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MAGAZINE INDUSTRY PAID INTERNSHIP STUDY

Feasibility Study Final Report

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Executive Summary

Research Objectives

How will magazines continue to attract new, diverse, skilled talent? And in this tough job market, how will young people with the skills and desire find a way to build careers in magazine publishing?

Magazines Canada, with funding from the Ontario Media Development Corporation, carried out a research study to ask the industry how—working together—we can bridge this market gap.

Through phone interviews with a range of key stakeholders and an online survey sent to Magazines Canada members, this feasibility study on an industry paid internship program was designed to:

- Understand the sector's current experience with paid internships and assess the needs, gaps and opportunities among publishers, interns and educational partners.
- Understand requirements and identify benefits of a paid internship program; test response to potential funding and program models.
- Measure the degree of interest of magazine publishers and students/prospective interns in a paid internship program.
- Provide recommendations based on the research findings.

Publisher Perspective

"Creating opportunities for new talent to enter the market is crucial to the diversity and survival of our industry."

- Multi-title Publisher, BC

"It's important to pay your interns. Unpaid internships are archaic and don't do our industry any favours."

- Multi-title Publisher, AB



Research Methodology

The research was carried out in three stages between December 2016 and March 2017.

1. Environmental Scan

The study began with an analysis of existing paid internship models and best practices in various industries and sectors, including publishing, arts and cultural organizations, industry associations, foundations and private sector companies.

2. Qualitative Research

To gather market insights and inform the questions for the online survey, the researcher conducted 22 one-on-one stakeholder phone interviews with the following:

- Three organizations with existing paid internship programs.
- 11 magazine publishers (three cultural, four business-to-business, four consumer.)
- Five interns (one current student and graduates/former interns from 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015.)
- Three post-secondary educational institutions.

(See Appendix C for a list of stakeholders consulted.)

3. Quantitative Survey

Magazines Canada member contacts were emailed individually and invited to participate in an online survey open between February 12 to March 3, 2017. The survey received 86 total responses out of 283 survey invitations to deliverable email addresses—representing a statistically valid sample with a 95% confidence level and a $\pm 10\%$ margin of error.

Because companies may publish more than one member title and multiple member titles may be represented by a single contact in the Magazines Canada database, the survey asked whether their organization published more than one title and, if so, how many were Magazines Canada members. With this information (and by removing one instance of multiple responses from the same company) we were able to determine that the 86 responses represented 161 individual member titles as follows: 65 business-to-business titles (40%); 54 consumer titles (34%); 42 cultural titles (26%)

The survey results shown in this report are raw data from the 86 responses in the total sample and have not been adjusted in cases where a single response represents more than one member magazine.

Of the 79 responses indicating province of operation, 44 were in Ontario (56%); 14 in British Columbia (18%); 11 in Alberta (14%); and 3 or fewer from each of Quebec, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Yukon and New Brunswick.



Key Findings

There's strong publisher interest in an industry paid intern program.

When asked to rate their degree of interest in participating in a magazine industry paid intern program, a combined 89% of respondents indicated that they were either very interested (59%) or somewhat interested (30%.) Final comments were enthusiastic: urging action, offering thanks for undertaking this initiative, asking for updates about future developments, and even volunteering to assist.

Publishers see paid internships as beneficial to interns, their organizations, and the industry.

When asked their opinion on the value, if any, of an industry paid intern program, almost two-thirds of respondents strongly agreed that it would create a way into the industry, offering interns training and employment in a difficult job market. Over half of respondents strongly agreed that it would help the industry develop a more diverse talent pool. And over one-third strongly agreed that interns provided a source of digital expertise and innovation.

Internships lead to employment and investment in human capital.

Internships provide young people with specific job skills as well as workplace readiness training, helping

them develop “soft skills” like communication, collaboration, problem solving and agility.

Publishers see interns as their first source for new hires. 64% of respondents answered yes when asked if they had hired an intern in the past. A subsequent question asked the respondent to enter the number of interns their magazine or company has hired over the past 5 years—the cumulative impact was 184 new jobs.

The main barrier to paid internships: cost.

Publishers who said they hadn't had a paid intern in the past two years (69%) said that it was primarily because they can't afford it. For lean publishing operations, other issues have affected this decision, including the lack of physical space, the limited return on their investment of time and people resources to recruit, hire, train and manage short term internships, and difficulty finding qualified interns with the right combination of skills and genuine interest in the magazine. Some publisher comments referred to the challenges of having a paid intern in a virtual office, or a magazine run by part-time staff or volunteers.

Despite these limitations, 39% of respondents who hadn't had paid interns accepted unpaid student interns as part of their educational work placement, and made the commitment to enhance this experiential learning opportunity through on-the-job training, mentoring and industry connections.

Key Findings

When there's funding support, publishers will invest in paid interns.

In the survey, 31% of respondents answered yes when asked if they had paid interns in the past two years. Almost all said they had some form of funding—specific grants or donations, or from programs run by government, government agencies, and charitable or non-profit organizations.

Though the sample size was too small to cross-tabulate by province (with the results of any comparison being unreliable), there is some suggestion in the numbers that publishers based in Alberta or British Columbia are more likely to have paid interns than those based in Ontario. A significant number of write-in comments noted that specific respondents had taken part in paid internship initiatives offered by Magazines BC and the Alberta Magazine Publishers Association.

The preferred program model: maximum autonomy, flexibility and inclusive eligibility criteria.

Given the number of micro and small businesses represented in the survey, it's no surprise that respondents preferred a grant funding model over co-funding—primarily because they were concerned about having the financial resources to cover their 50% share of co-funded costs. They also strongly supported a program that would allow them to find and hire their own interns, based on the premise that magazines know their specific needs and are best suited to managing the process.

Respondents opted for flexibility in the timing of intern starts (year round) and duration of internships (at least three to six months) and wanted as broad a definition of intern eligibility as possible to allow for more diversity, quality and choice—including current students in post-secondary programs, graduates within the past five years, mature career changers or any individual with a high school diploma, demonstrated interest, aptitude and transferable skills.

Bridging the gap: key issues to address.

- **Lack of human resources capacity.**

Of those respondents who said yes to having paid interns in the past two years, 93% indicated that committing the time and resources to recruit, hire, train and manage interns was, to various degrees, difficult.

- **Job market information gap.**

40% of respondents with paid interns found it moderately to very difficult to find interns with the right skills and interest in their magazines. On the other hand, 30% of respondents found it not at all difficult. Through survey comments and in the initial phone interviews, a number of business-to-business and regional publishers expressed their frustrations at sourcing qualified interns. The mismatch in supply and demand may be due to differing degrees of brand recognition, as well as a general lack of awareness (among educational institutions, students, and the broader job market) of the wide range of niche magazines and the variety of job training opportunities they represent.

- **The need for a more diverse talent pool.**

Publishers are looking for a variety of voices, experiences and backgrounds in interns. Similarly, post-secondary institutions are themselves working to increase diversity and inclusion in their programs. What actions can publishers, educators and Magazines Canada take to create a more diverse group of applicants?

Recommendations for further actions

The research findings point to key opportunities for taking action through greater collaboration within the industry and partnerships with educators and funders.

1. Work to design and secure resources for a pilot program.

Magazines Canada members have a strong interest in providing job training through paid internships, but the biggest barrier is the financial risk to these micro, small and medium-sized enterprises. Mitigating publisher financial risk through funding will create more opportunities for paid internships, and help realize benefits to job seekers, publishers and the magazine sector.

How to determine the resources required for a national industry program?

There are 400 Magazines Canada member magazines across Canada. Factors to consider in assessing program costs include varying provincial minimum wage rates, publisher capacity for a co-funding contribution, length of internship and whether the magazine has the structure to support a full-time or part-time intern. A sliding scale for funding based on an individual publisher means test may be optimal but adds another layer of administration to a program that publishers would prefer to see streamlined.

To reduce some of the complexity, the funding model recommendation is to provide more funding (75%-100%) for cultural magazines in recognition of their constrained financial resources while sharing the cost (50% co-funding) with consumer and business-to-business magazines.

2. Test a simple program model.

The research found that publishers wanted the autonomy to recruit and hire their own interns and had significant doubts about the benefits of Magazines Canada serving as an intermediary in the recruiting process. The recommendation is to test a program based, in part, on the initiative set up by the Alberta Magazine Publishers Association (AMPA), where publishers apply in advance for funding and then undertake their own recruiting and hiring. In line with the research findings, it's recommended that the test program allow for year round start dates, three month terms, and a broad criteria for internship eligibility.

In order to move ahead with a simplified pilot program, this report recommends introducing a phase one test with a small number of Ontario-based business-to-business magazines—a segment that appears to have a significant gap in intern supply and demand as well as challenges finding qualified applicants for available job openings.

A pilot with 15 participating Ontario business-to-business magazines, where each hires an intern for a three month period in 2018 with a 50% co-funding model shared between the publisher and Magazines Canada, represents a total pilot program cost of \$96,000 for wages and benefits, and would require additional people resources from Magazines Canada to develop, implement and assess the pilot.

Potential timelines for pilot implementation:

Next 6 months: share report findings with stakeholders, secure financial resources to fund the pilot program, develop pilot program guidelines and materials, communicate and promote the pilot to members.

October-November: applications for co-funding accepted, assessed and participating magazines notified.

January-December 2018: pilot program active. Magazines Canada works with educational partners and other stakeholders to help drive awareness of the paid internship opportunities.

3. Help build publisher HR capacity through training and resources.

The demand on staff time and resources to hire, recruit, train and supervise interns was cited by publishers as the most difficult part of an internship program. Magazines Canada can help address this issue by providing support for publishers through training and resources, such as creating a best practices handbook for publishers, offering webinars and conference workshops, and providing publishers with ready-made templates for job descriptions, interview questions and performance reviews, along with tips for promoting internship postings to a broader audience.

4. Build partnerships with post-secondary institutions in order to:

- Raise awareness with students and educators of the variety of magazines (business-to-business, cultural and consumer in different geographic regions) as well as the breadth of internship opportunities (going beyond editorial content creation to the demand for skills related to graphic design, digital platform development, social media, marketing and communications, sales, audience development, and event management.)
- Provide post-secondary programs with real-life feedback on industry needs and skills requirements.
- Collaborate with design-focused post-secondary creative incubators and centres for multimedia innovation to work with students with advanced digital skills (in areas such as UI, UX, AI, and AR) on R&D projects that would explore new ways for magazines to develop content, tell engaging stories and connect with audiences through emerging technologies.

5. Drive awareness through marketing and communications to increase the diversity of the talent pool.

Leverage the collective audience reach of Magazines Canada members in order to raise awareness of magazine career opportunities and on-the-job training provided by paid internships.

Conclusion

Publishers have a strong interest in an industry paid internship program and recognize its potential benefits to interns, publishers and the industry as a whole. Survey findings show that past magazine internships have provided a pathway to employment, and so more paid work placements would represent a larger economic benefit as well.

Magazines Canada is well-positioned to bring stakeholders together to develop a program that will help mitigate financial risk as well as empower and support publishers with resources, marketing and new educational partnerships to help them in their efforts to attract, recruit, train and mentor new diverse talent.

Given recent high profile reports calling for more investment in paid work placement opportunities—such as those from the Ontario Premier’s Highly Skilled Workforce Panel and the Business Council of Canada’s Higher Education Roundtable—the timing is right to move ahead with developing and testing a magazine industry paid internship program.



Appendix A: Acknowledgements



Ontario

Ontario Media Development
Corporation

Société de développement
de l'industrie des médias
de l'Ontario

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Appendix B: Researcher Biography

If asked to respond to this industry survey at various points in her career, consultant and researcher **Sharon McAuley** would have checked a number of boxes to identify “type of magazine”, having worked in all three magazine categories—as the Group Publisher of consumer titles (*Toronto Life*, *Where Canada*, *Ottawa Magazine*), cultural titles (*Quill & Quire*) and business-to-business titles (*Investment Executive*, *Finance et Investissement*)—for both medium-sized and large companies. Although her career is based in Toronto (large, urban centre), she was born and raised in Northern Ontario in Sault Ste. Marie (population 73,368.)

As an industry consultant, Sharon specializes in helping magazines achieve their goals through new business development, driving revenue through sales and marketing strategy, audience development and operations management. Over the course of her career, she has worked with over 50 Canadian magazines as a Magazines Canada Travelling Consultant. Contact her directly at **sharonmcauley119@gmail.com**.



Appendix C: Summary of Stakeholders Consulted

Phone interviews took place between December 16, 2016 and February 22, 2017.

Associations and NGOs

- Alberta Magazine Publishers Association
- Independent Publishers Association of Ontario
- Journalists for Human Rights

Publishers

- Actual Media
- Annex Business Media
- Brick Magazine
- Broken Pencil Magazine
- House and Home Media
- Law and Style Media
- Observer Publications
- On The Bay Magazine
- Rogers Communications
- Red Maple Foundation
- Your Workplace

Post-secondary Programs

- Centennial College Book, Magazine and Electronic Publishing
- Sheridan College Design, Illustration & Photography
- Western University, Master of Media in Journalism and Communications

Students and Former Interns

- Current student, Centennial College Book, Magazine and Electronic Publishing
- Graduate 2015, Centennial College Book, Magazine and Electronic Publishing
- Graduate 2014, Carleton University Master of Journalism
- Graduate 2013, Simon Fraser University Master of Publishing
- Graduate 2012, Centennial College Book, Magazine and Electronic Publishing