

# Papers face plague of glossy mags

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**"People are confusing issues of censorship with commercial exploitation. There's a material value in having access to students, and that's something that should belong to student-owned media."**



Rose-Ann Bailey

For undergrads, reading *Campus Canada* and *Looking Up* is not unlike the experience prisoners of war must undergo while watching *Hogan's Heroes* reruns. Before your very eyes, you are transformed into a lurid sitcom-like of the Typical Canadian Student and then told in clumsy and imperious prose exactly what is supposed to be important in your life. It is a world stripped of conflict, tragedy, injustice, inequality (unless it is in the process of being solved by eager young altruists), or any of the countercultural eruptions or gaping frustrations that might make being young in Canada in the nineties something actually worth reading about.

But if these publications are attuned to students without souls, they themselves are something even worse: they are magazines without journalists. They are part of that quintessential phenomenon of our time, the advertorial magazine, where advertising and editorial material are virtually one in the same. Operating on the sole precept of providing maximum satisfaction to their advertisers, the two magazines have no use for critical or creative journalism.

Which would make them little more than a slick annoyance, if it weren't for the real threat they pose to one of the few sources of critical and creative journalism that actually exists in Canada. To the students who own and run university newspapers, *Campus Canada* and *Looking Up* are much more than throwaway chintz. In fact, it turns out they are downright adversarial advertorials.

**Strolling across the University** of Manitoba campus one day almost two years ago, Alayne Armstrong nonchalantly grabbed a copy of *Campus Canada* from a pile. As entertainment editor of the *Manitoban*, she made a point of reading everything she could get her hands on.

Flipping through it, she was stunned to discover an article on the *Rocky Horror Picture Show* — lifted directly from the pages of the *Manitoban*.

"They hadn't bothered to ask us permission," Armstrong said in a recent telephone interview. "I was very angry."

Some weeks later, Armstrong spoke to the editor of *Campus Canada*. "She basically said they had the right to print anything they wanted from anywhere they wanted," Armstrong remembers, "and we should be pleased that they picked our stuff. She actually said 'You should be flattered that we did this.'"

This was not an isolated incident. On at least one other occasion, Armstrong saw *Manitoban* material appear in glossy magazines. Other newspapers have had similar experiences. The *McGill Daily* was forced to change its copyright policy two years ago after discovering their writers' articles appearing, without permission, in *Looking Up*. Editors of the University of Toronto *Varsity* have had their photos reproduced. And writers from literally dozens of papers have seen their stories paraphrased weeks later, without permission, in either of the two glossies.

And they are rarely flattered.

This is partly because of the company their articles are forced to keep. Both magazines regularly obfuscate the border between ads and articles. A 'news' article in a recent *Campus Canada*, for example, contains the unlikely phrase "Bauer Precision In-line Skates can provide a fun and beneficial workout." A few pages later, a lavish full-page ad appears for guess whose skates. In the latest *Looking Up*, an article which promises "a snapshot" of the affordable computer market names the products of only two companies — Apple and Hewlett Packard — embellishing them with adjectives like "snazzy" and "affordable." As it happens, there are only two companies which regularly advertise computer products in *Looking Up*...

It gets worse. Both magazines regularly run material where you're left wondering whether you've just read paid advertising, gratuitous endorsement or some combination thereof. This is further complicated by the fact that both magazines run 'articles' promoting their own products (*Looking Up's* publishers also import career-help books from south of the border; *Campus Canada's* publishers run product-promotion 'caravans'.) Needless to say, neither has ever published anything that could even obliquely offend an advertiser.

**To understand the rude reaction** they have received from student journalists, you have to understand the long-established traditions of Canada's student press, which is probably the most financially and politically independent of its kind in the world. Canadian students have been putting out their own newspapers for over a century — and have spent much of that time building up

both editorial autonomy and an advertising market.

There are few things student journalists like to argue about more than *principles*. Even if the paper is sloppy, sophomoric and dull, its editors will spend days — months — engaged in arguments with other editors over journalistic principles. In Canada there is a strongly established tradition of newspapers fighting, often physically, to maintain their principles — to stay independent of the student union, for example, or to keep authorities from controlling the content of their papers. Over the years, volunteer staffs have barricaded offices, tackled police and gathered in demonstrations to maintain their publishing independence.

But beneath this patina of quixotic obstinacy lies an almost impossibly fragile organization. Without permanent editorial staffs, the papers are constantly pulling themselves up by the bootlaces as their editors and volunteer staffs successively re-learn their skills and then graduate. Most papers are tiny non-profit organizations with budgets barely above the cost of printing. They get base funds from tuition levies — and the rest has to come from selling ads.

In short, student papers are vulnerable to sudden reductions in advertising revenue. And many student press business managers fear that magazines like *Campus Canada* and *Looking Up* are cutting thick slices out of their own advertising pie.

There is at least some truth to this, says Chuck Kirkham. As executive manager of the student-owned ad sales company Campus Plus, Kirkham handles national advertising for 60 student papers. He warns that an even more serious threat comes from direct marketing, where advertisers skip print media entirely and instead sell their products on campus. Nonetheless, he is able to list a number of major advertisers who have abandoned the student press for the glossy magazines.

"Student newspapers really built the student advertising market. Now other companies are able to take advantage of the fact that there is a market out there," he says.

**The founders of *Campus Canada* and *Looking Up*** never anticipated how seriously students take their papers. They were simply entrepreneurs, after all, who saw a relatively open market in advertising on campuses. How could they have known that the market had been created, nurtured and tightly held by *students*?

Speaking from his Toronto office, *Campus Canada* publisher Kim Locke sounds like he is genuinely bewildered by it all.

"I don't know," he says, when asked why some campuses, including York University, refuse to distribute his magazine. "I hope we can rectify it; we're trying to find a solution to it. I wish I knew why a school such as York would have such difficulty with us."

As far as Locke is concerned, students really *should* be grateful for *Campus Canada*. "People sit back and say 'well, you've never put anything back,'" he says. "Well, you know, that's not true." He then lists the things he's given students: donations to campus athletics, paycheques to the students who distribute his magazine, and — most exciting — the more than \$50,000 in prizes students have won during the past two years, "which include typewriters, stereos, and in-line skates."

Locke doesn't even refer to *Campus Canada* as a magazine in conversation. Rather, it's a "vehicle."

So the student press and the glossy mags don't exactly speak the same language. And, like many other people who don't speak the same language, they are bound to come into conflict.

**It is October of 1991.** Editors and writers from Ontario and Quebec student papers are packed into a common room at the University of Toronto. The occasion: a meeting to talk about advertising competition from glossy magazines. The guest of honour: Monte Perlman, publisher and co-owner of *Looking Up*, who has asked permission to address the gathering.

Though he is not much older than the students, it is easy to spot Perlman. He's the one wearing a suit. Perlman graduated from the University of Western Ontario in 1989 and was immediately attracted to the student advertising market. With his friend Glenn Eisenberg he founded Glenmont Publications and launched *Looking Up* in 1990. Neither had a background in journalism.

The students sit silently as Perlman addresses them: "First of all, I want to let you know that if any of you print anything negative about me, I'm prepared to sue you. And if you try to have my magazine banned from campus, or thrown out or boycotted, I will take you to court. It's as simple as that."

With that as an opening, Perlman slides gracefully into