

E-magazine aims to illuminate local professional women

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The tiny team at Illuminence (<http://illuminencemag.com/>) didn't really start their e-magazine with writers from incredibly diverse backgrounds on purpose.

It just happened.

May-Marie Duwai-Sowa, who has a full-time job at the city as an access and equity specialist, just wanted to read a magazine about local women, about how they were coping with work, planning a wedding, or figuring out how to break the glass ceiling.

"We wanted to be inspired and motivated, said Duwai-Sowa, referring to the initial team of four. "We started out thinking we would do a traditional print magazine."

But then the quotes started coming in and it quickly became obvious it was out of reach.

The website was ready, though, so they decided to launch it as an online product in on International Women's Day in March.

The team, now three people — Duwai-Sowa, Rachel Rukeba and Alyssa Lai — fine-tuned the site. They acted as editor, publisher, CFO, CEO, photographer, writer, webmaster, event planner — whatever was needed for the product aimed at a largely female readership aged 25 to 34.

The office space? Usually Duwai-Sowa's dining-room table.

The hours? Way more than expected and way later than most of them can handle.

But it works.

"We felt it wasn't sustainable (as a print product). None of us are getting paid yet; we all have other jobs," Lai said. "It's been a great testing ground for us. It's actually been very exciting."

The trio also attracted about a dozen contributors with a variety of ethnic and professional backgrounds — a consequence, says Duwai-Sowa, of their own circle of colleagues and friends.

"We really want to connect with women, whether they are black, Middle Eastern, whatever, to celebrate our commonalities and our achievements," she said.

With 10,000 visitors so far, the magazine has realized a constantly increasing readership. Some readers are from Toronto, Ottawa and even the United States. Illuminence now has a writer in Toronto and Burlington to broaden the magazine's appeal.

This month, they launched the magazine's advertising campaign, charging for ads in hope of generating some return for their efforts. The women have plans to hire a salesperson to handle that end of the business.

Until now, advertisers have provided the company with services in return for free advertising.

The women plan to take some of those revenues to pay contributors for articles. The magazine has one short article a day based on a theme (Wellness Wednesdays, for example) with one feature a week.

"We feel we need to start paying them something," Lai said.

Gary Garland is the executive director of advertising services at Magazines Canada — a trade association for about 400 magazine publishers.

He said the e-magazine market is growing, but usually from already existing print publications issuing an online version.

"Digital magazines that launch as online-only have often gone back and started issuing a print version as well. They've reversed," Garland said. "I think in terms of the market of people who want to read on a tablet, a computer or a smartphone is still small versus the number of people who want to read a printed version. But that (e) market is growing and will continue to grow."

He said the business model for e-magazines or online versions varies as much as the magazines as publishers search for a profitable model.



"There is a lot of testing and trying going on," Garland added.

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<http://www.thespec.com/news-story/3925994-e-magazine-aims-...>

Illuminence is straddling the gap between the real and the virtual by hosting events, which also helps cement the e-magazine's branding while providing a different revenue stream.

The next event, for example, is a luncheon with five panellists speaking on various workplace issues such as personal branding. It is scheduled for Aug. 17 at Sarcoa restaurant between 1 and 3 p.m. Tickets are \$30.

"We're not a service agency. Sometimes people are confused by that," Rukeba said. "We are here to help women network and learn about what's going on in the community. It's just a great way to connect and it's fun. It is a business, though. We want to keep changing it up to be interesting."