

Powerhouse Press PR

Interview Transcription

Conducted: Sept. 11, 2005 @ 4:45 p.m. in Brower Student Center,
The College of New Jersey

Interviewees: Matthew Fair – Editor in Chief
Joe Adorna – Business/Ad Manager

Q: What specific audiences do you target and how do you target them?

MF: We target college students, specifically college students at The College of New Jersey, by writing articles about things that are going on here, covering events that are taking place here and trying somehow to amuse them.

Q: What message do you try to get across through the paper?

MF: We don't really have a message so much as we're just a vehicle for bringing people information. So I guess our message is just to be informed and involved.

Q: What image do you want to achieve?

MF: Respectability.

Q: Who do you view as your competition?

MF: The only other news-oriented thing on campus would be Unbound, the online magazine, and I guess the Journal, but do they even broadcast anymore? They used to my sophomore year.

Q: Something our professor mentioned is that competition doesn't necessarily have to be another student newspaper, but like people watching tv or going online rather than picking up our newspaper.

MF: Our competition is ignorance and apathy. We struggle against them.

JA: The Trenton Times, I guess.

Q: Would you consider them competition?

MF: Yeah I guess, they're a real paper. We're just playing dress-up.

JA: Aren't they also available on campus?

Q: Yeah, what newspapers are available on campus?

JA: Trenton Times are.

MF: Trenton Times. The Wall Street Journal.

JA: The Wall Street Journal. But that's not even in the same ballpark. I wouldn't even see The Wall Street Journal as competition.

Q: What literature do you have on your company that we can review?

MF: Well we have the Signal constitution and we have information about advertising rates.

Q: The only other information I thought of, was, I guess we can ask cyber or Jackie about it, is I know the Web site, doesn't it keep track of who reads what articles how many times?

MF: Yeah, we have readership numbers. Just for the Web site.

Q: If there's a way to print that out.

MF: I don't know if there's a way to print that out. It's there. You can write it down. Yeah I don't know how to go farther back into that. I'm sure Jackie would know.

Q: What is the history of the Signal?

MF: The Signal started publishing in 1855, making it the oldest college newspaper in the state. So we published for a while and then stopped publishing for a few years during World War II. There is a whole article that we published in the Sesquicentennial Issue last year that you guys can refer to that is like a whole big history of the Signal. So I can hook you up with a copy of that, because I don't know a lot off the top of my head.

Q: Have you significantly increased circulation over the years?

MF: That's kind of hard to do because our circulation to a point based on the number of people who are enrolled in the College. I know that our circulation was like 3,000 two years ago, and we bumped up to 3,500 now. Maybe my sophomore year. Was that when Amanda was EIC?

Q: Yeah.

MF: Because I know she increased circulation.

Q: Do you know why? Was everything being taken and we needed more?

MF: No, I think that the reason was just so we could tell advertisers that our circulation was higher than it actually is. But our distribution director takes the paper around every Wednesday to all the buildings and we usually end up going through most of them. 3,500 is a pretty good number for where we're at.

JA: I usually indicate to advertisers that we're around 4,000. I round up. Just a little bit. It makes it look that much better.

Q: When you put out the paper, are there ever old piles still sitting there that haven't been taken?

MF: Sometimes, like it really depends on the building, if it's not a heavily trafficked building. We put different amounts in each building. Like four or five stacks in Social Sciences Building, four or five stacks in Bliss and they are usually all gone when the next week comes along. We put like one or two stacks in like Armstrong and there will be some left. It really depends on how heavily trafficked the building is.

Q: Do you have a list of all the buildings you put them in how many you put in each building?

MF: No, because we kind of just ballpark it. I told our distribution director to keep it in his head how many he put where and see if they are all gone by the time he gets there next week then maybe he should leave like one or two more. Or if there are still some left maybe he should just leave one instead of two. We don't have a set number that we use.

Q: I know that you were considering putting some in 7-11.

MF: I told him to start doing that.

Q: So then are you trying to also target an off-campus audience.

MF: If off-campus people want to read about what's going on here, that's cool. And also students who leave this campus from time to time might pick up the paper if they saw it in 7-11.

Q: So are you trying to target just the off-campus students?

MF: No we also cover local issues. We cover a lot of like Ewing Twp. politics and stuff like that.

JA: We try to extend our campus into the community of Ewing. So people who live in Ewing know what's going on on-campus.

MF: Ewing Twp. has kind of like an iffy relationship with the College. Like we don't pay taxes on this land that the College sits on even though it is under Ewing Twp. jurisdiction because you know it's state property. So instead of that we pay them like a pilot payment every year which hasn't gone up in like 15 years even though we keep buying out land from the town. Like where the apartments are, that was all houses in Ewing Twp. and we bought up the land and tore the houses down so we could build the apartments. I know we've done that with a couple other places over the years. So there is a lot of tenuous stuff that goes on between Ewing and the College that we try to stay on top of. So while stuff like that might not get covered too extensively in like the Trenton Times or something like that because it's a bigger paper and they have a lot more stuff to worry about, we try to provide more coverage on issues like that.

Q: Is your logo recognizable?

MF: Like our flag? I think so. It's relatively new. We just changed it last year. I think its pretty snappy. It's better than the old one. It looks a little more legitimate.

Q: Also it has the history in it.

MF: Yeah that flag is actually the original flag that was used when the paper started printing in 1885. When College and Community Relations was putting out a Sesquicentennial Issue of the paper we decided to use the original flag for it. But then we realized that we liked the flag so much that we just kept it.

Q: What are your goals?

MF: I'd say our goals are just to be the best damn college newspaper we can be. No, I'd say our goals are to provide more intensive coverage. Just to get writers more involved in. You know, I think that people have a pretty bad image of journalists overall. And I think that journalists can do a lot of good, you know. Like a good reporter, it's they're job to find out things that the administration, for example, wouldn't want you to know about. Like fighting for truth with a pen. So I guess its my goal to kind of get people to realize that and to, you know, work for us so that we can spread information to the campus. So my goal would also to be for the people of the campus to realize the good The Signal can do and to tell us what they think. Just to have an active communication between the campus community at large and us.

Q: Have you ever done any type of research previously to find out what students think of The Signal on campus?

MF: I know we haven't done anything like that since I've been involved in it. I don't know if anything has been done like that in the past. We have a pretty small staff and we have a lot of stuff to do as it is.

Q: Is your staff small because you want it to be small or is it because not enough people want to work for the Signal?

MF: Kind of both. Our staff is small because our office is small and if you had too many people in there it would just be too cramped and I think that responsibilities down there

are divvied out pretty reasonably. But it's still a lot of work for a lot of people. And I have put thought into creating a couple of new positions. I think we could fill like having a graphics designer on staff instead of just getting people on the fly to do it for us. Maybe having an assignment editor on top of having all the section editors. There aren't ideas that are really thought about too extensively yet because they kind of just occurred to me in the last couple of weeks.

Q: Do people volunteer to work at the Signal?

MF: Oh yeah, all the writers are volunteer. The only people we pay are the people who are on staff. But we get enough people to make sure we have coverage.

Q: And the assistant editors don't get paid. And what the editors do get paid is very minimal.

MF: Yeah it's not a lot.

Q: But, do you have an abundance of people who want to work for the Signal?

MF: For the most part. I mean it depends on the position. You get people when we have elections we'll have like five people running for like Copy Editor or Fact Checker because they are entry level positions. But when it comes down to like the Art Editor or the Funstuff Editor, it's kind of hard to find. For the most part we have all the people we need.

Q: And I don't know if the activities fair was any indication, but a lot of people showed interest in writing for many of the sections.

MF: To be fair, lots of people usually sign up and like five percent of the people actually follow through, but you know I guess it shows that people would want to theoretically do something with us. They don't hate us.

Q: I don't think anybody hates you.

Q: What is your budget? (@ 456 on timer)

MF: Our budget is basically whatever we pull in from ads every week.

JA: It costs about 1,000 a week to publish The Signal. My goal each week is to earn more money in advertising revenues to earn that cost and make a little profit on the side so we can do some cool things with The Signal. So I like to pull in \$1,500 a week, that's a little goal I have for myself, sometimes it doesn't always work out. So that's my goal, about \$1,500, so we're at least making like \$500 a week.

Q: Do you have steady advertisers, people that advertise every week?

JA: I work with advertising agencies and then they have their clients, so 360 Youth is an advertising agency that I use a lot, Y2K Marketing is another agency, so I use that, and then a couple other local places around here. You'd think I would get more from them but most of the money comes from the advertising agencies. We do Domino's Pizza in Ewing advertisements, just last week Cluck U started advertising, Kaplan test center they advertise with us from time to time, NYTimes just ran an ad with us, so they're not just around here, they're also, y'know, down the road a little bit.

Q: What can we do for you?

MF: ahhh

Q: Are there any particular goals that we can help you with?

MF: See, I think that advertising the Signal goes hand-in-hand with improving our internal function. The only thing you'll really be able to do is maybe like, advertise more off-campus to get more people to advertise with us. Or you could publicize more on campus to get more people to read us, and if you do that second thing then that means we as an organization have to deliver the goods. Which means we have to do that, so yea that's something you guys can do for us?

Q: Do you think maybe the students pick it up but don't necessarily read most of it, and there's something we can do to communicate to them 'there really is some good stuff in here' for those who may just look through the comics and then throw it out?

MF: I think something you can do is try to facilitate maybe a discussion between The Signal and campus. I think you guys can do something like that where you can go out and talk with people and do polls and see what people like, what people don't like, what people would like to see that they don't see. Things like that to try to figure out what we should be covering, how we should be covering it, what we can do better.

Q: What are you doing now that is working, and what are you doing now that is not working?

MF: Working how?

Q: To achieve your goal.

MF: Um, I think we have been doing a certain amount of outreach as far as getting new people to come down and do stuff for us. I think to a point we're having more open discussions among our staff about what we're covering and how we're covering it. We're doing things we've never really done before, like sat down, and usually we'd just say 'here's a story' to the writer and they'd go out and then come back and if it's not good then we'd all get mad but y'know, it's like "coaching," like in the news editing book. It's like talking about how we're going to do what we're going to do, instead of just everybody doing it and slapping it all together. So I feel like we have been communicating more than we have in the past, at least amongst the staff.

Q: Do you think that that communication leads to a better product which translates to getting more people to read The Signal?

MF: I think that's a big part of it. I also know that I've been talking to a lot of people on-campus and asking them questions like that. I know that we've been getting a lot more people to write for the Opinions section which I think is really important for students to get involved. If they don't want to be a beat writer where they get an assignment every week but they just get to write their opinion about something, I think it's important for them to realize that they have this option. So yea that can be another piece of the campaign, to get people to realize The Signal is not only something for them to read but something to take part in and they can talk to us about writing something like an opinion or something like that if they don't want to be a reporter, y'know. Like I said in the past we have published all kinds of essays and things like that and I wouldn't be opposed to doing more things like that.

Q: Do you think letters to the editor is another section that we could publicize as a way to interact with the campus?

MF: Oh definitely. For a long time we weren't getting like any letters to the editor ever. I think that more people have been taking the Signal a little more seriously in the last like two or three years because every week we have at least two or three letters published. Usually we just put them all on one page. But sometimes we add a second page with letters.

Q: How much media coverage or recognition do you receive?

MF: Two years ago The Signal won the New Jersey Press Association award for General Excellence among four-year college newspapers in the state. Last year we got elbowed out because Princeton joined.

JA: We also won in 2001 and 1997 as well.

MF: Yea it wasn't just that one year. And then I know that a number of the people on our staff they also won awards, our photo editor won an award.

Q: Didn't the New York Times just write an article about what Nicole found in The Signal about Whitman?

MF: Well that really wasn't an article on us.

Q: But it put your name in the New York Times at least.

MF: Well yea I guess so.

Q: How many people do you have on staff?

MF: Actually down there any given week, I'd say maybe like 25 people who are down there working on putting it together. Once you add writers in there it's probably closer to 50, probably even higher than that. There've been a lot of people who've had an article once or twice, they won't write regularly but every couple weeks. It's a pretty big staff but it's rare that we get everybody together at the same time.

Q: The writers that write sporadically, do they come to you with ideas and say "OK I want to write about this," or do they say "OK I have some time this week, can I write a story?"

MF: It's more the latter. We actually will call them and say "we have a story, do you want one?" Sometimes they'll come down and say "can I have a story this week?" but that's a good idea, that can be part of the campaign too. Especially the Entertainment section, it doesn't operate like the other sections. It really more relies on people saying "I'll review this or I'm going to watch this documentary or I'm going to go to this restaurant or this club." I feel like that's something that needs to be worked on. Getting people to realize they have to take the initiative and can say what they want to review.

Q: People don't realize they can dictate the content.

MF: That's another thing people don't realize is if they have ideas they can come and tell us. Y'know, as much as we have our ear to the ground

Q: I think the Web site is something that can be helpful, like if people use the message board to talk to us ... you know I had no idea you guys even had a Web site? Maybe we can send out an e-mail to all the students letting them know.

MF: That's a good idea, trying to find out if there's a way to have The Signal sent to everyone on campus without having them sign up on the Web site.

Q: But do you think that could also then just cut out the print version because then people would say, "Why would I go pick up the paper? I can get it online."

MF: Well I think people still like to read the print version.

Q: Yea that's true, like you can go on NYTimes.com and see the same content yet actually seeing the paper is so different.

Q: What percentages make up your target audience? Do you have any ideas like how many teachers read it?

MF: I know a lot of teachers read it. There's not really any way to gauge readership because it's a free paper so we don't really have statistics ...there's no way unless we like stood there and watched people pick it up. I know a lot of faculty read it because they talk about it.

Q: Do you think maybe it's 25 percent faculty, 75 percent students?

MF: I would be hesitant to try to pin any numbers to it because I really have no way of knowing.

Q: Do you think it's maybe in proportion to the population on campus?

MF: Yea I would say it probably breaks down to the way the population on campus breaks down.

Q: What about alumni? Maybe The Signal could be their tie to their alma mater. Maybe if we could target alumni through the Web site that could increase that population too.

Q: What location do most people seem to pick up the Signal at? I know you said it's really hard to gauge, but where do you put the most stacks at?

MF: Most of them go right here in the student center. Usually the printing company comes and drops them off over there on Tuesday night and when I come in Wednesday morning before they've been distributed I already see people have been taking them. I would say mostly here, and the other two buildings I know we put the most in are Bliss and the Social Science building.

JA: I think Eickhoff too.

MF: Yea there are two big baskets there.

Q: What would entice more students to read The Signal?

MF: I think part of it is physically where it is. The older buildings have a big thing that's hard to miss of where the Signals are every week. And I know a lot of the new buildings don't have those.

Q: I know in the residence halls when I was younger, a lot of people would take them like in Travers and Wolfe but in the Townhouses they don't have them there. I think that was a good way to target them, where they live.

MF: I have always regretted the fact that I haven't figured out a good way to deliver them to Townhouses. I don't know if that's something you guys can pursue or not. Maybe we

could work out something with the Office Assistants where they can like bring them back to the Townhouses or something like that.

Q: Yea like if each brought some back. Also when I do my laundry and I sit there, it would be nice if it was there.

MF: Also we could put them in like Health Services. I guess something you can look into is how do we get access to those places and develop that infrastructure. So, yea.

Q: I know in Travers and Wolfe and Centennial, they were always gone by the end of the week, so putting them where they live is a big thing.

Q: What do you think your real state is and what's your ideal state, what you want?

MF: I think our real state, is that when we get into the grind of producing the paper that's all we worry about. There's just so much work involved in that making sure the paper gets out every week that we don't really have time or energy to think about things like the questions that we've been talking about. So while we are like, pretty fucking good at making sure the paper gets out every week, there are like these little issues that we don't think about like how to y'know make sure that everyone knows what we're doing and knows how to get a copy of it and knows how to provide us with feedback and y'know there are these issues. For the most part The Signal tends to be a pretty insular organization considering its responsibility to be a voice for the student body. We get so involved in the mechanics of putting out the paper that we tend to get kind of alienated from seeing what's actually going on. Well that sounds bad, that's not actually what I mean...

Q: Do you get e-mails from students or ideas from them for your stories?

MF: Not really. We're pretty much responsible for trying to cover every little thing that's going on and I'm sure that shit gets by without us knowing about it because people don't know to come to us. Like the responsibility is as much on us as the staff of the paper as them as citizens who have to act the part and tell us what's happening.

Q: If students interacted you could probably get more stories if they told you what they know about. I think part of that may be because of your location in the basement. I don't think anyone even knows where the office is. Especially now with the Web content, you can easily be accessible through e-mail and whatever. A lot of people don't even know where the basement is in the student center. Maybe if you moved up here, I'd say hey y'know, look at all the people working at The Signal, maybe I'll pop in.

MF: They are closing that lab, y'know, maybe we could move in there.

JA: Yea but they're putting office space in there or something.

MF: Fuck that, they have so much office space. That would be great, but it would never happen.

Q: IF we make the e-mail address more known that can help make it more accessible.

Q: What do you want your readership to be?

MF: Everyone. I want everyone to read The Signal.

Q: Do you write articles about the faculty that you're targeting toward the faculty?

MF: I mean yea we do write articles, like the Corzine speech, that's an article that isn't just for students, it's also for education faculty, hopefully they can get something out of that to learn what the senator's plans for education in the state is should he be elected.

Q: Do you have any other statistics that you tell your advertisers besides the circulation?

JA: At the beginning of each semester I provide a media kit and update anything that needs to be updated, like the amount of pages and stuff like that but in terms of statistics, not really.

Q: We see how many people pick it up, but for how many people actually read it, so I guess the only way to find that out is with a survey.

JA: The thing about a survey is if you actually answer it, I mean where would the survey be?

Q: We would distribute it.

MF: Why don't we put the survey next to The Signal?

Q: Yea we could have boxes next to it that they could pick it up there.

Q: Do you have other information that you want to know about that you want us to find out for you?

MF: No I think that's about it. And if you have any hesitations, don't hesitate to call, I'll give you my cell phone number if you want. I'm really excited about this, I think it's a really good opportunity for us.

Q: Thanks. I can't believe this was never done in the past.

MF: So do you want my phone number incase you need it? Should I say it into the recorder? Aright it's 267-994-5286.

Q: Thank you!