

ASME Guidelines for Editors and Publishers

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The ASME Guidelines for Editors and Publishers codify longstanding practices governing the relationship between editorial and advertising content. The guidelines ensure that practices commonly used by editors and publishers to prevent or resolve editorial-advertising conflicts are clearly understood and consistently applied in magazine media.

In a rapidly changing media environment, no set of rules can anticipate every issue, but these are the basic principles behind the ASME Guidelines for Editors and Publishers:

- Every reader is entitled to fair and accurate news and information
- The value of magazines to advertisers depends on reader trust
- The difference between editorial content and marketing messages must be transparent
- Editorial integrity must not be compromised by advertiser influence

ASME believes that adherence to these principles enhances the value of print and digital publications for readers and advertisers and protects the integrity and independence of magazine media. Editors and publishers of magazines found to be in violation of the guidelines by the ASME Board of Directors are notified in writing. Repeated and willful violation of the guidelines may lead to public sanction, including disqualification from the National Magazine Awards. To ask questions about the guidelines, email asme@magazine.org or telephone 212.872.3737.

Founded in 1963, the American Society of Magazine Editors is the principal organization for magazine journalists in the United States. The members of ASME include the editorial leaders of most major consumer and business magazines published in print and on digital platforms. ASME works to defend the First Amendment, protect editorial independence and support the development of journalism. ASME sponsors the National Magazine Awards in association with the Columbia Journalism School and has published the ASME Guidelines since 1982.

PRINT GUIDELINES

These guidelines answer some of the questions most frequently asked by editors and publishers but can be easily summarized in one sentence: Don't deceive the reader.

1. Don't Print Ads on Covers

The cover is the editor and publisher's brand statement. Advertisements should not be printed directly on the cover or spine.

- Advertisements printed on false covers or cover flaps should not imitate the cover of the magazine and should not be integrated with editorial content.
- Advertisements printed on false covers and cover flaps should be labeled as advertising. *See* "Label Ads That Resemble Edit," section 4, for directions.

2. Don't Print Ad Logos on Edit Pages

Advertiser logos should not be used on editorial pages except in an editorial context, that is, editorial coverage of a company and its products.

3. Don't Allow Ads to Imitate Edit

Advertisements should not imitate the design of the magazine in which they appear and should not use type or graphics associated with the magazine, nor should the magazine logo be used on advertisements except for multi-advertiser sections such as classified listings and gift guides; promotional pages published by and for the magazine; and advertisements for products that have received editorial awards.

4. Label Ads That Resemble Edit

The following kinds of advertisements should always be labeled as advertising: advertisements that could be mistaken for editorial content, including advertising sections (“advertorials”); multi-advertiser sections such as classified listings and gift guides; and promotional pages published by and for the magazine.

- The use of the terms “Advertisement,” “Advertising” and “Special Advertising Section” to label advertising is recommended. “Promotion” should be used with caution as it may conflict with USPS regulations requiring the labeling of advertising. “Advertorial” should not be used under any circumstances.
- Labels should be printed horizontally and centered at the top of the page or advertising unit in readable type comparable in size and weight with the body type used on editorial pages and should not be hidden or disguised.
- Every page of multi-page advertisements, including advertising sections (“advertorials”), should be labeled as advertising.
- The logo of the magazine should not be used on the cover or any other page of an advertising section (“advertorial”).

The labeling of editorial-like advertising is required by federal law. The USPS Domestic Mail Manual states: “Under 18 USC 1734, if a valuable consideration is paid, accepted, or promised for the publication of any editorial or other reading matter in a Periodicals publication, that matter must be plainly marked ‘advertisement.’” In addition, the Federal Trade Commission advises in 73 FTC 1307 (1968) that when a marketing message “uses the format and has the general appearance of a news feature and/or article for public information which purports [to be] independent, impartial and unbiased . . . the Commission is of the opinion that it will be necessary to clearly and conspicuously disclose it is an advertisement.”

5. Don't Accept Sponsorships for Regularly Published Edit

Sponsorships of tables of content, mastheads, editors’ letters, columns and other front- and back-of-the-book departments should not be accepted.

6. Explain Sponsored Sections to Readers

The sponsorship of special issues, special sections and editorial inserts, onserts and outserts by one or more advertisers should be acknowledged in an editor’s or publisher’s letter published in the issue containing the sponsored content. Sponsor logos should not be used on editorial pages. Single-advertiser issues and sponsored sections are editorial content and should not be subject to advertising review or approval.

7. Avoid Adjacencies That Suggest Conflict of Interest

Advertisements should not be positioned adjacent to or near editorial pages that discuss or show the same or similar branded products. Advertisements for products endorsed by or associated with public figures,

including but not limited to motion pictures and television programs, should not be positioned near editorial content concerning those public figures.

8. Don't Accept Product Placement

Products or persons should not be “placed” or promoted in editorial content in exchange for payment of any kind. Advertisements should not be integrated with editorial content. Editorial content and advertisements should not refer, or “talk,” to each another. Editorial content should not be designed around unusual or invasive advertising units or point readers to them.

9. Don't Ask Editors to Write Ads

Editorial staff should not participate in the creation of advertising. Editorial contributors should not participate in the creation of advertising if their work would appear to be a conflict of interest.

10. Don't Allow Advertisers to Approve Edit

Magazine covers, tables of content, articles, photographs, page layouts and other editorial matter should not be submitted to advertisers for review or approval.

DIGITAL GUIDELINES

These guidelines apply to websites, tablets, smartphones and social media. Digital media should follow the print guidelines that generally apply to the practice of journalism, specifically section 8, “Don't Accept Product Placement”; section 9, “Don't Ask Editors to Write Ads”; and section 10, “Don't Allow Advertisers to Approve Edit.” Editors and publishers should also review the FTC's [.com Disclosures: How to Make Effective Disclosures in Digital Advertising](#) and [Guides Concerning the Use of Endorsements and Testimonials in Advertising](#).

D1. Separate Ads From Edit

Marketing messages that cannot be easily identified as advertising should be clearly labeled as such and visually separated from editorial content by rules or shading. The term “Advertorial” should not be used to label advertising under any circumstances.

- “Brought to You By” and “Sponsored By” are widely used terms for labeling editorial content supported by a single advertiser and should not be used for marketing messages.
- “Powered By” should be used only for providers of editorial content or technological features, as should “Partner” when used in consumer-facing content. These terms should not be used for advertisers or sponsors.

D2. Label Native Advertising

Marketer-provided content, including native advertising, should be prominently labeled as advertising, and the source of such content and the affiliation of the authors should be clearly acknowledged. The term “Sponsor Content,” already in use on some websites, can be used to label native advertising.

- Native advertising that has the appearance of a news article or feature story should include a prominent statement or “What's This?” rollover or link at the top of the advertising unit explaining that the content has been created by a marketer and that the marketer has paid for its publication.
- Native advertising that has the appearance of a news article or feature story should not use type fonts and graphics resembling those used for editorial content and should be visually separated from editorial content.

D3. Differentiate Sponsored Microsites From Edit Sites

Sponsored microsites should be visually distinct from the main website and should not share design elements such as the masthead or the navigation bar with the main site.

- Microsite sponsors should be clearly identified and the relationship with the main website should be acknowledged. “A [Sponsor Name] microsite presented by [Editorial Website Name]” is a standard label for microsites.
- Editorial staff should not contribute original content to sponsored microsites, and editorial content repurposed from the main site should be clearly distinguished from marketer-provided content.

D4. Allow Users to Close Interruptive Ads

Interruptive advertising should have a prominent “Close” or “Skip” button and should last no more than 10 seconds. Video pre-roll should last no more than 15 seconds.

D5. Identify Paid Links

Paid or sponsored links embedded in editorial content should be clearly identified as such with a distinct label or design.

- Collections of paid links should be visually separated from editorial content by rules or shading and should be clearly labeled as advertising.
- If collections of paid links contain links from multiple sources, the name of the sponsor or the destination URL for each link should be easily identified.

D6. Disclose E-Commerce Partnerships

E-commerce partnerships must be self-evident or clearly disclosed on any page on which e-commerce options appear adjacent to related editorial content.

- E-commerce options should be visually separated from editorial content by rules or shading.
- E-commerce partners should not receive preferential treatment in editorially driven search results, shopping recommendations and price comparisons.

D7. Differentiate Edit and Ads on Tablets

Because adjacent pages are not always displayed on tablets, advertisements should not use type fonts and graphics resembling those used for editorial content.

- Advertisements should not use on-page navigational controls that resemble those used for editorial content.
- Advertisements that take over the user interface should include a prominent “Close” or “Skip” control.

For further information about standards and practices in digital media, editors and publishers may wish to consult [Editorial Guidelines for Bing Ads](#), [Publishing on Google Play](#), [Consumer Best Practices of the Mobile Media Association](#) and [Social Media Guidelines for AP Employees](#).