

Some Thoughts on ezines

A few years back, I decided to start moving from print media to ezine format as the primary venue for my columns, papers, and stories. Motivated mostly by those abysmal and rapidly falling author payment rates. Which, in real dollars, are now less than *one tenth* of what they were thirty years ago. As well as those "slow pay" and "no pay" policies of publishers who routinely milk (and sometimes actually butcher) their authors as cash cows. As several tech hobby magazines now seem to be circling the drain, I started none too soon.

Are newsstand print mags and trade journals doomed?

I certainly think so. At least those of them that insist in staying unmodified in their present formats. Brought about by the simple fact that advertisers will no longer stand still for the way things were. And thus creating an unavoidable downward revenue-pages-quality spiral.

Let's review a few of the more obvious ezine benefits...

The *advertiser* gains...

- immediate targeted quantifiable results
- absolute and total accountability
- single-step sales closure
- full color at zero extra cost
- no bingo boingo blippo bango
- easy changes, splits, tests
- active archives that earn forever
- much lower per-sale costs

The *reader* gains...

- faster, better, and more timely info
- convenient 2 am delivery worldwide
- full text searchability and web indexing
- immediate hot links to further resources
- magnifiable details and hard copies
- optional sound, animation, and video
- going directly to relevant interests
- no obnoxious blow-ins or junk mail

The *author* gains...

- being first with freshness and immediacy
- absolute control of appearance and layout
- not having to pay others to make stupid mistakes
- full color plus animation, video, and sound
- a backlist archive that earns forever
- far fewer fingers in the pie
- simple and easy error fixing and updates
- the ability to link to tutorial or advanced content

And the *publisher* gains...

- no makeready, printing, or presswork
- less labor from far smaller staff
- no fulfillment hassles or costs
- no distribution scams or remainders
- no postal fees or bureaucratic hassles
- ability to focus on timely quality content
- 24 hour worldwide readership
- back issues continue to work for you

Dynabooks and the Straw Man

"But touchy-feely magazines look a lot better and I can take them to the beach/lunch/airplane/carpool/bathroom/kayak/couch". Sorry, but when you go to the ezines in my *Guru's Lair* at www.tinaja.com, you'll find that at least my own stories consistently look *much* better online than they do in print magazines.

And have done so for many years.

Reasons include the full color, careful layout, and the superb properties of the magnifiable and anti-aliased *Adobe Acrobat* PDF files. Files which average a mere 12K per page. Along with super sneaky *picojustification* and hyphenation algorithms. Not to mention the web-only features of hot linking, all-word searches, and full indexing.

There is no doubt that a low cost magic "appliance" will shortly appear which actually looks better and works more conveniently than a conventional magazine. I'll go with Alan Kay's original name of a *Dynabook* for such a device. I will further predict that these will be given away free as promotional items within two decades.

I see Dynabooks ultimately showing two full pages at once with uncompromizing legibility, brightness, and battery life. Along with smaller "pocket" models that can go anywhere a paperback book can.

The latest crop of Dynabook equivalents are finally more or less readable at more or less acceptable prices. And that crucial legibility issue is now aggressively getting addressed on many fronts. Use of true anti-aliased (rather than low pass filtered) fonts can make an amazing difference. Going to the old Apple II scheme of *sub pixel resolution* can give you a near tripling of text legibility. Carefully matching the content and presentation to the exact display being used helps bunches. Plain old improved resolution is not all that far away. But it obviously pays to newly play every trick in the book to maximize what you can do with the pixels you have on hand.

Getting Paid

I do not see there's too fine of a distinction to be drawn between an author not getting paid very well from his own ezines compared to his grudgingly getting paid far too little way too late or not at all by a conventional publisher. But my own ezines definitely are positive cash flow profitable.

The traditional magazine model of "advertisers pay the costs" and "subscriptions and newsstand sales make your profit" no longer applies. Online readers flat out will not stand still for subscription fees. Because they know that better material is available "free" elsewhere. Even requiring a registration or a password is largely unacceptable and will dramatically lower your readership.

Here are the mechanisms I am currently exploring to pay for my ezines...

- [banner advertisements](#)
- [conventional display ads](#)
- [InfoPack consulting services](#)
- other consultant referrals
- book and CD sales
- ongoing online auctions
- surplus bargain sales
- reprints and special collections
- seminars and training sessions
- service and barter trades

"Wag the Dog" Survival Strategies

What can an existing magazine do to survive the ezine onslaught? First and foremost, they should recognize that the old economic rules no longer apply. The way things were no longer seem viable. Instead, the foremost web rule of *give a lot away to sell a little* should dominate.

Second, they should aggressively create a superb quality and high profile website. One that, at the very least, should contain freely downloadable Acrobat PDF full copies of *all* issues older than three months, links to all advertisers and other sites of interest, with an extensive body of free but obviously high quality reference material. Plus a genuinely useful site search feature that can fuzzily find any word in any issue at any time. Additional reader support in the way of forums and responsive email should also obviously be provided. Such a website should constitute a major portion of *all* time and effort being spent.

Third, future content should get adjusted to be as web friendly as possible. For openers, shorter stories largely in landscape format with web compatible graphics. Or longer material broken into manageable pieces. Extensive hot links internal to content leading to more fundamental or more advanced tutorial material. Or to all mentioned suppliers or products having a current website. Including those of competitors. All links must be carefully maintained.

Fourth, their web site should get used for the orderly transition between traditional and electronic content. And ultimately become the tail wagging the dog. Website technology should be continuously optimized to deliver the best possible Dynabook legibility and appearance.

Fifth and most important, authors and other content developers should be given a *much* larger role in what they say and how they say it. And be paid lavishly enough to attract the best possible talent. And paid on time.

For More Assistance

A useful sampling of 5000 or so ezines can be found at meer.net/~johnl/e-zine-list

Examples of working ezines include my [Tech Musings](#), [Resource Bin](#), [Hardware Hacker](#), [Ask the Guru](#), and my [Blatant Opportunist](#), among others. Reach examples of these by clicking on their respective MUSE, RESBN, GURU, HACK, and BLAT buttons on www.tinaja.com

Much more on these concepts appears as tutorial files on the same website. Especially the webmastering library at www.tinaja.com/weplib01.html More details on sub pixel resolution are in my [MUSE132.PDF](#). Details on a method of gaining superb web images appears as [IMAGIMAG.PDF](#).

"Cash and carry" consulting services can be picked up at www.tinaja.com/info01.html page while ongoing custom programs, seminars, and training are now available per my <http://www.tinaja.com/consul01.html> Capabilities are found in www.tinaja.com/donbio.html

Let's hear from you. ♦

Microcomputer pioneer and guru Don Lancaster is the author of 35 books and countless articles. Don maintains a US technical helpline you'll find at (520) 428-4073, besides offering all his own books, reprints and consulting services.

Don has catalogs at www.tinaja.com/synlib01.html and at www.tinaja.com/barg01.html

Don is also the webmaster of www.tinaja.com You can also reach Don at Synergetics, Box 809, Thatcher, AZ 85552. Or you can use email via don@tinaja.com

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