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At the Crossroads of the Digital Transformation: A Contemporary History of *TV Guide* Magazine

TV Guide is a towering magazine brand, but has declined as a magazine.[1]

"Iconic brands provide extraordinary identity value because they address the collective anxieties and desires of the nation."[2]

Landscape TV Guide Inc. commemorated its fiftieth anniversary in 2002 with a celebration that reflected its evolving mission in an increasingly digital world. The company that was then a subsidiary of Gemstar-TV Guide International Inc. developed a series of cross-platform anniversary events for each media property under the TV Guide brand, including the TV Guide magazine, website, and television network. Drawing from years of relationship building in the entertainment industry, the anniversary party attracted such stars as Oprah Winfrey, Robin Williams, Walter Cronkite, and Mary Tyler Moore. The U.S. Postal Service even created a stamp embossed with a specially-created TV Guide anniversary logo.[3] The celebration recognized not only the role TV Guide has played through publishing television listings; it also reflected a greater appreciation for the role of television, both as an apparatus and as an integral contributor to cultural life.

Despite the rosy picture painted by the celebration described above *TV Guide* magazine has experienced a dramatic decline in readership and cultural significance since its peak during the network television era. In the 1970s, *TV Guide* boasted distribution in 25% of American homes and was read by 50 million people each week.[4] In 2008, prior to the magazine's sale to Macrovision Corporation, the magazine promoted an advertiser base of 3.3 million. In today's fragmented media environment defined increasingly by the growth of the Internet and digital technology, the decline of a print publication is not unsurprising. Yet the broader significance of *TV Guide* culturally and institutionally invites an investigation of the contemporary media environment's transformation. As media scholars struggle to define the current television landscape in light of a host of new media technology that are challenging the primacy of the apparatus as the nation's primary vehicle for viewing moving images, *TV Guide* offers insight into how traditional media, including print journalism and broadcasting, continue to struggle to define their relevance today. In this essay, I trace the recent history of *TV Guide*, analyzing the magazine as a victim of the digital age, corporate convergence, and the exploitation of brand ideology.

The failures of the corporate owners of *TV Guide*, as I will demonstrate, are twofold. First, corporate efforts to rebrand product lines across the media landscape with the TV Guide name diluted the meaning and value of the brand. Second, the multiple mergers with companies better positioned to profit from new technology marginalized the

[1] Ives, Nat, "TV Guide Magazine Finds a Buyer," *Advertising Age* 13 Oct. 2008.
[2] Holt, Douglas B., "Chapter 1: What Is an Iconic Brand?", *How Brands Become Icons: The Principles of Cultural Branding* (Boston: Harvard Business School P, 2004) 6.
[3] "TV Guide Turns 50," *Business Wire* 1 Apr. 2002.
[4] Lowry, Tom. "Will 500 Channels Kill TV Guide?" *Business Week* 12 Mar. 2001.

importance of the magazine itself, even while its name recognition increased in value. Though this case study does not propose that *TV Guide* magazine remains an essential voice in media reporting today, it does position *TV Guide* at the intersection of contemporary discourse about how traditional media are adapting to the contemporary media landscape. That television is changing is not news to media scholars or the general populace.[5] Television scholar Amanda Lotz, for example, focuses upon network television in her consideration of how television production and industrial practices have changed in response to the rise of new technologies, growing niche audience participation, and ever-increasing demand for content. Her book *The Television Will Be Revolutionized* counters frequent accusations that television is dying, insisting instead that we need to redefine it apart from the apparatus itself.[6] Changing times require a change in outlook.

The history of *TV Guide* offered here presents a case study of parallel changes. In addition, it offers a means of further expanding our consideration of the meanings of television beyond the set itself. *TV Guide* is more than a magazine. Like television, it entered millions of American homes and became a constant feature on coffee tables.[7] This is certainly the main line of the *TV Guide* mythology, but its circulation numbers during its peak attest to the unique appeal of its listings, its editorial content, and its trusted name. My story of *TV Guide* offers an industrial analysis that examines the tension between brand recognition and dissemination. In this study, I position the magazine at the intersection of technological innovation and corporate neglect. At the same time, this study speaks to larger questions about how the larger media landscape is being revolutionized.

The Challenge of Successful Branding

In their top-down approach to branding, the owners of *TV Guide* failed to nurture the brand from the bottom-up. Though this is not a reception study, the evidence of corporate discourse that I present suggests that the various owners of *TV Guide* misunderstood the role that consumers have played and continue to play in the creation and maintenance of a brand. Branding is a controversial practice in today's globalized economy, as documented by Naomi Klein in her influential *No Logo*. She identifies companies that have marketed their name as a brand to convey a certain lifestyle. For example, Disney represents family and the American dream, Virgin represents independence and adventure, and Starbucks represents community.[8] Branding in today's climate therefore involves several degrees of removal; brand value is no longer verified by your local farmer or local store, or even by the product itself. The value of the name trumps all material manifestations. Klein illustrates how brand identity obscures the exploitation of the worker and otherwise occludes the process of material production that creates consumer goods.

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[5] As the digital television conversion is demonstrating, even those television audiences without cable or a DVR understand that television is indeed changing.

[6] Lotz, Amanda, *The Television Will Be Revolutionized* (New York: New York UP, 2007) 21.

[7] A recent episode of *Hell's Kitchen* featured the contestants participating in a photo shoot for the cover of *TV Guide*. One contestant described her excitement by referencing *TV Guide* as that magazine on American coffee tables and in grocery store aisles. *TV Guide*'s original brand identity persists.

[8] *No Logo: Brands, Globalization, & Resistance*, dir. Sut Jhally, Media Education Forum, 2003.

Yet branding is not necessarily bad in itself. Acknowledging the validity of Klein's critique, Nicholas Ind nevertheless contends, "we should also recognize that brands can increase choice, enhance freedom and provide enjoyment."[9] My goal is not to defend or critique the practice of branding. Rather, my analysis of the branding of *TV Guide* follows the lead of Paul Grainge in *Brand Hollywood*. He, too, notes the debate surrounding branding, yet he explains that his focus is more upon the operation of brand ideology in the contemporary film industry: "While it is important to recognize monopolies of power in the field of representation, brand signification remains a source for the construction and contestation of meaning; it does not position goods or sustain commercial mutations in ways that are ever straightforward or uncomplicated."[10] Building upon Grainge's notion that the logic of branding exposes the contradictions implicit in the construction of meaning, I posit that the decline of *TV Guide* demonstrates the failure of its corporate owners to effectively capitalize on the trusted brand name of the magazine.

Branding is an act of storytelling. Douglas Holt writes, "Brand stories have plots and characters, and they rely heavily on metaphor to communicate and to spur our imaginations."[11] As the television landscape has changed over the last 15 years, the narrative of the TV Guide brand failed to keep up with these changes. Examining the plots and characters of the *TV Guide* story since the popularization of usage of the Internet, I will broaden this narrative to tell the larger story of the transformation of the digital age.

<u>Print Media in the Digital Age</u>

TV Guide is not the only print publication struggling to survive today. Journalistic discourse on the newspaper industry in the last few weeks, for example, has examined the politics of a government bailout of the newspaper industry[12], the relocation of the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* to an online-only publication[13], and the closing of the *Rocky Mountain News* weeks before its 150th birthday after a buyer for the paper could not be found.[14] For an example of the impact of the web upon print magazines in particular, consider the example of *Premiere* magazine. In response to the announcement in 2007 that Hachette Filipacchi Media would no longer publish a print version of *Premiere*, *Variety* journalist Anne Thompson investigated the whereabouts of former staff members of the film-focused magazine. Not surprisingly, most of the staffers had found new jobs writing for web publications. One anonymous Paramount marketing executive told Thompson that advertising in print magazines was no longer an efficient

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[9] Ind, Nicholas, "A Brand of Enlightenment," *Beyond Branding*, Ed. Nicholas Ind. (London: Kogan Page, 2003) 2.

[10] Grainge, Paul, "Introduction," *Brand Hollywood: Selling Entertainment in a Global Media Age* (London: Routledge, 2008) 12.

[11] Grainge 3.

[12] Calderone, Michael, "Papers won't get bailout anytime soon," *Politico* 23 March 2009 http://www.politico.com/news/stories/0309/20350.html.

[13] Ovide, Shira, "Hearst Shuts Down a Seattle Paper," *Wall Street Journal* 17 March 2009 http://online.wsj.com/article/SB123722313512843963.html?mod=dist_smartbrief.

[14] Pérez, Peña, Richard, "Rocky Mountain News Fails to Find Buyer and Will Close," *New York Times* 26 Feb. 2009 http://www.nytimes.com/2009/02/27/business/media/27paper.html?_r=1&scp=2&sq=%22rocky%20mountain%20news%22&st=cse

means of marketing a film: “There was no reason to advertise in *Premiere*… It used to be an early opinion setter and part of the buzz. But aficionados who read it already knew that a movie was coming. How do you cut through? My job is to make as much noise as possible so people feel an urgency to see a movie.”[15] Print magazines simply cannot compete with the immediacy of the Internet, and Hachette did not successfully adapt its print magazine to fit the new media environment. Unlike *Premiere*, which failed to anticipate the importance of expanding its presence on the World Wide Web soon enough to compete with other entertainment outlets, *TV Guide* and its parent corporation formulated an approach to the web early in the history of the Internet.[16]

TV Guide Online was born to corporate parent News Corporation in 1996 as part of a venture called iGuide. This earliest version of TV Guide Online offered a searchable television listings grid, fulfilling TV Guide’s primary mission to offer television guidance to viewers.[17] The complete mission of iGuide, however, was larger than merely television guidance. For instance, one month after launching the site, TV Guide hired Jeanne Wolf, a well-respected entertainment journalist who had provided gossip reports for competitor E! Entertainment Television, Inc., to publish online television editorial content on iguide.com.[18] A month later, TV Guide Online announced enhanced editorial content, offering online users complete (and free) access to TV Guide magazine’s editorial content. iGuide described its value as “a new Web site strategically built to make sense of the Internet.”[19] In other words, iGuide provided listings for the World Wide Web in addition to television. It featured recommendations for which Web sites were worth visiting and which were not. TV Guide became part of the World Wide Web under the aegis of News Corp.’s desire to keep up with technology. According to journalist Scott Donaton, who worked at TV Guide Online in 1994, the TV Guide brand owes its longevity to News Corporation’s timely emergence on the World Wide Web.[20] Of course, competition among publications offering television guidance was already rampant on the web. Consider that in August of 1996 a reporter in Washington D.C. compared the television listings on her local newspaper’s website to TV Guide’s online grid, and she found that washingtonpost.com offered a more user-friendly search functionality.[21] While the TV Guide brand dominated the world of print television listings,[22] it had yet to develop an equally trusted name in online guidance.

In 1997, executives at News Corp. expressed optimism about the role TV Guide Online would play on the web. “We’re confident that the TV Guide Entertainment Network will be a top 10 content site by the end of 1997.”[23] But the reality did not match the intention. TV Guide’s online presence was actually a subset of News Corp.’s larger

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[15] “Thompson, Anne, “Mags Drag As Biz Goes Online,” *Variety* 9 Apr. 2007: 7.
[16] Thompson, “Mags Drag,” 7.
[17] “iGuide Debuts TV Guide Online Centerpiece,” *M2 Presswire* 8 Mar. 1996.
[18] “TV Guide Online to Feature Eclusive Column by Leading Entertainment Reporter Jeanne Wolf,” *M2 Presswire* 18 Apr. 1996.
[19] “TV Guide Online to Feature Complete TV Guide Magazine Online,” *PR Newswire* 7 May 1996.
[20] Donaton, Scott, “Web Success Not a Sure Thing for Kings of Bricks and Mortar,” *Advertising Age* 12 Jul. 1999.
[21] Shannon, Victoria, “Where On-Line Really Has An Edge: TV and Movie Listings,” *The Washington Post* 19 Aug. 1996.
[22] Competition proved especially strong from cable companies who provided their own listings, but only TV Guide owned the most recognizable name in the television guidance business.
[23] “News Corporation Unveils The TV Guide Entertainment Network,” *Business Wire* 13 Jan. 1997.

strategy to bolster other News Corp.'s websites like foxsports.com and foxnews.com.[24] This attempt to exploit the brand to bolster other media products became a theme in the recent history of *TV Guide*. Despite Donaton's suggestion that the TV Guide brand survives today due to its early arrival on the web, Murdoch's decision to sell TV Guide two years after its birth on the Internet suggests his online strategy failed to deliver economically.[25]

For purposes of comparison, consider the example of E! Entertainment during the same period. While E! had no stake in print media, it did oversee both a television network and a website. Rather than exploit one to build the other, E! executives encouraged a spirit of competition among the two entities. "'They're trying to scoop each other all the time,' said Lee Masters, president and chief executive of E! Entertainment. 'It keeps everyone on their toes.'"[26] The competition worked to the advantage of both, encouraging risk-taking and forward thinking. News Corporation's exploitation of the brand without direct attention to the magazine undermined the value of all its media properties.

<u>Corporate Merger Part One</u>

In 1998, News Corp. entered into a deal with John C. Malone of Prevue Channel in which the two pooled resources to exploit the brand recognition of TV Guide. Suddenly TV Guide existed in five forms—as a magazine, a television channel, an international print entity, a website, and an interactive channel listing. Explaining the merger, a spokesman for News Corp. stated, "this deal allows us to be where the growth is."[27] This statement implies that the future of *TV Guide* magazine and its parent corporation was not in print but on the web. At this point, United Video Satellite Group took over as corporate parent for TV Guide Inc.[28] and began the process of rebranding all of their holdings with the respected TV Guide brand. Pam McKissick, Prevue Network executive Vice President and General Manager praised the merger of United Video and TV Guide because Prevue Chanel "was virtually brandless…We knew we needed a major branding initiative with the consumer."[29] The magazine's value as a known entity was further exploited in the advertising campaign for the rebranded Prevue Network. "Can a magazine have an out of body experience?" read the headlines.[30] In this way, the merger expanded the influence of the TV Guide brand, yet the benefits for the magazine were unclear.

Amidst this talk of growth and expansion into cable and the new frontier of the Internet, TV Guide magazine often took a backseat. Perhaps more problematic was the executive decision for TV Guide magazine to look backwards from that backseat. *TV Guide* magazine chairman and CEO Anthea Disney reported that the magazine was "'going back to its roots' by focusing on its 'broadcast-centric' readers who mostly watch

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[24] Ginsberg, Steven, "Murdoch, Malone to Put TV Guide on Cable," *The Washington Post* 12 June 1998.
[25] Ginsberg "Murdoch, Malone."
[26] Richtel, Matt, "In-House Competition From Web News Team," *NewYork Times* 7 Sept. 1998.
[27] Richtel "In-House."
[28] News Corp. has maintained a percentage stake to this day.
[29] Kerwin, Ann Marie, "TV Guide Brand Moves Beyond Print With TV, Internet Debut," *Advertising Age* 1 Feb. 1999.
[30] Kerwin "TV Guide Brand Moves."

the major networks."[31] Disney's words reflect a vision of the TV Guide brand as addressing increasingly smaller audiences, consistent with the niche marketing that now dominates the media industry. However, an earlier statement made by Disney declared that *TV Guide* may abandon its listings in the future.[32] Her first statement suggests that *TV Guide* under her leadership will continue to address a network-model audience. Her second, earlier statement, proclaims that the magazine may give up its primary function of audience guidance.

Disney's confusion about the relevance of *TV Guide* in the changing media scene indicates the way the value of the brand was being undermined. As Chuck Brymer argues, one element that makes a brand great is the "alignment of internal and external commitment to the brand." In other words, if the owners lack commitment to the brand, customers, too, will lose interest in it.[33] Furthermore, Brymer notes, "it is clear that to deliver on their individual promises requires taking a stand and not wavering for short-term benefit. It demands consistency and clarity within the organization to succinctly articulate benefits."[34] Disney's conflicting accounts suggest that the owners of *TV Guide* proffered statements that undermined the relevance of the magazine. It simply was not their first priority. Gene DeWitt, chairman of New York-based Optimedia International, said of United Video's merger with TV Guide, "I think it's a very intelligent strategy to take a very strong brand whose original platform is vulnerable and exploit the hell out of it."[35] In keeping with this brand-centric logic, Disney publicized that the integrity of the magazine was less important to its owners than leveraging the value of the magazine's brand identity for other, sometimes competing, products.

During an age of cable channel proliferation, News Corporation's sale of *TV Guide* to United Video opened a new revenue stream for the company, but as executives turned their attention to spreading the brand across cable and the Internet, they limited the growth potential of the magazine. Indeed, Disney promised a *second* magazine focusing upon a more affluent, cable-viewing audience and a third magazine focusing on entertainment hardware. Having already diluted the brand identity by spreading it to entirely new mediums, TV Guide then divided its print publication audience. Rather than focus the company's attention towards expanding the scope and depth of the original *TV Guide* magazine, the executives continued their lateral spread across media landscapes. This expansive strategy may mark the times. Grainge posits, "For much of this period, at least until the dot-com crash in 2001, the US economy witnessed an unprecedented boom. Rapid growth in gross domestic product, labour productivity and investment matched with sky-rocketing equity prices and persona/corporate debt, fuelled an explosion of consumption. In this context, branding moved to the heart of marketing as a discipline, organizing the exchange between producers and consumers through its co-ordination of information, image and media."[36] Caught up in a period of economic expansion and technological innovation, executive attention to emerging media markets bolstered the growth of the Internet. As with all bubbles, though, it eventually burst.

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[31] Kerwin "TV Guide Brand Moves."

[32] Peers, Martin, "Changing Channels: TV Guide cable able after $2 bil TVI deal," *Variety* 12 June 1998.

[33] Brymer, Chuck, "What Makes Brands Great," *The Economist: Brands and Branding*, Eds. Rita Clifton and John Simmons (Princeton, Bloomberg P, 2003) 70.

[34] Brymer 69.

[35] "Guiding the way," *Advertising Age* 23 Oct. 2000.

[36] Grainge 14.

From 1999-2000, as the dot.com bubble expanded and ruptured, TV Guide's corporate discourse remained virtually silent about the magazine's prospects while the corporation boasted about other company units. In quarterly reports from 1999 and 2000, the video media sector dominated the official press releases. Chairman and Chief Executive Officer Joe Kiener praised advertising sales growth on the TV Guide Channel and also singled out company investment in the TV Games division, a unit in which the company had placed a large investment but had not yet turned a profit.[37] When Gemstar International Group Limited entered into an agreement to buy TV Guide Inc. in 2000, President and COO of TV Guide Peter C. Boylan III listed the company's assets as its "extensive advertising relationships," "access to international marketplaces" and "a fabulous brand name."[38] He did not list the magazine that built the brand name as an asset. This corporation's laissez-faire attitude towards *TV Guide* is evident in an *Advertising Age* article July of 2000, in which Dick Porter, executive Vice President and general manager of the media sales unit admits that "the magazine's circulation is 'not a real concern. We think about the brand.'"[39] The expansion of the company's media interests relegated the magazine to a less prominent position.

Brands demand constant and consistent nurturing. As argued by Douglas Holt, a corporate owner must understand the origins of the brand identity in order to strategically cultivate that brand.[40] During a period of corporate transition, the owners of *TV Guide* allowed the magazine that provided the brand with its meaning to lie fallow, floundering amidst a transformed media landscape that increased its declining significance. Though *TV Guide* is only one of many print publications to suffer declining revenue in the digital age, it demonstrates the folly of heralding a brand without careful attention to the maintenance of that brand.

Perhaps the great irony of *TV Guide*'s decline derives from the fact that does offer a widely recognized brand name able to be exploited, as opposed to a magazine like *Premiere*. TV Guide missed this opportunity because they failed to recognize that another important factor with branding is creating a partnership of the consumer. As described by Denzil Meyers, the practice and meaning of branding have transformed since its origins in the early years of the twentieth century. Meyers writes, "Over the past 100 or so years, the term 'brand' has undergone radical evolution from commodity, to product, to experience, to relationship, to this book's current usage—the interdependent living system of stakeholders."[41] Meyers defines the stakeholders loosely to include corporate owners, stockholders and consumers, but the word that I want to highlight is "interdependent." For Meyers, the consumer plays an important role in constructing brand identity in accordance with the corporation. Other branding experts place an even greater emphasis upon the role of the consumer. Ind goes so far as to note that it is the consumer who is most responsible for a product or company's brand identity: "the company does not control the life of the brand—the customer does."[42] TV Guide

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[37] "TV Guide, Inc. Announces Fourth Quarter and Year End 1999 Earnings," *PR Newswire* 14 Feb. 2000.
[38] "Gemstar Shines with TV Guide Buy," *Daily Deal (New York)* 13 Jul. 2000.
[39] "Guiding the way: Gemstar Lights Up TV Guide Brand to Blaze a Multiplatform Trail to Ever-increasing Channels," *Advertising Age* 23 Oct. 2000.
[40] Holt 5-6.
[41] Meyers, Denzil, "Whose Brand is it Anyway?", *Beyond Branding*, Ed. Nicholas Ind. (London: Kogan Page, 2003) 23.
[42] Ind 3.

attempted to cultivate new audiences but it divided its audience between those it defined as "broadcast viewers" and those it defined as "cable viewers." With an increasing cache of media products to sell, the company failed to provide a coherent narrative addressed to an audience meant to consume *all* their products. The company's conflicting brand address only intensified with another merger.

Corporate Merger Part 2

In 2000, the Justice Department's Antitrust Division investigated a planned merger between TV Guide and Gemstar International Group.[43] Gemstar, which had accused TV Guide of infringing upon their patent for interactive programming, decided to consume TV Guide whole as a subsidiary of their company. As with the sale to United Video, *TV Guide* magazine's primary asset remained it brand recognition. This emphasis on the brand makes sense within the context of the two mergers TV Guide underwent. Less well-known companies wanted to benefit from the oft-mentioned value of the TV Guide name.

It is also important to consider the symmetry between the new corporate partners and the emerging digital media business at TV Guide. United Video Satellite Group controlled the Prevue Channel, a television guidance network. Gemstar International was a competitor in the online television guidance business. Perhaps more important, Gemstar offered established relationships with consumer-electronics manufacturers, leading to the development of one of the most profitable units of Gemstar-TV Guide today—IPG, or Interactive Programming Guide technology. The driving interest of both companies led TV Guide further afield from its print identity. Yet the merger made a certain synergistic sense in that Gemstar's programming technology could bring state-of-the-art software to TV Guide Inc.[44] It also brought together three legendary businessmen: TV Guide's John C. Malone, News Corporation's Rupert Murdoch, and Gemstar's Henry Yuen.

Henry Yuen was no stranger to legal battles, having defended the Gemstar company's patents so often that Gemstar's facility with law suits was likened to a "fine art" by *Business Week*.[45] Yet as a subsidiary of Gemstar, TV Guide suffered the strain of repeated legal entanglements under the leadership of Yuen, an additional burden for a company struggling to maintain its relevance in a drastically altered publishing landscape. Initial reports after the proposed merger in 1999 seemed positive. In 2000, Yuen announced a "landmark year for Gemstar," noting in particular that the merger (pending government approval) "raised Gemstar to a higher business horizon."[46] Despite Yuen's optimism, all was not well.

Three months before, TV Guide delivered its own year-end financial report, citing a decrease in earnings of 97.4 million dollars.[47] This decrease was attributed to expenses resulting from the merger, but it also points to a period of general instability at TV Guide Inc. Fiscal year-end statements from Yuen in 2001 reflect some hedging, but revenue

[43] Grover, Ronald, "Gemstar Holds the Remote Control," *Business Week* 5 Jun. 2000: 71.
[44] "Gemstar Shines," *Daily Deal (New York)* 13 Jul. 2000.
[45] Grover 71.
[46] "Gemstar International Group Limited Reports Fourth Quarter and Fiscal Year 2000 Financial Results," *Business Wire* 31 May 2000.
[47] "TV Guide reports fourth-quarter, year-end earnings," *The Associated Press State and Local Wire* 15 Feb. 2000.

decreases were consistent with a general downturn in the U.S. economy after the dot.com crash and 9/11. Despite these challenges, Yuen announced, "we are proud to report results among the best—if not the best—of any technology and/or media company in the U.S. despite the weak national economy."[48]

TV Guide did not have the same opportunity to rebound as other companies, however. A report in 2002 details a 40% drop in Gemstar's stock after questions arose over Gemstar's accounting methods.[49] Yuen responded quickly to these questions, conceding, "during the last year and a half, we may have not sent a consistent message out there on how to measure the strength and growth of the company."[50] Despite his careful use of the word "may," Gemstar most definitely engaged in creative financial reporting. A subsequent *AP* report confirmed that Gemstar-TV Guide would issue corrected financial results for the years 2000, 2001, and 2002, resulting in a reduced revenue totaling $110.9 million.[51] Yuen maintained that his accounting practices involved no financial malfeasance, but his rhetoric and the financial realities contradict each other. News Corporation stepped in to protect its interest in TV Guide.

Yuen had rejected News Corporation's offer to buy Gemstar in 2000. Therefore, Murdoch's subsequent replacement of Yuen with a new management team after the accounting scandal seemed reminiscent of Shakespearean tragedy. Citing the personal politics involved in Yuen's ouster, journalist Gary Gentile overblown rhetoric describes Yuen's downfall as follows: "Two ambitious business men with dreams of corporate dominance. Only one can survive."[52] Yuen later resigned with a $22 million severance,[53] and he continued to defend his accounting practices.[54] Yet his financial shenanigans damaged the company's reputation and bottom line. Though Gentile's reporting pokes some fun at the scandal, Yuen's downfall drew attention away from *TV Guide* magazine during crucial years of continual change, within the company and the larger media world.

For an already fragile magazine, Yuen inflicted his greatest damage through neglect. Gemstar merged with TV Guide and appropriated all of the value of its brand. Yet the company did little to distinguish *TV Guide* magazine. Yuen is a visionary who developed the technology for VCR+ when he had trouble programming his VCR to record a baseball game. He understood the need to be on top of technological innovation, but this led him to focus his attention on enhancing his own technological interests under the name of TV Guide while the magazine itself floundered. As VCRs began to be replaced by newer technology, Gemstar shifted its focus to developing and distributing IPG software. Phillip Swann, president and publisher of tvpredictions.com noted that Yuen ignored the magazine in his planning for the future of the TV Guide brand: "there was no talk of getting better writers, or photographers. All he talked about was electronic

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[48] "Gemstar-TV Guide International, Inc. Reports Financial Results for the Quarter and Year Ended December 31, 2001," *Business Wire* 18 Mar. 2002.
[49] Gentile, Gary, "Gemstar Hits Hard Times in Push for TV Programming Technology," *The Associated Press State and Local Wire* 5 Apr. 2002.
[50] Gentile "Gemstar Hits Hard."
[51] "Gemstar-TV Guide to Cut Revenues $111M," *Associated Press Online* 10 Mar. 2003.
[52] Gentile, Gary, "Tech Darling Ousted From Own Company," *Associate Press Online* 9 Oct. 2002.
[53] Courts recently upheld a ruling that blocks Yuen from receiving this severance.
[54] Gentile "Tech Darling."

publishing and how TV Guide would play a role in that."[55] To employ an agricultural metaphor, Yuen salted the earth of *TV Guide*.

After Yuen's resignation, the corporate discourse surrounding TV Guide changed dramatically. The term "brand" continues to dominate company rhetoric, but a decided effort to reinvigorate the identity of the magazine supports the brand ideology. Beginning with the fiftieth celebration of *TV Guide* in 2002, the company planned an elaborate promotional strategy to enhance the reputation of the magazine. Newly installed president of the TV Guide Publishing Group John Loughlin said, "The magazine, because of its history and its size, it's at the heart of the brand, and we've got to be sure that these different platforms, these different media reinforce the same set of messages."[56] With an infusion of $20 million dollars in 2003, Gemstar-TV Guide recommitted itself to the magazine.[57]

The period from 2003 to 2008 demonstrates Gemstar-TV Guide's dedication to the magazine. Earlier in the essay, I described E! Entertainment's model of encouraging competition between their television channel and their website. TV Guide chose a more friendly approach in which the two mediums mutually reinforce each other to the benefit of each. For example, recognizing that the magazine could no longer publish all programs on the ever-expanding channel line-up, the website picked up where the magazine left off. In return, visitors to the website were encouraged to become TV Guide subscribers.[58] During 2006, the company relaunched both the magazine and the website, with the former featuring an expanded size and editorial content and the latter featuring over sixty blogs, enhanced personalization, and more video.[59]

As a result of these efforts, magazine newsstand sales increased by 38%[60] and the revenue for TV Guide Online increased 51 percent.[61] Further increasing the cooperation between the two mediums, Gemstar-TV Guide went so far as to make all their editorial content from the magazine available online. Gemstar-TV Guide International CEO Richard Battista described the company's cross-platform strategy, "we invented this world of 'TV guidance,'…we believe we're in a very unique position to capitalize on this significant guidance opportunity in this new world."[62]

This new spirit of cooperation is nowhere more evident than in the example of the company's relationship with TiVo Inc. Under Yuen's leadership, Gemstar-TV Guide sued TiVo for patent infringement. But post-Yuen, the company entered a licensing agreement with TiVo in 2003. At that time, a research analyst noted the marked change in company policy: "The attitude of Gemstar toward everybody in the business was, 'You do it our way and you pay us or we'll sue you and make your life very difficult…That has changed very much in the last 12 months."[63] TiVo made a similar overture of friendship

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[55] Gentile, "Gemstar Hits Hard."
[56] Kay, Jennifer, "TV Guide Celebrates 50th anniversary," *The Associated Press* 2 Apr. 2003.
[57] Laporte, Nicole, "Gemstar channels $20 mil to TV Guide," *Variety* 16 Jun. 2003.
[58] Learmonth, Michael, "TV Guide Taps Brit Editor," *Variety* 1 Sep. 2004.
[59] Kissell, Rick, "Blogs Fuel Viewers' Passion Play," *Variety* 20 Jul. 2006.
[60] "Gemstar Issues New TV Guide Circulation," *Associated Press Financial Wire* 11 Jan. 2006.
[61] "Gemstar-TV Guide Posts 2nd Quarter Profit Despite Revenue Decline," *The Associated Press* 9 Aug. 2006.
[62] "TV Guide Site Channeling Content," *VNU Entertainment News Wire* 16 Jun. 2006.
[63] Fordahl, Matthew, "Video recorder-maker TiVo ends Gemstar patent dispute," *The Associate Press State and Local News Wire* 9 Jun. 2003.

to TV Guide three years later when it entered a deal to allow tvguide.com to feature TiVo's Online Scheduling.[64]

Having made peace in the media landscape, the public narrative about Gemstar-TV Guide during this three-year period was extremely positive and forward thinking. It also voiced support of the traditional media format that gave TV Guide its most valuable asset, its widely recognized and respect brand identity. The financial reports provide a similarly sunny outlook, though they acknowledge the challenge the company faced in rebuilding after the Yuen debacle. As CEO Jeff Shell joked, "From a financial perspective, we are obviously pleased to be turning the page on 2003."[65] 2003 featured fiscal disappointments, but it also saw Gemstar-TV Guide make critical deals with DirecTV, Comcast, and electronics manufacturers like Sony and Mitsubishi. The company also settled lawsuits over the accounting scandal with their shareholders.[66] During the next three years, it built on this progress by re-investing in both the old and new media components of the company, as noted above. IPG became the money maker for Gemstar-TV Guide. Charts from the company's May 2007 Shareholder's Meeting reflect a growth in licensing revenue from 32% in 2004 to 46% in 2006.[67] Circulation revenue rates decreased during this same period from 29% in 2004 to 19% in 2006.[68] Yet the company promised to continue their investment in reinvigorating the TV Guide brand through its cross-platform strategy. The magazine even offered a "better-than-forecasted performance" in fiscal year 2007.[69]

Based on this data, it is tempting to argue that the evidence demonstrates the continued relevance of *TV Guide* as a print publication. Rather than depend solely upon brand recognition, the leadership of the magazine attempted to transform the magazine's identity to respond to the changing media landscape. These actions are consistent with Brymer's suggestion that brands maintain relevance through strong and inventive leadership.[70] The potential success of their efforts to stabilize, if not to reverse, the bleeding of the audience base of the magazine will never be known. Yet again, an ownership turnover stifled the growth of the magazine and today, the status of *TV Guide* is more precarious than ever.

Corporate Merger Part 3

Even as Gemstar-TV Guide delivered its fiscal year 2007 results, Macrovision Corporation had already offered to buy the company for $2.8 billion.[71] Having announced that it was open to talks of a merger with another company in July of 2007, the decision prompted much media buzz. As reported by Paul R. La Monica for CNNMoney.com, Gemstar-TV Guide made an enticing sale prospect due to its

[64] "Gemstar-TV Guide to Feature TiVo's Online Scheduling Service on TVGuide.com," *Business Wire* 11 Sept. 2006.
[65] "Gemstar-TV Guide Announces Fourth Quarter and Full Year 2003 Results," *Business Wire* 2 Mar. 2004.
[66] "Gemstar-TV Guide Announces Fourth."
[67] "Gemstar-TV Guide Shareholders Meeting," 16 May 2007.
[68] "Gemstar-TV Guide Shareholders."
[69] "Gemstar-TV Guide Announces Full Year and Fourth Quarter 2007 Results," *Business Wire* 14 Feb. 2008.
[70] Brymer 71.
[71] "TV Guide's Future Full of Static After $2.8B Deal with Macrovision," *The Associated Press* 7 Dec. 2007.

tremendous growth in video search: "Alan Gould, an analyst with Natexis Bleichroeder, told me that Gemstar-TV Guide could be worth a lot more to a media or technology firm than a private equity shop since Gemstar's most attractive asset is not the magazine but its intellectual property."[72] Ironically, it was Yuen's determination to defend Gemstar patents in court that made the company so valuable; although he made the company vulnerable to a takeover, he also protected the company's key asset. Macrovision is an Internet-security software company, making TV Guide desirable for its online and mobile software technology.

What Macrovision is not, however, is a company with experience in publishing. Macrovision Chief Executive Fred Amoroso said, "he didn't know much about publishing and needed more time to assess how TV Guide could fit into his strategy."[73] Some industry experts questioned the wisdom of Macrovision's buyout offer. Said Kaufman Brothers analyst Todd Mitchell, "Macrovision seems to want only certain assets and doesn't know what to do with others."[74] "Others" refers to *TV Guide* magazine and tvguide.com.

Gemstar-TV Guide shareholders, including Rupert Murdoch, approved Macrovision's purchase of the company on April 28, 2008. A press released from Macrovision dated October 13, 2008 sealed the fate of *TV Guide* magazine by listing it as a "discontinued operation." The press release states, "The divestiture of TV Guide Magazine is consistent with Macrovision's plans, outlined in January 2008 following the company's announcement of the acquisition of Gemstar-TV Guide. Macrovision is focused on providing technology solutions and *TV Guide* Magazine was identified as a business not aligned with that core corporate strategy."[75] Acknowledging that it had no interest in pursuing the business of print media, Macrovision chose instead to unload the magazine as quickly as possible. Yet Macrovision may also be confirming the tough times ahead for print media. The press release from October also offers the company's vision of the future of media, and it does not include traditional media formats: "Today's consumers dictate how and when they engage with all forms of digital media. Macrovision sees music, movies, photos, videos and television programs transforming into personalized catalogs that users will be able to search, access and expand at the touch of a button."[76] This vision of a fully digital and on-demand media atmosphere portrays Macrovision as singularly focused upon leading the transformations of tomorrow. It also suggests the company does not have to depend upon the brand name of TV Guide, long associated with (and limited by) the network model of television, to chart its future direction.

Indeed, Macrovision has issued an (unintentional) direct challenge at the value of the TV Guide brand in its manner of selling the discontinued operations associated with Gemstar. First Macrovision sold the magazine for the cost of its liabilities, signaling its failure as a profit-producing consumer product. *Ad Age* reported, "How much is TV Guide magazine worth in a morphing media business and molten credit markets? Try

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[72] La Monica, Paul R., "A Bidding War for TV Guide?", 10 Jul. 2007 *http://mediabiz.blogs.cnnmoney.cnn.com/2007/07/10/a-bidding-war-for-tv-guide/.*

[73] "TV Guide's Future," *The Associated Press* 7 Dec. 2007.

[74] "TV Guide's Future."

[75] Macrovision Corporation, "Macrovision Announces Sale of TV Guide Magazine," *Press Release* 13 Oct. 2008.

[76] "Macrovision Corporation.

$1."[77] Reflecting the market value of the magazine in the digital age, the sale price verifies Macrovision's eagerness to rid itself of a losing enterprise.

New owner of the magazine Andrew Nikou, founder & managing partner of OpenGate Capital, cited the legacy of the brand as key to its purchase of the magazine: "TV Guide Magazine is a powerful media brand that serves the television and entertainment community by providing a combination of breaking news, behind-the-scenes features and photos, and exclusive stories on television's biggest shows and stars."[78] Nikou's dependence upon the value of the brand to drive the magazine's future seems naïve considering the repeated failure of the former owners of *TV Guide* to profit from the print publication. Further, Nikou's statement fails to account for Macrovision's other blow to brand ideology in that it sold separately the magazine and the website that shares its content.

Although the TV Guide channel and the website tvguide.com sold together for the substantially higher price of $255 million, the brand has now been split between different corporate owners. The full implications of this have yet to play out. Tvguide.com continues to publish online, though several well-known journalists like Matt Roush and Stephen Battaglio chose to stay with the magazine and therefore no longer write for the website. The magazine has recently launched a new website, tvguidemagazine.com, which is in the beta testing phase. Journalistic accounts voice pessimism about the future of the magazine and its new website: "Steven Cohn, the editor of Media Industry Newsletter, said he was not confident about TV Guide's future. 'I hope it survives, but I think it's a long shot, to be honest.'"[79] Allen Shapiro, whose One Equity Partners now owns the TV Guide Channel and tvguide.com, boldly stated the challenge before the magazine, noting that with its presence in 83 million homes, the cable channel simply touches more television viewers than the magazine.[80] Either way, both will likely suffer from the divorce. In a comment attached to the short announcement posted on tvguide.com that Matt Roush was no longer writing for the website, reader anakinjmt commented, "This...this is a joke, right? I mean, how can TVGuide.com and *TV Guide* Magazine be owned by different companies? This doesn't make any sense." From a branding perspective, one that requires consistency and interdependence among stakeholders, it certainly does not.[81]

Conclusion

The larger lesson of *TV Guide*'s history calls attention to the broader transformation of the digital landscape. Douglas Holt defines cultural icons as brands that "perform the particular myth society especially needs at a given historical moment."[82] Drawing from this, *TV Guide* magazine embodies the varied contradictions of the digital negotiation among media companies. Blogger and New York University Professor Clay Shirky recently posted an entry that compares the digital transformation to the year 1500

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[77] Ives, Nat, "TV Guide Sold for a Buck," *AdAge* 15 Oct. 2008.
[78] Ives "TV Guide Sold."
[79] Clifford, Stephanie, "TV Guide, Once Master of the Airwaves, Tries to Survive in a Competitive Category," *New York Times* 8 Dec. 2008: 8.
[80] Schneider, Michael and Dade Hayes, "TV Guide to flip channel," *Variety* 19 Dec. 2008: 1.
[81] Anakinjmt, "Comment," *Tvguide.com* 12 Dec. 2008.
[82] Holt, Douglas B., "Chapter 1: What Is an Iconic Brand?", *How Brands Become Icons: The Principles of Cultural Branding* (Boston: Harvard Business School P, 2004) 2.

when the printing press was invented. He writes, "With the old economics destroyed, organizational forms perfected for industrial production have to be replaced with structures optimized for digital data. It makes increasingly less sense even to talk about a publishing industry, because the core problem publishing solves — the incredible difficulty, complexity, and expense of making something available to the public — has stopped being a problem."[83] *TV Guide*'s relevance today may have less to do with its success as a magazine or its former glory but more with the way it illustrates society's contradictory response to technological innovation. Drawing upon the nostalgia generated by a relic of the network age of television, the various owners of *TV Guide* imposed upon the magazine a backward gaze that affirmed the industrial model of the television and publishing industry.

The publishing industry may be in crisis, but Americans continue to consume large amounts of TV. A Nielsen-sponsored study at Ball State University's Center for Media Design confirmed that the television apparatus continues to dominate computer and cell phone video consumption.[84] This study prompted *Wired* blogger Ryan Singel to argue, "talk all you want about the disruption from Hulu, DVRs, BitTorrent, on-demand movie rentals and user-generated videos — there's still a lot more money to be made flashing ads at couch potatoes watching television on TV sets."[85] As this blog post reflects, in this moment of transition, media industries are at once persisting in traditional production models while also adapting and creating new ones. *TV Guide* is one example of a publication that has attempted to seize the opportunity of the digital age while maintaining its foundational identity as *the* name in television guidance. Yet its development has been hindered by brand instability and corporate mismanagement. As its history continues, it will likely continue to parallel the larger story of the digital revolution while also speaking to the struggle to maintain a consistent brand across multiple media platforms. Though journalists continue to pronounce this or that form of media dead, perhaps the approach demonstrated here—to consider one case study and track its negotiations across the mediascape—offers a more nuanced, if less definitive, method to ask questions about the digital transformation, even when answers continue to elude analysis.

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[83] Shirky, Clay, "Newspapers and Thinking the Unthinkable," 13 March 2009 http://ginx.com/-LQcGF#http://www.shirky.com/weblog/2009/03/newspapers-and-thinking-the-unthinkable.
[84] Stelter, Brian, "8 Hours a Day Spent on Screens, Study Finds," 27 Mar. 2009 http://www.nytimes.com/2009/03/27/business/media/27adco.html?_r=1&ref=media.
[85] Singel, Ryan. "Television: Reports of My Death are Greatly Exaggerated," 27 Mar. 2009 http://blog.wired.com/business/2009/03/television-isnt.html.

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