

# OUTLOOK

◆ Spring 2009 ◆

## PUBLICATION SPOTLIGHT:



### Total Redesign Was Easier Done Than Said

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Imagine what it would take to completely redesign your healthcare publication. There'd be seemingly endless meetings to attend, dozens of mock-ups to view, focus groups to organize, and lengthy discussions about fonts and graphics and colors and mastheads and tables of content and folios and on and on and on...

Ugh.

That's exactly what I envisioned last fall when our two graphic designers at the American College of Physician Executives (ACPE) suggested that we redesign our flagship publication, *The Physician Executive—Journal of Medical Management*.

Luckily, I was wrong.

The journal, distributed to 10,000 ACPE physician members and a few hundred non-member subscribers, has been published by the association for nearly 25 years. Readex surveys show it is widely read.

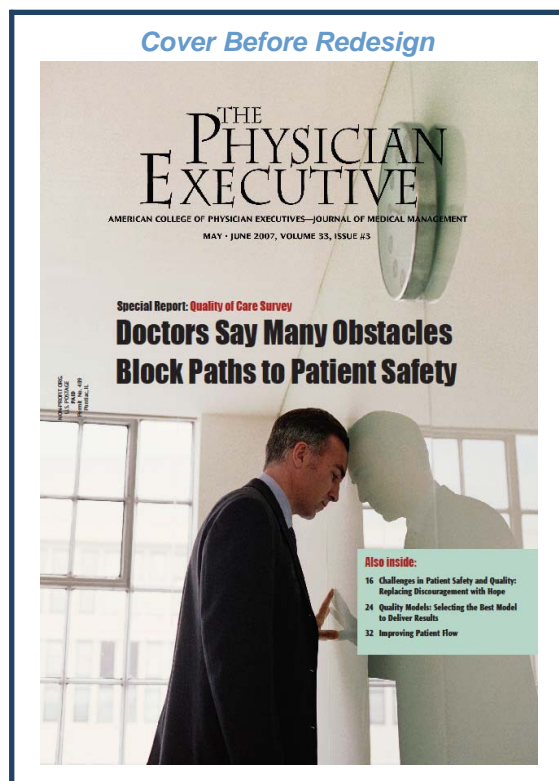
Its content focuses on the business aspects of running hospitals, group practices, health systems and other types of healthcare organizations. Primarily, the journal's articles come from three sources:

- ◆ Submissions from ACPE members
- ◆ Articles commissioned from doctors and business experts
- ◆ Freelance assignments.

The graphic designers—Jill and Steve, a husband and wife team—came up with the idea for a redesign in November 2008, and wanted to debut the new look in January 2009. I thought they were crazy to think we could pull off such a feat in less than two months.

Luckily, the environment here at ACPE encourages innovation while simultaneously placing a great amount of trust and accountability in each employee. It's a very flat organization where everything is accomplished quickly by small teams.

Jill and Steve, along with me and three other employees, made up the team to oversee the redesign. Within



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## Publication Spotlight: The Physician Executive

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two weeks, the designers had already put together a couple mock-ups of a new cover.

One of their most radical suggestions was to downplay the formal name of the journal and simply label it the “PEJ”—a slang term used by the ACPE staff for more than a dozen years when referring to the journal.

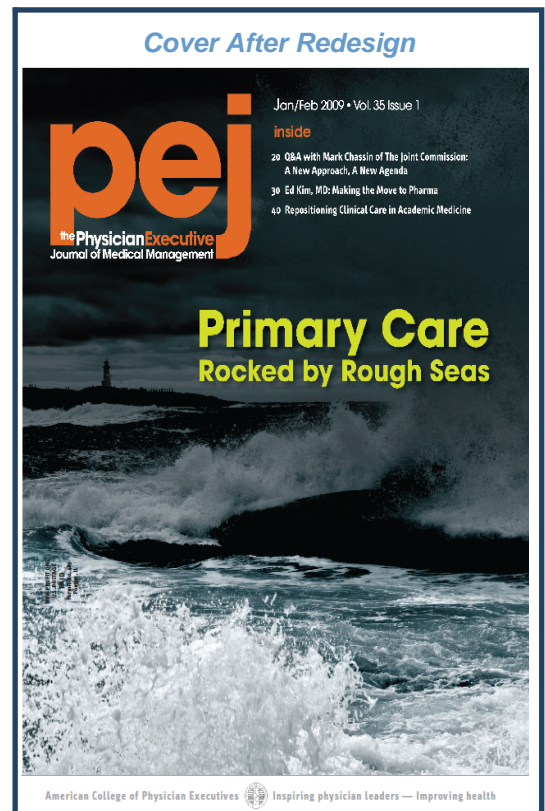
While Jill and Steve turned their attention to the inside pages of the journal, I took the mock-ups on tour. Amazingly, the new covers won approval from nearly the entire staff and a few members who viewed a .pdf of the new look. After a few minor tweaks, the cover was good to go.

Redesigning the inside pages took even less effort. Steve is something of a font junkie. He can identify

even obscure fonts instantly, and he has keen eye for which fonts work best for headlines, pull-quotes and body text. Add in Jill’s flair for illustrations, graphics and excellent color choices, and we were ready to launch the newly designed PEJ in a little over a month.

Reaction to the new look has been very positive. A few members called or wrote to comment about how much they liked the clean, fresh appearance. And an ACPE board member joked that he almost threw the journal away because he didn’t recognize it when it landed on his desk.

All in all, the redesign was a huge success. I can only wish that you have the same nearly effortless experience when you makeover your healthcare publication. ♦



## Tips on Working with Your Art Director

A publication editor should make it a standard practice to hold a story conference with the writers and assigned designers. And it should be held while the issue is being planned.

An art director and designers bring an element of “helpful ignorance” to the process, explains design consultant Jan White. By explaining the article to the designer, the writer decides what the story is about and tells the designer what’s in it for the reader, and, therefore, what needs to be displayed. Designers can often miss the “big picture” if the editor doesn’t explain it, and as a result, the reader will tend to miss it, too.

White recommends writing the headline during the conference — not necessarily the final headline, but one that will provide a general idea of the article’s content and tone. If illustration ideas or photos are available at the time of the conference, they should be presented and their func-

tion discussed. Captions can be written at this stage for possible use later on—like headlines, they provide direction for both editorial and design staff.

White recommends that concepts for an article’s thrust and design should come before the writing. (At this point, most editors will no doubt loudly exclaim, “What? No! Are you nuts?”) Needless to say, the jury is still out on this recommendation.

White admits that few publication staffs work this way. Articles are typically written, then copy edited, then tossed “over the wall” from the editor to the designer. The risk to this setup, White asserts, is that designers are reduced to little more than cake decorators. “They rely on their aesthetic sense rather than the article’s point. Editors and designers may try to dress up weak articles with ‘flashy’ art, but no amount of flamboyance from a designer will

make up for bad subject material.”

As White sees it, the more complicated the design is visually, the less the message of an article will come through. On a daily basis, designers are doing what they’ve been trained to do—be as uniquely creative as possible. That can scare some editors if they see the work as art and don’t know how to react to it. Quite often, editors abdicate their responsibility either by saying they don’t like a layout design or by approving it because the designer is an art expert.

White points out that art has nothing to do with it. It’s really about communication, and that’s the editor’s responsibility. The editors should know the story, its purpose and how to communicate it both verbally and visually. Readers coming across an article must immediately know WIIFM (what’s in it for me) and if they don’t see it, they’ll give up and move on to something else. ♦

## Journalists' Websites Are All A'Twitter

Professional athletes are doing it during halftime. Movie stars are doing it from location shoots. Even Barack Obama did it while campaigning for President. What is it? Twittering, of course.

One-hundred forty characters. If you had a mere sentence or two to spread the hottest news and developments within your industry, could you squeeze it all into a mere 140 characters? If you're not sure, it's time you figured out that many of your competitors are already staying in touch with their readers via Twitter, a website that facilitates the broadcasting of very short—though not necessarily terse—messages (known as “tweets”) to readers who have requested a regular delivery of these tweets.

Due to the 140-character limit, Twittering has gained much of its popularity via BlackBerrys, iPhones and other mobile devices. How popular? According to media research firm Nielsen, Twitter experience a growth rate of 1,382% from February 2008 to February 2009 (see chart below). Estimates of total users vary widely, but best guesses put the number somewhere in the neighborhood of between 4 million to 6 million users, many of them using applets rather than the Twitter.com website.

And don't dismiss Twittering as just another “kid thing.” Nielsen's research indicates that adults aged 35 to 49

represent the biggest demographic of Twitterers. The vast majority of users (62%) access Twitter while at work, according to Nielsen, compared to 35% who Twitter from home. (“Twitter,” apparently, can be used as either a noun or a verb.)

Okay, so Twitter is popular, but what's in it for magazine editors? Plenty, if the idea of building and culti-

a public relations gatekeeper.

Twitter does have its share of problems, notes the *Wall Street Journal's* Katherine Boehret. For instance, it can't sort tweets according to the user's preferences. “If I just want to see tweets from real people and not those that are automatically generated, I'm out of luck,” she points out. “Same goes if I want to keep certain

vating a highly engaged audience (though admittedly, a very ephemeral audience) is at all appealing to you. According to Jon Friedman, a senior columnist for *MarketWatch*, “Plenty of reporters have told me they've gotten terrific responses from people simply by throwing out a question on Twitter and asking people to tell their stories.” (*MarketWatch*, March 20, 2009)

“Such social-networking sites as Facebook and Twitter are transforming the craft of journalism,” Friedman adds, since they can help reporters communicate with newsmakers and sources without having to go through

friends' tweets in a prominent place on my homepage; Twitter has no way of doing this.” (*WSJ*, Dec. 8, 2008)

As a new medium with few hard-and-fast rules, Twitter's potential is both untapped and largely unimagined. “Don't knock it till you've tried it,” suggests the *New York Times'* David Pogue, but then he adds, “Twitter is still largely a geek and early-adopter phenomenon at this point.” (*NYT*, Feb. 17, 2009) One thing at least is for certain: You need to prepare yourself for a deluge of articles throughout 2009 on Twitter; this technology fad is still very much in the infant stages. ♦

## Fastest Growing Member Community Destinations in February 2009

RANK	Site	Feb 08	Feb 09	% growth
1	Twitter.com	475,000	7,038,000	1382%
2	Zimbio	809,000	2,752,000	240%
3	Facebook	20,043,000	65,704,000	228%
4	Multiply	821,000	2,394,000	192%
5	Wikia	1,381,000	3,758,000	172%

Source: Nielsen NetView, 2/09, U.S., Home and Work

## How to Start and Maintain a Regular Column

■ Don't launch a new regular column until you've tested the topic and determined that it's neither too narrow nor too broad. If you're a chief editor of a monthly publication, decide upon the general topic to be covered and then make a list of six topics within that subject that would be of interest to the readership. Then come up with six more. If you're proposing a column to a publication or to the chief editor, write six complete columns on a topic and then see if you can come up with six more. Freelance writers should approach an editor with at least six ideas, and three complete columns written. If you can do any of the preceding, the column and topic is a "go."

■ Consider the frequency and placement of the column. For a weekly, frequency should be at least once a month. For a monthly, frequency should be no less than once a quarter. Six times a year—every other month—for monthly publications is the best minimum. Monthly is best. For a bi-monthly, the column should run in every issue. Placement of a column

within a publication is important. If at all possible, columns should appear in the same order and relatively close to the same location in every issue. Why? To answer the needs and save time for readers. It has been shown readers do look for and turn to columns in an issue. Of course, the sales staff likes this because they can sell a preferred position next to or near a high-readership column.

■ The columnist must be able to write tight and to cut their own material. A column's length depends on the publication, but as a rule of thumb, the fewer pages in the publication, the shorter the column must be. Most print publications favor a 500-word column length as editors find that a comfortable, manageable length. It makes it possible for the columnist to write tight and it discourages rambling. It also is excellent for fractional space allocation within a publication.

■ Stick to the straight and narrow. Unlike reporters or feature editors, a regular column offers writers flexibility

where they can give their own opinion rather than presenting just the facts or all sides of an issue. This provides focus and can spark genuine controversy and, possibly, lead to feature articles and letters to the editor.

■ Lighten up. There is nothing wrong with a columnist using their sense of humor, or at least a light tone, unless it conflicts with the content. Even a column on technical matters should be easy to read.

■ There is nothing wrong with discontinuing a column. When it has run the gamut of topics applicable and of use to readers, it's time to move on. Editors too often make the mistake of establishing and running columns in perpetuity, repeating material already covered. Conversely, there is nothing wrong with bringing back a column that was discontinued if the subject matter has become germane once again due to a new development or change of course in a field being covered by the publication. Remember, service to the reader is the goal. ♦

## Heard & Overheard

Speaking at the recent Magazine Publishers of America's digital conference, Paul Maidment, editor of *Forbes* magazine, observed that getting magazine publishers to put the Web first in terms of priority is not just a good idea—"it's essential to their survival."

Source: [foliomag.com](http://foliomag.com)

## A Note from the Managing Director ...

Although spring is in the air, the climate for business publications has been decidedly arctic in recent months, with far too many layoffs, cutbacks and cancellations at publishing houses large and small. The healthcare field, so far, has largely been spared the brunt of the recession, but nothing can be taken for granted these days. That's why it's been particularly gratifying to see so many outstanding entries cross our desk in this year's ASHPE Awards competition. Based on the quality of work submitted, it's fair to say the recession's impact hasn't diminished the level of professionalism within the healthcare publication field. Results of the competition will be announced during the first week of May.

— Nancy Blanchard



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