



# Columbia Journalism Review.

The voice of journalism

---

Print is the new  
'new media'

*Photo by Chava Gourarie*

**PRINT IS BEAUTIFUL.** It can't notify you when a work email arrives, can't be tweeted mid-sentence, and won't die without a charger. Even better, it's finite.

It's also supposed to be dead. For years, the new media vanguard has preached "digital first" and the death knell has sounded again and again for print, as legendary magazines moved online or ceased publication altogether. Now, 20 years into the digital revolution, print is making something of a comeback. Tablet (<http://www.tabletmag.com/signmeup>), Politico (<http://www.politico.com/magazine/>), and The Pitchfork Review (<http://thepitchforkreview.com/>) are among the successful digital publications that have ventured into print. Nautilus (<http://nautil.us/>), Kinfolk

(<http://www.kinfolk.com/>), and California Sunday Magazine (<https://californiasunday.com/>) have launched in print in the last few years, and their audiences are passionate and growing.

Tablet, a digital magazine for curious Jews (and their friends) that has been around since 2009, issued its first print edition in November. Editor in chief Alana Newhouse says certain stories, including fiction and “deeper” news and culture pieces, work better on paper. “I don’t think the internet metabolizes certain kinds of stories properly,” she says.

Tablet’s print edition is substantial, in size and quality: The pages are artful, the text is generously spaced. The first issue contains three hefty features, including a story on a Japanese manga-style comic about Anne Frank, plus a photography spread, a work of fiction, and a meditation on a Saltine. Tablet’s website receives around 1.5 million readers a month, and the first edition had a print run of 15,000.

“Some of our best content deserves to be on the newsstand or on someone’s coffee table for a while,” says Mark Oppenheimer, Tablet’s editor at large. You can reach more people online, he says, but at what cost? He points to a feature in the magazine by Brett Ratner about the role of Miami Beach Jews in the birth of “modern American cool” after World War II, introduced by a memorable full-color double-page photo of beachgoers. “A perspective-altering piece is worth more for 10,000 in print than as a brief distraction for 100,000 online,” says Oppenheimer.

Samir Husni predicted print’s recovery, if that’s indeed what this is. A University of Mississippi professor known online as Mr. Magazine, he rattles off websites turned print magazines, including CNET, Catster, Dogster, Allrecipes, WebMD, and Net-a-Porter, three of which launched this year. They are among 204 new print magazines to launch in 2015, by Husni’s count, which he maintains on his website (<https://launchmonitor.wordpress.com/>) and updates monthly. Those who abandoned print, lured by the elusive promise of digital, are beginning to repent, says Husni. “Print is the faithful spouse. Ninety-five percent of the money is in print.”

Sign up for **CJR**'s daily email

*A perspective-altering piece is worth more for 10,000 in print than as a brief distraction for 100,000 online.*

Ruth Jamieson, a UK-based journalist and author of *Print is Dead. Long Live Print*, says there's a symbiosis between the melee of the Web and the contained space of a print magazine. "Far from digital being the grim reaper for print," she says, "it's actually made it easier to start a magazine." The Web enables publishers to find and connect with their audiences, and most editorial operations related to running a magazine can be done online.

An advantage of print over the Web, says Newhouse, of Tablet, is that it doesn't have to appeal to everybody. In fact, it's better when it doesn't. "This magazine might not be for you," she writes in her letter from the editor in the first print edition. People want to be part of a tribe, and magazines with tailored content for an ardent readership reinforce a strong sense of community. "We launched to a loyal and excited audience," says Tablet's Oppenheimer. "We don't have a stereotype of who they are, but we think they're willing to be the tribe for this magazine."

Husni agrees that magazines foster community. "It's like a membership card you receive once a week, or month." Costly membership cards are one way to build a tribe, and the fact that they're tangible and collectible is important. "It's primal," says Jamieson. "You can replicate the content online and people will still want the physical object."

A magazine is now a brand: It's a podcast, a social media embed, an article, a homepage, an app. Why not printed pages? One thing is clear: A resurgence in luxe print magazines won't save the newspaper industry, which must compete with the immediacy of the Web.

While some new print magazines have demonstrated success, many, like Tablet, are too new to have a track record. Some experiment with funding models, or they begin their lives as startups with enough funding to last one or two issues before finding a more permanent solution.

*Print is the faithful spouse. Ninety-five percent of the money is in print.*

This summer, Josh Kinney, a Philadelphian and former print journalist, revived the *Philadelphia Evening Post*, a century-old newspaper, with a Kickstarter campaign and an unpaid two-person team. He's on the third issue now, and says the paper has been well-received by readers. "Old people like it because they're nostalgic," says Kinney, and hipsters "swarm all over it like they just found this new, trendy, nostalgic thing." But it's not close to financially sustainable yet. Kinney distributes the *Post* for free, and says that covering the \$5,000 printing cost per issue through ads is tough.

Sure, say the cynics, there will always be enthusiasts, and the Web will help hopeful publishers find enough of them to fund a Kickstarter or two, but the whims of Williamsburg hipsters won't pay your mortgage. (A Williamsburg favorite, *Modern Farmer*, died briefly ([https://www.cjr.org/business\\_of\\_news/modern\\_farmer\\_future.php?page=all](https://www.cjr.org/business_of_news/modern_farmer_future.php?page=all)) due to financial trouble, but has since returned, saved by a loyal reader, according to the *New York Times* ([http://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/15/dining/modern-farmer-tries-a-new-approach.html?\\_r=0&pagewanted=all](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/15/dining/modern-farmer-tries-a-new-approach.html?_r=0&pagewanted=all)).) Jamieson doesn't think print's only appeal is nostalgia. She says that fledgling print-after-digital publishers are still finding their footing, but will soon become truly profitable.

"You don't have to be an artisanal Luddite" to like print magazines, says Mike Miller, deputy managing editor at the *Wall Street Journal*. The legacy stalwart launched a glossy fashion magazine 7 years ago in what Miller described as "a gamble." A year later, in light of its success, the paper is considering launching a second magazine, says Miller, and will distribute a one-off edition with this week's Friday's newspaper. "What we learned is that readers love holding on to glossy mags and curling up with them."

It seems print and digital can co-exist after all. The new won't replace the old. The new will hammer the old, deform it, reform it, reconceive, reconfigure, but the old won't disappear.

In an ironic reversal, it's the old guard that thinks the move to print is crazy. "They think it's retrograde," says Newhouse, "I think it's innovative."

*Has America ever needed a media watchdog more than now? Help us  
by joining CJR today  
([https://ssl.palmcoastd.com/18801/apps/MEMBER1?  
ikey=5\\*\\*M02](https://ssl.palmcoastd.com/18801/apps/MEMBER1?ikey=5**M02)).*

---

Chava Gourarie is a freelance writer based in New York and a former CJR Delacorte Fellow. Follow her on Twitter at @ChavaRisa (<http://twitter.com/ChavaRisa>)