the core readership of the *Flyer* now was not so much young people but those who started reading the paper when they were young and have grown with the publication during its 20-year existence. The age gap between the alternative newspaper and the city magazine is narrower than most expect. *Memphis* magazine's readers are a bit older and more sedate partially because of the difference in content styles, the magazine taking a more "reader service" approach (Neill, 2010). This supports staff writer Bianca Phillips's comment, "that's not to say someone my age wouldn't be interested in reading *Memphis* Magazine, it just depends on their interests (Phillips, 2010)."

Also aware that the reader must maintain loyalty and grow with a publication of choice, staff writer Chris Davis's return from scrutiny over the compilation of *Memphis* magazine's bar guide rings true: accused of writing everything like it was for an 18 year old reader, the editor at the time informed Davis that the magazine's reader was 55. Davis knew that if he continued only to write for the average age reader, that age would become older and older and eventually the readership of the magazine would all be deceased (Davis, 2010).

Managing editor Frank Murtaugh said the average magazine reader was indeed 54 but the goal of the publication was to influence younger readers to become the next generation of *Memphis* magazine readers (Murtaugh, 2010).

Davis also told of the detachment of *Flyer*-readers to the actual demographic. Older, conservatives from the suburbs of Memphis who have read the *Flyer* every week since its first

issue still think only young, liberal mid-towners are the primary readers of the paper when in actuality the figures stretch these boundaries and are in some cases reveal just the opposite (Davis, 2010).

Murtaugh said the *Memphis Flyer* is labeled as a midtown/downtown establishment but its reach is much further and consumers in the suburbs need to be made aware that the paper is available and convenient for them (Murtaugh, 2010).

In the matter of competition and distribution, Murtaugh said the company is not concerned when each publication occupies a similar location, for example Kroger Grocery Stores. "I wouldn't considered our [*Memphis* magazine] newsstand visibility or viability threatened by the *Flyer* presence, we like to think you'd pick them both up and use them for different reasons (Murtaugh, 2010)."

Baer said the differences in the types of distribution between the publications are a strength to both the company and to each publication. The *Flyer's* free non-forced distribution is easily approachable by the public and provides a quick report of success back to the company by the number of papers picked up and the number remaining in the box the next week; with a 96 percent pick-up rate the company knows it is on the right path and can adjust to or attribute any drops in pick-up to external forces (Baer, 2010). The publisher uses the 96 percent pick-up rate of the paper as leverage when attracting advertisers: "every paper picked up is a consumer decision (Neill, 2010)."

Making use of a different model, *Memphis* magazine uses a paid circulation distribution method, delivering most issues of the product directly to the homes or businesses of

subscribers, in addition to placing the magazine on retail shelves. This distribution type provides for longer hold times of the product increasing the assumed value making the publication more attractive to different advertisers than would normally be inclined to place ads in the *Memphis Flyer* (Baer, 2010).

*Memphis* magazine does not solely depend on subscription revenue to support the business. Similar to the *Flyer*, Murtaugh said, the magazine is dependent on advertising to generate sufficient revenue to maintain stability (Murtaugh, 2010). But by allowing readers to subscribe, this creates loyalty, adding the magazine to the identity of the reader, ensuring the longevity of the business. Subscriptions are key to the success of *Memphis* magazine even if the benefit cannot be directly calculated into the revenue stream.

With both the *Memphis Flyer* and *Memphis* magazine primarily supported by ad-revenue the uniqueness of each title is also a benefit in attracting a wider variety of advertisers. Murtaugh said the creation of the *Flyer* brought new life to journalism in Memphis and new life to Contemporary Media, garnering new readers and with that new advertisers that would not have considered *Memphis* magazine, but were attracted to the *Flyer* (Murtaugh, 2010). With twice as many publications, Contemporary Media now also had twice as many potential advertisers with a possibility to double revenue.

Phillips illustrated the differences in ads of the two publications: *Memphis Flyer* ads generally concentrated with entertainment and nightlife, *Memphis* magazine ads involve more high-end items like fine jewelry or shelter items such as furniture or items involving home life (Phillips, 2010). These advertisers do sometimes crossover, like the readerships of each

publication often do, calling for advertisers to purchase space in multiple publications (Baer, 2010). Murtaugh confirmed that advertisers are rewarded for frequency and versatility of their ads through advertising package discounts. Some crossovers are so recurrent that advertisers can be seen in all four of Contemporary Media's publications; "we're lucky because we don't want to cannibalize advertising between publications, just move parts around (Murtaugh, 2010)."

In fact, Baer said the company is lucky to be able to share resources between its publications. Contemporary Media keeps accounts for each publication separately, setting and maintaining different budgets for each, so in spite of pooled resources each division is responsible for its own gains or losses (Baer, 2010). From a managerial stand point this is ideal in order to monitor the progress of a product. Neill's statements support this when he said each of the five divisions of the company had separate balance sheets for accounting purposes. This is to keep track of raw costs while each division shares overhead in proportion to revenue (Neill, 2010).

Accounting and financial monitoring to insure stability is critical in a company that, as the publisher said, has "no real assets." "We're not mining gold, all we have is the brain-power of the people you have with you (Neill, 2010)."

Those people are another essential resource Contemporary Media shares between its publications. Evidence of this can be seen through the career moves within Contemporary Media described by those interviewed above: Phillips holds the positions of both staff writer for the *Flyer* and also entertainment editor for *Memphis* magazine; the managing editor for

*Memphis* magazine Frank Murtaugh, also writes sports for the *Flyer*; Davis has worked on both the business side and editorial sides of the *Flyer* and claims to have written for all of the company's publications except for one; in a reverse of Davis's departmental move at the *Flyer*, account representative Shara Clark started with the company as an editorial intern but then crossed over when the sales department needed a full time employee. As a director, Baer focuses on both *Memphis* magazine and the *Memphis Flyer* and said the same production staff in the advertising department is shared across all publications as well as some of the sales staff aiding in different areas.

Neill calls the web of relationships between publications and employees a "fire drill grid;" if a particular issue needs extra attention everyone available contributes. "Everyone's ambidextrous (Neill, 2010)." Each Contemporary Media publication still upholds its own individual unique points and strengths regardless of the crossovers in staff; in Murtaugh's "one-trick-pony" comment, he illustrated the demand for flexibility from the staff at Contemporary Media (Murtaugh, 2010). Davis attributes the allocation in staff to the change in economic climate; Davis added these changes have allowed for the company to be more unified than ever before (Davis, 2010).

By sharing staff between publications, occasional duplication of content is inevitable. Contemporary Media staff members acknowledge these *faux pas* as rare but admit they do happen. Occurrences for overlap in stories are possible because different writers and publications are simply unaware of what other company divisions are currently planning to include in upcoming issues, as Phillips mentioned (Phillips, 2010).



From an editor's perspective Murtaugh reasons that another cause for overlap in content between publications is due to the priority of a story in the news-stream. If an event or subject is important, it deserves coverage no matter the medium. Murtaugh's example of both the *Memphis Flyer* and *Memphis* magazine both concentrating articles on college football in mirrored issues due to the time published, football season, show this theory (Murtaugh, 2010).

Murtaugh also attributes duplicated content to the difference in publication schedules with the *Flyer* being weekly and *Memphis* magazine monthly. Phillips supported this idea adding that due to the *Flyer's* more frequent release the paper is more likely to break likely-to-be-repeated stories simply because it is published sooner.

With the comparisons and contrasts in content, distribution, finances, and readership both *Memphis* magazine and the *Memphis Flyer* are balancing to an equilibrium with one another. What first comes about as a "pot-hole" filler can evolve into a major enterprise.

Davis said stepping back through the history of *Memphis* magazine and tracing its evolution to the present is astounding. Now the *Flyer* fills the niche the magazine filled 20 years ago. The once "edgy" *Memphis* magazine has lessened its news and politics portions becoming more of a lifestyle magazine; while the hard-hitting *Flyer* now steps up to the plate in the areas the magazine has abandoned (Davis, 2010). Murtaugh calls the magazine a "variety interest" publication, marking it as a comprehensive manual for many different facets of life in the city (Murtaugh, 2010).

Defining the identity of each publication was a challenge Contemporary Media faced said Neill. Some lines are still blurred from time to time between the *Flyer* and *Memphis*

magazine; but the last 20 years have allowed for both to change, evolve, and finally find their place within the media world, within Memphis, and within the company.

Another researchable relationship that Contemporary Media's publications share is with the traditional daily newspaper of the area, *The Commercial Appeal*, and its weekly arts and entertainment supplement, *GoMemphis*.

Collectively most sources interviewed said the noticeable difference between the *Memphis Flyer* and *The Commercial Appeal* is the difference in publication intervals; the *Flyer* is a weekly paper and *The Commercial Appeal* is a daily. Phillips said the daily paper has an advantage over the weekly paper because it can deliver news at a fast pace. "By the time Thursday rolls around for us, it's not news anymore (Phillips, 2010)." Because of this realization the company does not view *The Commercial Appeal* as a rival in delivering news; as an alternative the publications occupy two different roles.

Instead the competition with the daily paper comes more in the advertising market; "...every advertiser they have we want and if they're honest they'd tell you the same (Murtaugh, 2010)."

Davis's account of Contemporary Media's sales department coming into possession of a media kit directly informing *The Commercial Appeal* on how to sell against the *Flyer* illustrates the dispute. Davis said this was evidence that the traditional newspaper saw the up-and-coming alternative as at least somewhat of a threat but the aggressive stance of the sales department is overshadowed by the friendly, good-natured rivalry between each paper's reporters. Davis optimistically said it was a strange rivalry, but that kind of friendly competition

allowed for the daily and weekly to offer an unexpected but welcomed support to one another (Davis, 2010).

A different comparison that Clark added to the discussion was that the *Memphis Flyer* is a “hyper-local” paper, heavily concentrated with news pertaining to the region of its publication. Where in addition to some local coverage as well, *The Commercial Appeal* is faced with the responsibility to also include national and world news (Clark, 2010).

The traditional daily’s publication schedule may be different from that of the *Flyer*, eliminating some potential need for comparison, but that same newspaper’s own *GoMemphis* is published on a weekly interval, identical to the studied alternative. *Commercial Appeal* and *GoMemphis* columnist Michael Donahue said that because the early edition always trumps the late edition, weeklies are charged by the daily papers to connect further with readers. They must give more than just headlines by the addition of inspiring content that initiates the minds of readers and satisfy a hunger for intellectual content to ponder and discuss (Donahue, 2010).

Donahue said *GoMemphis* had previously been known as *The Commercial Appeal’s* successful enterprise, *Playbook*; but was made over as *GoMemphis* to function as a stand-alone magazine as well as a newspaper insert (Donahue, 2010). Davis added that many traditional papers, not only in Memphis, with these types of inserts also took a head to head approach to compete with alternatives, falling into the movement, transforming and transplanting their arts supplements to stand-alone boxes. Some even went as far as to add news and political content attempting to create their own sort of alternative weekly. Davis theorized that the *Memphis*

*Flyer* responded early to the need to fill the alternative-void: “we can do just that, be a better *Playbook* (Davis, 2010).”

To be a better alternative, the *Flyer* has the freedom and expectation of risking more by pushing the boundaries of the traditional journalistic voice. With this bar raised, Reagar called *GoMemphis* more “safe,” but added that the rebellious vigil of an alternative paper did not ensure better writing only different concentrations to appeal to a different set of readers. In his comments Reagar pointed out that the alternative reader-set would connect more to the type of content an arts and entertainment focused paper offers, to the extent of further action due to what the reader has discovered within the alternatives pages (Reagar, 2010). The relationship with the targeted niche is more in focus through the lens of a true alternative.

According to Phillips, the *Flyer’s* brand has been very recognizable within Memphis since the alt-weekly’s creation. Because of its strong, recognizable brand Contemporary Media is not concerned with being trumped by *GoMemphis* (Phillips, 2010). In fact, an example of the *Flyer’s* confidence is seen in the 2010 edition of *Flyer’s Best of Memphis* issue (The Real Best of Memphis 2010, 2010), the three top columnists in the city were published as three writers from *The Commercial Appeal*. Contemporary Media publisher Ken Neill said, “We weren’t going to skew the vote in our favor just to have one of writers be included. That’s how the people voted; so that’s what we printed (Neill, 2010).”

Clark said the *Flyer’s* print news turnaround is not as instantaneous as their daily contemporary, but the alternative’s website did update instantly throughout the day as soon as the need to report relevant, breaking news arose (Clark, 2010). The comparison brings this

analysis to its third research question involving the Memphis publications studied: how has the increasing popularity of online journalism affected Contemporary Media, Inc.'s publications?

Comparing the print periodicals to what the web-scene offers, Davis said alternatives have always been available and always free of charge. Alternative newspapers lead the free content race even before the Internet began to offer the very same material at increased convenience (Davis, 2010).

Addressing the amplified expediency that the Internet offers, Murtaugh said, "The news cycle now is not even 24 hours." By the time the morning newspaper is delivered, the Internet has already broken the stories within its digital pages hours in advance. But Murtaugh rests soundly in that the two mediums can co-exist at least for now; people are still interested in the style of information browsing and newsgathering that Contemporary Media's products offer (Murtaugh, 2010). Like weekly papers must offer content on a higher plane than daily publications, reflecting on the statements of Donahue, print publications must offer content beyond that offered online.

Neill said the web's agenda is direct delivery of information, the first with raw facts and breaking news. The print products that are fading away are those that only focus on the delivery aspect of information, but reflective journalism like in magazines still maintain a place in the readers' market (Neill, 2010).

Print will remain in some way, Neill said, and the model will still attract advertisers. The battle with online sources for advertisers calls for the development of new strategies from print publications though. "Technology is the major game-changer," Baer said. "We all [alternatives

and traditional print sources] need to rethink revenue strategy. It isn't as simple as it once was (Baer, 2010)."

The most stable model is a cooperation of both print and online products. Like Neill said, established brands are more valuable than ever and now the web can aid in the protection of those brands. On the flipside, gaining initial traction to launch a web-only product is additionally challenging. "People who are going to survive now are those who take care of their brand online and off (Neill, 2010)."

Those involved with conventionally print publications must learn to adapt to the shift, accepting new duties in order to maintain stability in their founding medium and also increase online presence. According to Phillips, one example of these additional duties is the commitment of Contemporary Media writers to now contribute to online blogs (Phillips, 2010). Other online appendages Contemporary Media is using to "hype up" the online visibility of its publications are social media networks such as Twitter, MySpace, and Facebook (Clark, 2010). But the tour de force is an attractive and user-friendly website. These websites include auxiliary content, not included in print editions, and are interactive, allowing for patrons to be directly involved by posting comments to an article's site or forwarding material through email.

Online journalism is not the evolution of print; instead it is a catalyst, pushing journalist to attain a higher level of desirable news delivery. Donahue takes advantage of new opportunities by adding video content to his online columns. Without online blogs, Reagar's options as a freelance writer would be severely limited. Clark said online newsgathering is a companion to traditional journalism, not a threat.

Addressing the final research question, alternative newspapers, like the *Memphis Flyer* fill the need for increased and in-touch local content. In a world uninhibited by miles, linked through computers and cell phones, people are closer to Facebook acquaintances in other countries than they are with their next-door neighbors. Knowledge of national and world events dwarf attention to local affairs. Alternative publications balance these freshly skewed ratios.

Murtuagh said being local is a strength. *Memphis* magazine is not distracted by competitions with the 200 other magazines on the newsstand; Memphis magazine is concerned with Memphis (Murtaugh, 2010). Baer said Contemporary Media is effective, sustainable, and inspiring because it is local, because the company fuels the local economy, makes use of local talents, and exists to serve the local community. "I wouldn't feel right selling for a corporate entity (Baer, 2010)."

In the same vein, Phipps said she works for the *Memphis Flyer* instead of a paper like *The Commercial Appeal* despite possibly perks elsewhere because at the *Flyer* she writes articles that have an impact, stories that make a difference (Phillips, 2010).

Making use of local talents, Neill said keeping 50 people employed in time of recession is a public good. The public goods delivered by Contemporary Media do not go unnoticed. When Neill recalled the group of investors that purchased *Memphis* magazine to save it from foreclosure, those investors saw the potential for the local publication, potential that could serve a community. Leading to Neill's notion that local publications like *Memphis* magazine or the *Memphis Flyer* will one day be publicly supported in some way (Neill, 2010).

Alternatives and local arts and entertainment publications in general adhere to normative theory. From a different perspective, Donahue said he believes that there will always be a market for local entertainment journalism; rewarding creative energy instead of crime and comparable attention-grabbers, “It’s a way to get local people in the paper without them murdering anybody (Donahue, 2010).” This positive coverage adds some balance to the all too increasing epidemic of negative headlines.

## **Conclusion**

The knowledge gained through intimate study of Contemporary Media and the company’s publications has yielded a better understanding of the unusual but sustaining symbiotic relationship between *Memphis* magazine and the *Memphis Flyer*. Each publication fills a niche in the city; a strict focus on those niches, a careful grid of boundaries and opportunities is what allows these publications to survive and prosper.

Each publication also plays the roll of a building block within the greater company, Contemporary Media. These publications could exist separately, however they support of the parent company; other divisions and employees make way to maximize the potential of all.

Ultimately, this study has found the concentrated tactic of “staying local” to be key for the alternative and city magazine observed. Focusing the content of each publication on coverage of local matters of importance and also keeping the business within the boundaries of the city and its suburbs has built strong brands for Contemporary Media, Inc. This business model is widely applicable and has potential as an example of success for future publications.



## **Suggestions for Future Research**

A content analysis of *Memphis* magazine and the *Memphis Flyer* to trace and document each publication's changes in evolving to their respective brands should be a suggestion for a possible sequel to this study. Interviewees of this study spoke of how a steady evolution between the two publications transformed each, especially in the case of *Memphis* magazine's pedigree as somewhat of a previous alternative, then displaced by the *Memphis Flyer*, transforming the magazine to the lifestyle publication it is today.

Also, a survey of *Memphis* magazine subscribers asking for their thoughts on the *Memphis Flyer* could perhaps further identify crossovers in readership. These studies and others like them could add to the body of knowledge regarding not only Contemporary Media, Inc.'s publications but also expand academic research of alternative weekly newspapers and city magazines.

## Works Cited

- AAN. (2009 September). *The Memphis Flyer*. Retrieved 2010 21-September from Association of Alternative Newsweeklies: <http://www.altweeklies.com/aan/the-memphis-flyer/Company?oid=46>
- Armstrong, D. (1981). *A Trumpet to Arms: Alternative Media in America*. Los Angeles: J.P. Tarcher, Inc.
- Atton, C. (2002). *Alternative Media*. London: Sage Publications.
- Baer, P. H. (2010 September). Email Interview. (C. Cox, Interviewer) Memphis, TN.
- Baran, S. J., & Davis, D. K. (2009). *Mass Communicatin Theory: Fifth Edition*. Boston: Wadsworth.
- Bartlette, D. R. (2008 May). *Alternative Newsweeklies: Democratizing Print Journalism in an Age of Conglomerates*. Thesis . University of Arkansas.
- Benson, R. (2003). *Contesting Media Power: Alternative Media in a Networked World*. In *Commercialism and Critique: California's Alternative Weeklies* (pp. p111-127). Oxford, UK: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, INC.
- (2007). *C.V. for Kenneth Neill*. biography.
- City and Regional Magazine Association* . (2010). Retrieved 2010 15-September from Member Directory: Memphis Magazine: <http://www.citymag.org/City-and-Regional-Magazine-Association/CRMA-Membership/Member-Directory/index.php/dma/Memphis%252C%2BTN/city/Memphis/name/Memphis-magazine/listing/24671/>
- Clark, S. (2010 September). Email Interview. (C. Cox, Interviewer) Memphis, TN.
- Creative Loafing goes to battle with AJC*. (2003 3-June). Retrieved 2010 6-September from Atlanta Business Chronicle: <http://www.bizjournals.com/atlanta/stories/2003/06/02/daily20.html>
- Creative Loafing's New Generation. (2008). *Quill* , 96 (1), pp. 18-19.
- (1998). In J. W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Traditions* (pp. 61-64). Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications.
- Davis, C. (2010 17-September). (C. Cox, Interviewer) Memphis, TN, USA.
- Donahue, M. (2010 26-September). Interview at the Commercial Appeal. (C. Cox, Interviewer) Memphis, TN, USA.
- Dyrness, C. (2002 15-Aug). Durham, N.C.-Area Free-Weekly Newspaper Buys Rival. *Bews & Observer* .
- Fitzgerald, M. a. (2007). Chain Reaction Hits 'Alternative World'. *Editor & Publisher* , 140 (8), pp. 24-27.

- Fitzgerald, M. a. (2009). Ready for Takeoff? *Editor & Publisher* , 142 (5), 19.
- Hau, L. (2007 24-July). *Ambitious Move By Creative Loafing*. Retrieved 2010 2-September from Forbes.com: [http://www.forbes.com/2007/07/24/creative-loafing-reader-biz-media-cx\\_lh\\_0724bizcreative.html](http://www.forbes.com/2007/07/24/creative-loafing-reader-biz-media-cx_lh_0724bizcreative.html)
- Hernandez, D. G. (1994). In Quest of Baby Boomers and Generation X. *Editor & Publisher* , 127 (21), 13.
- Hundley, K. (2004 19-July). *Weekly Planet is back in its own orbit*. Retrieved 2010 2-September from St. Petersburg Times: [http://www.sptimes.com/2004/07/19/Business/Weekly\\_Planet\\_is\\_back.shtml](http://www.sptimes.com/2004/07/19/Business/Weekly_Planet_is_back.shtml)
- Iwan, C. (2000 27-September). *Creative Loafing to Sell Minority Interest to Cox*. Retrieved 2010 2-September from AAN News: <http://posting.altweeklies.com/aan/creative-loafing-to-sell-minority-interest-to-cox/Article?oid=1099>
- Ladd, D. (2009 23-April). *Alternative Journalism: Jackson Free Press (Lecture)*. Oxford, MS.
- Mcclelland, E. (2008). Hope I Die.. *Columbia Journalism Review* , 47 (3), 22-23.
- Memphis Magazine Wins Three National Awards*. (n.d.). (Contemporary Media, Inc) Retrieved 2010 21-September from Memphis The City Magazine: <http://www.memphismagazine.com/gyrobase/Magazine/Page?oid=17915>
- Memphis Most 2009. (2009 23-August). *The Commercial Appeal* .
- (2011). *Memphis: The City Magazine 2011 Media Kit*. Memphis, TN: Contemporary Media, Inc.
- Menand, L. (2009 5-January). It Took a Village: How the Voice Changed Journalism. *New Yorker* , pp. Vol. 84 Issue 43, p36-45, 10p.
- Moynihan, S. (2010). New Owners, New Life for Alt-Chain Creative Loafing. *Editor & Publisher* , 143 (4), 10-11.
- Murtaugh, F. (2010 16-September). (C. Cox, Interviewer) Memphis, TN.
- Neill, K. (2010 22-September). CEO/Publisher Contemporary Media, INC. (C. Cox, Interviewer) Memphis, TN.
- Phillips, B. (2010 14-September). (C. Cox, Interviewer) Memphis, TN.
- Phillips, B. (2010 6-May). *Herding Cats*. From Memphis Flyer: <http://www.memphisflyer.com/memphis/herding-cats/Content?oid=2067932>
- Phillips, B. (2010 22-June). *House of Mews Gets Adopted*. From Memphis Flyer: <http://www.memphisflyer.com/TheDailyBuzz/archives/2010/06/22/house-of-mews-gets-adopted>
- Reagar, J. (2010 September). Email Interview. (C. Cox, Interviewer) Memphis, TN.

Roberts, J. (2006 15-September). Memphis, Tenn., Business Magazine to Launch with 20,000 Copies. *Commercial Appeal* .

Sasso, M. (2009 25-August). New York Equity Firm Snaps Up Tampa's Creative Loafing. *Tampa Tribune* .

Schaffer, S. (2003 Vol. 25 Issue 1-Jan/Feb). Alt-weeklies Play Hard to Get with Adult Ads. *American Journalism review* , p. p16.

Scott, J. (2009 25-August). Creative Loafing chain sold to biggest creditor for \$5 million. *Atlanta Journal Constitution* .

Shaw, D. (1977). *Journalism Today: A Changing Press for a Changing America*. Harper's College Press.

Stanfield, D. W., & Lemert, J. B. (1987 Vol. 64 Issue 2-Summer/Autumn). Alternative Newspapers And Mobilizing Information. *Journalism Quarterly* , pp. p604-607.

The Real Best of Memphis 2010. (2010 23-29-September). *Memphis Flyer* (1126).

Vale, V. (1996). *Zines! Volume 1*. San Francisco: V Search.

**VITA**

Master of Arts Journalism: University of Mississippi	2010
Bachelors of Business Administration: University of North Alabama	2008
Associate of Arts Music: Northeast Mississippi Community College	2006