

"What kind of paper is this, anyway?"

Questions we've heard over and over in the last year.

How can we afford to give the paper away free? This question is best answered with another one, "how could we afford not to?" There are (for purposes of this argument, at least) three ways to begin a periodical. 1) You can start big, charging for the paper, and plan to invest a fortune in promotional activities. Look at **Ms.** They sold 400,000 copies of their first edition, sure. But they had Gloria Steinem touring the country and getting them on every front page in the nation—not to mention the nightly news, the Today Show, and Dick Cavett. Alternatively, you can use paid advertising: The **Chicago Free Press** (which lasted only a few weeks before it folded in the fall of 1970) spent thousands on radio, newspaper, poster, even television advertising before they put out their first issue; they managed to sell about 20,000 copies of their first issue at a cover price of 50¢, of which they got maybe 10¢ and the newsstands and distributors got the rest. We had neither Gloria Steinem nor thousands for advertising, so that method was out.

2) You can start small, charging for the paper. There are really two subcategories within this group. a) The old fashioned way, how all those old papers like the Ben Franklin **Saturday Evening Post** and the **New York Times** got started, was with miniscule circulation and miniscule advertising rates. They jolly well took their time. That was possible because in those days one man could write a newspaper and run his press and come out once a week. He could spend a few thousand dollars on the press, and then only have to pay for paper out of pocket. The **Reader** has spent something like \$300 before the first newspaper ever comes off the press in make-ready charges. True, one man operations are still possible, but they do not produce anything resembling the modern newspaper. b) The modern way, which is how almost every underground paper in America was begun. You print a price on the cover of your newspaper. You sell a few copies. You give away at least six times that many. You add together the number of copies you sell and the number of copies you give away, multiply by two, and claim that this artificial figure is your total paid circulation, on which you base your advertising rates. There are two very convenient things about this method: first, you never print as many copies as you say, so you save money on production; and second, you can claim you have paid circulation, so that makes you "better" than free papers. There is only one real drawback to this method: to do it, you must be happy as an inveterate liar.

3) You can start with a large free circulation, which is the paper's own best advertising. You can set advertising rates at a reasonably high rate to reflect your high circulation, which makes the whole thing more reasonable economically without resorting to falsehood. You do forego 5¢ a copy on the newspaper (what you might expect to get from a cover price of a quarter) but you are also freed of the obligation to print 24 pages or more to make the paper feel like it is worth its cost. Presented with those alternatives, which would you choose? We chose to start with a large free circulation, and are certain that we made the right choice.

How is the paper doing? The **Reader** sustained a \$19,874 loss in its first ten months of operation

but all the indices are up. We pay the most attention to four: First: the paper's more in demand every week, with many locations exhausting their supplies by Sunday. Second: letters to the editor. We have two to three times as many letters to the editor as our principle competitor. We take this as an indicator of the intensity of our readership. Third: use of the free classifieds section has risen dramatically. We take this as a direct indicator of the wideness of our circulation, since everybody reads classifieds. Fourth: advertising sales. This is a bit more difficult to say with surety, since July and August were not very good; however, they are not very good months for advertising sales for anybody. September was good and the long term trend is definitely upward. Two good signs in this regard: we are developing a broader

base: more smaller advertisers so we are less dependent upon the whims of a few larger ones. They become cream on the milk, so to speak. The other good sign: exceptional interest in advertising for fall. Witness the fatness of this issue.

How can the paper be expected to do? We have given up expressing sanguine sentiments. Making this newspaper turn a profit does not appear easy, as long as we attempt to stay honest. It is a slow building process, and although we are convinced that it will work out in the end, we don't want to put any dates on it.

Who runs the Reader? Currently, four people are working full-time on the **Reader**. Bob Roth, 25, is given the title "publisher." He maintains the check-book, and plans the stories that appear in the paper. Bob McCamant, 23, is called the editor. He designs the paper, and edits the copy, and sends out the bills. He also does free-lance advertising work, on which he supports himself. Tom Rehwaldt, 23, is director of circulation, which means he drives his own VW bug all over the city distributing the paper. He also does a large part of the layout work. He is employed three days a week, which is how he supports himself. Randy Barnett (Northwestern '74) has been working full time as our advertising director for the latter part of the summer.

The rest of the staff includes: two part-time ad salesmen; Jerry Reinwaldt and Kathy Gilles; Jane Lantz and Katie Kane, who have volunteered to come and work one evening a week free to organize the classifieds; and many writers, who get paid anything from \$25 to nothing per story, depending upon circumstances. The **Reader** is owned by Roth, Rehwaldt and McCamant, plus six friends, scattered all over the country and all in their early twenties. Roth, Rehwaldt, and McCamant are working without pay, but are receiving equity in lieu of pay.

Why doesn't the Reader print news? Tom Wolfe wrote us, "The future of the newspaper (as opposed to the past, which is available at every newsstand) lies in your direction, i.e., the sheet willing to deal with 'the way we live now.'" That sums up our thoughts quite well: we find street sellers more interesting than politicians, and musicians more interesting than the Cubs. They are closer to home. We are convinced that very few **facts** mean anything uninterpreted.

When the **Reader** began, this policy caused some consternation. Neighborhood organizations sent their press releases and acted hurt when we didn't print them. In twelve months, this has changed. More and more people tell us how relieved they are not to have to fight through radical political polemics to read a story. Others, who have a different standard, have come to admit that there is more truth in small details than carefully balanced generalizations.

Who are the Reader writers? Follow down the list of contributing editors on the masthead. Nancy Banks is an aspiring free-lance writer who works part time for the Historical Society. Les Bridges is a promotion director for the **Tribune**. Andrew Epstein is a free-lance artist, represented by the Art Factory. Terry Fox is attempting to make his living as a free-lance writer. Beth Lester hides out in the creative department of Leo Burnett. Myron Meisel was an undergraduate at the University of Chicago, who has now gone to Harvard Law School and will be contributing intermittently. Sally Banes is still a U of C undergraduate. J. Leland is a character in **Citizen Kane**. Steve Metalitz works for the American Friends Service Committee and Transition radio. Gerry Keteelaar is studying to be a professional dancer. Ken Love runs a pipe shop in Hyde Park.

Out of the list, the **Reader** found three and the rest found the **Reader**. Which is to say, you, too, can be a **Reader** writer. Send us a manuscript, which we do not promise to return.

Why do we continue with this crazy project? 1) We are convinced it will be successful eventually. 2) We really enjoy our work. 3) The paper seems to be fulfilling a definite need for "alternative" publications which are nonetheless not "radical." 4) We are bringing exposure to some (potentially) great writers.