

# Magazine Design

Editor  
Chris Foges

The magazine cover is a subject art directors, editors and publishers treat with almost neurotic seriousness. For a magazine facing fierce competition from its neighbours on the rack, it is the difference between being 15 per cent up on average sales in any given month, and 15 per cent down. Of course, content is the key, but without a good cover to attract their attention in the first place, readers will never know what was inside. In his novel *With Friends Like These*, managing director of Condé Nast UK, Nicholas Coleridge, describes the process of selecting a cover for magazines very like those he oversees in real life (*Vogue*, *GQ*, *Homes and Gardens*): 'Successful cover personalities are difficult to predict. A Hollywood star can put out an Oscar-winning performance but flop on a cover. A different star might be going through a professional famine but still shift magazines. Certain actors like Kevin Costner, Hugh Grant, Michael Caine

and Johnny Depp always sell. They're bankers. Barbra Streisand's a banker. Roseanne Barr's a banker. Uma Thurman too. Elizabeth Hurley does it for a certain title but not for others. Kate Moss works where Elizabeth Hurley doesn't. Princess Diana was once worth a 15 per cent boost but then it stopped working. Oprah Winfrey doesn't even pass go. You learn these things as you go along.'

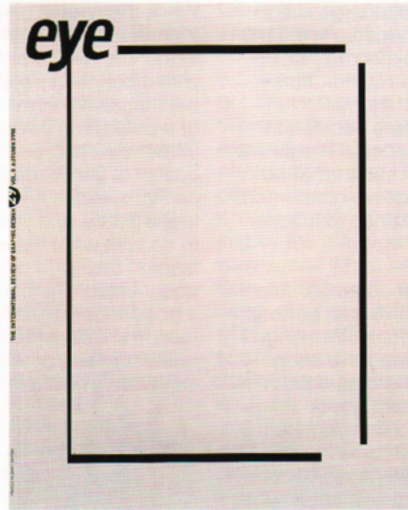
The magazines Coleridge is describing are monthly glossies, in close competition for readers - and by extensive advertising revenue and financial survival - with several other all-but-identical titles. The cover is critical in persuading the reader to pick up one magazine instead of another from the rack. Even when the magazine is not a high-profile, mass-market glossy - a subscription only or in-house magazine, for example - the cover must still compete for the

reader's attention with everything around it: whatever else is in the magazine rack, in the mail that day, or being distributed on the street corner.

Covers have other responsibilities too, besides attracting attention and shifting copies, as Nicholas Coleridge implies in *With Friends Like These*: 'If circulation directors were editors you'd only get six cover personalities on a loop, round and round again. Except at Christmas where there'd be a heavily decorated Christmas tree with sprigs of holly around the logo. And all the cover lines would be about sex and relationships and there wouldn't be any green logos or blue backgrounds because they don't sell. And all the fashion models would be blond and smiling and wearing red jackets and be called Claudia Schiffer.' Readers expect a familiar framework and new content

when they read each new issue of a magazine. As well as creating a long-term brand impression, the cover must also convince the reader that what they are being asked to pay for one month is substantially different to what they paid for the month before, and substantially different again from the next magazine in the rack.

The interrelated functions of the cover - provision of basic information such as price, bar-code, issue number, month, name of magazine, what's inside, special offers, as well as the aforementioned aesthetic considerations - are discussed individually over the coming pages. But magazine covers work as a whole, and successful cover designers consider each of these aspects in the context of all of the others.



**Eye**  
Issue: 29, 1998  
Art director:  
Nick Bell  
UK



**Common Ground**  
Issue: 98, 1998  
Art director:  
Alan Cummings  
USA

Although this San Francisco publication is distributed free on street corners, and is produced on a low budget, an impactful colour cover is used to attract the passer-by's attention away from other distractions.

**Dazed & Confused**  
Issue: Aug 1997  
Art director:  
Matt Roach  
UK

In this issue, cover model Helena Christiansen's modesty was preserved by the application of a metallic coating. Half of the readers who bought the magazine and scratched off the panel got lucky, and saw Christiansen unclothed. The others were disappointed to find herensored by two black stars under the panel.

**Crash**  
Issue: 5, 1998  
Art director:  
Yorgo  
France

**DAZED**  
THIRD ANNIVERSARY SPECIAL  
FASHION ISSUE  
ONLY £1

**STARRING:**  
NOBUYOSHI ARAKI  
NICK KNIGHT  
HELENA CHRISTENSEN  
DAVID LACHAPPELLE  
KARL LAGERFELD  
GLEN LUCHFORD  
RAYMOND MEIER  
STEVEN MEISEL  
JEAN BAPTISTE MONDINO  
HELMUT NEWTON  
DAVID SIMS  
MARIO SORRENTI  
JUERGEN TELLER  
MARIO TESTINO

**PHIL BICKER**  
ANNA COCKBURN  
KATY ENGLAND  
TIBOR KALMAN  
CATHY KASTERINE  
RICHARD PANDISCIO  
NANCY ROHDE  
CARINE ROITFELD  
CHRISTOPH STEINEGGER  
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