Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

5 Essentials I Have Learned Publishing Cultural Weekly

Adam Leipzig · Saturday, September 5th, 2020

When I started Cultural Weekly, I thought it was going to be a blog. I was lucky enough to grab the URL CulturalWeekly.com, and I just started posting stuff. But six months later a friend asked if he could guest post. I said yes. Then it happened again. Over time, Cultural Weekly transformed into a full-blown digital magazine, and we've now published more than 5,000 articles and poems by more than 900 authors.

Cultural Weekly has been a digital laboratory exploring what works best and matters most for content creators and their audiences. We're now looking at some design changes and upgrades, which will be our fifth transformation. We're looking at being mobile-first, publishing daily, and we're even looking at a new name.

As we enter this next phase, which will take who-knows-how-long, because it's all about creative process, money, time, and wanting to get it really right, here are some things I have learned that won't change.

1. Frequency matters. Writers have a lot to say, especially as social and political events become more prominent in our daily discourse. We have actually started publishing new pieces everyday, to great response. Thanks to editor Chiwan Choi for making this happen. Similarly, our readers expect regularity. The fact that we call ourselves "Weekly" means we have to publish at least once a week.

2. We want to be where others are not. We are not trying to be *The New Yorker*, *The Atlantic*, *Rattle*. We're just trying to be ourselves. We like to be the place that will publish writers who are not published elsewhere, who publish with us because they can get their work up quickly, and keep their copyrights. Or who get their starts here. That said, writers and poets who have first published in Cultural Weekly have later been featured in some more famous platforms, The New Yorker, for instance. That's wonderful, too.

3. Stay open. If people want to write for us, we have an easy submission process. For poetry, it's once a year, through the Jack Grapes Poetry Prize (going on now through August 31), which is also our poetry open submission period. For everything else, including some poetry specially curated of-the-moment, writers just query us. Once we feel a writer is a good fit, we provide them with credentials and they upload material themselves. We check and catch spelling mistakes most fo the time, but we don't edit for content or point of view. We want writers to say what they want to say, in the way they want to say it. (We do weed out the people who want to write promotional material. And we do moderate all comments, to keep the tone of conversation constructive.)

4. Aesthetics is power-structure. We do not have a governing aesthetic at Cultural Weekly, and we do not want to. A society that has an "acceptable" aesthetic turns easily to authoritarianism. Too often in our society, aesthetics have been used as a lever to disempower voices of people whom the normative structures would prefer to be unheard and unseen. You know, saying that something's in "poor taste," "bad taste," "bad grammar," "inarticulate." We don't care what our contributors' aesthetic is, as long as they have an aesthetic. However…

5. Design makes the difference. From the beginning, we wanted to put writers into a well-designed space. The design of an online page creates a sense of importance (or not), clarity (or not), style (or not), even before you get to reading the words. We feel it's a significant and revolutionary act to place creative people whose work may often be unseen into the frame of what is profoundly seen.

I'd love to know what you feel and think about Cultural Weekly, and how we can best transform and respond to creative culture today. Please share your comments below, and I'll keep you posted, too.

Adam Leipzig is the founder, publisher and managing editor of Cultural Weekly. He is also the founder and CEO of Entertainment Media Partners, and is on faculty at the UC Berkeley Haas School of Business. Previously, he has served as the President of National Geographic Films and as a Senior VP at Walt Disney Studios.

Read Adam's take on independent film in 2020 HERE.

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