

How Does One Woman Create a Block Buster Magazine- *Tenacity and Talent*

By Robert Tussey



San Diego Woman magazine is the only women's magazine in San Diego and it took a brave woman from New York to make it happen. Judith Habert claims she is more of a San Diegan than a New Yorker, as Rancho Bernardo has been her home for the past ten years. With a love of writing and photography, she attended St John's University in New York to obtain a Bachelor of Science Degree in Photojournalism. Judith worked as a photographer for New York Newsday and Doubleday publishing company and spent many years freelancing for several well known entities including; the History Channel, The Girl Scouts, Canon USA, and the State of NY just to name a few. Along with her love of photography she was a wordsmith and knew that at some point in her career she needed to find a way to combine the two art forms. Judith's business, marketing and promotional skills were sharpened working as a Recruitment and Marketing Manager for one of the largest Prudential offices in Manhattan, as corporate Liaison for Nikon USA, and as a Professional Photography Liaison for Canon USA. After relocating to San Diego, Judith found a way to combine her interests and talents and San Diego Woman Magazine was born.

Ironically, the origin of the magazine was not planned. Judith was teaching classes in writing and publishing and helping potential writers recognize and hone their writing skills in the hopes of one day getting published. She also offered students insight into how to get published having authored and published two books. It was one of her former students who approached her with an idea to start a local magazine. She asked Judith if she would consider signing on as the Editor-in-Chief of this new publication. After several weeks of meetings with the publisher and a friend, who was an extremely talented graphic designer, the concept of San Diego Woman Magazine was born.

The three women launched the first issue of San Diego Woman in December of 2006. The magazine was not sophisticated or glossy, but it provided a forum for local women to share their thoughts and dreams in a medium previously unavailable to them. The attention to the magazine began to grow and writers and photographers rallied to become a part of this new publication. Many of Judith's current and former students were thrilled to be contributors to the publication and she was able to give first time writers the dream of seeing their names in print. The magazine covered topics of interest to women of all ages and ethnicities. After five issues the former publisher of the magazine decided she needed more time with her family so she decided to close down the publication. It was at this point that Judith felt devastated, as did the magazine's creative director, Sonali Soni. The magazine was met with such excitement and interest that the thought of saying goodbye to it was just too hard. Judith started pounding the pavement trying to come up with some financial backing to revamp San Diego Woman and bring it back to the women of San Diego bigger, better, and glossier than before. "One of the first things I did was to contact the top 50 female business owners in town to ask them what they wanted to see in a women's magazine" states Judith. She was not surprised when the answers were almost identical. "The women told me that they were sick and tired of women's publications that focused on the fact that they were too old or too fat. For once they wanted a publication which was entertaining, educational and recognized the accomplishments of women, not one that made you feel bad after reading it" So Judith was determined to do just that.

With a small amount of start-up capital and a large amount of determination, the new San Diego Woman Magazine was born and its first issue hit the newsstands in March of 2007. The look was totally different,

whereas the previous publication was on paper stock the new version was on high quality glossy stock, the page count rose from 32 pages to 52 pages (with future plans to grow to 100 or more,) and more sophisticated distribution methods were utilized. It didn't take long for this new publication to get noticed. The Women's Regional Publication of America, an organization consisting of women's magazines nationwide, bestowed two First Place Gold Medals on the new publication. They received "Best New Publication Launch" and "Best Publication Redesign." The recognition did not stop there. Soon San Diego Woman gained media exposure with cover stories on two of the favorite women in San Diego, news anchors Carol Lebeau and Kimberly Hunt, the longest running female news anchor team in the nation. Before too long the local TV stations had picked up the newfound popularity and San Diego Woman found itself featured on the News.

The response from San Diego women was phenomenal, and some of the top women in town began showing interest in San Diego Woman and what it was accomplishing for local women. Carol Lebeau, this well known and respected news anchor and women's health advocate was so thrilled with the publication that she even signed on as a columnist with the magazine. A regular feature, "Women of Distinction" became a favorite of readers. This feature highlighted local women who have made a difference, fought back from adversity, became successful in spite of the odds, or just took the initiative to dedicate their lives to causes of importance. Some of the prominent women in town were soon contacting the magazine to become involved. San Diego Woman took up issues, focusing on local charities that didn't have big budgets behind them to promote worthy causes, but needed a platform to make their needs heard. The Mayor's wife, a well known philanthropist, introduced the magazine to the San Diego Center for Children and San Diego Woman ran a feature on the good that this center was doing for special needs children. San Diego Woman continues to support the Center in all of its promotional needs.

Health issues, like new scanning options for breast cancer, health symposiums for women, and walks to promote healing for many women centric diseases became prominent in the publication pages . Once again, San Diego Woman and more specifically Judith Habert, received recognition for the good she was doing in town by the Mom Business Association (MBA) at their inaugural conference held at Joan Kroc Institute for Peace and Justice at the University of San Diego. Judith received the "Momprenneur of the Year Award" sponsored by MBA and National Association of Women Business Owners.

So where does the magazine go from here? "We are looking towards the future. Improving every issue and making it the voice of the Women of San Diego. We are increasing our web presence and reaching out to women everywhere, to share their accomplishments and help our readers to realize that no star is out of reach. As for our hopes for the future, plans are in the works to expand the size of the publication, and the frequency (becoming a monthly publication.) We also plan to retool the website to better meet the needs of our readers and to become the home page for all San Diego Women." Judith's dreams for San Diego Woman do not stop there. She strongly believes that every community deserves a women's publication and long range goals are to introduce this concept to other areas of California in the future. Right now she has developed long range goals to start an "LA Woman" and an "Orange County Woman," but she may not stop there.

San Diego Woman is a truly unique publication with a truly unique woman at the helm. It is a publication that fills a void that has long existed in San Diego, and probably in most communities across the nation. A voice for women, not a male bashing publication or an "I am woman hear me roar" magazine, but instead it provides a forum for women. To sum it up simply, you can refer to the mission statement prominently displayed below the Red, Black and White banner on each magazine cover. "Informing, Entertaining and Featuring the Women of San Diego" but perhaps they should add in Helping, Supporting and Encouraging because this is certainly what this San Diego Publication has been doing.

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