

Magazines: A Primer

We are often asked why *audioXpress* is so expensive. Compared to what? Well, *Stereophile* for one. The simple answer is that the old maxims of supply and demand apply. Buy few and the cost is higher, buy a lot and you get a quantity break. The last time I looked, our friends at *Stereophile* were about four times the size of our list of subscribers and newsstand readers. And you can subscribe to *Stereophile* for about one-third the amount you pay for *aX*.

Delivery of the larger magazines is now cheaper per copy. The Postal Service, founded to expedite information in aid of an informed citizenry of a participatory republic, is now a fully capitalist enterprise working to avoid losing money. It is cheaper per copy to deliver a big mag for a lot of technical reasons I won't bore you with.

Today all magazines are paying more for delivery across the board. Oil is one large reason, raising the cost of everything which goes into producing, printing, and delivering the product. Why not publish electronically? Because, so far, subscribers prefer "a hold in the two hands object."

Advertisers prefer big magazines. Quantity is something advertising agencies understand, especially with technical magazines whose content they often seem not to understand. If it is bigger, the hit rate is likely to

be bigger.

Promotional budgets of large mags are large. When *Stereophile* was first purchased from J. Gordon Holt, the price was low, but the buyer owned a Mercedes agency and was obviously not poor. Unfortunately, I have never owned a Mercedes agency. I could only afford a mailing of 100,000 to launch *Audio Amateur* in 1970, which netted about 5,000 responses. *Stereophile* was relaunched after purchase with a huge effort and rose steadily to over 80,000.

We spend all we can regularly to promote *aX* these days, sometimes with a lot of help from other vendors, sometimes not. But we have never been very big. Big enough to provide a living for those of us who produce our magazines, but never a fat bottom line.

Of course, these two periodicals are selling different content. *Stereophile* readers are mostly treated to a vicarious pleasure of a dream of owning stratospherically expensive audio gear which only the fabulously rich can actually purchase. In some ways the prices tell the buyer something about how important he or she is, making normally priced equipment emotionally unacceptable. But what fun to dream about playing with this month's expensive toys.

audioXpress and its several predecessors offers readers a way to take audio in hand. We like to know how the equipment works, what makes it better, and believe that if it is tech-

nically better it is likely to be more satisfying to listen to. We also love to be able to build or modify speakers, amplifiers, preamps, and almost anything having to do with reproducing sound. We like to do it ourselves—or look over the shoulders of others who do it, which is our form of vicarious experience.

You have doubtless noticed that *audioXpress* looks as though it has been on a rigorous diet. Not so. The old law of supply and demand still works in publishing like everywhere else. Profitability requires a balance of 60% editorial to 40% advertising. When ad sales slip, we must cut editorial content. Sadly, we have a rich cupboard well-stocked with great audio projects. Authors are producing excellent manuscripts in amazing quantities. Alas, they will be published much more slowly unless things change.

Advertisers like traffic to their websites or their phones. This gives them the sense that their messages are getting through to readers and the feeling their money is well spent. They feel even better if readers find their offerings so appealing that they order merchandise. If you spend no time with the ads in each issue, you are jeopardizing the health of your publication. Our advertisers are an unusual band often providing unique products and services. If you want *audioXpress* to thicken, spend some time getting to know our advertisers.—E.T.D.