

THE WORLD OF HELLO!

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The world of HELLO!, magazine for fun, pleasure and entertainment. It's origins, how it is produced and distributed, together with some of the high spots in its ten year life.

I have to tell you that for me the whole business of the UK Serials Group is shrouded in total mystery. If you say the name 'UK Serials Group' to someone, an expression of puzzlement appears - first of all, they think you're talking about cornflakes and rice krispies; then you move on to serials in the sense of a good story to be continued next week, whether it is on television, radio or in a magazine; then to serial numbers. Unless people actually work in your world, the meaning of 'serials' would never occur to them. I had to ring up your head office and ask before the light dawned.

The other mystery is less explicable. I accepted the invitation to speak here some time last autumn, and at some point in November I had a telephone call from a very strange man. He introduced himself, let us say as John Smith, and said that he had called to find out how I had "got myself involved with the UK Serials Group" conference. I said I had been asked to speak, and had agreed to do so. He proceeded to interrogate me as to how the contact had been made, implying that I was about to join some secret society on a par with the Masons, or perhaps even the Mafia. Certainly the feeling was that there was something deeply sinister about the UK Serials Group.

I got rid of him, with some difficulty, and forgot about it. Then, in December, there I was at the HELLO! Christmas party quietly chatting with a friend, when I was approached by a small, intense-looking man in a hand-knitted jumper. He came up to me, and whispered confidentially to me that he was that same John Smith, and that he had come to give me a final warning "not to get too closely involved with the UK Serials Group." It was not what I had expected at the office party.

Having warned me, he vanished back into the crowd, presumably mission accomplished. Now, as I look around me today I see no-one with horns, no-one (thank God) wearing a hand-knitted jumper, and no-one at all with the sinister bearing I had been led to expect.

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He has not contacted me again (and I sincerely hope he does not), but you will understand that all this led me to look forward to today with some anticipation, some hope of a mystery to be revealed. Would anyone who can explain all this to me kindly see me afterward (behind closed doors, if it is necessary) to tell me what I am missing?

Anyway, serials in your term, as I understand it, are academic journals or publications produced at regular intervals. *HELLO!* is certainly produced at regular intervals, but even I would not attempt to call it academic. *HELLO!* is for fun, for pleasure, for entertainment and relaxation. I imagine there are some similarities in the process of producing it, but not many.

HELLO! was launched in the UK in May 1988, so this is our 10th birthday year. It is the daughter publication of the Spanish magazine *HOLA!*, which was founded in Barcelona in 1944 by Antonio Sanchez Gomez. His intention was to produce a magazine "whose contents were entertaining, very informative, and spectacularly graphic", his view was that "things of human interest would have pride of place in the magazine, and people more than things", aimed at women but without excluding men. *HOLA!*, and *HELLO!*, fulfil that aim even today.

He wanted a magazine which would entertain more than it would create complications, which would be supremely topical, which would gather into its pages something I can really only directly translate from the Spanish as 'the froth of life' - a nice expression.

HOLA! was launched as a regional magazine, based in Barcelona, by Antonio Sanchez and his wife. Over time it grew, aided by an entrepreneurial attitude and a number of excellent exclusives - the marriage of Prince Juan Carlos of Spain to Princess Sophia of Greece, and that of Prince Rainier of Monaco to Grace Kelly being two of them. Both marriages took place outside Spain, but *HOLA!* actually flew pictures back to get them on the streets first. This was unheard of in the 1950s, and ensured them a phenomenal success.

The big breakthrough, astonishingly had come with the International Eucharistical Congress of 1952, which took place in Barcelona but which gave them, for the first time sales across the whole of Spain.

So, *HOLA!* prospered, became a national magazine, and moved to Madrid. Its sales grew and grew across time, and even today it is still Spain's premier magazine, with more advertisement revenue than any other title.

Antonio Sanchez had always wanted to have an English-language edition, but it was not until after his death in 1985 that that dream came to fruition. The present owner and editor-in-chief of both *HOLA!* and *HELLO!* is his son, Eduardo Sanchez, and even now the only shareholders are Eduardo and his mother, Antonio's widow, Mercedes Junco Calderon (who, incidentally, still acts as *HOLA!*'s Art Editor).

The philosophy is very simple - we are a news magazine about people - celebrities, actors, royalty, sportsmen, entertainers, anyone who is in the public eye. It is our aim to be first with the story, and to make that story as visually appealing as it can be.

We do (and do not do!) a number of things because that is the way Eduardo wants it. We do not run editorial offers, because we should not attempt to take money from our readers in any other way than the cover price. We do not include horoscopes, because they are a load of nonsense. We do not have a problems page, because *HELLO!* does not set out to deal with people's problems. Nor do we set out to improve your sex life, your job prospects, or the state of the world. There are many excellent publications which do that very well indeed, and we leave it to them.

Consumer magazines are unusual as a product, in that they have two sources of revenue rather than just one - cover price and advertisement sales. The balance of these two revenue sources varies from magazine to magazine, but overall is shifting more towards a dependence on cover price. These days, monthly magazines would tend to get about 55% of their revenue from advertising and 45% from cover price (although something like *VOGUE* might be as high as 75% advertising). Weeklies, on the other hand, are more like 25% advertising and 75% cover price.

I am responsible for both these income sources, and between them they take up most of my time. With sales currently of 575,000 every week, and a cover price of £1.35, we bring in nearly £40,000,000 across the newsagents counters every year. We are the fourth largest revenue earner in most newsagents and wholesalers. This is big

business, and takes a lot of care and attention to get it right.

Roughly speaking, the cover-price gets divided up so that the retailer keeps 25%, the wholesaler 15%, the distributor 5%, and the publisher keeps 55%.

Our advertising revenue is also very important, and we have a team of 9 people selling it, and providing the back-up services of marketing, production and so on. Advertisement sales is a highly sophisticated business these days, involving vast reams of figures and statistics. I picked out a volume from the shelf, opened a page at random, and can now tell you that the magazine whose readers are most likely to be heavy users of talcum powder (more than once a day) is, astonishingly, *Golf Monthly*.

Or, more worryingly, that the highest index for total non-users of deodorant is the readers of the RSPB Magazine, *Birds!* Stay well away from them, I would suggest.

Where *HELLO!* readers do score well is in what they spend on themselves, which is critically important to our advertisers. They are, for instance very heavy users of perfumes and eau de toilettes. These indulgences are in keeping with the whole ethos of *HELLO!*

Because *HELLO!* itself is an indulgence, a small luxury, a relaxation and pleasure. It is for reading when you get home from work and need to unwind; it is for reading in the bath with a gin and tonic; it is to make you smile.

Because of our insistence on immediacy, we work to very tight deadlines. On a Monday morning, we very rarely have any idea at all what is going to go into the next week's issue - mainly because it will depend on what happens that week! The magazine is generally printed in two sections, one of which goes to bed on the Wednesday evening and the second on the Thursday evening.

On Friday, the cylinders are engraved and printing starts Friday night, going through into the Saturday. We are printed in Madrid, because it is still cost-effective to do that, and the lorries start to leave the printers around mid-day Saturday. It takes four hours to print enough copies to fill a lorry, so the lorries leave at four-hourly intervals.

They drive to the Spanish-French border at Irun, where the drivers and tractor-units change

from Spanish to French, and the lorries head on across France to the western Channel ports - St. Malo, Caen, and Cherbourg. The crossings are longer from there, but the drive is shorter and long crossing gives the drivers time for their statutory eight-hour breaks.

Once in this country, from the early hours of Monday morning, the lorries go to various destinations - Southampton for copies for London and the South East, Coventry for the rest of the country and Colnbrook for Ireland. Then the loads are split up and sent on to the 109 wholesalers with whom we deal. From those wholesalers, they go out to the 55,000 retailers who handle *HELLO!*

We are on sale on a Tuesday in London, and on a Wednesday in the rest of the country. Strange as it may seem, it is still quicker to print in Madrid and ship the copies by lorry than it would be to print in the UK, mainly because UK printers are, frankly, less flexible and less happy to work through the night and over the weekend.

My life would certainly be a lot easier if we printed in the UK, and I still have hopes that it may happen some day, but at the moment the system works. Give or take the odd French lorry drivers' strike, that is. Actually, we have been late on sale due to transport problems just three times out of the 502 issues.

The major concern in the Editor's life is getting the best stories first. Contrary to popular belief, we do not habitually pay out hundreds of thousands of pounds every week, and a great many of our best selling issues have had nothing exclusive about them at all. For example, royal weddings - there are no exclusive photos available, but what we do is to use the best pictures, biggest, and more of them.

For instance, in our top 10 best-selling issues of all time, there are three paid exclusives, and the rest are features which anyone could have done but which we did better, faster and bigger than the others. For your amusement, Table 1 shows the top 10 - and yes, you will see that Princess Diana features in four of them.

That time of Princess Diana's death was extraordinary for anyone in our business. I heard the news at my home in Wiltshire early on the Sunday morning, and just got straight into my car and headed up to London and the office. We had an issue printed and in transit across France, but

<i>Position</i>	<i>Issue no.</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Cover feature</i>
1	475	13.09.97	Princess Diana's funeral
2	474	06.09.97	Princess Diana's death
3	415	13.07.96	Paul Gascoigne wedding
4	432	09.11.96	Duchess of York/My Story part 1
5	439	04.01.97	Princess Diana (Christmas)
6	174	19.10.91	Liz Taylor wedding
7	387	31.12.95	Diana frocks/Christmas
8	314	23.07.94	Lady Sarah A-J wedding
9	275	16.10.93	Lord Linley wedding
10	476	20.09.97	Lord Spencer/flowers

Table 1

*Top 10 best selling
issues of Hello!*

that morning we made the decision to scrap it completely. Not because it had anything particularly offensive in it, but it did contain a feature with a number of prominent people giving their views on whether or not Diana and Dodi had a future together, and it just would not have been appropriate to put that issue on sale.

So the office filled up on that Sunday morning, people came in with bags of provisions for the day, and fast decisions were made. Would we print in Spain, and if we did how could we get the copies here quickly? Could we print in the UK? Were there slots available at the printers? Was there enough paper in the UK? These were my area, but of course at the same time the Editor was going frantic putting together a new magazine in 24 hours.

We printed a million copies of that issue, and sold them all. If we could have printed more, they would have sold, but there was literally no time and no paper. One of the curious side-effects of Princess Diana's death was an instant European shortage of lightweight coated paper.

To an extent, we were isolated from the general mood of the public that week, because we were all working flat out, and in the office all hours. I only went out to sleep, and to do television and radio interviews. The Monday night, I went down to Buckingham Palace to do a live interview for Uruguayan television, and the scene there was extraordinary. One side of the area in front of the palace was fenced off for the television crews, and there were at least 20, from all over the world. You could hear every language in the world

spoken there, and all, as far as I could gather, saying the same thing.

An Argentinean team heard me speaking Spanish for the Uruguayans, and as I left them I was grabbed to do another interview for Argentina. For the rest of the week I was on a strange and unnatural circuit of interviews for the Spanish speaking world. If I had any relatives in South America, they would have seen and heard a lot of me. It's not that I was a particular expert on Princess Diana, but the media was desperate to fill air-time, and anyone who spoke Spanish was a godsend. By the end of the week, I had done 17 television interviews, about half in Spanish, and goodness knows how much radio. I'd had to appear on Channel 4 news to defend our picture policy, and on the BBC to explain how magazines work. I had reassured the Mexicans that the British were indeed capable of emotion, and I had vastly expanded my Spanish vocabulary with words like 'gun carriage' and 'anti-personnel mines'.

It is part of my job as a publisher to represent the magazine in public, whether on television or radio, or by speaking at occasions like this. Sometimes that's a pleasure, and sometimes it's very difficult indeed. In general, radio interviews are fair and reasonable, television depends on the angle they have chosen, and national newspaper journalists are vicious, twisting bastards.

HELLO! is often criticised for its 'uncritical' approach to celebrities, but I have absolute confidence that what we set out to do we do well and honestly. *HELLO!* is not a magazine of

comment, of editorialisation, it is a magazine of reportage. We print exactly what people say, without comment or bias. We leave it to our readers to make the judgements.

The joy of *HELLO!* is precisely that - looking at someone's living room, seeing what is on their mantelpiece, being amazed at what they choose to wear. It's a glimpse into someone's private life, but a glimpse that you can take without guilt, because you know *HELLO!* has been invited to be there.

The world of *HELLO!* is one which works very well on the pages of a magazine, because you can choose how much of it you want. You can begin at the back, skip articles, re-read them, and use the magazine as you choose. We have had a great many requests to allow *HELLO!* to be made into a television programme, and so far we have resisted this very firmly, because television is such a very

different medium. Television comes at you, it is in your face, your only choice is whether or not to stay watching. In my opinion, *HELLO!* would not work on television because the mixture might well prove too rich, too cloying.

Equally, at the moment I cannot see how *HELLO!* would really work as a magazine on the Internet. *HELLO!* is a very visual medium, very picture-dominated, and the Internet is still very much fact and information driven. Also it is still true that Internet users tend to be young, male, and, I am sorry to say, with a liking for anoraks. Maybe this will change, and then we shall certainly change with it.

So, that is the world of *HELLO!* Sometimes glamorous, sometimes intensely irritating, but always, always interesting. And I certainly would not wish to give it up for another one.