

**It's showtime,
folks!**

And payday.

**Events are
becoming a
substantial
source of new
revenue**



POLL: Do events deliver
over 10% of total revenue?
WATCH: Inside the GQ
Comedy Extravaganza



Some publisher's events drive as much as 20 per cent of total revenues, plus events diversify revenue sources, deepen connections with audiences and sponsors, help hike circulation, attract advertisers who might not advertise in the magazine's media, give magazines "face time" with their subscribers and potential subscribers, and have high growth potential.

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Most publishers do not have hundreds of advertisers queuing up on the street, praying for the chance to buy expensive advertising inventory that has already been sold out.

But some publishers do have waiting lists of hundreds of consumers clamouring to spend thousands of dollars to attend the magazine's sold-out seminars and summits.

Welcome to the red-hot world of events.

Some publishers are reaping millions of dollars in event income, representing as much as 20 per cent of total revenues.



The many benefits of events

As good as the revenues are, the side benefits of events are at least as good. According to the American Press Institute, events:

- Boost exposure
- Diversify revenue sources
- Are much harder to disrupt than other revenue sources
- Deepen connections with audiences and sponsors
- Hike circulation
- Beat the competition to ownership of a niche
- Expand relationships with businesses and institutions that may add more to a publisher's coffers over time
- Attract advertisers who might not advertise in the magazine's media
- Break news
- Raise the magazine's stature among consumers and key players in a niche
- Reward subscribers with special access
- Give magazines "face time" with their subscribers and potential subscribers
- Change organisational culture
- Have high growth potential

Given the continuing decline of print advertising, publishers around the world are looking for replacements and are finding events to be a lucrative alternative.

"There's money in this business," media analyst Ken Doctor told MarketPlace.org. Advertisers who might be hesitant about advertising in print see more and different

Advertisers who might be hesitant about advertising in print see more and different value in sponsoring events. "There's money in this business."

Ken Doctor, media analyst



value in sponsoring events, Doctor believes.

The various event advertising and sponsorship opportunities give sales staff all sorts of flexibility to offer clients options to meet their needs, including pre-event promotions, sponsorship of separate sessions at the event, digital advertising, pre-roll advertising on videos of the event, sponsorship of streaming video from the event, event signage, booths, 60-second pitches to the full audience, etc.

Events work for all types of publishing companies

The list of publishers diving into events in a big way should remove any doubt as to their efficacy: *Vanity Fair*, *Sports Illustrated*, *Cosmopolitan*, *Esquire*, *Fortune*, *Wired*, *Bon Appetit*, *Men's Health*, and *Essence*.

And, despite the big-name nature of that line-up, medium and small publishers are also finding new revenues in events because they are not so much about scale as about value and connections leading to new subscriptions and new revenues.

The three media poster children for runaway success in the events game are The Atlantic Group, Condé Nast International, and *The Guardian* newspaper.

Condé Nast International: Niche events

Condé Nast International has created an impressive set of events, each unique to its market and targeting reader and advertiser needs in that market.

For example, *Vogue* India's executives noticed the wedding market growing at a stunning rate of 25-30 per cent per year. While they recognised that wedding exhibitions were a dime a dozen, those events did not cater to affluent families with big wedding budgets.

So, in 2014, *Vogue* India launched an invitation-only *Vogue* Wedding Show, connecting the discerning Indian consumer to the finest brands in the bridal space.

Vogue India also created the *Vogue* Wedding Book, a keepsake directory featuring each participating brand. The book, selling in books stores for a year, was a huge success. After the initial run, brands that did not participate in the show were invited to be in the book, and contributed to a significant increase in revenue.

In Russia, Condé Nast Russia launched an

invitation-only Condé Nast Russia Digital Day delivering both gate and sponsorship revenue. A Digital Day app extended both content and advertising opportunities.

And in Britain, GQ, which has developed

a reputation for comedy, took the next logical step and extended that reputation into its first-ever GQ Comedy Extravaganza. The event sold out the 3,500-seat Hammersmith Apollo theatre and coincided with the 2014

Five magazines nailing events

In addition to *Fortune* and *Atlantic* mentioned in the main story, what other magazine media are innovating successfully with events?



1 BLOOMBERG

What's the innovation in Bloomberg's approach to events?

They took note of the tack every other boat was taking, and set sail in the opposite direction.

Less is now more at Bloomberg.

Rather than continue to add new events to their roster (a risky proposition), Bloomberg announced in early 2015 that it had decided to run fewer, more high impact events, doubling down on those that already work for them and replicating those events around the world.

Bloomberg's three biggest events — "The Year Ahead" and its tech and finance summits — will be expanded to Asia, Europe, and the Middle East, and will be rebranded as Bloomberg Live (instead of Bloomberg Link).

Bloomberg also plays the exclusivity card: "Our gatherings bring together influential people with others in their peer group. In this environment, participants engage in open discussion

that leads to learning from each other's expertise and experience," the company announces on its website. "We take a proactive approach to connecting participants with each other, supported by the savvy use of technology and delivered through extraordinary, personalised customer service. Attendance is by invitation only and limited to ensure peer-to-peer interaction and open discussion."

The focus on fewer, bigger, proven events may reflect the experience of the executive hired in January 2015 to lead the re-imagining: Stephanie Mehta, whose last job was co-chairing *Forbes* "Most Power Women" summit, a blockbuster if there ever was one.



2 VANITY FAIR

Is something an innovation if it seems terribly obvious, but just wasn't being done?

In the case of *Vanity Fair*, that would appear to be the case and the innovation would be simply

leveraging your Rolodex.

The magazine's first-ever conference ("The *Vanity Fair* New Establishment Summit") was a big-ticket extravaganza with a speaker and guest list made up of just whom you'd expect if *Vanity Fair* editor Graydon Carter and his connections opened their address book. And they also marketed it as you'd expect — with unparalleled hutzpah: "An intimate forum at which the titans of technology, business, and media engage in important, exclusive conversations about the future [with the] pioneers, influencers, and disrupters who have driven the age of innovation."

And indeed it was: The speaker list included luminaries like Tesla founder Elon Musk, film-maker George Lucas, film producer Judd Apatow, HBO head Richard Pepler, and Twitter CEO Dick Costolo, venture capitalist Marc Andreessen, YouTube CEO Susan Wojcicki, Entrepreneur Michael Bloomberg, Walt Disney chairman and CEO Bob Iger, etc.

As a result, 350 attendees paid US\$5,000 each for the privilege, netting the company more than US\$2 million in new revenue.

No surprise: The second annual "VF New Establishment Summit" is already scheduled for October 2015.

GQ comedy issue hitting the newsstands. The second Extravaganza will take place in 2015.

Atlantic: An event machine

The Atlantic Group is one of two hands-down

leaders in creating, running, and profiting from series of events.

From a standing start in 2006, Atlantic Media now runs 125 events a year, and has doubled revenues over the last four years to



3 SPORTS ILLUSTRATED

Sports Illustrated's innovation could also fall into the "what took them so long?" category.

What started back in 1964 as a five-page supplement has grown to become a billion dollar (US) business, generating between seven and 11 per cent of the magazine's total annual ad revenue, according to various sources. *Forbes* called it the swimsuit issue: "a billion-dollar industry".

In addition to the actual print edition, there have been TV shows, DVDs, video previews, even a reality show. But until February 2015, there was no event other than a Las Vegas launch party.

That all changed in a big way in February.

Sports Illustrated (SI) threw a massive, two-day "Swimville Fan Festival" in Nashville Feb. 11-12 that included concerts by ten emerging Nashville artists, highlighted by the popular band Kings of Leon. Two city blocks were closed off for the event to make room for exhibits, live music from ten emerging Nashville artists, and **model appearances**.

"I saw the potential for something to be way bigger," *SI* publisher Brendan Ripp told

AdAge. "The strategy was to build the most consumer-facing swimsuit franchise in brand history. Let's bring swimsuits to our fans and consumers [and] be younger, broader, bigger. Nashville is helping us check off all those boxes."



4 FORTUNE

In a world where some publishers run events for free and let sponsors pay the freight, *Fortune* had the nerve to actually raise its already stratospheric admission fee of US\$7,500 by US\$1,000 to US\$8,500 for its three-day "Fortune's Most Powerful Women (MPW)" event. Four hundred attendees paid the fee, and 250 others on the wait list wish they could have.

Fortune live-streamed the conference (more sponsorship and advertising opportunities), and offered consumers backstage glimpses via Twitter and Instagram (yet more sponsorship and advertising opportunities). Those videos live on at fortune.com, garnering hundreds and in some cases more than 10,000 views (more advertising opportunities). One video (the Warren Buffett session) received 85,000 views.

No fools, the folks at *Fortune* launched a sister MPW

conference in London three years ago. Then, at the 2014 MPW event, *Fortune* announced:

- A daily MPW newsletter ("daily dish" in their words)
- A Most-Powerful-Women-focused channel on Fortune's website, and
- A piggyback conference "MPW Next Generation" starting in 2015



5 GLAMOUR

Create your own hot niche, and own it.

That's what *Glamour* did back in 1990. The magazine decided to launch a "Women of the Year" awards campaign and ceremony. Organisers were probably thrilled at the turnout for the first presentation at New York City's iconic Rainbow Room: 250.

Last November, 3,000 executives, movie stars, athletes, activists, singers, designers, academics and more attended the 2014 "Women of the Year" awards ceremony at Carnegie Hall in New York City.

In addition to the good cause of highlighting the achievement of women across industries and callings, the campaign draws ad revenue and media coverage for *Glamour*, as well as building its relationship with Hollywood where it solicits many of its cover models.



Vogue India launched an invitation-only Vogue Wedding Show, connecting the discerning Indian consumer to the finest brands in the bridal space with all sorts of activities and interviews with key players in the high-end wedding market

Best practices: Event ethics

Digiday surveyed some top publishers to find the best practices in the area of the ethics of running events. Here is a summary of what they found:

- ***The New Yorker***

Programming: Editorial decides the speakers and agenda.

Sponsor involvement: Sponsors can't participate in the festival (although the content doesn't quite lend itself to sponsors like Acura and MasterCard, two of this year's festival backers.)

- ***The Atlantic***

Programming: The Atlantic's journalists have final say over the content.

Journalist participation: According to The Atlantic's exhaustive guidelines (one of the few to be posted online), its journalists are encouraged to participate and attend but may not be pressured to do so.

Sponsor involvement: Underwriters are clearly communicated to event attendees. Sponsors must be called "underwriters" and not "co-host." They may participate on panels if they have no economic interest in the outcome, or if an opposing view is included, among other stipulations.

- ***Fortune***

Programming: Editorial decides the programming.

Journalist participation: Reporters and editors attend but aren't required to participate.

Sponsor involvement: Speaking roles aren't sold as a benefit of sponsorship, but sponsors may be asked to be on the agenda if editorial deems them suitable, which happened when AT&T sponsored Fortune Brainstorm Tech and editorial invited AT&T's chairman and CEO to sit on a panel.

- ***TechCrunch (Disrupt, Engadget's Expand)***

Programming: The editorial side sets the agenda.

Sponsor involvement: Sponsors can buy a booth and go to networking events, but aren't included in programming. "Sponsors can't buy their way on stage," said Ned Desmond, COO, TechCrunch.

- ***The Washington Post***

Programming: Editorial directs all content.

Sponsor involvement: They may make introductory remarks; if they're newsmakers, they may be asked by editorial to be on panels.

- ***The New York Times***

Programming: By staff overseen by the general manager and editorial director of conferences,

Sponsor involvement: They're not on panels unless they're coincidentally picked by the editorial team that independently creates the programme.



Vogue India also created the Vogue Wedding Book, a keepsake wedding directory featuring each participating brand. The book, selling in books stores for a year after the event, was a huge success.

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The Atlantic Media event organisers (a 30-person staff) are also not shy about asking attendees to fork over big bucks. The largest conference, the week-long "Aspen Ideas Festival", costs as much as \$3,000 for a four-day pass. Four thousand people happily open their wallets every year.

But big-ticket events are not Atlantic Media's bread and butter: the majority of the other 124 events cost much less. For example, the "New York Ideas" conference drew 815 people at \$149 each and "Start-Up City: Miami" enticed 700 people at \$75 a pop.

The Guardian: An even bigger event machine

The Guardian's innovation? Go big, or go home.

One year from now, The Guardian will cut the ribbon on a 30,000-square-foot renovated warehouse that will serve exclusively as the home to Guardian events.

Seriously.

In late 2014, the world's third largest news site announced it was completely redeveloping a decrepit, two-story warehouse in the heart of London and converting it into "Guardian Space" to host dozens of events

every week. Most media companies don't host dozens of events every year.

But the warehouse is just an extension of an already robust events operation at The Guardian. Beginning last autumn, *The Guardian* was actually running and/or sponsoring a mind-boggling several hundred events a week across the UK.

The key to this massive "events, activities and courses" initiative was partnering. The company identified educational and cultural institutions around the UK with whom to

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produce and co-produce the events.

Events are not a slam dunk

All of the above is not to say events are risk-free cash cows just waiting to be milked.

What might look like sure-shot winners turn out to be busts. Lack of communication between editorial and advertising can doom a conference. Expenses can get out of control. Misjudging the potential audience can result in empty halls.

And the competition in the events field is heating up as other publishers and outside operators realise how much money is to be made in running successful events. The

events market in the US alone is estimated to be a US\$40 billion business, and corporations are now earmarking 10 per cent of their marketing budgets for events, according to media analyst Ken Doctor.

“Events are competitive,” *New York* magazine publisher Larry Burstein told *Digiday*. *New York* runs four events including “Vulture Festival” and “New York Culinary Experience”. “Each of ours exists in a competitive environment and requires a personality as unique as the brand from which it’s inspired. They require constant innovation to appeal to ticket buyers, and sponsors. Pricing, concept, advertising are constantly being rethought.”

In the niche of events focused on women, magazine executives estimate the number of those events has tripled in just the last two years. “I feel like we’re reaching kind of a saturation point,” *More* editor in chief Lesley Jane Seymour told *The New York Times*. “I feel like it’s everywhere. Everybody’s doing it; everybody’s trying to get in on this.”

The eight categories of events

- Corporate/Industry events
- Education and training workshops
- Galas and awards
- Lifestyle expos
- Cultural events.
- Social events
- Idea festivals
- Political events

Don’t succumb to unethical behaviour

In addition to competition, there are the ethical questions that must be handled properly or the event and the sponsoring magazine run the risk of losing money and credibility.

Poor handling of event ethics can blow back on a publisher in nasty ways. *The Wash-*

ington Post, for example, created salons where sponsors could pay US\$25,000 to get access to high-level government officials. Those salons were discontinued after a tsunami of very public, very damaging bad press.

The trick is to get advertisers involved without giving them the keys to the event, and getting editorial staff involved without conveying the impression that their coverage can be bought.

Getting it right is lucrative

If the Atlantic Group's experience is any indication, events can be one of several substantial alternative revenue sources to replace declining print advertising income.

Aside from intrusion by competitors, once a magazine owns an events niche, there is little that can disrupt that revenue stream.

So, what are you waiting for? When's your first event?

Thirteen great event planning tips

Several media organisations have created checklists for media company event planning based on the experiences of their members. We have curated the best from the International News Media Association, the American Press Institute, and the MediaShift/Knight Projects Idea Lab:

1. *What do you know about your audience?*

What are their passions? Who are your high-performing audiences? What are their information needs?

2. *Who and what will you compete with?*

Identify media and event companies that also produce events in your geographical or topical turf. Consider your other competition — "abstract" competitors such as long commutes, traffic, family obligations, etc.

3. *Brainstorm your creative ideas*

Brainstorm whatever comes to mind, whittle away at the list later.

4. *What kind of event would work best?*

Based on the target audience, the subject matter and the potential advertisers and sponsors, what format would serve all of them best.

5. *Craft an initial budget*

Create a spreadsheet for revenue versus expenses. Who are the most likely potential sponsors/exhibitors and what can you uniquely offer them for what price? What are your key expenses, and how could you creatively cut costs without harming quality?

6. *How will you promote this event externally?*

Think creatively about all the possibilities, then narrow the list later. If you partnered with another organisation, how could they promote the event?

7. *How will you get your staff involved and excited?*

Success and energy for events comes from your staff's motivation and understanding of their role. How can you get them involved and contributing to its success?

8. *Start with a single event*

From your idea list, which event would have the greatest chance of success given your staff and resources? And which single event would attract the most top-tier desired sponsors and partners?

9. *Hire a proven leader*

People who are experienced event planners can help make your event more successful, more efficient, and generate more revenue. Search for someone with the personality of an entrepreneur, who also has a track record of creating a vision and executing it successfully.

10. *Recognise the power of your brand and use it*

Your publication has the power to convey messages that carry weight among your audiences. An events company without your resources will have trouble getting its foot in the door. So promote the event in print and online intensely.

11. *Reward subscribers*

Use events to reward your current subscribers. Provide advance access, discounted rates, subscriber-only events and meet-and-greet opportunities with stars in your niche.

12. *Repurpose content*

Live stream the event, post the video or audio afterwards, Storify the social media coverage, write a follow-up piece. Video highlights have a life of their own, and reports and publications coming out of the events can promote and raise awareness about your next event.

13. *Launch a new content channel*

Determine if the interest generated by the event merits the creation of a new content channel with new revenue opportunities based on the event advertising or sponsor list.