**Energize Your Recording Volunteers:**

**Tips for Producing MAGAZINES in the Digital Talking-Book Format**

*What makes magazines so special? So worthy of your ambitious goal-setting?*

*There are many reasons, but* ***four basic ideas*** *come to mind:*

***DEFINE*** *your library’s identity*

***EXPAND*** *the audience for your studio’s efforts*

***DISRUPT*** *the usual production routine, maximize teamwork potential*

***ENERGIZE*** *and challenge your volunteers like never before…with MAGAZINES!*

**O N E**

INTRODUCTION:

WHAT’S SO GREAT ABOUT MAGAZINES?

**Some incentives to consider:**

1. **MAGAZINES CAN ESTABLISH “BRAND IDENTITY”**

* Has your program considered a “signature” title the showcases or better defines your state or region? Examples include *Arizona Highways, Michigan History, Missouri Conservationist, Southern Living, Texas Monthly* ...just to name a few.
* Or what about establishing a strong link to a “national interest” title -- more of a household name? *National Geographic Traveler and Smithsonian* are clearly “signature” titles for Insight for the Blind studio (Fort Lauderdale, FL)… and by extension - the Florida Bureau of Braille and Talking Book Library. Likewise, *Cowboys & Indians* magazine remains the primary identifier for the Oklahoma LBPH recording program.

1. **MAGAZINES = WIDER REACH + ONGOING ENGAGEMENT**

* Regardless of publishing schedule magazines offer a chance for steady patron “traffic”. They can help gradually build visibility and recognition for your library and recording group. Magazine readership can gradually“snowball”,especially if you’re creating a dependably professional sounding product.
* A bestselling book in audio format can enjoy a temporary surge in readership on the heels of good reviews or its release as a major motion picture. While *magazines* that have developed a loyal following may enjoy a few hundred hits per issue!
* As more patrons access magazines through BARD mobile and the magazines on cartridge (MOC) program – and become more comfortable with the bookshelf function -- we anticipate a gradual increase in subscribers.

1. **THE BENEFITS OF BACK ISSUES**

* Once you’ve been producing a “signature” magazine for a while, a growing collection of back issues may be the tipping point for someone considering a subscription. NLS-produced titles like *American History*, *Asimov’s Science Fiction*, *Consumer Reports*, *National Geographic*, and *Poetry* are just few legacy titles that possess “timeless” appeal. Seeing several *year’s-worth* of back issues available for download may incentivize new subscribers.

1. **DEMOGRAPHIC OPPORTUNITIES**

* Are there are opportunities to pick a title that “scratches an itch” for an underserved demographic? NLS currently recording **48 magazines** under contract with 3 professional studios. And our current roster Network-produced QA magazines now includes **12 titles** from 5 volunteer groups. So, we’ve “officially” got **60 different NLS magazines on BARD**. How many other Network magazines are produced in NLS format? A few dozen, perhaps? Sounds like an OCEAN of opportunity to expand our selection.

1. **MAGAZINES =** ***GROUP EFFORT!***

* By their very nature, they can play directly to the strengths and diversity of your volunteer team! Magazines have the potential to call upon a wide range of skill sets…and as you discover the unique *strengths and expertise* of your individual volunteers, some natural fits may emerge.

**T W O**

BENEFITS FOR YOUR VOLUNTEER TEAM

**FULL ORCHESTRA**

Rather than a “duo, trio, or quartet” as we see in audio book recording, the production of a full-size monthly magazine can engage a “**full orchestra**”

**OUT OF SEQUENCE**

Like motion pictures, magazinescan be produced out-of-sequence, based on who’s available and when. This is especially helpful when dealing with volunteers that have irregular schedules, or just come in whenever they have a little time available.

**CASTING**

We often think about casting as pertaining only to narrators, but really, it extends far beyond that.With careful planning, magazine productions can zero in on the core strengths of your team and promote more efficient use of their time... Because ideally, there’s always SOMETHING to do!   Specifically, the preparation of print copy, rehearsal and recording, corrections and final mastering; DTB construction, testing, and shipment.

**THREE ESSENTIAL TEAM FUNCTIONS** - featuring a mix of studio roles...

1. PAGINATION (i.e. PRE-READING + RESEARCH + NOTATING PRINT COPIES)
2. PRIMARY RECORDING (i.e. NARRATION + MONITORING + REVIEWING)
3. IN-HOUSE REVIEW & FINAL MASTERING (i.e. FINAL QC + EDITING + DTB CREATION)

**STUDIO ROLES....**

Many studios frame the Narrator role as a “carrot” - something to be earned after a person gains experience as a monitor and reviewer. In this light, magazines can provide a great training ground for new talent, offering opportunities to develop good habits and sharper attention to detail *ahead of* actual hands-on recording duties.

1. **REVIEWER**

* Gets volunteers familiar with the subject matter and overall “voice” of the magazine.
* Teaches new recruits about the building blocksof good audio quality and continuity.With magazines especially, they’ll encounter a *variety of voices* and recording teams -- and new reviewers can learn to recognize the strengths and weaknesses of each.
* And perhaps best of all, reviewing can instill an overall sense of pickiness that can carry over to the monitor and narrator roles!

1. **MONITOR**

* By overseeing live recording sessions, volunteer monitors can become more confident and efficient sound engineers/editors
* Monitors directthe recording session,helping set the tone and pace of the workflow. The also set and maintain good volume levels for the narrator, cueing and capturing each moment of the session.
* Monitors listen with a discerning ear and offer praise and encouragement; they also request touch ups and re-dos, as needed.

1. **NARRATOR**
   * Magazines offer experience with shorter projects - articles vs. full books – newer narrators gain experience navigating the “story arc” for smaller chunks of material 5 to 35 min.
   * Magazine work can help build vocal endurance for longer projects… Magazines can also help newer narrators develop their tools of expression, since they may be juggling a variety of subject matter.
   * They can expand the interpretive, navigational skills required for relaying the dynamics of longer more complex reading assignments.

MAGAZINES activate a greater variety of diverse talent, while working with a wider variety of subject matter. They are a great teaching ground, since the lessons come in smaller chunks. Time spent in ALL studio roles can help to elevate the everyone’s performance. Volunteers can gain an enhanced sense of pickiness, more technical expertise, develop empathy and diplomacy, plus the can discover their own “voice”.

**T H R E E**

PLANNING AND PRODUCTION TIPS

**Should you consider a *truly* local magazine?**

Such a title may provide a perfect match to your library’s or state’s mission.

***Reflections from Central Florida*** and ***Oklahoma Today*** do a great job of providing historical perspectives, personality profiles, and local event coverage. Back issues of local-interest magazines can provide a solid historical or cultural. In a nutshell -- recording a local interest title could be of real value to patrons in your service area who might otherwise go without!

**What about a *“marquee”* name title”?**

A wider-interest magazine may be of wider interest to your volunteers!  It could spur more participation.  If you’ve got a large and restless team, perhaps a more complex title may fit the bill and keep many folks occupied. Of course, it doesn’t have to be a “big” complex title when sometimes, a shorter, more compact one may be a better fit -- Especially if your studio’s resources are more scarce. Whatever the size and scope, a more recognizable title can also serve as impressive and practical talking point -- especially when it comes to firming up state budget allocations or planning fundraising messages.

**PAGINATION = *PREPARATION***

Technically, pagination is “the sequence of numbers assigned to pages in a book or periodical”. But when it comes to preparing a print issue for recording, we suggest paginating the key components of each article, too.

* Be sure to obtain at least TWO copies of each issue: Monitor + Narrator
* Pagination is a great team activity – it’s like afleshing out a **screenplay**, since you’ve got the “script” and you’re adding more instruction for the narrator and monitor to follow.
* And what should be **excluded?**  Candidates include time-sensitive listings (some contests, calendars), visually dependent pieces, photo essays lacking useful stand-alone text, word puzzles, etc.When preparing the print copy, some studios **staple together** non-article content to ensure that no advertising or other intentionally excluded items are recorded.
* Pagination helps to establish a standardized approach for the magazine as a whole. You’re seeking to eliminate any ambiguity about the intended flow and also ensure that complementary items appear at appropriate points within articles.
* Some print layouts can be “busy” looking - this requires extra effort to chart the course for the recording team and make sense of things.
* Look at “the big picture” and prioritize the print page accordingly and number items in their best order of appearance.
* Be sure to incorporate secondary itemsinto the numbering -- e.g. captioned items, sidebars, sections, subsections, recipes, poems, etc. Remember -- these may be best placed within the body of the article, or immediately after it -- wherever it’s the most useful.
* In most -- but not all cases -- photo captions are groupedat the end of an article…but may be a useful complement when placed within the article – judge this on a case by case basis.
* Of very high importance: PRONUNCIATION GUIDES!Carefully pre-read and highlight all potentially problematic words - *then look them up.*
* Write out *phonetic pronunciations* in a WORD LIST reflecting order of appearance in the article. Staple these “cheat sheets” ahead of the articles themselves.
* Share your pronunciation research liberally, since this can help to avoid redundant homework and provides a nice boost to other recording teams.
* Word lists are also helpful for narration rehearsal ahead of recording sessions - the actual pronunciations are right in front of them, making it easier to practice a smooth delivery.
* It’s also important for monitors to have their own photocopy handy.  If the narrator accidentally stumbles or skims over something, request a correction on the spot.

**Here are some commonsense tips for RECORDING MAGAZINES**

* Maintain clear STUDIO LOG SHEETS. Create detailed temporary file names for each article that incorporate page range, narrator name, and studio number.
* Have teams match new recording levels to “surrounding material”.
* Ideally recording sessions last 3 hours max, with breaks every 30 minutes.
* Encourage monitors to drop basic markers in the WAV file for navigable items. E.g. captions, recipes, sections, subsections, and the like. These can help eliminate guess work for the DTB author.
* Reinforce that rich multi-level navigation in magazines brings audio readers *closer to the print reader experience*. Level-one articles are crucial. Secondary and tertiary levels of navigation can further enhance the reader’s experience.
* Make *corrections* part of your volunteers’ regular routine. Once an article is recorded, send it to review as soon as possible. If problem areas are identified, the original recording team can make “corrections” part of their session -  so their work can be finalized ASAP for the master WAV file.
* When outfitting or upgrading multiple recording rooms with new gear, try to have everything match: workstations, sound cards, digital interfaces, microphones, peripherals. This makes for a level playing field for multiple recording teams using multiple set-ups -- especially the case for magazines. Naturally, this also helps your book recordings sound like they all came from *the same place.*
* In the same vein -- have teams record their corrections in their “original” recording room (consult the studio log sheet)...
* Once the FULL audio master wav file is complete, we highly recommend renaming it, using NLS’ time-tested file-naming convention for magazines. Use a

BASE FILE NAME.

* The title is written in lower-case, with each word separated by a dash. Then, underscore followed by the four-digit year ( \_YYYY). This is followed immediately by a dash, then the two-digit month (-MM). *Popular Science* January 2017 is written as “popular-science\_2017-01”. For bi-monthlies, the numerical representation of the first month is used.
* The Table of Contents is best be recorded AFTER the body of the issue is done.  It must reflect the chronological order of articles in print, and should supply accurate recording times, rounded to the nearest minute.
* IGNORE the print contents and *create your own script*. Sometimes, the print issue will offer only scant highlights of what’s to come, or it will visually break up department and feature listings over several panels or pages. It seldom gets right to the point!
* Each audio contents listing must include the article title, starting page number, and reading time.  It’s okay to add more descriptive information culled from the print Contents if it’s a helpful enhancement.
* Another post-production tip: Double check all of the opening and closing announcements for accuracy. In the opening announcement -- does copyright info match print copy?  Approximate reading time match actual? In the closing announcement, is the correct publisher name and address present?  Specialized format announcement, correct? Instruction for defective copies?
* It’s really wise to do \*one last\* front-to-back scan of the magazine’s master audio file to ensure that it’s complete. With the open + close checked, make sure that ALL articles in between are actually “on board”, too!
* In many cases, a single individual ultimately takes care of the final assembly of the audio master. Ideally, they will serve as the last check to ensure completeness and proper chronology of articles - Ensuring that page numbers and reading time citations all agree. They’ll also verify audio quality and continuity.  If any mistakes or irregularities are identified, this is THE time to fix them!

*Remember* It’s all about DEDE!

* How magazines can **DEFINE** your state library’s identity
* How they can **ENGAGE** more patrons; reach underserved demographics; provide more choice for OVER-SERVED demographics (haha)! They can increase return traffic & foster loyalty -  especially as patrons become more tech-savvy
* Magazines can **DISRUPT** the usual studio routine and put more volunteers to work with a wider array of tasks
* They will **ENERGIZE** your volunteers by providing ample training opportunities and playing up to their unique interests, expertise, and backgrounds...

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