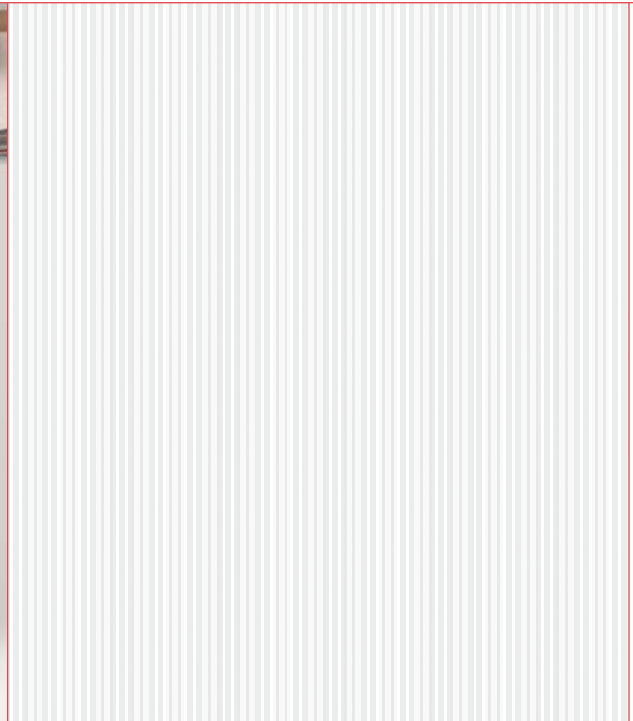


# 2006 MAGAZINE CRITIQUE SERVICE



- FINAL REPORT FOR: Sample Magazine #2
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# EDITORIAL REPORT



**■ MAGAZINE ARCHITECTURE – COVER****REVIEW #1**

The two covers I reviewed, May and June 2006 look like they could be from different publications. While the logo all the way across the top still seems strong and modern, neither of the two cover art choices rocked my world. Below the logo, elements seemed almost upside down: cover story promotion at the bottom of the page and inside stories promoted at the top. Not only would this not hold up in a newsstand setting, I don't think it would hold up on an office desktop where tops of covers peek out from a stack or mail and other publications,

In May, the Internet illustration seemed generic. I don't know if it was chosen from an image bank or not, but I've seen its like many times and the TV commercial of a few years ago that featured an audio system having the "blow him away" effect from which it was derived. But more of a problem was the location of the promo type. The first story on the cover was "Countdown to XXXXXXXX" and my eye kept me going back to the art and that type, trying to find a connection between the cover art and XXXXXXXX. When I finally moved my eye downward, I got the point of the Internet story. Overall, though, it seemed like a reasonable attempt to deliver a contemporary, consumer-like look.

In June, the cover art seemed like a great idea that didn't quite work. Without the inside cover description, I couldn't tell that the 30s folk were in front of Cloudgate. It looked like an old-fashioned "fish-eye" lens approach and the distortion was distracting. I know it's important to get the faces of your honorees on the cover, but since the folk were not particularly well-known, they weren't very compelling. As a result, June looked more like a "trade" magazine than May. Again, the position of the promo type bugged me. What do these guys have to do with "How to get (almost) any buyer into a home?" Oh, I see, these are the Under 30 people promoted at the bottom.

Three stories are probably enough to promo on the cover, but only the "How to..." promo grabbed me, even though the XXXXXXXX and Digital Camera stories were very good when I got into them inside.

**REVIEW #2**

The key points that jump out from these covers: cover language and page numbers both need to be in a larger point size, and the language could be jazzed up a bit. Questions are good ("Can the XXXXXXXX survive?") for drawing in readers, but other lines ("Blogs for business growth") seem a bit staid. In light of the "30 Under 30" issue, it seems these covers need language that's a bit more punched up, language that suggests an up-to-date insider-ness.

In addition, the June cover button calling for registration for the XXXXXXXX conference is also too small. Think bolder with all cover elements.

Concept covers offer a special challenge for designers, and I think this one in May ("The Power of Internet Marketing") works well. For redesign purposes, I'd suggest sticking with the full bleed and going to a more interesting sans serif for cover language.

You should also redesign your logo. Again, there are sharper, heavier, more updated sans serifs that might work nicely for you. This logo font looks a little thin.



■ MAGAZINE ARCHITECTURE – TABLE OF CONTENTS

REVIEW #1

The Tables of Content I reviewed were all pretty strong, well-organized, clean and directing, not distracting. Features, departments and columns are clearly separated and the features, in particular, are promoted nicely with well-written blurbs that are bright without being overly clever. The department subsections with the one or two word bold label for stories bothered me a bit. The demand for one or two bold words meant the choices were very generic, i.e. in May, XXXXXXXX section, the label is Money. Money is always nice but in a business magazine, every story could be promoted with that. It's a tough assignment to find clever labels for each story, but when they are so generic, they are not very valuable.

The art alongside the Table seemed lost to me and while it squared off the page well, it didn't direct me well to stories. Not bad, but more decorative than designed.

REVIEW #2

Contents pages are text heavy and slabby. If possible, go to a two-page design with features on one page and departments on the next. This should allow for bolder treatment with graphics.

Art element choices in June TOC are excellent, as all have a person or people in them—even the illustration. In May, however, there's not a single person to be found. I'd be more likely to read a story that I felt had a human connection, so consider trying to get at least one photo on the TOC each month that shows a person.



■ MAGAZINE ARCHITECTURE – EDITORIAL

REVIEW #1

Only one of the issues, June 2006, had a traditional editorial in the “Editor’s Note” and I didn’t find it to be particularly compelling. While it did successfully mix a discussion of the issue content with the announcement of the association anniversary, it was very much an association-pleaser and empty of any recognition of real issue or conflict. Not bad, but something I believe most readers would skip.

The other editorial option, “The XXXXXXXXXXXX Report” could have been dreadful—just another bunch of boosterism by an association president, but actually was several cuts above the usual. Both editorials were about “real” issues and had balanced arguments. One actually was about “balance” in news reporting and suggested some ways in which the audience could react and promote their industry. Pretty decent leadership and if not totally inspirational, well-written with a sense of “marching orders” for the audience. Not the usual industry hype.

The photos were adequate, but both could have used an e-mail address to encourage reader interaction.

REVIEW #2

The editorials by XXXXXXXXX are fine. They convey a sense of being written by a seasoned professional, and of course they are, so there are no problems here. Stevens takes a nice tone in encouraging readers to help uplift the public’s impression of XXXXXXXXX, and he does it inclusively with language like “let’s make sure that we’re providing...” He makes himself a part of the industry. Good.

Why is there a call-out quote from XXXXXXXXX in the June issue and not in the May issue? This is an important element for a text-heavy page. Use it, and use it in a larger font.

And there’s an editor’s note column by XXXXXXXXX in one issue but not the other. Why doesn’t she appear in every issue?



**■ MAGAZINE ARCHITECTURE – NEWS COVERAGE****REVIEW #1**

The XXXXXXXX section was a little disappointing and confusing. Obviously, this is the section that is reserved for news, but some columns, the Economy, also go under its banner. Most specialty business publications have moved to a “News You Can Use” format that makes business news trends relevant to its unique readership. XXXXXXXX, however, still seems to emphasize the direct association connection—legislative efforts, studies, etc. This would be fine, especially since the association is so actively engaged in news trends and issues such as health care and proliferation of banks in unrelated services, but when it is mixed with conference promotion articles and a New Orleans feature as the conference site, the whole section starts to read like old-fashioned “association releases.”

I think the writing needs some improvement, too. Shorter paragraphs, some brighter language and fewer vague time references. Too many items begin with “recently” or “for years” rather than a sense of breaking news. A few more non-association sources in the news trends articles would be nice, too. I can see the staff is putting an effort into improving on the usual releases they must get from the association, but many of the stories still read like the press release is where they were initiated.

However, the writing in general showed the advantages of clarity and brevity—clearly professional in preparation—and a good sense of news order.

The State Roundup items were all interesting but I don’t really understand the “one paragraph” for each item format. Make sit look cumbersome and blocky.

**REVIEW #2**

The Front Line mixes up news nicely with short bits (Fast Takes), data-supporting graphics (Economy) and longer pieces (conference), but I think the short takes need to come first to grab attention and keep the section moving. It’s heavy to have such long stories at the front of the news section, too heavy to pull readers through quickly.

And while the stories do a fine job in terms of writing and reporting, design undermines their message. Why does the Front Line eyebrow revert to a serif font? (For that matter, why do ALL of the eyebrows appear in a serif?) There seems to be no relationship between the XXXXXXXX font on the cover and the eyebrows throughout the magazine. No cohesion here, design-wise.

Summary: get to the quicker, shorter stories first and end with the meatier stuff (conference reports).



■ MAGAZINE ARCHITECTURE – DEPARTMENTS

REVIEW #1

The Departments—I'll throw in The Economy even though it is grouped under Frontlines-- are a mixed bag, some written by staff and some as columns and each reflecting the writers. The LAW and ETHICS stories read like rewritten speeches—generic advice acknowledging the needs of the audience but dreary in their preachiness. The ones I saw could have been enhanced PowerPoint presentations. As a result, I didn't see them having much impact

The staff written departments, however, very generally bright short features showing good reporting, a solid sense of the need for informed voices throughout the stories. "Service journalism" is the still order of the day for most business magazines, but that doesn't preclude good interviews conveying guidance to the readers. For the most part, the staff-written pieces did that job well, though the "For Brokers" section at times slipped into recitation of advice rather than journalism.

The ECONOMY column was always interesting with supporting charts and graphs and I really liked XXXXXXXX's "A Few Minutes With" stories. They made the ideas of industry outsiders relevant and compelling.

I also liked the Buyer's Guide on digital cameras which was a good, specific tech article on a technology that everyone in the field needs to use.

REVIEW #2

Your departments are unquestionably your greatest strength. Your headlines are better in the departments than they are elsewhere, and the text of the departments presents a nice read.

Call-out quotes in departments need to be bigger.





■ MAGAZINE ARCHITECTURE – COLUMNS

REVIEW #1

See my comments on Departments since the columns get groped in that area in the TOC. Again, the staff-written work generally excels, but the “expert” columns are way too generic. The Tech@Work column, on pod casts, for example, was as generic as anything I’ve seen. It could have been published for any audience and read as though it was written as a “one-size fits all” self-promotion article for the author.

Again, the Economy column always had something to say and the “A Few Minutes with...” was a highlight.

REVIEW #2

N/A



## ■ MAGAZINE ARCHITECTURE – FEATURES

### REVIEW #1

Features are this magazine's particular strength. In May, the Internet Marketing package was excellent: well-organized and thoughtfully conceived for this audience. It was loaded with good interviews and practical sidebars like "7 Tips" and "Lead Generation Companies." The package mixed association sources and individual practitioner sources along with tech experts for a compelling blend of to-the-point, practical advice, counsel and news.

As noted earlier in the discussion of the covers, I wasn't fond of the "blown away" images and the generic computer art, but generally the design was sound and I didn't have a sense of being swallowed in gray type, so it did its job. You know, considering the proliferation of laptops and Web-enabled handhelds, art with desktop computers looks like an anachronism these days.

Ditto for the "XXXXXXXX" feature in June. The package featured compelling bursts of narrative within each of the example sections. I'm not real big on breaking these stories up into separate boxes, but the interviews were all excellent choices with good specifics and special points of view. All these folks had something unique to say and the writer conveyed that well. The graphics and design were sound. Sidebars were specific and to-the-point support for the narratives. Good work.

30 Under 30? Well, I'm sure these are all very nice young people, but wading through each profile and smiling headshot was more than I could handle. I understand the value of these features and appreciate the work and reporting, but I find it hard to believe anyone reads all the profiles and get anything of value out of them for their business. If the only glue to this story is "youth" much of the audience won't have it or care about it, I fear. However, an admirable job getting it all together and I don't know what more could have been done with the design to help it.

### REVIEW #2

Wow, the "30 Under 30" feature in the June issue is impressive and well written, but there's no sense of excitement in the design of the headline. In fact, I nearly skipped over the first spread entirely. No draw here graphically. Be bold! Be bold! You've got the best and brightest featured here; they deserve a bold and youthfully sophisticated design.

As for writing, the "30 Under 30" bios are terrific: personal, reflective, easy to read. This is a great piece with human interest. I wanted to keep reading. Your staff handles this style of reporting/writing very well.

Oddly, jumping to "Finding the American Dream," the graphics here do stop me and invite me in. Looks like different people are designing different feature pages in the June issue. The deck on this story is a bit long, but says what is needs to. The type in the graphics describing the XXXXXXXXX family is too small. Same with other boxes. Copy here is also good, easy to read and draws on that human element that's important to this profession.

In the May issue, there's too much slabiness in the cover story sequence, but I can see why. With a concept cover it's hard to carry over elements into several features pages and make it look pretty. But something more should probably have been done here to counteract the slabs of text so many pages in a row. There are virtually no points of entry for the reader when things get this slabby.

Reporting in May features appears solid. Sidebar ("7 Tips for Attracting Leads") is excellent text-wise; short tips are easy to read and quick.



■ MAGAZINE ARCHITECTURE – OTHER

**REVIEW #1**

Not much to say here. I think the TOC might separate out more specifically columns and Departments, but considering how I feel about some of the columns, that might just give the readers more opportunity to skip the columns to get to the meatier short features that I like so much better.

Overall, the magazine seems to have an excellent sense of its audience and mission and I was rarely at a loss as to the focus of the publication.

Again, I liked the ‘A Few Minutes With’ which brought an outsider’s face and comments into the focus...a real nice closer.

**REVIEW #2**

Nice use of last-page space! Calling on people who are not XXXXXXXXX for advice on team building, deal making, etc. is a terrific idea, and once again, you do well with pieces that focus on people and personalities.



■ GENERAL EDITORIAL SCOPE – HEADLINES, DECKS, ETC.

REVIEW #1

Even when cramped for space due to a column design, the staff seems to generate heads and decks with good hooks—rarely just labels. Most captions are just names, but simple and appropriate for business headshots. Feature article captions are more complete elements and fit the stories well. If there is any weakness among these elements, it is in the more generic columns which seem to have sub heads ripped from PowerPoint. I don't know what else I would do with them, but these generic advisory stories are snoozy and jumpier sub heads won't help much.

REVIEW #2

Headline treatment is good throughout most of these two issues, but avoid label heads like those found in the Internet marketing stories in May. Label heads are rarely needed for punch or emphasis, and almost always a more creative headline can be drummed up.

Need more entry points than you have now. Inserting subheads will help your more slabby pages of text.



■ GENERAL EDITORIAL SCOPE – EDITING, FLOW, TONE

REVIEW #1

This is truly a professional publication with high editing standards. While the writing quality varies. Depending upon staff vs. contributed, the editing is consistent and, I think, very sensitive to the need for technical information with compelling narrative. Grammar, punctuation are all fine and language use is generally invisible—no slips into jargon and then back to something else.

I think some of the paragraphing gets a little long and clunky. But that's a matter of my taste, not a professional standard.

- Flow

Most magazines have some trouble with flow and XXXXXXXX is no exception. Getting to the feature well is a little complicated; there seems to be so much stuff to wade through, such as the President's column, Frontlines, other columns. The color Tabs ("Law" "Ethics" etc.) don't help very much but considering how much the magazine offers in each issue, I don't know what else to suggest.

- Tone

See my comments elsewhere. Overall, XXXXXXXX has a great sense of audience and a sound tone of support and guidance. Stories are specific without being loaded with jargon and especially in the features, helpful and sometimes powerful without being preachy. In specific articles, however, this tone slips away in contributed pieces, particularly the generic tech stuff.

REVIEW #2

For the most part text is easy to follow and understand. Your writers understand their readers and it shows.

- Flow

Flow seems interrupted by ads that occasionally look like editorial. In some places you're using fonts that are similar to those found in ads, and this is sometimes confusing. I think a bolder overall design will address this problem.

- Tone

All writing appears appropriate for the audience. Writing and editing do not appear to have any obvious flaws to someone outside of the industry you're serving.



**■ GENERAL EDITORIAL SCOPE – REPORTING, INTERACTIVITY****REVIEW #1**

- Reporting

The reporting skills applied in staff-written departments and features are truly impressive. There is evidence of solid reporting and great effort to find and interview diverse sources, seek appropriate quantitative information to support narrative and provide a balanced view and discussion. I don't know that I can see evidence of fact-checking, but that may be good. Invisible fact-checking leads to strong, confident assertion of the reality of situations.

- Interactivity

Despite the "Reasons to Visit our Web Site" pages, and the "More Online" tabs interactivity doesn't seem to be a strength. Links for more show up in sidebars, but e-mail addresses are not very common among the stories. The "More online" tabs are a good idea but get lost in the column framing.

The letters page is simple and old-fashioned. Good letters, but not much sense of an attempt to generate an ongoing forum of opinion which is made possible by e-mail, blogs and new social networking tools.

**REVIEW #2**

- Reporting

Again, there's very little to find fault with in the researching/reporting end of things. The only comment that might be helpful is to turn more research material into charts or graphs, especially in features. These art elements can be just as useful outside of your Economy news section as they are within it, depending on the story and the data presented.

- Interactivity

Your "Reasons to visit our site in..." Online page looks like a great way to drive readers to your Web site, where they can hang out and get more information. But one page alone, as good as it is, may not be enough. Think about boxes at the end of each feature that repeat the information on the upfront Online page, or offer new information. If a reader misses the Online page you still have another chance at the end of each feature to drive people to your site and interact with them more.



■ GENERAL EDITORIAL SCOPE – OTHER

REVIEW #1

This is outside editorial purview, but the magazine has some of the worst looking ads I've seen in a long time and many seem of the "pretend to be like editorial" style. That must make your designer want to scream.

REVIEW #2

N/A



■ SUMMARY – MISSION STATEMENT

REVIEW #1

Can any magazine live up to XXXXXXXX's mission statement, which I think is a little grandiose? Sold and practical, it is, but "information on how to achieve business success" is a little much. I read two issues and am not much more successful than I was before reading them. However, I think I have absorbed some good guidance, explored some good new ideas and have been left with a sense of best practices. That's plenty.

REVIEW #2

Absolutely lives up to its mission statement. This is not where your challenges lie. You are speaking effectively to your audience and you know them well. That's very apparent.





## ■ SUMMARY – STRENGTH & CHALLENGES

### REVIEW #1

- Strengths

1. Powerful sense of audience needs
2. Excellent reporting, particularly in features
3. Solid adherence to professional journalistic standards

- Challenges

1. Proliferation of association content and promotion
2. Generic contributors

### REVIEW #2

- Strengths

1. Your departments—well written, excellent headlines, easy organization.
2. Infusing human interest and human connection. This is key for a people-oriented business like real estate sales, and you hit the mark with “30 Under 30” and “Finding the American Dream.” Everyone likes to read about people like themselves or people like their clients. It works for every reader. Well done.
3. An overall tone of understanding your readers’ jobs and challenges. You really sound like you’re out in trenches with them, and this probably generates a good deal of reader loyalty.

- Challenges

1. Slabby and timid design throughout.
2. Looks like different staffs are designing and editing different parts of the magazine; lack of cohesion.
3. Occasionally your ads and edit content are indistinguishable at first glance. (Example: page FB5 in your June issue is an ad with a similar, thin-looking sans serif font. Meanwhile, page 51 in the May issue looks at first glance like it could be paid advertising space.) It’s not always clear with a quick page turn where your editorial is starting or stopping.



■ SUMMARY – GENERAL COMMENTS & SUGGESTIONS

REVIEW #1

XXXXXXXXXX is a solid association publication with a strong sense of audience and professional editorial standards.

1. Pump up the online interaction with readers and let the print magazine reflect that.
2. Try to control the association hype in Frontlines. Maybe separate it from broader news.
3. Push contributors a little more to be less generic

REVIEW #2

Overall it looks like you're doing an excellent job speaking to readers in their language and at their level, and addressing the everyday concerns on their minds.

1. Your redesign must be bold and show some sense of movement and excitement.
2. Be sure to include the logo when redesigning. Take a look at newsstand books like Money magazine. You need a more courageous and cohesive approach in the new design.
3. Get away from any typeface that you might see echoed in ads. Do everything possible to distinguish edit content from ads, especially if your ratio favors ads.



# DESIGN REPORT



■ GENERAL DESIGN – COVER

REVIEW #1

Overall the covers are effective, organized, and clean without being too spartan. Masthead/logo works when placed against darker background, but could disappear with lighter areas in cover image.

Page numbering and subheads are at an acceptable amount — enough to generate interest, but not so many that they clutter the cover.

June 06 issue cover is excellent — subjects positioned well with Millennium Park sculpture and adds interest.

May 06 issue cover is a bit over the top for the subject at hand. Lens flare plus the interpretation of Memorex campaign comes across a little contrived. The lens flare effect also creates a “glowing orb” near subject’s hand — something that probably should have been touched up.



■ GENERAL DESIGN – OVERALL LAYOUT

REVIEW #1

The layout is appealing and effective in most cases. One significant issue — I'd recommend adding "curb appeal". In some cases, images are placed close to the fold when they'd be more effective placed near page edges. Images should also be placed closer to the top of the page when feasible. Photos almost always attract the eye before text — place them close to the curb, just as a XXXXXXXX would place a 'for sale' sign closer to passing traffic (aka the reader).

One common element that could be improved upon: the use of hairlines to divide text columns adds unnecessary clutter — I would recommend using them at a 30% shade rather than 100% black. The result would still divide and organize copy but contribute less visual clutter.

There are some issues with shaded pull quotes (example on page 48 of May 06). Yellow/gold tones tend to be difficult to read on a white background. The issue is compounded with the lighter paper stock so I'd suggest avoiding the yellow tones.



■ GENERAL DESIGN – TABLE OF CONTENTS

REVIEW #1

Overall the TOC is well laid out, with images at the outer edge, and features and departments clearly delineated. The magazine's departments and features are distinctively presented. I might suggest that the first page of each department be shown. For example "FRONT LINES.....14", rather than only listing with the department's individual story. This will help readers find their niche topics faster, and saving readers' time is a goal any publication should have.

I would advise against using all caps for the features and upper/lower case for department subheads. This is a case where it should be one or the other.



■ GENERAL DESIGN – FEATURES

REVIEW #1

**May 06**

“30 under 30”. Exceptional job organizing a text and copy heavy topic. Interesting use of quotations on right-facing page, but unsure of the meaning/purpose of the five square “icons” on left-facing pages. Although they don’t detract from the story, they don’t really contribute anything beyond “gingerbread” which is unnecessary with four people photos per page.

“Finding the American Dream”

Opening spread does a good job of catching readers’ attention. However, when it comes to personal/testimonial features, it’s almost imperative that a photo be included for each person/family. The photos help put a face to the subject and make the article much more effective than those that are simply text descriptions.

“What’s Next for the XXXXXXXXX”

A more copy-intensive feature than the above stories, this section might have benefited from photos of quoted XXXXXXXXX /contributors. Again, the hairline dividers could work much better at a lighter shade.

**June 06**

“The Power of Internet Marketing”

Although I think the “blazing computer” image was over-the-top for the cover, it works better as the opening page for this feature. It clearly sets the section apart from display ads and other editorial. Although the topic is technology, I think this is another feature that could use a more personal touch (XXXXXXXXX /contributor photos). The cohesive look of each page distinguishes the feature, however the pull quotes in a gold tone aren’t as easy to read as they should be.



■ GENERAL DESIGN – DEPARTMENTS

REVIEW #1

As a general rule, photos should be placed near outside edge of page to capture interest. Elements such as pull-quotes are well placed — use of shaded quotes adds a nice touch. Good use of space in corner “tabs” to promote online information — they resemble “pull down” menu buttons that readers would see online.

The featured information on the right-facing pages of Departments is well thought out, and is a great way to present smaller stories that relate to their respective departments. The green screened backgrounds help those stories stand out. The only suggestion would be changing the hairline column dividers from 100% black to a lighter shade.





■ GENERAL DESIGN – GRAPHICS/ILLUSTRATIONS

REVIEW #1

In most cases, charts and graphs are effectively used to complement the information presented. The quality of the charts is acceptable, as is the sizing and placement. I think a little more consistency with the styles of illustrations (such as the illustrations on pages 22 and 28 of the May 2006 issue) would give the editorial a little more cohesiveness and appeal.



■ GENERAL DESIGN – PHOTOS

REVIEW #1

Quality and composition of editorial photos are generally fine — placement could more effective (i.e. towards outer edges, etc.). As XXXXXXXX are defined by their relationships (with clients as well as within the industry), I might suggest more frequent use of people in photos. It would accomplish two things — giving the editorial more of a personal touch as well as open opportunities for including diversity. I would not recommend simply using stock photography, especially given the audience.



■ GENERAL DESIGN – OTHER

REVIEW #1

Color treatment needs attention with certain shades. Type treatment of gold/yellow tones on white backgrounds can be difficult to read. Also, exercise caution when using reversed type with large amounts of text (page 42, May 2006). Reversed type is great for attention grabbing headlines and bullet points but in large quantity can strain readers' eyes. Font choices are well-suited for their respective purpose (headline, pull quotes, etc.)



■ SUMMARY – GENERAL COMMENTS

REVIEW #1

As a whole, XXXXXXXXX is a well-designed publication that strikes a healthy balance between approachability and utility. The magazine excels at delivering a product that appeals to its diverse and large audience.



■ SUMMARY – STRENGTHS & CHALLENGES

REVIEW #1

- Strengths

XXXXXXXXX offers a lot of information without being overwhelming. The magazine also manages to maintain a strong “look” while working with a large amount of display advertising.

- Challenges

I'd say that the challenges mostly involve the “tweaking” of certain elements. I'm happy to say that the magazine has a distinctive layout and look, and there's no need to entirely re-engineer something that works well.



■ SUMMARY – SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENTS

REVIEW #1

Listed with each section above.

