

A Sound & Vibration Manifesto

Jack K. Mowry, Editor and Publisher

We have been publishing *Sound & Vibration* magazine for more than 43 years. Some of you may be curious about our standards of integrity, technical content and fairness. If you want to know more about what we do, why we do it, and how we do it, then read on.

Courting Quality. Quality assurance is a hackneyed and abused term in today's global economy. Still, we proudly and constantly strive to put the highest quality germane technical writing before your eyes in the most attractive format possible. We work hard to find stimulating articles and editorials with strong technical content and innovative viewpoints. We help many of our writers to polish and refine their articles, and then we support their effort with careful editing, graphics support, and page layout. We have steadfastly refused to join in the "dumbing down" of offerings made to our community. Instead, we have diligently labored to improve the communication of acoustics and vibration fundamentals as well as pace-setting new developments, methods and applications. In a recessed economy, it is tempting to build using cheaper materials. We have never done this and never will. Our paper, printing, binding and mailing reflect our dedication to producing the best *Sound & Vibration* magazine possible, never the cheapest.

Circulation. In our "prime," the circulation of *Sound & Vibration* maxed out at about 19,500 qualified readers plus about 500 paid subscribers. We are now at 8,090 qualified subscribers and 335 nonqualified paid subscribers as of our December 2009 circulation statement. We need to requalify our subscribers every three years to meet BPA Worldwide circulation audit requirements. (Maintaining our membership in BPA is a time-consuming, expensive process.) We make three attempts every month to requalify existing readers nearing their three-year subscription limit. We continually attempt to add free-qualified and paid subscribers to the *S&V* circulation list. Our circulation continues to slowly dwindle. We lose about 50-60 qualified subscribers for every monthly list update. Maybe you can help us out by asking your associates to subscribe or, even better, maintaining your own subscription. It is easy – just go to our web site and click on the "Subscribe" tab or fill out the subscription card bound into every issue. Then mail or FAX the card back to us. We want to help you, and now you have an opportunity to help us.

www.SandVinfo.com. For many years, the reader-service card (bingo card) bound into every issue of most magazines was the prime mechanism for a reader to request

additional information from an advertiser. The cards were mailed back to the magazine, leads were digitally processed and inquiries sent to the advertisers. Inquiry production provided a major incentive for an advertiser to use a given magazine in its advertising schedule. The Internet has changed everything – forever. Today just about everybody "Googles" the name of a manufacturer or goes directly to its web site. We recognize this, and we want to help with the process. If you use our SandVinfo reader-service system and have a copy of *S&V* at your fingertips, you can save some time and have the best possible web experience. We put a lot of work into providing this service to *S&V* readers and we continue to hope that they will use it as much as possible. The "click-through" and inquiry "Submit" numbers remain minimal. We think that if you "try it, you will like it," and we hope that inquiry production for the benefit of our advertisers will improve in the months to come.

Digital Edition. We are occasionally asked if we will publish a digital edition of *S&V*. The quick answer is "not at this time." We have been posting PDF files of major editorial items to our web site www.SandV.com for free download. These files include Editorials, "S&V Observer" items, and full-length articles. The technology to publish a complete digital edition is mature and available to us. Our decision is based on predicted use and the history of other engineering magazines that have converted from paper to all-digital publishing format.

When I attend engineering conferences, I regularly take an informal, nonscientific poll. I ask attendees who receive digital editions of engineering magazines if they read the digital edition? The answer is either "no" or "I take a quick look, but don't scan the entire issue." When asked if they read the paper edition, the answer is universally a resounding "yes." They also report that they sometimes save individual articles or ads, or even save the whole magazine. I am regularly astonished when *S&V* readers tell me that they have saved every copy they have ever received – sometimes 30-40 years' worth of issues.

I have followed the history of many engineering and business-to-business magazines. Some have switched from paper to all-digital format, and many of these have ceased publication. Some publish both a paper and digital edition and are surviving, but these survivors are only a frail "shell" of earlier editions. Some of the magazines published by engineering societies are still doing quite well, and others are barely hanging on. The publishing business, like

engineering, is a tough game.

The Internet. We can all agree that the Internet is a very necessary and useful form of communication but has caused profound changes to other communication tools. We receive almost all of our editorial material via the Internet – I check e-mail many times a day, and I "Google" just about everything. I can't imagine doing business without the Internet, and I wonder how we ever conducted our business before. A nice feature of the web is that it is almost free – at least after you pay your Internet service provider.

We publish a base advertising rate of \$4,640 for a full-page, four-color ad in *S&V*. We could only charge a tiny fraction of this for an ad in a digital edition or for an ad on our web site. You can see why all-digital editions of engineering magazines cannot be financially viable. It takes nearly as much work to publish a digital edition as a paper one. The usual dual-format production workflow is to publish the paper edition and then convert this to a digital format. Viewing a digital edition requires a computer or digital reader. A paper edition, on the other hand, is completely portable, easily viewed, and easily stored for future reference. The same cannot be said about digital. There is no question that digital editions of textbooks and some other media are cost effective and will dominate future forms of communication.

Our Archives. *Sound & Vibration* has published 12 issues per year since January 1967 – some 510 issues to date. We used mechanical production techniques until January 1995, when we began to use digital page-layout and graphics software. We started posting PDF files of major editorial items to our web site in July 2002. We hope to gradually add files to our web database for issues from 1967 to 2002. If you advise us of specific articles published prior to July 2002 that you would like to have available for download, we will do our best to provide these first. We have commissioned a system to provide PDF files of scanned pages that retain high-quality graphics (including color), have minimum file size, and are searchable by title, byline, and abstract. We need to get going on this project, since the chemically treated paper used for printing *S&V* is slowly deteriorating. The white pages of over-40-year-old issues are turning an ugly sepia tone.

Peer Review. We are sometimes asked if the major editorial content of *S&V* undergoes peer review. The answer is yes – and no. One of our staff attends the most important engineering conferences on the topics that we cover. George Fox Lang and I review the proceedings from these conferences,

and we try to pick the “best-of-the-best” for publication. These source papers were prepared for personal presentation by the authors directly to an audience of their peers. Also keep in mind that most papers produced within a corporate environment undergo a very rigorous review, ensuring that what you are reading is current, correct and legal. That’s good enough for us and I think for our audience as well. We contact the authors, get updated versions of their papers, and put them into high-quality magazine format. We put a lot of work into graphics and text editing.

Original Manuscripts. While conferences and symposia provide the source for many of our articles, we also publish pieces written specifically for *Sound & Vibration*. Most of these are requested from experienced engineers and scientists who have previously provided high quality articles. Others come unexpectedly from authors new to us, people we cherish. Our highly competent Contributing Editors help us “filter” unsolicited material and provide an unending stream of great Editorials. We routinely help new authors evolve their technical story-telling ability and polish their writing style.

Politics and Engineering. Occasionally we have published provocative, politically oriented editorials. We have received

complaints that “you should not use an engineering magazine to wield a political ax.” We accept the criticism, but we are pleased to report that the supportive comments have always greatly outweighed the negative ones. We often feel obligated to reflect upon the environment in which we function as well as the technical details of sound and vibration practice.

Competitive Comparisons. We are generally opposed to running competitive comparisons in *S&V*. It is extremely difficult to correctly and fairly compare the merits of competitive products and satisfy the sales and engineering departments of the manufacturers. We *have* done it a few times with good success. However, we often run technical briefs and even full-length articles that feature a given product or manufacturer. We do our best to edit these for technical content, and we give competitors every opportunity to provide articles of similar stature for possible publication in *S&V*. We strongly feel that the marketplace should use its buying power to substantiate the claims of a manufacturer. Many years ago, we got ourselves into what was turning out to be an unending dialog between two competitive firms over the performance of their respective products. We finally ended the process by informing the two parties that we will not provide the pages of *S&V*

as their public battleground. We also informed them that they could use their paid advertising program in any manner that did not open them to legal action – and let the marketplace decide.

What’s Next? Lois Mowry and I have joined the ranks of senior citizens. Our friends often ask me, “When are you going to retire?” My quick answer is “never.” Or I say “I am still vertical and taking nourishment.” I admit that my 28-year running career is over after two dozen marathons, countless shorter races, and endless workouts. What I do now cannot be called “running” – I call it a “geriatric jog/walk.”

As I sit in front of this ever-glowing screen with my bony fingers on the keyboard and mouse, I ask myself “am I still having fun?” I find it increasingly difficult to answer that question affirmatively. We have been publishing minimum issues these days (24 pages to meet U.S. postal requirements). Thanks to the distressed economy, our paid advertising support has dwindled substantially, and we are fighting to remain fiscally viable. Perhaps it’s time to ask our readers to comment on the value of *S&V* to their work and careers. Your comments may or may not make me feel good or they may or may not be supportive of our advertising sales efforts. We’ll let the marketplace decide. You can reach me at: sv@mindspring.com. 