Grace Magazine

Emmie Martin

Follow this and additional works at: https://surface.syr.edu/honors_capstone

Part of the Journalism Studies Commons

Recommended Citation

This Honors Capstone Project is brought to you for free and open access by the Syracuse University Honors Program Capstone Projects at SURFACE. It has been accepted for inclusion in Syracuse University Honors Program Capstone Projects by an authorized administrator of SURFACE. For more information, please contact surface@syr.edu.
Grace Magazine

A Capstone Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements of the Renée Crown University Honors Program at Syracuse University

Emmie Martin
Candidate for B.S. Magazine Journalism and Renée Crown University Honors
May 2014

Honors Capstone Project in Magazine Journalism

Capstone Project Advisor: _______________________
Melissa Chessher

Capstone Project Reader: _______________________
Jim Shahin

Honors Director: _______________________
Stephen Kuusisto, Director

Date: April 23, 2014
Abstract

*Grace* is an online web magazine aimed at girls ages 13 through 18. This website features material divided into four distinct categories that each cater to important aspects of a modern teenage girl’s life: Your Life, which covers lifestyle topics; Your Self, which covers health-related subjects including food, exercise, and nutrition; Your Style, which features fashion and beauty advice and news; and Your World, which delves into all aspects of modern culture.

This website publishes all original content, and strives to serve as an intellectual and entertaining resource in young girls’ lives. *Grace* provides girls with relevant articles that use sophisticated language, yet remain approachable and conversational. In a marketplace saturated with superficial fluff and watered-down information, *Grace* aims to stand out as a stimulating and engaging place for this demographic to spend time online.

This website is hosted and supported by WordPress, but includes all custom coding and design. All works not written by Emmie Martin are original works submitted by Syracuse students. These pieces were either specifically commissioned to be included in *Grace* or previously unpublished articles written for classes. All articles were edited by Emmie Martin.

The website can be found at grace-magazine-online.com.
© (Emmie Martin April 2014)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executive Summary</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflective Essay</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Executive Summary

*Grace* magazine provides a smart, interesting online resource for teenage girls that is both accessible and fun to read. Girls today lead fast-paced lives, running from class to soccer practice to dinner with friends, while checking Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter along the way. *Grace* aims to keep up with this brisk lifestyle, presenting girls with articles that range from beauty advice to healthy recipes to relevant social and cultural issues.

*Grace’s* website is divided into four sections: *Your Style*, which features fashion and beauty articles; *Your Self*, which features health and fitness articles; *Your Life*, which covers relationships, schoolwork, DIY projects, and other pertinent lifestyle topics; and *Your World*, which focuses on entertainment, social trends, and other subjects of teenage culture. Each section is updated regularly with articles that explore new trends or ideas within the main theme of the section to keep girls both entertained and connected with the larger pop culture scene shaping their world.

Outside of providing girls with fresh topics and information, *Grace* aims to fill an important niche currently missing in the world of web content for this age group: Intelligent writing. In place of the overly conversational, “*you look totes adorbs*” writing style many similar publications embody, *Grace* offers articles that are interesting and relatable, yet smartly written. Young women today
are bright, knowledgeable, and connected to the world, and deserve a magazine that feeds into both their fun, young side as well as their curious, intelligent side.

In short, *Grace* is a web magazine for teenage girls that combines the light-heartedness of *Buzzfeed* and the dedication to teenage culture of *Seventeen* with solid writing and fresh ideas, creating a new, must-read site specifically for girls.
This project could not have been completed without the steadfast support of several individuals. First and foremost, I’d like to acknowledge and thank—profusely—my Capstone advisor Melissa Chessher for being there for me and believing in this project from day one. Despite the many topic changes and swerves in direction this journey took me, she constantly supported my decisions and steered me down the right path when I sought advice. From keeping an eye out in her magazine writing classes for applicable articles to calming me down when I worked myself up over a tiny detail, she always gave me the inspiration and constant motivation to push forward to the finish line. Thank you for everything, I couldn’t have done it without you.

Next, I would like to thank Jim Shahin, my Capstone reader, for being an equally solid force in keeping me grounded throughout this project. He always gave me realistic and practical advice regarding project decisions, as well as unceasing support. Again, I couldn’t have completed this project without Professor Shahin’s input and encouragement, and I’m truly grateful to have had it.

Without Jeff Passetti, this website would be as basic as they come. From helping me with simple questions, such as how to embed video, to larger overhauls, such as formatting the feature image slideshow, Professor Passetti went above and beyond the call of a web design professor to help make this project the best it could be. I can’t thank you enough for pushing me to be a better coder and delve deeper into the amazing features WordPress offers in order to make my website as functional as possible. He was always one step ahead regarding usability and design, and I’m truly thankful for everything.
A major portion of this project relied on submissions and assignments from my talented friends and classmates. Without their articles and willingness to share, Grace’s content would have turned out completely one-dimensional. I’m forever thankful for the community I’ve found within Newhouse and particularly my magazine major, and would like to thank the following women for contributing their hard work to this website: Nicole Battafarano, Lexi Crovatto, Marwa Eltagouri, Tina Ferraro, Brittany Fowler, Maya Kosoff, Emma McAnaw, Leigh Miller, Sarah Schmalbruch, Hannah Simon, Diana Pearl, and Katie Richards.

Lastly, I’d like to acknowledge and thank my wonderful friends and roommates for their perpetual support. I can’t thank you enough for being my models and camerawomen, for making me laugh when I get stressed, and always being there in my time of need.
There’s a common mindset among magazine majors, especially as underclassmen, that all things print are inherently superior to their digital counterparts. For me, it’s the combination of print’s rich history as the “golden age” of magazines combined with its tangibility that’s appealing. When I receive new magazines in the mail each month, I can physically hold them and sift through them. I can tear out my favorite fashion spreads for future collage projects and bookmark recipes for future dinners. I hold them and save them and cherish them, and have been doing so since before I ever even learned how to Google.

But the future of the magazine industry doesn’t lie in print—and for good reason. Though print magazines will be around for years to come, digital publishing offers several advantages for reader engagement and enjoyment that other mediums simply cannot. Digital publications can publish instantaneously, as soon as news breaks, as well as cover stories across several platforms, including written stories, slideshows, and videos. Web articles can link to other relevant pages, allowing readers to access background information and engage with writers via social media. Digital publications also lack the space constraints of print publications, and allow articles to be as long or short as the subject matter calls for.

For these reasons, I chose to forego creating a traditional print publication as my Capstone project for my magazine major, and create a website instead. The final project, *Grace*, is an online magazine that offers smart and insightful content for girls ages 13 through 18. The site categorizes material into four categories that each represent important aspects of a modern teenage girl’s life: *Your Life*, which covers lifestyle topics ranging from social media to relationship advice; *Your
Self, which covers health-related subjects including food, exercise, and nutrition; Your Style, which features fashion and beauty advice and news; and Your World, which delves into all aspects of modern culture from new dating apps to SlutWalks.
Break Free From Fashion Rules

Thanks to internet and an individualistic-obsessed youth generation, fashion loses its obsession with rules that dictate matching metals, color pairings, and no white after Labor Day.

Style Inspiration: The Trendiest Women on TV

From Blair Waldorf to Olivia Pope, female characters set the style bar high. Next time you’re in need of fashion inspiration, look no further than the silver screen. Here’s our choices for the chicest women on television.

James Deen: Porn as the New Frontier of Female Sexuality

For many women, James Deen’s pornography is the first glimpse of a world where they can be

How To Take Perfect Instagrams Every Time

Filters can only fix so much. The key to great photos starts before the picture is even taken. Next
Demographic Focus: Choice and Reasoning

Arriving at a Demographic

During the spring of my junior year, when it came time to settle on a Capstone project, I immediately brainstormed ideas for print magazines. I love writing and editing articles, but also designing magazine spreads via InDesign—a skill I rarely get the chance to use. Naturally, a print magazine seemed like the ideal way to combine these talents, so I began brainstorming other interests I wanted to expand upon. Ultimately, I finished junior year set on trivia-based theme magazine for children, ages 6 to 12, analogous to *Mental Floss* or *Wired*.

However, upon meeting with my advisor in the fall, she suggested switching to an online project. Though I clung to the print idea for a hot minute, it didn’t take long to realize the advantages of going digital. I was already signed up for a Digital Interactivity class—better known as Web Design—so the decision fit perfectly with my plan for the semester.
As the fall continued, we began expanding the content of the project. Would a website be the best venue for reaching children? Would a children’s version of *Mental Floss* have much reach? As much pride as I took in my original idea, I effectively scrapped it in favor of filling an unexplored niche, and moved on to researching online resources for teenage boys. With several sites catering to the same demographic of girls, it seemed that teenage boys needed an outlet of their own. Yet, as much as I researched sneaker trends and football players, I couldn’t garner a personal connection to the project. I wanted my Capstone to be an undertaking that focused on an issue I genuinely cared about, and it rapidly became apparent that this wasn’t it. Though I still believe teenage boys are slighted when it comes to appropriate web content, I switched the focus of my research one last time to concentrate on content aimed at teenage girls. With this final switch, I had finally settled on a project I knew I would put my entire weight behind.

**State of the Competition**

Currently, there lies a noticeable divide between content created specifically for adolescent girls and that aimed at young women only slightly older. Magazines such as *Marie Claire* or *Glamour* target twenty-somethings with well-researched and thought-provoking articles. Though these publications still contain their fair share of fluff, their content is prudently curated to be easy to digest and balance out heavier pieces. Women’s magazines carefully foster an environment that seems effortlessly relaxed, providing a deliberate equilibrium between in-depth features and softer service pieces.
However, these same, meticulous precautions are rarely taken for sites that cater exclusively to teenage girls. With notable exceptions, such as Rookie, most of the websites I encountered during my research—gURL, Girl Zone, Girls’ World, and Discovery Girls, to name a few—either posted little to no content, only covered superficial topics, or were written so haphazardly it diminished any credibility they might hold. To be completely honest, it was distressing to witness how few resources girls have to read and absorb content specifically targeted toward their age group.

It is also unsettling to think that the moment a girl graduates from sites like Gurl or Girl Zone, she will be immediately thrust into a world of content completely unfamiliar to her. Yes, many girls begin reading magazines like Allure, Glamour, or even Cosmopolitan in high school, and subsequently visiting their respective websites, but the abrupt difference between “teenage” content and “adult” content remains appalling.

To remedy this issue, sites specifically aimed at teenage girls should not be afraid to approach delicate topics, such as sex or dating. However, these sites hold a responsibility to do so with finesse and intelligence, instead of lukewarmly breaching a topic and leaving several loose ends. For many young girls, print magazines and their online counterparts are the first introduction they receive to real-world topics, such as relationship violence or sexism in media. A surface-level once-over will leave girls with more questions than answers, creating several moral dilemmas. Additionally, bringing up topics as points of discussion without concrete information to back them up creates similar ethical problems. Teenage girls are still developing their compass for what’s true and what’s drivel, and will
believe anything they read in a seemingly safe space online. Gurl.com serves as one example of a site half-heartedly approaching such delicate topics as sex and relationships. Articles such as “How To Deal When Your Boyfriend Wants You To Send Naked Pictures” and “8 Things That Will Happen When You Give Your Ex A Second Chance” seem like ideal venues for the site to offer substantial, reliable advice, yet these articles remain completely devoid of expert sources, relying entirely on contributors’ opinions, with no indication of the contributors’ credentials. The site also posts discussion board questions on intimate topics such as masturbation, but leaves the entire conversation open to commenters’ opinions and advice. While opening a dialogue regarding such a controversial topic is a step in the right direction, leaving all the advice open to anonymous users seems irresponsible. Young girls often turn to sites like this looking for guidance, and therefore such content should be moderated to ensure safety and accuracy.

Publications aimed at such a delicate demographic constantly toe the line between playing it safe by only printing trivial fluff pieces and risking creating controversy with more mature content. But these sites should have a responsibility to informing young girls—in an appropriate way—about mature topics. When girls graduate from teenage-specific sites to those aimed generally at young women, the change in content should not be as stark as where it currently lands.

Overall, I found that the current market vying for teenage girls’ attention doesn't offer much variety. Most magazines for young girls, including Discovery Girls and Girls’ World, had websites with almost no additional content to enrich the substance of the magazine. Other independent sites, such as Gurl, tried to
reach out to the older end of the teenage spectrum, but fell short by not providing expert advice and support.

**What Sets Grace Apart**

This content dilemma paves the way for a site like *Grace*, which aims to both entertain and inform young women on topics anywhere from the lighthearted, such as our do-it-yourself beauty treatment article; to the personal, such as one writer’s essay about her mom marrying her best friend’s dad; to the serious, such as the article exploring the impact of SlutWalks or our discussion of James Deen’s female fanbase.

When beginning this project and reaching out to friends and classmates to write and contribute articles, I emphasized that *Grace* aims to provide a stronger voice for teenage girls online. My number one rule for writers: no fluff language or phrases like “totes adorbs” or “so profesh.” While I understand and support the conversational tone necessary to connect with readers of women’s magazines, I draw a fine line between informal and condescending.

Providing a strong balance between superficial and deep topics also plays a major role in *Grace’s* content and variety. For example, the “Your Style” section, which focuses primarily on fashion and beauty, mixes blithe articles about the best new nail polishes and stylish female television characters with more serious takes on style, such as the recent trend of breaking traditional fashion rules or examining the rise in number of students pursuing degrees in fashion in recent years. Similarly, the “Your World” section includes several mature articles, ranging from an exploration of dating apps like Lulu and Tinder
to an examination of pornography’s role in girls’ sexuality. Lighter pieces in the “Your Life” section, such as how to take a perfect Instagram photo, balance out the depth of heavier topics, sustaining the fun, yet mature atmosphere *Grace* offers.

*Grace* asks readers to simultaneously view modern society through a critical lens and as an innocent teenager, proving these two viewpoints do not necessarily need to be mutually exclusive.
Aesthetics and Collaboration

Aesthetics

One of the most important aspects to me when crafting Grace was creating a website that was both sleek and functional. I didn’t want the page to become bogged down with too many extra colors or designs, which I felt would detract from the writing and photography. My main goal for the layout was to build an easy-to-navigate site that stays clean and easy to read no matter how deep into it a reader navigates.

The purple and grey color scheme stemmed from a desire for the site to be girly and playful, but not over-the-top, in-your-face pink and sparkles. The purple accents, inspired by my all-time favorite nail polish color, OPI’s Do You Lilac...
It?, provide subtle girly touches to the page, while the grey contrasts the black and white, yet still remains semi-neutral.

The decorative typefaces work to achieve this balance of feminine, yet composed as well. Though I loved the fun vibe the curly typeface Xiomara used for the header gives off, it’s easy to overuse. Serif Didot and sans serif Arial used throughout the majority of the site serve as anchors, providing a touch of decorativeness without appearing over-the-top.

One major inspiration for this aesthetic, and on some level the project as a whole, was blogger Emily Shuman’s Cupcakes and Cashmere site. Shuman’s neat layout features a solid white background, analogous to *Grace*, with simple headlines and non-distracting sidebars. Though she includes ads down the side of her blog, the editorial content of Cupcakes and Cashmere always remains the focus, and Shuman never loses her voice under sponsored content or pesky pop-ups. Though *Grace* stands apart from C&C as a journalistic website, instead of a blog, Shuman’s knack for succinct explanations and crisp photography certainly served as inspiration towards *Grace’s* overall design.

Blogger Kath Younger, of Kath Eats Real Food fame, also became an unintentional influence into the overall design of the website. Though slightly busier than Shuman’s sleek layout, Younger’s clean design, featuring pops of color on a white background, served as a second example of how simple, tidy layouts keep the focus on the writing instead of distracting the reader with moving ads or boisterous sidebars.

**Collaboration**
Unlike other hands-on journalism experiences offered at Syracuse, this project provided a unique opportunity to collaborate with my peers in an environment where I was in complete control. Free to make any editorial choices I wanted and starting completely from scratch, I called every shot along the way.

Collaborating with classmates and friends proved to contain both upsides and obstacles, however. I was lucky enough to work with some of the most talented writers and editors in my major, and am walking away from the partnership with well-written articles and strengthened friendships, bonding over a common love of journalism and a drive to constantly improve what's out there. Yet, holding hard deadlines for friends and sending constant email reminders became a nuisance. At times, it was hard to constantly harp on friends, yet the experience taught a valuable lesson on how to always stay professional in any situation.

The collaboration aspect of this project, while helpful for the most part because it allowed me to utilize others’ talents to fill my site with content, also proved detrimental to the ideal timeline. Relying on other people means working around missed deadlines and unanswered emails. The general timeline arched from creating a storyboard in November, procuring writers in January and February, and setting story deadlines for March in order to complete the project by late April. However, the unpredictability of others forced me to become flexible with the editorial timeline, working through pieces as I received them and constantly pushing for writers to meet deadlines.

Crafting the Website
The decision to code my own site completely from scratch, in place of using a template, played a major role in the layout, functionality, and challenges of this project.

I learned basic HTML5/CSS coding through my web design class, and was lucky enough to receive endless support from the professor. However, starting a website from nothing begins with a lot of tough questions regarding the layout, color scheme, and added features. Although anything can be changed later, it is a thousand times easier to have a clear plan from the beginning. I knew I wanted a sleek, clean layout and immediately chose lavender and grey as accent colors.

```php
/* Template Name: Fashion */

<?php
    get_header();
?>

<div class="showcase-column">
    <div class="showcase-container">
        <div if ( have_posts() ) : while ( have_posts() ) : the_post(); ?
            <h1><?php the_title(); ?></h1>
            <p><?php_e('Sorry, no posts matched your criteria.'); ?></p>
        </div>
    </div>
</div>

<?php wp_reset_query(); ?>

<?php query_posts('category_name=fashion&posts_per_page=1'); ?>
    <div class="showcase">
        <div class="slide-text">
            <h2><?php the_title(); ?></h2>
            <p>Read More »</p>
        </div>
    </div>
</div>
</div>
</div>
<br />
</div>
</div>
</div>
</div>
</div>
</body>
</html>
```
From there, the freedom of not using a template became apparent as I handpicked where each element went and what each looked like, from headlines to size and placement of photos. I wanted the sidebar on the right-hand side with links to social media and a live feed of Grace’s Twitter account. For the main compartment of the site, I chose to feature one large image teasing a story front and center, with smaller thumbnails stacked underneath, making the feature image the most prominent part of any screen. Although I believe that the Grace logo is an integral piece of the identity of the site, I didn’t want it to be the main focus of every page, as many pre-made WordPress templates do.

Although coding started off messy and confusing at first, as the site neared completion, I was able to quickly and easily format each story in a way that best suited each particular article. The flexibility that creating a custom site afforded became invaluable every time I decided to include a new feature, such as a custom search bar and an “About” page introducing the site to readers. Creating a custom site also allowed me to control miniscule, yet important, details such as
the spacing between lines of text, where each different typeface was used, and the animated feature image on the home screen. Though any single detail might not greatly detract from the project if eliminated on its own, the culmination of so many personalized features gives the site its essence and personality. The customization and specialization of each page also makes Grace unique from any other site, especially others targeting the same key demographic.
Another reason choosing to create a custom site proved the right choice for this project was the ability to include responsive design. Though tricky to measure and test at first, I was able to modify the proportions of the site to it may be viewed on mobile devices and tablets as well, without losing the functionality of the desktop view. Because of the mobile nature of today’s young women, as well as how they divide their time between several devices, adding responsive design allows Grace to become mobile and keep up with the fast-paced nature of its readers. This feature is crucial in remaining a competitive source of news and entertainment for this age demographic.
Style Inspiration: The Trendiest Women on TV

Written by Nicole Battafarano

Photography by 2014 Wallpaper

From Blair Waldorf to Olivia Pope, female characters set the style bar high. Next time you’re in need of fashion inspiration, look no further than the silver screen. Here’s our choice for the chicest women on television.

Gossip Girl
Though the outfits of the entire cast were drool worthy, no GG devotee could forget the preppy, sophisticated outfits of the “Queen B” herself. Whether on a press day with the Prince or scheming with Chuck Bass, Blair always set the tone with her outfits. The bad girl’s mix of ruffles, bright colors, and floral prints showed us that
Reflection

For a period, I wasn’t sure if I truly loved my chosen topic. Part of me still wished I had focused on children or created something in print. But with society’s constant shift toward digital platforms, as evidenced through the rise of social media and the development of native iPad publications, a print magazine, especially aimed toward an extremely young demographic, would have fallen flat. Informing others, sharing significant stories, and bringing people together serve as constant goals for my career in journalism, and creating a publication that solely served as a personal interest would not have fulfilled those objectives.

Instead, Grace fills a necessary gap within the digital magazine content available to teenage girls, as discussed previously. It serves a higher purpose than simply entertaining young girls with superfluous quizzes and doesn’t insult their intelligence with condescending tones. Young girls deserve the same amount of variety, depth, and intellect in the content created specifically for them that older women have access to.

I hope that websites like this become the mainstream style for not only Grace’s targeted demographic of teenage girls, but teenage boys and younger children as well. This website serves as an example of a site that is able to offer content both relevant and interesting to a young adult audience, yet intelligent and thought-provoking in the same breath. Though still developing their opinions and worldviews, I do not believe teenage girls need to be sheltered from every aspect of the “real world.” These girls deserve more credit than many websites allow them, and Grace sets itself apart by offering a healthy mix of frivolous and provocative.
As a subscriber to Seventeen, one of Grace’s viable competitors for this age bracket, I constantly compare their content with my own. Despite the competition factor, Seventeen’s stance as a national magazine facing a large market makes it a solid benchmark for comparing how my content and ideas contend. Much to my delight, upon flipping through Seventeen’s April 2014 issue, I found several articles that completely overlapped with topics Grace had covered, including healthy smoothies, slumber party ideas, and do-it-yourself beauty treatments. This discovery reassured me that I was leading Grace in the right direction, and providing content that young girls truly will find relevant. Grace would be nothing if it didn’t serve readers well, and I’m incredibly pleased to find that it hits the bullseye.