



failure of flash over substance

It is with genuine sadness as a magazine publisher that we note the passing of *Grace* magazine this month. Not a direct competitor of ours, *Grace* was a good magazine that did everything right, according to the so-called industry pundits.

The question is, then, do the industry pundits have the slightest clue what they're talking about, or are magazines losing sales because editors and publishers have spent too long taking advice from the wrong people?

It could be argued that the collapse of *Grace*, and the continuing massive sales slump for *Metro*, serve as a warning to publishers, advertisers and magazine readers alike: they are proof of the failure of flash over substance.

And before everyone jumps down my throat for appearing to suggest that *Grace* lacked substance (because it didn't), let me explain. The magazine industry is currently dominated by advertising agencies. Those agencies can make or break a publication by placing or withholding advertising (which is one reason why *Investigate* relies heavily on direct subscribers). But the agencies also dictate the look of magazines. They like frenetic, active design. Young ad agency staff have to browse through dozens of new magazine titles each week and very quickly get bored. They don't care whether your journalism is the best in the country. They don't actually *read* the magazines in many cases, they just flick through them. So they like magazines that are easy to flick through.

Magazines with frenetic design, like the tech business mag *Unlimited*, are popular with ad agencies who love the look. The magazine wins design awards. *Grace* won awards and was applauded for its design, but ultimately it couldn't turn a profit.

Investigate probably won't win design awards – it is not



considered avant garde enough. But there is a good reason for that: our magazine is designed to be read from cover to cover. Pages that are too busy, or disjointed or wild, do not induce the eye to actually rest on the whole reason for buy-

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ing the magazine in the first place – the articles. And if people don't actually read the articles, but merely glance through the pages, then they're going to finish the magazine 15 minutes later wondering why they paid seven or nine dollars for it. Several more months like that, and they'll just give up buying the magazine altogether, especially if the economy is looking tight.

Too much flash can detract from the substance. It might win applause from the creative types in various design studios and ad agencies, but then – they're not the people actually *buying* the magazine.

So I suspect the truth is that many of the so-called trendier magazines are losing readership because their editors have taken advice from art directors suffering from attention deficit disorder. Which, again, isn't to be critical of art directors - this magazine could do with one from time to time – but I would have thought that the whole aim of the exercise was to relax a person and make them want to read the articles.

The Magazine Publishers Association notes British surveys showing the average time people spent reading a British current affairs magazine was 65 minutes. In New Zealand the figures are similar at the top of the range. But with *Investigate*, a readership survey in July of several hundred people showed the average time spent reading was a whopping 190 minutes. Keep that figure in mind, because when media research company A.C. Nielsen publishes annual figures on the readership of various publications, a “reader” is

defined as a person who looks at that publication for as little as two minutes.

Naturally, at *Investigate* we've tried to identify what it is that people like about the magazine. The research has consistently thrown up comments: “We buy it to read the articles” or “It's great to sit down with a coffee and spend the afternoon reading it.”

And then, after all this, a creative designer-type tells us we're doing it wrong. Go figure.

“In a country this size,” writes *Grace* editor Linda Clark in her final editorial, “a magazine like *Grace* was always going to be a gamble. One look at any magazine stand will tell you sex, scandal and slogan journalism will always be an easier sell.

“So here's a tip. The next time someone tries to do something out of the ordinary, the next time someone tries to treat you like a thinking person and not just a mindless consumer - support them. Because if you don't, they may not last the distance.”

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The awe-inspiring charm of Salzburg

Salzburg is a city to stroll through. A rich and colourful tapestry of gardens and greenery, narrow streets and sun-filled squares, nestling in an incomparable setting. It's clean and wholesome, orderly and quaint. Austria's crown of culture liberally sprinkled with brilliant architectural gems.

Europe's largest and best preserved fortress, the Hohensalzburg, dominates the city. From the lofty heights of the Monchberg, its sombre, majestic stonework rears imperiously over towers and spires, churches and rooftops. Eleven hundred years of chequered history stored within its massive walls.

Founded in the seventh century, Salzburg is the capital of the Salzburg province and owes its early prosperity and wealth to centuries of trading in salt. Before refrigeration, this commodity was essential for the preservation of food and was shipped down river to the Danube, the Black Sea and markets beyond. The 'white gold' was instrumental in providing the revenue for the prince-archbishops to build a city that was sometimes referred to as the 'Rome of the North', due to its Italian character, its special atmosphere and a whole host of ecclesiastical buildings.

The city's favourite son, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (his real name was Joannes Chrysostomus Wolfgangus Theophilus), was born here in 1756. He died of typhoid in

1791 and his grave is unmarked. Short-lived as he was, the child genius was a prolific composer and put Salzburg on the map as a centre of music and culture.

Today this is the big business and tourists from around the world flock to the city to attend any of the annual 4,000 happenings on the musical calendar.

Mozart Week, Easter, Whitsun, and summer festivals, culture days, advent singing and a jazz festival, are just a few of the events that find people of all nationalities queuing to sup from the cultural cup.

Salzburg is probably best known as the 'Sound of Music' city, forever stamped by Hollywood into the hearts of viewers world-wide with the family musical that launched the career of Julie Andrews into orbit. With a daily tour to the original film locations that are scattered throughout the city and its environment, fans are offered free edelweiss seeds, or there is a nightly *Sound of Music* show with or without dinner. There are books and videos, chocolates and calendars, CDs and souvenirs to add more shillings to the millions that flow into the annual Salzburg tourist coffers.

Strolling through the Mozart Place, where a statue of the master glares at the Glockenspiel café, I succumbed to superb coffee served with a slice of heaven cut from gateau the size of a chateau.

Salzburgers may strike the musical notes and accu-

mulate the monetary notes, but count the calories they do not. Close by is Residenz Square, site of the archiepiscopal residence, shown in the film with Swastika flags draped outside and actually fronted by a magnificent baroque fountain. In the square the horse and carriages, a traditional means of transport around the city, await custom.

Narrow passages and graceful archways open on to sun-dappled squares overshadowed with centuries old buildings, picturesque or Romanesque, Renaissance or Baroque. The Stiftskeller St Peter has hosted an eating house of some description since the year 803, and Mozart concerts are held in the hall on the second floor.

I came unexpectedly on the St Peters cemetery, where the Von Trapp family hid amongst the tombstones. The Monchsberg forms a backdrop, with catacombs carved into the massive stone wall.

It's a short walk to the river through streets that are little more than alleyways, packed with boutiques and cafes, restaurants and shops, each one distinguished by an art-worked sign or bedecked with flags and banners. I crossed a bridge over the Salzach and walked through the new town to the Mirabell Gardens where Maria and the children sang 'Do-Re-Mi'. The fairytale fortress was etched against a cloudless sky for this timeless scene from the movie, my own memory was the scent of lilac heavy in the air.

I showed interest in visiting a salt mine and found myself on a guided tour that crossed the now open border into neighbouring Germany and the village of Berchtesgarden. The name may have gained sinister connotations from the days of the Nazis, but the village basks in an enchanting setting of snow-capped mountains, pine forests, and picturesque alpine buildings. Spring blossom illuminates the trees.

It's old world, chocolate box pretty, quiet and peaceful, with delightful narrow streets, pavement cafes, squeaky clean houses with tiny wrought-iron balconies and dazzling

window-boxes. Hitler's former country headquarters, the 'Eagle's Nest', still sits on a mountain peak, though the buildings are now used as a restaurant with all the profits given to various charities.

The salt mine is just outside the town and has been in continuous operation since 1517. Suitably equipped with overalls, we huddled on a small open train that plunged at speed into a very small and totally black tunnel running deep into the mountain. After what seemed an eternity, we came out into a large cave and were given an explanation and shown a video explaining how salt is obtained. We skimmed silently across a salt lake hundreds of metres underground and were presented with a tiny plastic canister of salt before taking the train back to sparkling daylight and the beauty of the mountains.

From Salzburg, I took the train to Bishopshofen and from the tiny station was driven to Altenmarkt, a small mountain village and winter ski-resort. It is also the location of Atomic Ski

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manufacturing, a single-storey garden factory that turns out 800,000 pairs of skis each year and employs a good proportion of the local people.

Altenmarkt is in the Salzburg province and blessed with a backdrop of stunning scenery. The snow had deserted the ski slopes about two weeks before I arrived and the meadows were lush green, speckled with the yellow, white, pink and blue of buttercups, daisies, forget-me-not and clover.



The 3,000 population can be boosted by up to 30,000 visitors during the ski season and many hikers and trampers during the summer. Almost every house in town offers food and lodging, usually at very reasonable prices.

I had been placed in Scheffers Hotel, which is less than 15 minutes drive from the nearest ski-lift, and has a lovely picture book appeal and a mountain view to set the senses reeling. I was following in the footsteps of elite company – Fergie stayed here in 1993 and my host, Anne, was proud to show me a scrap-book and photographs of the Royal visit.

Anne was also the chef and prepared cheese dumplings, a traditional Austrian dish that is placed on the table hot from the oven, with guests helping themselves. Not a meal that lends itself to wine, it is accompanied by large glasses of beer, followed of course by schnapps. How could I forget the tiny glasses of innocuous looking, 42 per cent rocket fuel that followed each beer? 'Prohst' they say and down in one gulp. It arrives with a kick like a wild mustang, and they were happy to tell me it could only be smoothed with more beer and liberal helpings of cheese dumplings. I was delighted to agree with them. Prohst!

Bob visited Austria at the invitation of the Austrian National Tourist Office and Lufthansa Airlines.