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JUST COUNTRY: A MAGAZINE PROTOTYPE AND BUSINESS PLAN

by
Clare Wojciechowski

A thesis submitted to the faculty of The University of Mississippi in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College.

Oxford, MS
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Approved By

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Reader: Doctor Jason Cain

Reader: Professor Evangeline Ivy

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my parents, without whom I would not be where I am today. Their unending support and love has guided me throughout my life and encouraged me to pursue all my dreams and passions. The idea for this thesis stemmed from two of my deepest loves; music and journalism. I owe both of these interests to my parents; my dad, who took me to my very first concert, and my mom, who has had a subscription to *People* magazine for as long as I can remember. I love you two always.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to start by thanking my advisor, Dr. Samir Husni. It was an absolute honor to spend this past year learning from someone who knows so much about the magazine industry. I have never met anyone so passionate about what they do, and I feel so lucky to have had the privilege to have him as my advisor and teacher this past year. Thank you for your unending guidance and pushing me to create the best magazine I could make.

I also want to thank the thesis readers, Dr. Jason Cain and Professor Evangeline Ivy, for being so willing to work with me through this process as well. The team of support they have all provided me with has been wonderful.

Lastly, I want to thank the Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College. Without the SMBHC, so much of my college experience would have been different. The opportunities I have been provided are unmatched and I will forever be grateful.

ABSTRACT

Through this thesis, I have aimed to understand how a print magazine can be successful in the digital age of 2021. In coming up with the concept of *Just Country*, I saw an area of popular interest that is not served well in the magazine industry. Through thorough research of magazines and country music, I have developed a business plan as well as a prototype for *Just Country: The 21st Century Country Music Magazine*.

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INTRODUCTION

As the home of country music, there is a need for a country music magazine in the United States. Country music fans are spread all across the 50 states and are in need of an outlet for their passion. With this magazine, fans will see pages of content devoted solely to country artists and the country music world. This magazine will see success because it will reflect the diversity of country music today; from honky-tonk sounds of Luke Combs, to pop-country of Sam Hunt, to country-rock of Chris Stapleton. There will be pieces of interest for every type of country fan. With multiple songs in the *Billboard* Top 100 every week, country music has maintained a mainstream audience.

People are not only interested in the music, but they are interested in the lives of the stars of country music. Thomas Rhett has 4.2 million followers on Instagram, Dolly Parton has 4.1, Luke Combs has 3.6; and that's just to name a few. These stars are popular in the media and fans want to keep up with them. With the combined new mainstream audience of country music and the old, devoted fans, this magazine will seek to fulfill all of their needs and wants. It will chronicle the lives of the stars, while also providing updates on the newest and best music.

Just Country will not be just a magazine. It will also create a community. The audience will feel like this magazine was made *for them*. It will unite people under common interests and provide a safe haven for them to share in their passion for country music.

Chapter 1: The History of Magazines

The first two American magazines were issued in 1741.¹ Benjamin Franklin came up with the idea of an American magazine after seeing British examples. Andrew Bradford, the editor of Franklin's newspaper, decided to create a magazine himself, and published *American Magazine* just days before Franklin published *General Magazine*.² Those first magazines were created not only as a new way to make a profit, but also to showcase American nationality to the mother country, England. That was 35 years before the signing of the Declaration of Independence, and America was already looking for a way to promote its independence and community.

However, magazines in that time were difficult to produce. The first two magazines lasted only a few months.³ Magazines were larger and heavier than regular newspapers, so there was difficulty in getting them delivered. The Postal Act of 1792 only increased these difficulties, as it resulted in lower postage rates for delivering newspapers and higher rates for magazines.⁴ Despite the challenges faced by magazines in the 18th century, the creation and passion for magazines is something that has lasted in America to this day. Magazine publishers did not give up; despite the creation and demise of many magazines, people persevered and continued to make new magazines.

¹ Mott, Frank Luther. *A History of American Magazines, 1741-1930*. Vol. 1, Harvard University Press, 1958.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

With literacy increasing throughout the states in the 19th century, magazines were able to target even more people than they hadn't before. From 1825 to 1850, more than 5,000 magazines were created in the US.⁵ Despite the rise of new magazines and wider audiences, the industry remained for those in the upper class, as production costs caused the prices of magazines to remain high. The first people to lower the price of magazines and allow middle-class citizens access were Samuel Sidney McClure, John Brisben Walker, and Frank A. Munsey.⁶ The three men revolutionized magazines by creating an advertising strategy that included both high circulation rates and high advertising rates.⁷ The high advertising rates allowed for the magazines to be sold for less than production costs, making them attainable to a large audience. This was the start of the advertising business model in magazines, a business model that remains today.

The 20th century brought about important changes to the magazine industry. The invention of the halftone and improvement of the printing press made costs decrease for printing images, allowing many magazines to utilize photos.⁸ *National Geographic* was one of the leaders in running images and photo spreads in magazines. That started when editor Gilbert Grosvenor created an entire page filled with photos in a 1904 issue due to lack of copy content.⁹ He expected to receive backlash for the lack of copy, but instead, the audiences loved it. With this great response, *National Geographic* continued to print photos in the magazine, which attracted more readers and new audiences. Soon after basic photography was introduced to the magazine world, photographers began to learn how to use their photographs to tell stories.

⁵ Mott, Frank Luther. *A History of American Magazines, 1741-1930*. Vol. 1, Harvard University Press, 1958.

⁶ Unwin, George, et al. "History of Publishing." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc., Oct. 2020, www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/482597/publishing/28679/Magazine-publishing.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Johnson, Sammie, and Patricia Prijatel. *The Magazine from Cover to Cover*. Oxford University Press, 2007

⁹ Ibid.

Photojournalism was introduced to America by *Life* magazine in 1936.¹⁰ *Life* was revolutionary in the way that it used often images to share their stories instead of copy.

Magazine readership grew exponentially in the 20th century. One important reason for this was the rise of education. In 1920, 32 percent of teenagers in America were in high school, but by 1950, that number was more than 77 percent.¹¹ In addition, there were 15 times as many college-enrolled students in 1960 as there were in 1900.¹² Those numbers are important in understanding the growing popularity in magazines that was taking place. Data suggests that the more educated a person is, the more likely it is that that person reads magazines. Eighty-six percent of college educated adults regularly read magazines, and 68 percent of high school educated adults read magazines.¹³

The 20th century also included a rise in specialized, niche magazines. In the 1960s, magazines were created with specialized audiences in mind. With the rise of college education, people's interests became more diverse. Colleges allowed people to pursue many forms of education and get a degree in nearly any subject. Magazine publishers noticed this trend in diversification of interests and tapped into it. In his book, *Magazines in the Twentieth Century*, Theodore Peterson says, "In the early sixties, one could scarcely name a specialized subject, from game breeding to geriatrics, that some magazine did not attempt to cover."¹⁴ In the time of newspapers, television, and radio, magazines were able to stay popular because of these specializations. While newspapers and televisions remained focused on broad categories,

¹⁰ Johnson, Sammye, and Patricia Prijatel. *The Magazine from Cover to Cover*. Oxford University Press, 2007

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Peterson, Theodore. *Magazines in the Twentieth Century*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press 1956.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

magazines provided an opportunity for readers to really explore and learn about a specific subject they were passionate about.

Chapter II: The History of Country Music

Country music in America has roots dating back to the early 1900s.¹⁵ However, it wasn't until the 1920s that country music would boom. In the summer of 1927 in Bristol, Tennessee, Ralph Peer of Victor Records led multiple recording sessions that would change history.¹⁶ The recordings produced from those sessions included, most notably, Jimmie Rodgers and The Carter Family. These recordings are known as "The Big Bang of Country Music."¹⁷ While these weren't necessarily the first sounds of country music America had heard, they were the factors that changed country music from a small audience into a national phenomenon.

While country music was being introduced to America, the Great Depression was well underway. From 1929-1933, the economic disaster in America changed almost every American's life. The need for a distraction and escape from life was prevalent in nearly every household. These needs led to the boom in the sales of radios. In 1930, there were 14 million radio sets in America.¹⁸ The rise of radios proved to be crucial for the rise of country music. Country "barn dances" played on Saturday nights, most notably the National Barn Dance, founded by WLS in Chicago in 1924.¹⁹ These shows displayed a variety of talent, but mainly featured country artists

¹⁵ Cusic, Don. *Discovering Country Music*. Praeger, 2008.

¹⁶ Mazor, Barry. "Country's Big Bang, Revisited." *The Wall Street Journal*, Dow Jones & Company, 7 Apr. 2011, www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052748703899704576205003814861580.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Cusic, Don. *Discovering Country Music*. Praeger, 2008.

¹⁹ Ibid.

and music. The barn dances that evolved in this time period allowed for amateur musicians to be in the spotlight, growing into professionals. A popular barn dance that emerged after the National Barn Dance was The Grand Ole Opry. The Grand Ole Opry began in 1927 and was broadcasted out of Nashville.²⁰ Following the way of the National Barn Dance, the Grand Ole Opry played on Saturday nights and featured many different country artists. The Grand Ole Opry grew in popularity as a radio show until 1934 when it began to be performed to a live audience.²¹ The show played in several different auditoriums until 1974, when the Grand Ole Opry House was built as a home for the show.²²

In the 1930s, radios were the main source of country music for the American people. The radio's Saturday night barn dances helped the genre grow in popularity. However, not long after the radio boom, country music had another breakthrough; this time in the cinema. Gene Autry, after creating a name for himself by performing on the National Barn Dance, paved the way for country music in movies.²³ *In Old Santa Fe* premiered in 1936 and was the first movie Autry performed in, paving the way for many other musical roles.²⁴ Gene Autry was known as one of the first "singing cowboys." The "singing cowboys" were a group of actors appearing in Hollywood movies that portrayed cowboys with musical talents.²⁴ These "singing cowboys" created a new sense of appreciation for country music among American people by illustrating a new image of what a country artist looked like.

²⁰ Malone, Bill C., and Travis D. Stimeling. "Grand Ole Opry." *Grove Music Online*. July 10, 2012. Oxford University Press. [www-oxfordmusiconline-com.umiss.idm.oclc.org/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-1002224530](http://www.oxfordmusiconline-com.umiss.idm.oclc.org/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-1002224530)

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Cusic, Don. *Discovering Country Music*. Praeger, 2008.

²⁴ Hemmerlein, Sandi. "Beyond Gene Autry: The Making of the Singing Cowboy Myth." *PBS SoCal*, 6 Sept. 2019, www.pbssocal.org/shows/country-music/beyond-gene-autry-making-singing-cowboy-myth.

In 1946, there were eight million music records sold in the United States, and country music accounted for 13.2 percent of sales.²⁵ That was also around the time country music began the shift to be centered in Nashville. After World War II, The National Barn Dance in Chicago began losing employees and advertisers. By 1957, the show ended, leaving the Grand Ole Opry to be the main form of country entertainment.²⁶ Nashville soon became the center for country music, as it was home to the Grand Ole Opry as well as the majority of recording studios.

The late 1950s proved to be a troublesome time for country music. With the introduction of rock 'n' roll, many artists recording in Nashville shifted their sound from country to rock, including Elvis Presley.²⁷ Many young country listeners shifted their listening, giving loyalty to the artists instead of the genre. With the majority of youth listening to rock 'n' roll, radio began playing rock 'n' roll instead of country, leaving country to nearly disappear from the radio.

In reaction to the growing popularity of rock 'n' roll, the Country Music Association was formed.²⁸ CMA was formed to keep country music on the radio, and by utilizing advertising agencies and sponsors, make the music profitable. Country radio once again was playing, and it climbed through the 1960s. As the audience and sales grew, so did the number of radio stations playing country music. In 1961, there were 81 stations playing country music full time. In 1969, there were 606.²⁹

While rock 'n' roll was booming, a new sound of country music evolved to compete: the Nashville Sound.³⁰ This new sound incorporated elements of pop music- less twang and more

²⁵ Cusic, Don. *Discovering Country Music*. Praeger, 2008

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Neal, Jocelyn R. "Country music." *Grove Music Online*. July 10, 2012. Oxford University Press. www-oxfordmusiconline-com.umiss.idm.oclc.org/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-1002224075

incorporation of drums. Patsy Cline was a pioneer of this new sound, as well as a new image for country music. She donned a sophisticated look, appearing in formal gowns and furs, as opposed to typical cowboy-western styles of other country artists.³¹

Patsy Cline also served as a pioneer for women in country music. Prior to Cline, Kitty Wells was the first to join the scene. “It Wasn’t God Who Made Honky Tonk Angels” was Wells’ breakthrough song, entering the *Billboard* charts in July 1952 and staying number one for six weeks.³² Women related to the sounds and songs of other women and their struggles, and appreciated country music in a new way. As a male-dominated genre, the introduction of women artists allowed for a new and expanding audience of other women.

In 1983, The Nashville Network and Country Music Television debuted on TV.³³ The rise of these stations allowed for country music to stay relevant as Americans changed from listening to the radio to watching television at night.

After the Nashville Sound evolved, the sound of country continued to change through the 80s and 90s. Artists began pushing boundaries, allowing the definition of country to broaden. The 1990s illustrated a decade of change, with sounds of rock, pop, and the old sound of honky-tonk finding their ways into the genre.³⁴ Today, country music maintains the balance of tradition and change. Country music in the 21st century combines all the elements of what it used to be, as well as pushing the boundaries of the definition of country.

One of the most notable introductions in the last decade is the rise of Lil Nas X to the country scene. Lil Nas X is a perfect example of pushing the boundaries of what country music

³¹ Cusic, Don. *Discovering Country Music*. Praeger, 2008

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Neal, Jocelyn R. "Country music." *Grove Music Online*. July 10, 2012. Oxford University Press. www-oxfordmusiconline-com.umiass.idm.oclc.org/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-1002224075

is. As a country and hip-hop artist, he put his own spin on the definition of country and proved to be successful. “Old Town Road,” his debut single, spent 19 weeks in the *Billboard* charts, and even led to remixes with other artists, including Billy Ray Cyrus.³⁵ At the 2020 Grammy awards, he performed “Old Town Road” alongside Billy Ray Cyrus, BTS, Mason Ramsey, and Diplo, and won two awards for the song.³⁶ John Meachem says Lil Nas X “offers a hopeful sign that in a world where all lines are blurring, broad audience acceptance of artists of color may be the next big front in country.”

Country music has always reflected America and the story of its people. As the world has evolved, so has country music. It has reflected gender, income, and even racial struggles. It is a storytelling genre, providing an escape for those who need it.

³⁵ MEACHAM, JON, and TIM MCGRAW. “Whose Country?” *TIME Magazine*, vol. 194, no. 7, Aug. 2019, pp. 50–53. *EBSCOhost*, search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=138066434&site=ehost-live&scope=site.

³⁶ Jefferson, J’Na. “Lil NAS X PERFORMS “OLD TOWN ROAD: 2020 GRAMMYS” Recording Academy, 26 January 2020, g.<https://www.grammy.com/grammys/news/lil-nas-x-bts-billy-ray-cyrus-enter-old-town-road-multiverse-2020-grammys>

Chapter III: Country Music Magazines in America

Country music recognition in popular, well-established magazines such as *Billboard* led to the growth of the genre in the middle of the 20th century. It was not until 1944 when *Billboard* added a new “folk” section to its record reviews that country was recognized in music magazines.³⁷ In 1948, *Billboard* also started to include country music in its charts section. The coverage of country music in *Billboard* legitimized the genre as well as increased respect.

As more respected music magazines began recognizing country as its own genre, new magazines were created devoted solely to country music. At the time, there were three main types of country music magazines: cowboy music magazines, country music radio guides, and general country music magazines.³⁸ The creation of these magazines allowed for the popularity of country music to grow in a new way; creating this publicity generated interest in not only the music, but also the artists themselves.

One of the most significant magazines created in the 1940s was *Country Song Roundup*. Beginning in 1949 and ending in 2000, it was the longest lasting of these early magazines.³⁸

Through the end of the 20th century to the beginning of the 21st, America saw the rise and fall of countless country music magazines. Two of the most popular and successful were *Country America* and *Country Weekly*. *Country America* lasted 14 years,

³⁷ Armstrong, Don. “Reflected Glory: The Birth of Country Music Journalism, 1930s-50s (Part 6).” *Music Journalism History*, 23 July 2019, www.music-journalism-history.com/2019/07/12/reflected-glory-the-birth-of-country-music-journalism-1930s-50s

³⁸ Armstrong, Don. “Reflected Glory: The Birth of Country Music Journalism, 1930s-50s (Part 4).” *Music Journalism History*, 15 July 2019, www.music-journalism-history.com/2019/07/12/reflected-glory-the-birth-of-country-music-journalism-1930s-50s/.

printing from 1989-2003.³⁹ *Country Weekly* ran in print from 1994-2016, rebranding in 2016 to Nash Country Daily, a digital media platform.⁴⁰ Both magazines chronicled all aspects of country music, from the lives of the stars to the popular songs and albums of the times.

³⁹ CMT.com Staff. "Country America To Shut Down." CMT News, 7 Aug. 2003, www.cmt.com/news/1476057/country-america-to-shut-down/.

⁴⁰ Roland, Tom. "Country Weekly' Magazine Cuts Staff, Goes All-Digital." Billboard, 20 Apr. 2016, www.billboard.com/articles/columns/country/7340787/nashville-weekly-cuts-staff-goes-all-digital/.

Chapter IV: Magazines in the Digital Age

With the rise of digitalization, people all across America are getting their information online. Despite this trend, a need for print remains. In an article published about how neuroscience has proven the advantages of print, Scott McDonald lists three findings from studies.

1. “Paper-based reading is widely associated with better transfer to long-term memory and clearer comprehension.”
2. “Memory and comprehension from paper-based reading is likely enriched by the multi-sensory experience of holding and manipulating paper.”
3. “In the case of advertising, print advertising activates neural activity associated with desirability and reward.”⁴¹

These three conclusions help the understanding of why print magazines are still important. Neuroscience has proved the effects of print vs. digital in a person’s mind: print is long-lasting, while digital lasts only seconds.

That is not to say that there are not increased challenges for print magazines in this digital age. Many people are more inclined to consume their content from their phone or computer, as it proves to be much easier. Many magazine brands have ended their print publications, changing to a digital-only format. However, thousands of “niche” magazines are currently successfully surviving in print.⁴² Niche magazines are smaller publications designed for a specialized

⁴¹ McDonald, Scott. “What Can Neuroscience Tell Us About Why Print Magazine Advertising Works?” *MPA - The Association of Magazine Media*, Sept. 2015, www.signetresearch.com/assets/MPA-Neuroscience-White-Paper-f1.pdf.

⁴² Baker, Kevin M. “How Niche Magazines Survive and Thrive Through an Industry in Turmoil.” *Publishing Research Quarterly*, vol. 34, no. 3, 2018, pp. 407–416., doi:10.1007/s12109-018-9592-1.

audience. Kevin Baker did a study in 2018 of three niche magazines and how they are surviving in print. He identified three components of each of these magazines that help them remain successful: audience devotion, digitalization, and digital subscriptions.⁴³ ⁴²Each of these magazines is a print magazine with a devoted readership. However, each magazine also offers digital content in addition to print content. With this digital content, they can increase revenue by allowing for print subscriptions and digital subscriptions. Using this study, as well as McDonald's findings can help understand what makes a print magazine work in a largely digital world.

Today, creating a magazine must fulfill every want of a consumer. It must be able to differentiate itself from any other magazine, and have the consumer feel like they need to know what is inside its pages. By creating an entire brand around the magazine, every aspect of a consumer's wants is fulfilled. A magazine must not be the only aspect of the brand; it must be an extension of it. Thomas Troland used the example of the success of *Martha Stewart Living* magazine when he said,

“Martha Stewart built a thoroughgoing infrastructure of presence in TV, on radio, in books, in syndicated newspaper columns, at retail. Each was an extension of the concept and value proposition of *Martha Stewart Living* and its satellite special interest magazines. Because the value of the magazine had been established long before the reader came upon it in a store or found it offered in the day's pile of direct response mail, *Martha Stewart Living* had the advantage in a zero-sum game of magazine sales.”⁴⁴

Martha Stewart Living was everywhere before the physical magazine even hit the shelves. It could be found in so many different aspects that by the time the magazine came out,

⁴³ Baker, Kevin M. “How Niche Magazines Survive and Thrive Through an Industry in Turmoil.” *Publishing Research Quarterly*, vol. 34, no. 3, 2018, pp. 407–416., doi:10.1007/s12109-018-9592-1.

⁴⁴ Troland, Thomas R. “Seeing Ahead: Underpinnings for What Is next for Magazine Publishing.” *Publishing Research Quarterly*, vol. 20, no. 4, 2005, pp. 3–13., doi:10.1007/s12109-005-0043-4.

its audience was so familiar with the brand that it could not wait for the newest part of the brand experience: the magazine.

A magazine enhances its brand. The brand and the magazine must go hand-in-hand, and when executed well, they contribute to the others' success. Joe Pulizzi, former CEO of the Content Marketing Institute said, "You put out a beautifully produced magazine that's targeted to your audience's needs, they are going to engage with that and pass it on to their friends and colleagues. It's become awfully crowded online. It's hard to break through the clutter."⁴⁵ A magazine helps the brand stand out; it is something physical, tangible that audiences can interact with and hold. Having a magazine gives the reader a sense of belonging to a community. It is like being a member of an exclusive club; not everyone has a subscription to every single magazine. Not only is it a sense of community, but the audience also gets a sense of ownership when they are holding their magazine. Samir Husni says of this feeling of ownership, "You own the print product. It's in your hands. No one can take it away from you. You can throw it away, you can keep it, you can cherish it; no matter what type of relationship you want, you can have it, it's yours."⁴⁶

In 2019, magazines in America reached a total readership of 228.7 million people. While this number includes both print and digital content, print remains the primary way readers subscribe to magazines.⁴⁷ The American people are proving in their habits that there is still a magic element to print. It is not going away, no matter how hard digital might try.

⁴⁵ "How Print Magazines Are Powering Audience-First Brand Marketing." *Imagination*, 4 May 2020, www.imaginepub.com/print-magazines-audience-brand-marketing.

⁴⁶ Husni, Samir. "Print: How Do I Love Thee. Let Me Count the Ways..." *FIPP*, 16 Mar. 2021, www.fipp.com/news/print-how-do-i-love-thee-let-me-count-the-ways/#.

⁴⁷ *2020 Magazine Media Factbook* (pp. 1-96, Rep.). (2020). Washington, DC: MPA-The Association of Magazine Media.

Chapter V: What is a Magazine?

Magazines are defined in *The Magazine from Cover to Cover* as, “printed and bound publications offering in-depth coverage of stories often of a timeless nature. Their content may provide opinion and interpretation as well as advocacy. They are geared to a well-defined, specialized audience, and they are published regularly, with a consistent format.”⁴⁸

Magazines have a few different classifications. The most popular type of magazine in America is the consumer magazine.⁴⁹ The consumer magazine is created for popular consumption by the general public. Examples of popular consumer magazines today include *People*, *Good Housekeeping*, *Southern Living*, and *Time*. These magazines can be purchased at a newsstand or from a subscription. Another type of magazine is a business-to-business magazine.⁴⁹ These magazines can also be referred to as trade magazines. The content of these magazines is catered to people in a specific profession/industry. These magazines are mainly subscription based due to the specificity of their content. The third major type of magazine is a custom magazine.⁵⁰ These are magazines from companies that aim to present their products or services in a positive light.

Magazines are typically split into three sections: departments, features, and columns.

⁴⁸ Johnson, Sammye, and Patricia Prijatel. *The Magazine from Cover to Cover*. Oxford University Press, 2007.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

Departments are the sections of the magazine that remain constant every issue.⁵¹ These typically include the table of contents and letter from the editor.⁵² Here is where magazines can include checklists, charts, and graphics. The following are the departments of *Just Country*'s first issue:

- Table of contents
- Welcome to the World of Country (Letter from the editor)
- Country Crossword
- Country Style
- Country Spotlight
- Who's on Tour
- Social Media Roundup
- Q&A
- In the News (2 pages)
 - Taylor's New Fearless
 - Life Rolls On
- Fast Facts
- Album Review

Columns are special articles of the magazine that are written by experts in the field or well-known people of interest.

Finally, the features section is what differs in every issue. These are typically longer than departments, as they are more in-depth with longer quotes and greater detail. The features are what keeps the audience interested and coming back for more. The first issue of *Just Country*

⁵¹ Husni, Samir. *The Definitive Guide on How to Launch Your Own Magazine*. Magazine Innovation Center, 2019.

⁵² Ibid.

will focus on the women of country music, so the features will all display this theme. For this issue, these are the features:

- Then and now: featuring Shania Twain and a timeline of her career, from the 1990s to present day.
- Women's History Month: celebrating the women of country music.

Chapter VI: The Business Plan

CONCEPT

Just Country magazine is a well-designed, visually appealing magazine focused on country music and country music stars in the United States. It is a quarterly magazine with four issues a year.

Just Country magazine is for those who have a deep love for country music. As the only American magazine solely devoted to country music, the magazine will have a devoted audience of music lovers. The magazine is focused on modern country music, but will occasionally feature classic artists from the 20th century. There is something for everyone in country music; and that is what you will find in this magazine.

AUDIENCE

My magazine audience is mostly female, as research shows the majority of people who read magazines are. They have a deep love for country music. Their favorite pastime is driving with the windows down, blaring their favorite country song. They are interested in magazines such as *People* and *Us Weekly*. They are between ages 18-35. They love attending country concerts, and their favorite concerts are the outdoor concerts in summer. The majority of my audience lives in the South, but there are audience members across the United States.

I am aiming to establish a long-term relationship with this audience. As many of them already are interested in similar magazines, my hope is they will cherish this magazine more as it has a more focused theme. As long as they love country music, they will love this magazine.

COMPETITION STUDY

While country music is occasionally featured in popular magazines such as *Rolling Stone* and *Billboard*, and artists are often featured in *People*, there are no print magazines solely focused on country music in the United States. The only current magazine, *Maverick*, is UK based. With six issues a year, *Maverick* has a successful readership of 35,000. However, as it is UK based, *Just Country* will be able to differentiate itself by focusing solely on the United States.

Country Weekly and *Country America* were two country music magazines in the United States that no longer publish. *Country America* ran from 1989-2003, producing two magazines a month.⁵³ *Country Weekly* was a print publication from 1994-2016. In 2016, it changed to a digital-only platform, *Nash Country Daily*.⁵⁴ The print publication had 35,000 subscribers before the change to digital.

By looking at these two magazines and the patterns they share, they both published at least two magazines a month. *Just Country* will be a quarterly magazine, publishing only four times a year. By only publishing four issues a year, *Just Country* will be able to save printing costs. In addition, readers will be allowed to savor the content of each magazine, by giving them enough time between each issue.

Three successful music print magazines are *The Fader*, *Under the Radar*, and *American Songwriter*. While these are not country music magazines, they are relevant to *Just Country* as they are American music magazines with successful print publications, as well as a digital presence. Looking to these magazines for inspiration and guidance will prove beneficial to the

⁵³ CMT.com Staff. "Country America To Shut Down." CMT News, 7 Aug. 2003, www.cmt.com/news/1476057/country-america-to-shut-down/.

⁵⁴ Roland, Tom. "'Country Weekly' Magazine Cuts Staff, Goes All-Digital." *Billboard*, 20 Apr. 2016, www.billboard.com/articles/columns/country/7340787/nashville-weekly-cuts-staff-goes-all-digital/.

success of *Just Country*. *The Fader* is published quarterly, has a subscription of 39,000 and sells an average of 58,500 newsstand copies.⁵⁵ *Under the Radar* is an indie music magazine, but also features TV and book reviews. It is published five times a year, with a circulation of 65,000 and 15,000 total subscribers.⁵⁶ *American Songwriter* is a bi-weekly magazine based out of Nashville focusing on news and helpful tips from the music industry. While the audience is mainly made up of songwriters, the magazine is relevant to *Just Country* and the music industry. *American Songwriter* has 30,000 members with a subscription to the print magazine and digital content.⁵⁷

By studying the current competition print magazines, as well as the magazines no longer in circulation, *Just Country* can use these ideas to formulate a successful business plan.

CIRCULATION

To launch our magazine brand and increase awareness before the first issue, we will launch a website and social media accounts. There will be an Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, and Spotify account. Through these platforms, viewers will be able to see sneak previews of content to be shown in the first issue of the magazine. Social media will also allow for partnering with celebrities, which would in turn increase followers and then increase subscriptions.

On the website, viewers will be able to subscribe to the magazine as well as digital content. Many successful print magazines today utilize this combination of print subscriptions and digital. *Just Country* will follow this technique by posting special articles on the website that will only be accessible to those who have the digital subscription. There will be packages on the website for both a digital and print subscription, with reduced costs for those who sign up for

⁵⁵ "The FADER." *FADER MEDIA*, advertising.thefader.com/platforms/print/.

⁵⁶ "Advertise: Under The Radar Magazine." *Under The Radar*, www.undertheradarmag.com/advertise/.

⁵⁷ Advertising " American Songwriter. 19 Feb. 2021, americansongwriter.com/advertising/.

both. For those who subscribe to the magazine before the first issue, we will offer a “founder’s” price and exclusive digital content.

The first issue will be sent to the subscribers and also be placed on the newsstands. In addition to this distribution, we will have controlled circulation. We will distribute the magazine at Stagecoach, the biggest country music festival in the country. Stagecoach is the ideal place to promote the magazine, as the audience for Stagecoach matches up with our target audience. In addition, Stagecoach takes place in April every year, lining up perfectly with the launch of the first issue.

BUDGET

Because *Just Country* will be a brand-new magazine, it is unrealistic to expect revenue in the first year and, possibly, the second. Because of this, the magazine will have to raise enough money before launch to sustain the first year of print. Investors are necessary to help sustain these expenses.

The expenses of a magazine are most simply broken down into three categories: printing and distribution, content creation, and staff salaries. The most important and fixed of those three is the printing and distribution. When the printing company gives a quote for the estimated cost, that number must be paid upfront. The average cost of printing a magazine is between \$.75-\$1.50 per issue.⁵⁸ For the first issue of *Just Country*, 10,000 copies will be printed. For those copies, we will need to budget at least \$15,000. Since there will be four issues in a year, we must budget at least \$60,000 for printing.

⁵⁸ Husni, Samir. *The Definitive Guide on How to Launch Your Own Magazine*. Magazine Innovation Center, 2019.

With the estimation of printing costs, it is a safe estimate to multiply that number by three to include the other elements of the expenses: content creation and staff salaries. This is a way to ensure a safe estimate; however, there are ways to reduce costs for content creation and staff salaries. By keeping the staff small, there will be less people to pay. Content creation can also be negotiated by finding writers and photographers who will create the content for little compensation.

The first issue will be the test of whether or not the publication is going to be successful. After the first issue goes to print and is on the newsstands, the best way to see the results of this test will be to see how it has sold. If 40 percent of the issues on the newsstand have sold, that will be a good sign.⁵⁸

The total budget for the first year of Just Country is around \$180,000. This is found by multiplying the estimated costs of printing by three to account for content creation and staff salaries as well.

ADVERTISING

In order to best plan for the advertising we are aiming to sell, we need to look at what the magazine audience is interested in. The magazine audience is obviously interested in music; this provides a great place to advertise Spotify, Apple Music, or any of the other competing streaming services. The audience loves going to concerts; therefore, Ticketmaster, StubHub, or other ticket-selling sites would also be relevant advertising.

Many country artists have their own liquor brands: Kenny Chesney has Blue Chair Bay rum, Thomas Rhett has Dos Primos tequila, Zac Brown has Uncaged wine, and many more. Any of these would be relevant to the audience's interest, as the majority is over the legal drinking

age and also would be interested in supporting their favorite artists' endeavors. Looking at what the audience is interested in will help decide what will be the most successful advertisements to show in the magazine.

In addition to advertisements in the magazine, *Just Country* also will incorporate advertisements on the website. We will sell packages of print and digital ads, allowing the advertisers to get the best coverage possible.

CONTINGENCY PLAN

Creating a magazine is taking a huge risk; it is an expensive endeavor that is practically guaranteed to not see revenue for at least a year.⁵⁹ Because of this extreme risk, it must be well thought out and concisely planned for before launch. In this planning, all possible outcomes must be thought of and explained in the contingency plan.

Magazines have a rate of 60% dying within the first year.⁶⁰ The magazine must stand out and have something unique about it in order for it to survive. *Just Country* can be successful because of the lack of competition; no magazines in the United States today are solely focused on country music. With the amount of country music fans in the United States, combined with the amount of people who still read magazines, there is a large audience for this magazine.

Funding is going to take a while; with this in mind, we will plan to have the proper funds a year prior to the launch magazine; having the funds together a year prior will allow time in case of any delays.

After the first magazine launches, if the newsstand does not sell well, we will cut the number of issues printed by 25%. If the issues on the newsstand sell over 90%, we will increase

⁵⁹ Husni, Samir. *The Definitive Guide on How to Launch Your Own Magazine*. Magazine Innovation Center, 2019.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

printing by 25%. If after the first year, we sell over 90% of the newsstand copies for the four issues and the subscription sales are high, we will increase the frequency of the magazine from four times a year to six times a year.

CONCLUSION

Just Country magazine will be America's only 21st century, country music magazine. The business plan was formulated for the magazine by thoroughly analyzing past country music magazines that were published in the United States as well as current music magazines. There is an untapped market for a country music magazine, and by creating the magazine as well as the brand itself, the audience will have all of their needs met and more.

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