

Grazia USA: The Most Notable Magazine Launch of 2021

(Editor's Note: To read Tony Silber's interview with Mr. Magazine,[™] for MediaPost's Publishers Daily, about the magazine launches of 2021 including the launch of the year, the relaunch of the year, and the reinvention of the year please [click here.](#))

The Mr. Magazine[™] Conversation With Dylan Howard, Chairman, CEO & Publisher

"We live in a digital led environment so our company slogan is 'stories matter, especially how they are told,'..." Dylan Howard, Chairman and CEO, Pantheon Media

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If you told me early in 2021 that someone would launch a print magazine with 400 pages and lots of advertising, I would have told you that you are out of your mind. Bringing *Grazia* to the U.S.A. is not only an act of faith and belief in the way print can be handled successfully, it is an experience unlike any on the market today combining both quality content, gorgeous photography, and above all a touch of class.

A much needed infusion to the world of magazines in general and the fashion magazine sector in particular. It was not a hard decision for me to choose *Grazia USA* as the most notable launch of 2021 because it rose to the top of the 122 titles launched that year exactly like the foam rises to the top of an excellent espresso.

To learn more about *Grazia USA's* launch, I reached out to Dylan Howard, Chairman, CEO of *Grazia USA's* parent company Pantheon Media Group and we engaged in a Mr. Magazine™ conversation about the story behind the launch of the magazine and his role in bringing it to the United States.

Mr. Howard was quick to point out that the launch of *Grazia USA* was a team effort led by media and business folks he assembled from leading media entities including *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, Condé Nast, *Tatler Asia*, *WWD*, Reuters, *Men's Journal*, Meredith, IAC, Cheddar, News Corp., Refinery29, and a360 Media.

So, here's my lightly edited casual conversation with Dylan Howard, Chairman & CEO, Pantheon Media Group publisher of *Grazia USA*:

Samir "Mr. Magazine™" Husni: As the publisher of *Grazia USA*, the most notable launch of 2021, can you please tell me how you were able to bring into the market in this day and age, an almost 400 page magazine, loaded with advertising among other things...

Dylan Howard: Samir, when COVID hit America, I had a lot to consider about what my next step was going to be, and I decided that I wanted to start another media company and I wasn't content with it being an independent small player. I wanted to bring to America brands that have flourished internationally but have not reached these shores. And in putting together on the back of an envelope, some brands, one of the first brands that came to mind was *Grazia*, because

close to 20 years ago, I actually wrote for *Grazia* when it was a weekly magazine in Australia, which is where I am from. So I opened discussions with Mondadori Media in Italy, and it had been Mondadori's dream to launch a United States version of their flagship fashion and luxury property and just never found the right partner. In me fortuitously, they saw someone who was prepared to actually back it, someone who has an entrepreneurial flair, someone who has gladly no fashion sense, I leave that to the editors, and someone who was prepared to innovate on the brand.

That innovation has meant more to digital covers, so we launched Kim Kardashian in October of 2020 as our first digital cover in the United States, then in February for New York Fashion Week we did three more digital covers which featured Elizabeth Olsen, Keke Palmer, and supermodel Kate Bosworth, and then in between that and the launch of our September issue, we published seven *Grazia Gazettes*, which is a first of its kind newspaper/luxury magazine-type publication- five here in the Hamptons, one in Art Basel in Miami, and one for New York Fashion Week, and that allowed us to create a sense of establishment in the industry. Next will be the Rodeo Drive edition in January. People immediately recognized the *Grazia* name, and they saw that we were doing things differently, and that led obviously up to our September issue, our fall issue, which as you said is almost 400 pages. **I personally believe it is one of the best products in the marketplace, in the category. I believe that its editorial is stronger than its competitive set,** and that is a tribute to the editor in chief David Thielebeule and Casey Brennan the executive editor, and many others (In fact Mr. Howard mentioned almost everyone who worked on the launch of the magazine), and I think that there is some hype around it. Again you mentioned almost 400 pages, loaded with advertising, content in my view, best in class, and three print runs. We had three separate covers. **So this is a commitment to fashion, a commitment to luxury.** This is not me saying I want to get

back in the industry. This is charting a new course and establishing *Grazia* for the future because our audience is younger than everyone else. 50 percent of our readers are age 18-34 and you don't find that anywhere in publishing today.

SH: The publishing model, you are distributing some as a control circulation, you have the newsstand, you have subscriptions, *Grazia* is known as a weekly, tell me more about your business model.

D.H.: So *Grazia* is just one of the tenets in my business, we have near on twenty brands now. We have the digital version of *OK* magazine, *Radar*. We did three start up brands. *Front Page Detectives* which actually picks up on the 1920s pulp magazines- so we relaunched that as a digital website. We have a *Royals* website. We have a female inspiration website. This year we will announce, we have *How it Works*, *History of War*, *All About Space*, and we are going to announce another 4 or 5 print productions that will launch in 2022. But for *Grazia*, it is our flagship, we will do four issues per year. We will continue with *The Grazia Gazette* newspaper which I refer to as the traveling newspaper. We go where people are, much attended events, is where you will find *The Grazia Gazette* like Art Basel in Miami. **We will continue to do our digital covers, but we have a commitment to print.** *Grazia* worldwide is in various shapes and forms, as you pointed out, it is a weekly in some countries. In other countries, it is a monthly. In Australia and here in the United States, it is a quarterly, which allows us the time and resources required to put out a publication that is best in class. **Instead of flooding the market with more of the same, we can take a considered approach to what it is we are publishing.** Likewise, that enables us to work closely with our advertisers to ensure that we are capturing what it is that they want to market and when they want to market. I think we would all agree that the industry is flooded with product and it is not necessarily the highest quality product because of

the frequency in which they print.

S.H.: Did anyone tell you when you came up with the idea that you are going to launch *Grazia* in the U.S., are you losing it? Are you out of your mind?

D. H.: I'll tell you about *The Grazia Gazette*, I mean, I've never published a newspaper. I've worked at newspapers before. I was sitting on a couch one night and I said what if we were to create a 56 page luxury newspaper and distribute it to 40k households in the Hamptons in 2021 and I called my Chief Operating Officer, Melissa Cronin, who joined me from A360 Media, and she said, this is a brilliant idea, and within days, we were in production. So, I'm sure people like to say behind my back, he's crazy. They don't necessarily say it to my face, but **I tell you what there is a sense of pride and accomplishment when my editorial staff and my business staff are able to put together a publication like this and for me as a CEO to be able to see that my investment in hiring the best of the best has paid off.** So for example, our Global Brands Officer is Brendan Monaghan, who has a strong lineage across the media industry from *The New York Times* to *Vogue* and *GQ*, Tanya Amini who comes from Conde Nast, *W Magazine*, our CFO Andrew Lee is a 22 year veteran of Conde Nast. Melissa Cronin who is the ying to my yang, a brilliant, insightful smart strategist, she is the COO and president of the company. Also, Casey Brennan who has worked with me for ten years and as I mentioned our editor in chief David Thielebeule who joined us from *The Wall Street Journal*, and many others. We also had Kevin Sessums as an editor at large. He was the former executive editor of *Interview* magazine and a host of other contributing editors. It's interesting before **I was a very hands-on content guy in my past role. With this I'm not, I've had to take a back seat which is a little different and a little discomfoting at times, but when we put out the three issues and we see that a market is reacting the way it has, I could not be more proud of my staff.**

S.H.: If you are going to look back at those one and a half years, what do you consider, the most pleasurable, the AHA moment, the I've made it...

D.H.: I don't subscribe to the notion that you've ever made it. You are only as good as the last issue and the challenge is on us to produce an issue for March that will again set us apart from the competitive set. **This is not a sprint, this is a marathon for our business. While those other publications will age out of the category in my opinion, I hope and I believe, and Mondadori also believes that *Grazia* will be the last one standing.** In order for that to occur, we need to continue to invest in fashion and luxury and we need to continue to invest in the product. So whilst 2021 was great and we had enormous success and we are all very proud of what we are able to put out, **2022 is only a few days away and we are looking at a very strong line up already of products that we will distribute to the marketplace whether it be a quarterly, the newspaper, or other news formats to tell stories.** We are just really excited about it. To be able to bring a brand that is 83 years young to the United States, with a legacy that it has from Italy to London to France to Germany and now in 21 other countries, is truly passing on the baton to us and **we have to do our founding editors proud and I think we did with the launch of the first issue.**

S.H.: I remember when Didier Guerin came from France trying to launch *Elle* magazine in the U.S., the naysayers said this will never work...

D.H.: I think it was the great Theodore Roosevelt who said something that has just sat with me about publishing. Theodore Roosevelt in his speech, **The Man in the Arena**, he said, "It is not the critique who counts, not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles or where the doer of deeds could have done them better, the credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood, who strives valiantly, who errs who comes short

again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming, but who does actually strive to do the deeds, who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions, who spins himself in a worthy cause, the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat." And that hangs in my office here (in the Hamptons) and hangs in my office in Manhattan as well.

S.H.: You are the man in the arena. What's the biggest challenge that's facing you?

The biggest challenge is continually innovating. **We live in a digital led environment so our company slogan is "stories matter, especially how they are told"** It is constantly innovating, looking for the next method or model in which to be able to showcase content, be it through the intersection of QR codes in a magazine pointing back to video, creating premium podcasts that can traverse the United States into Europe and other areas. **That is the biggest challenge, to constantly bear the cutting edge of how best to tell stories whilst also remembering that there is something beautiful about print.** I think our model of doing a quarterly with a brand offshoot as *The Grazia Gazette* is not only industry leading, it's a sign of what should happen moving forward for the industry to sustain itself.

S.H.: I have to ask you since you were an editorial person, a reporter, a writer, you name it, is there part of your brain that misses that now that you are a CEO and you have to deal with the business side and ensure the business is working and the money is coming in...

D.H.: I am far too busy focused on what is next than I am meddling in what others are achieving with their work, and the premiere issue is tantamount to that. I wasn't involved in the issue. Our COO and President Melissa Cronin, who I mentioned,

was. From a business side, she and Brendan Monaghan lead it. **I'm far too busy looking for what the next move for the company is and we have some big things lined up ready to announce in 2022.**

S.H.: Before I ask my typical last question, is there anything else I failed to ask you, anything else you'd like to add?

D.H.: No, just that I've always viewed myself as a historian and I think I told you this previously of media, I always like to understand the masthead, its history, the people involved, **and I think that those that believe the industry is at the crossroads need to sit back and analyze how to continue to operate in this climate.** I believe the future lies in topic specific or knowledge based journalism. In order to do that, instead of cutting costs, **maybe we need to be a little bit less frugal about that in order to create a product to introduce to customer so that we can convert them into ongoing customers and repeat customers.** I would implore others in the industry to do that because the industry cannot survive with few, it has to survive with many.

S.H.: My typical last question, what keeps you up at night these days?

D.H.: The next deal keeps me up at night.

S.H.: Thank you...