JANN WENNER is taking the high road.
This is kind of funny, because he’s talking about Us Weekly.
“A bra strap slipping, dirty shoes, Britney walking barefoot—they’re fun,” says the sharply dressed, slightly stubbled chairman of Wenner Media, who’s gazung down, mogul-
THE A-LIST

Yes, the ad ‘recovery’ is tepid, but these 10 magazines stand out as Advertising Age editors look at ad pages, editorial excellence and buzz to determine the A-List.

1. **US WEEKLY**
   - Parent: Wenner Media, Wall Street Co.
   - Publisher: Victoria Lasdon Rose
   - Editor in chief: Janice Min
   - Ad pages: 1,579 ▲ 25.2%
   - Total circulation: 1,351,663 ▲ 17.4%
   - Subscriptions: 605,276 ▲ 6.1%
   - Single-copy sales: 745,667 ▲ 47.3%

   Irresistible magazine confection or harbinger of the apocalypse? You decide—because we already have. Formerly Wenner’s folly, currently raking it in on all fronts. Watch Us Weekly drive newstand sales in an entire category. Judging from its track record, this list may be today’s best possible answer to Freud’s most famous open-ended question.

2. **REAL SIMPLE**
   - Parent: Time Inc.
   - Publisher: Robin Dorniloni
   - Managing editor: Kristin van Ogtrop
   - Ad pages: 925.6 ▲ 16.4%
   - Total circulation: 1,721,071 ▲ 25.1%
   - Subscriptions: 1,331,713 ▲ 30.2%
   - Single-copy sales: 389,358 ▲ 10.3%

   More like Real Something No. 2 or No. 1 for those straight on Ad Age’s A-List. This is a magazine that routinely achieves perfection in its specific aims. It looks gorgeous, the editorial is spot-on and its monthly hello is stunning. Revisited at launch, today like the single magazine other companies most wish they’d thought of first.

3. **MEN’S HEALTH**
   - Parent: Rodale
   - VP-publisher: MaryAnn Bekkedahl
   - Editor in chief: David Zinczenko
   - Ad pages: 760.8 ▲ 9.9%
   - Total circulation: 1,718,313 ▲ 13.3%
   - Subscriptions: 1,229,744 ▲ 9.9%
   - Single-copy sales: 488,575 ▲ 12.2%

   It’s no longer news that men care about this stuff—ab exercises, hair removal techniques—in fact, that men do is a downright middle-brow realization. But it is news that Men’s Health just keeps finding more consumers to buy it each month. High-profile team of Elaine’s regular Dave Zinczenko and MaryAnn Bekkedahl keeps the heat on.

4. **CONDE NAST TRAVELER**
   - Parent: Conde Nast Publications
   - VP-publisher: Lisa Hughes
   - Editor in chief: Tom Wallace
   - Ad pages: 1,093 ▲ 14.7%
   - Total circulation: 799,081 ▲ 16.1%
   - Subscriptions: 744,861 ▲ 11.3%
   - Single-copy sales: 34,220 ▲ 12.7%

   The travel category has come roaring back, and 2004 is a good year all around for the big travel magazines—but Conde Nast Traveler’s gains bested those of the competition. Besides posting positive performances on all key indicators, it remains an outpost for lush travel porn shots of distant locales.

5. **LUCKY**
   - Parent: Conde Nast Publications
   - VP-publisher: Alexandra W. Golinkin
   - Editor in chief: Kim France
   - Ad pages: 1,183 ▲ 13%
   - Total circulation: 970,672 ▲ 16.3%
   - Subscriptions: 710,469 ▲ 15.6%
   - Single-copy sales: 260,203 ▲ 18.3%

   If Time Inc.’s Real Simple is the magazine all companies wish they thought of first, Lucky is the magazine everyone else is outright copying. This year saw Conde Nast’s Cargo, Heath’s Shop Etc., Ziff Davis’ Sync and Fairchild’s Vital’s. Next year comes Vital’s for women and Conde Nast’s Domino. What they will see: It’s not a slam-dunk unless the edit formula is smart, direct and fun, like Lucky.

6. **PREVENTION**
   - Parent: Rodale
   - VP-publisher: Kate Kelly Smith
   - VP-editorial director: Rosemary Ellis
   - Ad pages: 889.7 ▲ 18.9%
   - Total circulation: 3,359,698 ▲ 2.5%
   - Subscriptions: 2,964,340 ▲ 2%
   - Single-copy sales: 395,358 ▲ 6.4%

   Never let it be said that the media landscape is dominated by the new, and that old warhorses don’t have some fight left in them. This venerable magazine—founded in 1950—saw its 2004 numbers blow by on all fronts, with solid gains in circulation and nearly a 20% jump in ad pages. Prevention’s performance provided a big boost in a big year for Rodale.

7. **ESQUIRE**
   - Parent: Hearst Magazines
   - VP-publisher: Kevin C. O’Malley
   - Editor in chief: David Granger
   - Ad pages: 703.8 ▼ 15.7%
   - Total circulation: 771,133 ▼ 9%
   - Subscriptions: 606,865 ▼ 3.3%
   - Single-copy sales: 110,248 ▼ 13.9%

   This tawdry story has been long in coming, and it’s not quite over yet, judging by a key Hearst executive’s cheerful admission that “there are months when it is profitable.” Still, the pamphlet-thin Esquires of the past are far behind it, as momentum continues and the work of Ad Age’s Editor of the Year David Granger speaks for itself—smart, smart-looking, ambitious and funny to boot.

8. **SHAPE**
   - Parent: Conde Nast Publications
   - Publisher: Ann Taylor
   - Editor in chief: Anne M. Russell
   - Ad pages: 1,010.5 ▲ 18.4%
   - Total circulation: 1,677,604 ▼ 11%
   - Subscriptions: 1,606,099 ▼ 5.9%
   - Single-copy sales: 54,505 ▲ 14.4%

   Given that this former Weder Publications title is one of the few unquestioned bright spots at American Media, it’s unsurprising if it alone was cited as a reason for dealing by rival bidders for Weder’s portfolio. Newsstand and ad page sales continue to soar, and Shape is significantly outpacing its competitors. Issues shipped out from Weder but still shoring up (we’re sorry) at its new home.

9. **THE NEW YORKER**
   - Parent: Conde Nast Publications
   - Publisher: David Carey
   - Editor in chief: David Remnick
   - Ad pages: 1,523.7 ▲ 13%
   - Total circulation: 1,903,205 ▲ 4.7%
   - Subscriptions: 954,076 ▼ 4.9%
   - Single-copy sales: 49,929 ▲ 3.1%

   They said it couldn’t be done—and sometimes we wonder—but the data instead show that The New Yorker’s transformation to profit center continues. David Carey may be the fair-haired publisher at Conde Nast now, but his success is unthinkable without David Remnick—who, with the likes of Seymour Hersh, proved a general-interest weekly can still thrill and drive news cycles.

10. **IN STYLE**
    - Parent: Time Inc.
    - Publishing director: Katy Egan
    - Editor: Louise Chunn
    - Ad pages: 2,373.3 ▲ 8.3%
    - Total circulation: 1,780,427 ▲ 4.8%
    - Subscriptions: 847,570 ▲ 12.3%
    - Single-copy sales: 932,857 ▲ 11%

    A prototype of sorts for the likes of Us Weekly and Lucky—and from the august Time Inc., no less—In Style shows no signs of slowing. Ad pages are up almost 10%, and this is for a monthly magazine that sold 3,000 o’em last year. As we net a ramp-up look for Time Inc. to continue to echo this executive’s sentiment: “Thank God for In Style”.

Notes: Prior to ad page figures are for January-September 2004; full issues' information during this period, overall ad pages for magazines tracked by PIB from October 2003 to January 2004. Circulation numbers for the period predated issue No. 30, 2004, from Audit Bureau of Circulations. All percentages change in year-over-year period.
US WEEKLY

MAGAZINE OF THE YEAR

This just in: Celebrities still ruling the world!

Us Weekly never shrinks from its fascination with the world it covers, from the absurdity of it all to its joy in following it.

US WEEKLY

From Page S1

style, onto midtown Manhattan from his hushed corner office: “You show people’s unfortunate body parts, which the Star has”—it has both traditionally and under the leadership of former Us Weekly editor reinventor Ronnie Fuller—that’s just uncomfortable. It’s compelling, but it’s uncomfortable.

Ah, yes. Us Weekly—class act. Roll your eyes; purse your lips and shake your head; slip it inside your bag so your smarty-pants friends don’t see it. But is it uncomfortable?

no. Us Weekly has become a cultural reference point, if not an entire worldview. It’s one in which the absolutely horrid picture in a magazine will likely turn a profit of $50 million, and it’s expected to outpace longtime competitor Us Weekly by $35 million in total revenue.

It’s one in which Britney Spears twice prancing barefoot into gas station bathroom merris news analysis, assuming a delirious picture page headlined “Britney: Totally Trashastic!” qualifies as news analysis. (Oh, all right: It does. These days, it does.)

Ask yourself if anything will attenuate America’s obsession with celebrity—and decimate sales of the Us Weeklies of the world—if you must. But also ask yourself: Would the likes of Bauer Publishing’s In Touch and American Media’s revamped Star—and Bauer’s upcoming Life & Style Weekly—exist were it not for Us Weekly?

Ask yourself: Is there nothing about the most pedestrian acts of celebrities—grocery shopping, struggling with sloppy ice cream cones—that America won’t devour?

As Mr. Wenner might put it, the answers to these questions are uncomfortable. But compelling. Wenner General Manager Kent Brownridge cites internal data showing the average celebrity weekly reader buys 2.1 copies of them on the newsstand each week.

Celebrity life “is a form of entertainment,” says Neal Gabler, author of “Life: The Movie” and a biography of ur-gossip columnist Walter Winchell. “I would go as far as to say it’s the most popular narrative of the last 15 years.”

For the first half of 2004, Us Weekly’s newsstand sales rose 47.3% to 745,807. Next year, an executive familiar with the financials says, Us Weekly will likely turn a profit of $50 million, and it’s expected to outpace longtime competitor Us Weekly by $35 million in total revenue.

It’s a clear early-autumn morning, and the white-hot center of celebrity culture—in other words, of American pop culture itself—is what’s most important. It’s one in which people look at, rather than read, magazines.

As Mr. Wenner struggled against his instincts. “Gwyneth [Paltrow] gave a quote where she said she was secretly wearing a griddle after she gave birth. That’s why she looked so thin,” says Ms. Min. “For our readers, that’s really interesting.”

Today, Us Weekly’s DNA is a convoluted helix with genetic material grafted from “50s scandal sheets like Confidential, supermarket tabloids, the newest wave of British weeklies like Heat and OK!, the E! channel, In Style, and even the warhorse women’s-service category.

It was not always this way. At Us Weekly’s launch in March 2000, under the stewardship of former Esquire and Men’s Journal editor Terry McDonel, its sharply defined target of women had not yet fully coalesced, and Mr. Wenner struggled against his instincts.

“Mr. Wenner really had to learn to give that up,” he says. “Three or four pages is way too long for an article” . . . 700 words is too long.” (Cynics may counter that three paragraphs is too long for Us Weekly.) In its first year, executives say, Us Weekly lost around $30 million and newsstand sales fell far short of stated goals. Wenner Media had to cut rate base 20% to 900,000.

In February 2001, Walt Disney Co. bought a half-interest in Us Weekly for $35 million. (Mr. Wenner had spent a year in the ‘90s trying to find a partner for Us Weekly recognizing a weekly launch was a mammoth undertaking for a company with a revenue}

TEAM LEADERS:

Publisher Victoria Lesdon Rose (L) and Editor in Chief Janice Min.

Report

MAGAZINES: THE A-LIST

See US WEEKLY on Page S12
By JON FINE

THE GOOD NEWS was that David Granger got the job he always wanted when he was named editor-in-chief of Esquire in 1997. The bad news? He got the job he always wanted when he was named editor-in-chief of Esquire in 1997.

“It was practically on life support,” recalls Cathleen Black, president of Hearst Magazines, who hired Mr. Granger away from his executive editor perch at Condé Nast Publications’ GQ. “He understood this was not going to be easy.”

Although perhaps not to the degree he discovered, Mark Adams, who worked with Mr. Granger at GQ, recalls an e-mail exchange he had with his former colleague shortly after Mr. Granger left. “I said, ‘Do you finally feel like there’s a light at the end of the tunnel?’” says Mr. Adams. Mr. Granger’s response, per Mr. Adams: “Let me put it this way. I am getting the idea that maybe I am in a tunnel.”

“He knew he had a long way to go,” says a friend, “at a fraction of Esquire’s budget.” Mr. Adams now deputy editor at National Geographic Adventure. An executive says Hearst then lost more than $12 million a year on Esquire, a Hearst spokesman declined to comment.

But Esquire still occupies the high ground of magazine journalism—a rare destination these days. Its wit and hefty ambitions are arguably matched only by Condé Nast’s New Yorker. Unlike The New Yorker, though, Esquire is required to devote serious space to service each month. Under Mr. Granger, Esquire has balanced both aims. He’s kept standards and quality high while editorial budgets shrink. He’s made Esquire’s newest stand sales increase by double-digit margins for three straight years, while most magazines struggle to stave off losses. He made, and kept, Esquire relevant, with nods in equal measure to what it was and what it must be in order to survive.

Mr. Granger did this in a media world increasingly ill-suited to his ambitions of being “part of the national conversation,” while not neglecting what makes his magazine surprisingly fun: its visual palette and playfulness, its greatly improved short pieces.

All this, as recent years severely tested the notions of what constitutes a men’s magazine (hello, Maxim) and highbrow general-interest magazine (goodbye, Talk). Mr. Granger even conquered a strong strain of earnestness that gripped earlier iterations of his magazine.

Even he concedes his tenure had a rocky start, and there are times when Esquire trips visibly over its outsized ambitions. But ad page and readership gains have accelerated, and National Magazine Award nominations are plentiful. And, in 2004, David Granger is Advertising Age’s Editor of the Year.

THE SWAGGER OF SUCCESS

Mr. Granger, who’s 47, is welcoming, albeit with a tinge of wariness. (He’s more of editor-as-observer than editor-as-host.) He dresses ridiculously well, mixing and matching textures and patterns against custom-made pinstripe suits. There’s a zebra pelt on the floor of his office, and a bit of swagger in his bearing that may not have been there when he took the job. More than one person contacted for this article referenced “a complicated father-son relationship” between Mr. Granger and his former boss, GQ’s Art Cooper, and it’s hard not to imagine the growing consensus that his magazine ultimately outdid the late Mr. Cooper’s a source of enormous pride for him.

“He is doing exactly the magazine he wanted to do,” says a friend, “at a fraction of GQ’s budget.”

But before all this, David Granger wrote a letter.

It was 1996. Ms. Black had just been named president of Hearst Magazines, and Mr. Granger wrote to tell her something. “I said I knew something about Esquire that the last couple of editors had forgotten,” he says. “Esquire had started taking out all the service … With the tangible, takeaway material out of the magazine, I thought it was in danger of becoming Harper’s, which is a great magazine but it’s going to be a very small audience.”

See GRANGER on Page S-12
PUBLISHING EXECUTIVE OF THE YEAR
MARY BERNER

From W to Women’s Wear Daily, from Details to Vitals, from Jane to Elegant Bride to ... Footwear News? Mary Berner has been busy building Advance’s next great publishing empire.

By GREG LINDSAY

It’s been said of Fairchild Publications President-CEO Mary Berner that if she doesn’t run Conde Nast someday, she’ll simply build her own magazine-publishing powerhouse. Having overseen Fairchild for the last five years, Mr. Berner appears ready to begin creating in earnest that publishing empire.

Ms. Berner arrived at Fairchild in November 1999, just as Advance Publications, parent of Conde Nast Publications, was completing its $650 million purchase of Fairchild from Walt Disney Co. Within a month, Ms. Berner had split the company into three divisions and boldly predicted that Fairchild would double its operating profit in five years.

Ms. Berner, 45, laughs at that prediction now. She recalls that the first two years of the job ended up being “about getting the house in order.” She created an executive committee and shuffled publishers to “get the right people on the bus, and get the wrong ones out.”

But it hasn’t all been executive rejiggering. Ms. Berner has more than doubled the number of titles Fairchild publishes, and has created or taken on new franchises like the Fairchild Bridal Group and the Vitals Network. The latter is transforming Vitals into the first magazine to alternate between men’s and women’s fashion with each issue.

NOW A PLAYER
“’We’ve done the heavy lifting,’” Ms. Berner says, adding, “I would argue that we are perceived as a player now.” Leading the transformation of Fairchild into a player has elevated Ms. Berner to Advertising Age’s Publishing Executive of the Year.

Upon getting the house in order, Ms. Berner and her team chose to focus on rehabilitating Fairchild’s core franchises first, like company flagship Women’s Wear Daily and profitable trades like DNR, Home Furnishings News and Supermarket News. Growth came through iterations and spinoffs.

Elevated Ms. Berner to NOW A ‘PLAYER’

VITALS

While Fairchild, like all units of the closely held Advance, doesn’t disclose top- or bottom-line figures, executives there are happy to reveal that ad revenue (not counting the recently arrived bridal titles) has risen 54% since 1999 to a projected $400 million in 2004. The Bridal Group is expected to generate $290 million in ads in ’04.

This year, however, has been bumpier; ad pages at stalwarts W and Jane have been flat and down, respectively; the B2B division is flat after growing even during the ad recession, according to TNS Media Intelligence/CMR; while WVD’s revenue is growing steadily once again, according to Publishers Information Bureau.

At this point, “We’re done with the iterations,” Ms. Berner says. “Otherwise, eventually you’ll have a sock magazine: WVD Socks. We’re building brands now.”

The Vitals Network is an early example of that evolution, creating a brand that is simultaneously niche and upscale.

Vitals began life in August as a men’s shopping book and competitor to Conde Nast’s GQ, but is set to evolve next year into a hybrid of men’s and women’s fashion, alternating the focus every issue.

The thinking behind the shift is typical of the entrepreneurial spirit that has infused Fairchild during Ms. Berner’s tenure. Vitals Editor Joe Zee had been the fashion director of W, so why not tap into that expertise and his reputation?

More launches are ahead. Fairchild is currently incubating an upscale parenting magazine and travel title, both of which are the fruits of another Berner invention—Fairchild’s “Idea” day, in which employees are encouraged to pitch concepts to the executive committee. Four different groups came up with a parenting idea, she says, a clear signal of its potential.

AD COMMUNITY ALSO A FAN

The advertising community loves Ms. Berner’s forthright style, her focus on operating as much as selling, and her commitment to delivering products that stick to, and define, their niches.

“She delivers one thing advertisers prize—an extremely considerable product,” says David Verklin, CEO of Aegis Group’s Carat Americas, New York. “You really feel there is a steady hand on the tiller at Fairchild, and you see it in the product.”

These days, Ms. Berner’s style is in vogue at Advance, where the similarly operations-obsessed Charles Townsend assumed the president-CEO post at Conde Nast in February. Ms. Berner succeeded Mr. Townsend as publisher of Glamour when he chose to exit VP later becoming chief operating officer at Conde Nast. Mr. Townsend describes their working relationship today as “extraordinarily close.”

Advanta Chairman S.I. Newhouse Jr. “We appreciate the close working relationship Map she has fostered with other divisions within the Advance Magazine Group.”

Mr. Townsend’s handover of the Bridal Group to Fairchild last spring was accordingly interpreted as a possible stepin Ms. Berner being groomed for CEO of Conde Nast someday.

“Has Conde-Nast learned from Fairchild?” Mr. Townsend asks rhetorically. “The answer is absolutely . . . These two divisions of Advance have never been closer than they are now.”

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Granger

By JENNA SCHNUER

Through Bill Shapiro, also a key player in the Granger relaunch, Managing Editor Nancy Fuller resigned abruptly in June 2003 to take over at a competitors title. Ms. Fuller’s template proved remarkably prescient. She “had 40 ad pages in the first issue. When it comes to some-thing truly American, most magazine folks would forget apple pie. Butcher,” says Publisher Peter Bauer. “It’s an added treat for people who are working harder and (who have to) compress all their personal life into the weekend.”

Friday is a great day for Life to be published. Life will appear in papers on a day when they have very few other inserts,” Mr. Bauer says, adding that marketers will be able to reach consumers before they head off on their usual weekend shopping trips. Mr. Bauer emphasizes that Time Inc. doesn’t consider Life to be a newspaper supplement, but rather a magazine delivered by newspaper. No one newspapers will be affected, Mr. Bauer also touts Life’s photo heritage, as well as its articles, as points of difference with newspaper supplements. The debut cover featured actress Sarah Jessica Parker, close on the heels of her Emmy win. The second cover? The must-have dog of the world, from the “pop culture leaders” to “what’s going on in Iraq.”

SUEDE

ONE LOOK AT SUEDE makes it clear: Women of color aren’t the afterthought here, they’re the It girls. Published by Time Inc.’s Essence Communications Partners, Suede says its goal is to give “multi-cultural fashionistas” a magazine that will resonate in their lives. “What was missing [for this group] was a true reflection of themselves,” says Editor in Chief Suzanne Boyd. “They use fashion and beauty to express and amplify their personality.”

Now is the time for Suede, says Publisher Enedina Vega, because there are “so many undercurrents of multicultural influence in the world, from the ‘pop culture leaders’ to ‘what you see when you walk down the street of any fashion center in the world’.”

Launched earlier this month with a rate base of 250,000, Suede had 40 ad pages in the first issue. Ms. Vega says the launch sold out quickly at many newsstands, so the preprint run was bumped up 100,000 for the second issue. Suede will publish nine issues in 2005. Suede gives the influencers their say. The “message to advertisers was one of the marketplace not being served,” says Ms. Vega. “Like what I see so far,” says Zenith’s Mr. Greenberger, senior VP-director of print services at Publicis Groupe’s Zenith Media, New York. “It seemed like it was more alive, I could see somebody enjoying having it.”

ALL YOU

ABOUT 425,000 Wal-Mart shoppers threw something extra into their carts in August—the launch issue of Time Inc.’s All You. With a competitive set that includes Bauer Publishing’s siblings, First for Women and Woman’s World, as well as other service magazines, All You turns the typical U.S. distribution model on its head in favor of a newest and driven magazine.

Of course, it doesn’t hurt that the launch pad was Wal-Mart Stores, which will be the only national newspaper to be promoted as a standalone ad package. “It was Wal-Mart Stores, which will be the only national newspaper to be promoted as a standalone ad package, and the traditional tropes of women’s service magazines, played out on the red-carpeted landscape of today’s celebrity culture.”

“You can read it, and I guarantee you not one story will make you feel stressed out,” Mr. Min says. “That’s not a bad thing!”

“Kind of need this sort of stuff when the world is going to hell in a handbasket,” agrees Mr. Dumenic. “It’s much more comforting to look at a horrific picture of a zombie, Booby Britney Spears than to think about what’s going on in Iraq.”

Magazines Worth Watching

By JENNA SCHNUER

WITH MANY of this year’s magazine launches arriving too late to be judged, Advertising Age found no title warranting recognition as Launch of the Year. But here are three new efforts that show particular promise.

LIFE

FORGET APPLE PIE. When it comes to something truly American, most magazine folks would probably give Life the nod. And now everybody’s all-American has come back, well, life onomore. On Oct. 1, 12 million readers found Life when they flipped through their Friday newspaper. The title relaunched as a free weekly in 72 papers in 45 states, and 20 of the top 25 demographic market areas.

Time Inc.’s third incarnation of Life, which first appeared as a weekly in 1936, makes the most of the 48 hours side during the week. The weekend is a great time to experience those emotions.”

FORGET APPLE PIE. When it comes to some-thing truly American, most magazine folks would