



## Doing Well By Doing Good

By Carolyn O'Hara

It has all the makings of a classic Hollywood story. Young man tragically loses both parents to cancer. Young man graduates from Ivy League college and goes west to make movies. He decides he wants to change the world in a different way instead. Fortunately, young man is already very, very rich, thanks to his magazine mogul father. But money isn't the only legacy his father leaves; he also bequeaths an entrepreneurial zeal for risk-taking. So, young man does what he knows best. He decides to bankroll a magazine.

This is the story of 27-year-old Ben Goldhirsh—scion of Bernard Goldhirsh, the founder of the business glossy Inc.—and his magazine, a slick bimonthly of politics, culture, and hot products aimed at earnest college grads still lured by print in a virtual age. Launched in September 2006 and branded with the moniker Good, the magazine's intentions are, well, good (as its cover proudly boasts, "for people who give a damn"). In his first founder's note, Goldhirsh suggested that he brought Good to the world to "add value," because "today's media is taking up our space, dumbing us down, and impeding our productivity." **But don't mistake his publication for a magazine designed for do-gooders who like to rail against corporate America, meat eaters, and Dick Cheney. No, Good wants to be the reading material of choice for folks who want to make the world a better place, but without giving up their iPhones and Xboxes.** Good is about compassionate consumerism, technology with taste, and environmentalism with a healthy dose of entertainment. Twenty-first-century hip, declares Good, doesn't have to be hypocritical.

In many ways, its mission has hit a nerve. After all, well-educated young Americans want little more than to be validated in their quest to be responsible global citizens, without having to give up the trappings of the good life. On a newsstand crowded with celebrity glossies and their parents' newsweeklies, Good stands out as an ambitious, well-designed, general-interest magazine that simultaneously seeks to educate and entertain. Not many magazines can get away with, as the May/June issue does, an eight-page primer on Kim Jong Il and his Hermit Kingdom with the snappy headline, "Li'l Kim" and a timeline charting Bono's acts of humanitarianism alongside his changing taste in sunglasses. In the process of bringing a slice of the world to its readers, Good also aims to create a sensibility for them. For starters, carbon offsetting is good. So is civic involvement, and caring about Darfur. The May/June issue also features profiles of a New York academic who prescribes art projects for environmental health maladies, a conservative preacher's wife who encourages churches to distribute HIV/AIDS medications to Africans, and a scientist who convinced Wal-Mart to try to sell one energy-efficient fluorescent lightbulb to each of its customers—all 100 million of them.

But because this is a magazine for affluent, urban 20- and 30- somethings, goods—designer clothes, high-tech gadgets, modern furnishings—are also good. The Marketplace section of each issue is devoted to feeding that youthful appetite for material items that allow their collectors to

maintain their hipster credentials while resting assured that no animals were harmed in the process. The Good imprimatur makes it acceptable to wear those new Nikes (never mind the child labor of yore; proceeds help fund education programs), to have another round of shots (organic, of course), and to splurge on that \$1,300 desk chair (it's made from recycled materials). It's not just the editorial content that feeds materialism. Good's advertisers include not only the Save Darfur campaign but also fashion designer Marc Jacobs and the über-trendy Fred Segal boutique in Santa Monica. Evidently, it's perfectly fine to be a capitalist, as long as you're being "good" about it.

That's partly where the magazine's business model comes in. For \$20, subscribers receive six issues, daily online exclusives, and invitations to conferences, free concerts, and block parties. Yet, not a single cent of subscription revenue goes to the magazine. Instead, readers choose from among 12 different nonprofit organizations, ranging from Teach for America to the World Wildlife Fund, to receive the subscription fee instead. After a year on the newsstand, the magazine boasts roughly 19,000 subscribers, with more than \$380,000 already donated to charity. But how does the magazine stay afloat? It's not just a rich-kid vanity project. True, Goldhirsh has invested a dollar figure he puts in the "single-digit millions" into Good. But he claims that his venture is nearly breaking even due to all that lucrative advertising.

The magazine hasn't just grabbed the brass ring financially; it's reached great editorial success as well. A skeleton crew of two has blossomed into a staff of 30, with half working on Web and video platforms to create content that complements the magazine. The associate publisher is none other than Al Gore III, son of the former U.S. vice president, which lends Good some environmental cachet. And a steady stream of all-stars have graced the magazine's pages with their work, from Vanity Fair Editor Graydon Carter and New Yorker financial columnist James Surowiecki to economist Jeffrey Sachs and the late writer Kurt Vonnegut. Such a roster of notable authors would be a success story for any publication, but it's particularly impressive for a magazine that's only a year out of the gate.

It would be easy to dismiss Good as a magazine for well-heeled whiners who prefer their serious subjects packaged with flashy visuals and a thumping beat, à la MTV. **But that characterization doesn't give sufficient credit to the sincere, and often endearing, curiosity that lies at the heart of what it is trying to accomplish. Ultimately, Good's editors, like many young idealists living in a prosperous age, want a place at the table. They want to reshape national discourse. There's just no reason not to do it in style.**

Goldhirsh finds it easiest to explain his mission by likening his magazine to the media influences of an earlier generation. "We're closer to the old Esquire than we are to Utne," he explains, referring to the former's heady decade in the 1960s under Editor Harold T.P. Hayes, whose run, according to Good's March/April 2007 media issue, made the Esquire of that age the best magazine of all time. In the homage, the editors wrote that it "visually and literarily alter[ed] the way Americans thought about their changing country." In other words, it was a magazine for a country coming of age. And there's something very Good about that.

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