



# CASE

MAGMA



“A Magazine Was Born:  
Prototyping a Print Edition  
through Audience  
Research

# STUDY

## IN SHORT

Magma Magazine developed and prototyped its first print edition, combining audience research, design collaboration, and a small crowdfunding campaign to test interest and determine production numbers. The project strengthened engagement with existing readers while attracting new audiences who were interested specifically in a physical product.

## ABOUT THE NEWS OUTLET

Magma Magazine is a nonprofit newsroom founded at the end of 2021. Mostly run by volunteers, it began by producing monthly newsletters in Italian and later in English focused on Mediterranean environmental issues and climate change. Magma also launched an environmental-journalism fellowship and began publishing more editorial content on its website. The print edition prototype is Magma's attempt to expand and its first physical product.



## PROJECT OBJECTIVES

Magma set out to prototype its first print edition to test audience interest, gather feedback on design and content, and assess whether a physical product could complement its digital newsletters. The goal was also to strengthen engagement and reach new readers through a tangible, visually curated publication.



## IMPLEMENTED SOLUTIONS

The team conducted user interviews to understand reader expectations, collaborated with designers to develop the print prototype, and used a small crowdfunding campaign to pre-sell copies and gauge demand. Through coordinated editorial and design workflows, Magma produced an audience-informed prototype.



## WHY THIS PROJECT?

From the beginning, Magma planned to have a digital magazine complemented by an annual physical publication; a curated end-of-year collection of its most significant stories. The team feels that digital content tends to have a shorter life, so Magma wanted to create something visually appealing that readers could hold, archive, and revisit. The print prototype offered the chance to finally explore this vision and reinforce their identity.

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## HOW DID APPLYING DESIGN THINKING PRINCIPLES HELP?

User interviews were the most valuable and utilized design-thinking component for Magma. Speaking directly with subscribers helped the team understand audience expectations, preferences, and perceptions, particularly around design and how the print edition could complement existing newsletters. The process gave the team concrete feedback while allowing them to maintain creative autonomy over the final product. The audience insights contributed to shaping a final magazine that reflects Magma's editorial vision and a strong design identity.

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## DID MAGMA'S APPROACH CHANGE ENGAGEMENT WITH ITS AUDIENCE IN ANY WAY?

Yes, the audience research revealed that some longtime newsletter readers were not interested in print, while entirely new audiences were drawn to the physical edition. Magma did a small crowdfunding campaign, run partly through Kickstarter, which helped it pre-sell copies, reach new readers, and expand interest beyond its existing community. The project also created opportunities for deeper interaction, as several newsletter subscribers volunteered for in-depth interviews and expressed enthusiasm for more regular conversations with the team.

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## WHAT CHALLENGES DID MAGMA ENCOUNTER AND HOW DID IT ADDRESS THEM?

Time management was one of the team's biggest challenges. Coordinating story production, design work, and the prototype's timeline was difficult, especially when several stories were still being finalized. Magma also faced structural constraints. The newsroom is very small, with limited financial and human resources. This affects long-term planning, including the possibility of producing future print editions. Another difficulty is reach and community growth. While the print edition helped attract new readers, expanding visibility remains challenging. The team plans to use events and presentations to address this. Lastly, increasing visibility has also led to more unsolicited story pitches, some of which are very promising, although the team isn't able to assign stories yet because of a lack of funds to pay contributors.

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## HOW WAS MAGMA'S PROJECT RECEIVED BY ITS AUDIENCE?

Readers who participated in user interviews were very enthusiastic. Many expressed strong appreciation for Magma's design quality, the monthly newsletter covers, and the anticipation of receiving each issue. Some were excited to see that same level of quality translated into a physical object. Interviewees also appreciated the opportunity to engage in conversation, with some of them encouraging Magma to hold the sessions more often.

## WHAT INSIGHTS OR LESSONS DID MAGMA GAIN FROM THIS PROJECT?

In-depth conversations with readers proved far more meaningful than survey-based feedback. Interviews offered richer insights into how audiences discover Magma, how they read the newsletter and what they value most. The process also demonstrated how crucial design and presentation are to Magma's community; people strongly associate the outlet with its visual identity.

## WHAT DOES MAGMA PLAN ON DOING NEXT?

Magma will send the print magazine to everyone who ordered it in advance. The team plans to organize presentations in bookstores and at events, including applying to relevant festivals and to work with their network of former fellows across the Mediterranean to host localized events. They are beginning work with a new cohort of fellows on new stories. Ideally, with additional funding, Magma hopes to produce a second edition of the print magazine and continue growing the community around it.

## WHAT ADVICE WOULD MAGMA GIVE TO OTHER JOURNALISTS OR ORGANISATIONS CONSIDERING A SIMILAR PATH?

The team points out that these are challenging times for independent journalism, with shrinking trust in media and readers increasingly turning to individuals on social media instead of journalistic platforms. They consider persistence, clear planning, and thorough research essential, especially engaging with communities. Understanding their needs or even identifying needs they may not yet recognize is important, but so is maintaining a strong editorial vision. The process requires patience, creativity and a lot of passion for your product. Crowdfunding and grants can play a crucial role for small newsrooms experimenting with new formats like print.