# A Print Magazine on Any Screen: The Wired App Story

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## Abstract

Magazines are a cultural artifact. In the USA alone, there are 189 million individuals who read magazines, and 88% of adults between 18-34 are active magazine readers. Through the portrait of their editors' views, magazines provide a lens into what society is thinking. These views are expressed not only through the words of articles but also through the careful design and layout of each issue. So what would it mean to take this important physical media into the digital world? This case study reports on the design process behind the the digital reading experience developed by Adobe Systems for Wired Magazine.

## Author Keywords

magazine; touch interface; ebook

## ACM Classification Keywords

H.5.2 [Information Interfaces and Presentation]: User Interfaces — Interaction styles;

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## Introduction

Magazines are effective because they combine compelling writing, beautiful imagery, and high-fidelity design and layout. All of these ingredients are essential to the experience of reading a magazine. This paper explores Adobe Systems' and Wired Magazine's process of reimagining these rich print experiences in a digital world.

Periodical print publications (magazines and newspapers) have varying degrees of what we call *design fidelity* — the degree to which the design and layout is an important and integral part of the storytelling process (see Figure 1). Note that *design fidelity* is distinct from *design quality* — it is very possible to have a high quality design for low design-fidelity content. Newspapers and other dailies, for instance, tend to have lower design fidelity, whereas monthly publications (like Wired, GQ, or Glamour) tend to have a great deal of design fidelity. In publications with longer lead times, editors have more time to make design a part of the storytelling process.

Adobe began its engagement with digital publishing by partnering with the New York Times to develop the NY Times Reader 2.0 application. This gave us the opportunity to learn about what both readers and authors wanted and how the publishing industry functioned. However, our ultimate goal was to bring some of the richest print reading experiences, already being authored with Adobe's tools such as Photoshop, Illustrator and InDesign, to the digital world. We wanted to meld the promise of an interactive, portable, connected device with the quality and impact of a print magazine.

To pursue this goal, we partnered with Wired Magazine, a Condé Nast publication based in San Francisco, California. Wired is a publication that has won many awards for both its excellent writing and its brilliant print design. Moreover, it is a magazine at the forefront of technology. Their team was simultaneously looking at how it would need to change its editorial and design processes to allow their creative department to address both print and digital formats. Thus, it seemed like a perfect fit for this project.

## What is a magazine?

To better understand what a magazine is, our team embedded with Wired Magazine for one complete issue cycle. We also analyzed four issues of Wired to find commonality and unique elements.

**Text + Photography + Graphic Design.** Articles are laid out with a very high degree of fidelity, and the layout plays an important role in the exposition.

**Curation + Editing + Voice.** In contrast to newspaper articles, most magazine articles express the authors' and editors' opinions. Editors typically have weeks or months to think about a story and associated media. Each brand has its own voice or view of the world. Every magazine is different, so one-size-fits-all templates are not a viable option for design.

### What is a digital magazine?

We began with the tenants that a digital magazine should combine the beauty of print, the engagement of print, and digital distribution.

We also felt it was important to enable designers and editors of the existing print edition to be the same
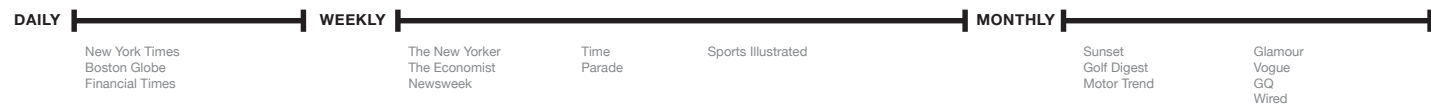


**Figure 1.** The design fidelity spectrum of print publications. More frequently-published periodicals tend to have lower design fidelity.
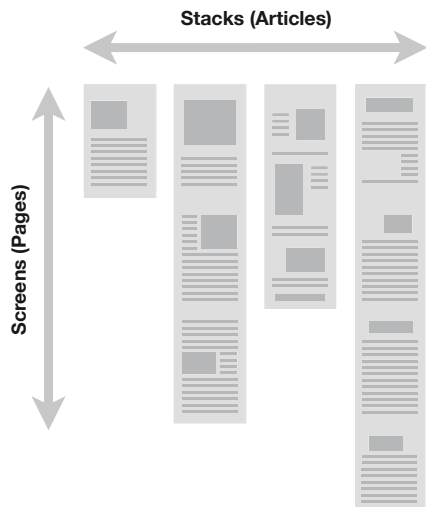
**Stacks (Articles)**

**Screens (Pages)**

**Figure 2.** Conceptual mapping of print magazine's notion of articles and pages to similar notions in the digital world. Each article is represented by a single "stack" of one or more content "screens". These content screens correspond roughly to pages in the print world. However, screens have a much more broad definition than pages – they can include highly interactive elements, and may have several layouts of the same content (*e.g.*, for portrait and landscape orientation).

people that would design the digital version. When we began this project, the process they followed to digitize their content for the web was a completely separate workflow. In many of the web departments at these magazines, a Web publishing staff (separate from the print staff) would convert the files from the design team into a format such as XML, and bring that textual content along with a few associated images into a content management system such as WordPress. This led to many magazines having the same look-and-feel online, which is antithetical to the unique nature of each magazine's layout style. The websites were devoid of any truly identifiable brand elements, save for a logo here or there.

From our experiences observing Wired, we arrived at four goals:

- Retain the essence of the magazine
- Promote new forms of advertising
- Invent a new publishing process that evolves the existing process
- Put the readers first

And, we began our design process with three principles:

- Content, content, content — content is king and so that should be the thing that is at the forefront. There should not be any distracting chrome to clutter the reader's view unless it is explicitly invoked by the reader.
- Walk-up usability — it should be as intuitive to learn how to use a digital magazine as it is to "learn" how to use a print magazine.
- Revolution through evolution — don't reinvent every part of the reading process at once. Just as this change would require publishers to adapt a new workflow, it would also require readers to adjust to a new reading paradigm and those changes would need time. We would need to be agile and adapt our methods as necessary.

## Design of a Digital Magazine Reading Experience

In a print magazine, browsing the issue as a whole is a mostly a linear, horizontal experience. But, progressing through an article (i.e. turning pages) is also a horizontal experience. In the digital world, we have two dimensions of scrolling to work with.

In the digital world, scrolling through "pages" of content is typically done vertically. So, we mapped vertical scrolling to changing between content screens of an individual article. Moving between articles is accomplished through panning content horizontally (see Figure 2).

In the digital world, individual screens can have very different formats. We came up with four general types of screens that supported the majority of things we wanted to do with the Wired magazine (see Figure 3):

- Continuous content — Screens with fluid vertical scrolling. Users navigate this content much like navigating a Web page in a browser.
- Paginated — Screens that are exactly the size of the device. Users flip between screens when scrolling rather than moving fluidly through content that doesn't fit on the screen.
- Bite-sized — Used to present interactive content where portions of the screen can change, while leaving the rest of the content stay intact (*e.g.,* slideshow, flip book)
- Rich media — Screens that present media like videos, audio, or games.

*Browsing Mode*
Because a user can't hold a physical magazine and easily understand their current place in the context of the overall issue, we wanted to create a mode that zooms the user out from the screen they are on and reveals it in its context. We called this the "browse mode."

Our browsing mode presents a view similar to Figure 2. The user can scroll horizontally through all of the articles, and see a static representation of each "screen" in every article.

## Conclusion and Lessons Learned

The first digital issue of Wired magazine was released in June 2010, on the same day as it was released in print. That issue sold 300,000 digital copies, and 80,000 print copies at the newsstand (subscriptions not included). The large amount of marketing and press attention around the first digital issue certainly contributed to these high sales figures. However, over one year later, digital sales average 30,000 copies per

issue. Sales at the newsstand have remained relatively constant at an average of 80,000 copies per issue. In sort, digital sales represent a significant portion of Wired's revenue.

The success of the Wired magazine project was due in large part to a "perfect storm" of factors. First, we had a captive audience —90% of magazine publishers use Adobe tools. Second, we partnered with a company, Wired, who was interested in reinventing not just their *product*, but their *process*. To truly deliver a great product month after month, augmenting the existing publishing model was crucial. They understood that this would be a collaborative effort, and were willing to work substantially more closely with us than other partners had been in past projects. Third, our partner company was part of a large publishing organization. This meant that after we showed initial success, we had a ready target market which allowed us to grow our offering from a "one off" experiment into an entire first-tier product at Adobe. Ultimately, this has changed how Adobe views the Experience Design group: We are no longer just a group capable of showcasing Adobe's best existing technology. We are a group that creates new technologies, products, and markets.
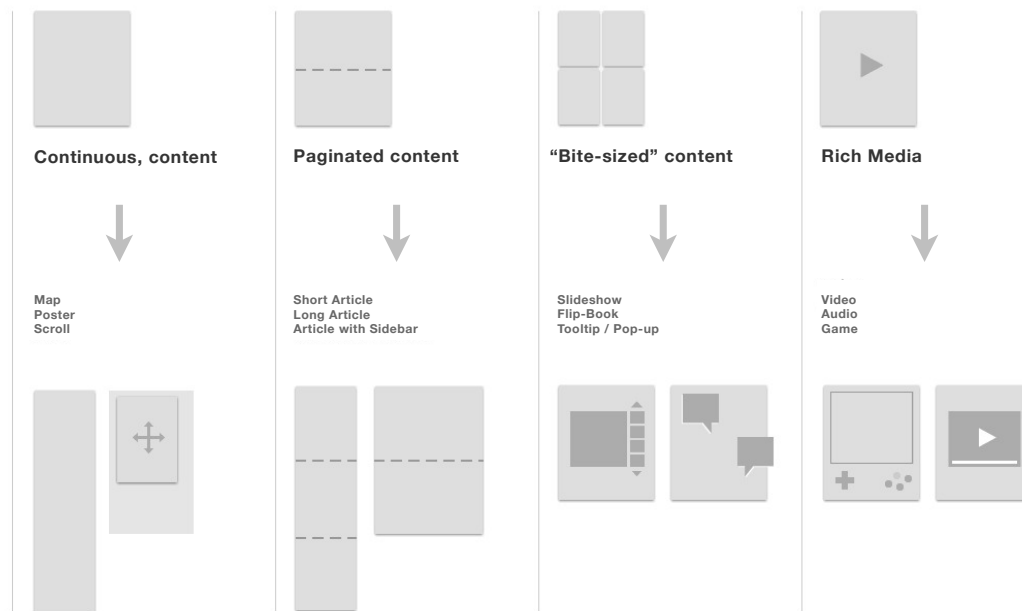
## Acknowledgements

**Figure 3.** Types of screens used for the digital version of Wired Magazine