Marketing the Women's Journals, 1873-1900

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The last decades of the 19th century saw the creation of the women's magazines which led the industry in circulation and ad revenues for the first half of the 20th century. These journals differed from the women's magazines begun before the Civil War in the quantity and nature of their targeted audience, production methods and technology, financial structures, and marketing methods [24]. Women's magazine publishers innovated and developed marketing practices which remained in place for much of the next century [14, 15, 23].

While journalism historians are coming to recognize the leading role of the women's journals in the development of mass market publishing, none have adequately differentiated among the marketing strategies used by the women's magazine publishers in the late 19th century. The new women's journals were not monolithic and in these early years of the industry the marketing methods of the young magazines differed. By the end of the century, as the industry moved into a more advanced stage of its life cycle, and the journals competed more directly with one another, the magazines grew more alike, both in content and in the techniques used to market them. The histories of the Butterick and Curtis companies illustrate this transition.

Patterns and Publications: Butterick Company, Ltd.

The Butterick Company, Ltd. evolved from a pattern company into a major publisher over the decades of the late 19th century. It transformed one of its fashion catalogs, the *Delineator*, into a best-selling, general-interest woman's magazine, changing the way it marketed the journal in the process. The development of the Butterick Company and the techniques used in marketing first its patterns, then its publications, typifies the path followed by other pattern manufacturers turned publishers.

Tissue-paper patterns formed the basis of the Butterick empire, fueling its marketing methods. *Godey's Lady's Book* had been offering women hand-colored plates of French fashions since the 1830s, and other antebellum magazines followed suit. However, none provided patterns from which the pictured styles could be made readily; a seamstress had to work from the illustration. An affordable domestic sewing machine was available to middle-class women by the time of the Civil War, but to easily create fashionable garments on the machine, they needed accurate patterns. It was left to Ebenezer Butterick to design the first patterns which could be mass marketed [3, 31].

Butterick had started producing proportionally graded patterns for men's shirts in 1863. At his wife's suggestion he developed similar patterns, adaptable to different sizes, for children's clothes. These proved so popular

BUSINESS AND ECONOMIC HISTORY, Second Series, Volume Eighteen, 1989.
 ISSN 0849-6825.

that the next year Butterick opened an office in New York, where the patterns could be mass produced and sold. While most of the patterns were sold initially through the mail, Butterick also hired traveling sales agents. One of these, Jonas Warren Wilder, reported to Butterick that women wanted patterns for their own garments. The company proceeded to satisfy this demand by producing a variety of women's styles in standard sizes [3].

Wilder, the marketing strategist of the firm, received a promotion to general distribution agent, then joined Ebenezer Butterick and Abner W. Pollard (office secretary and Butterick's brother-in-law) as a partner [13]. The company focused its product and marketing efforts on women's and children's clothes because Wilder believed these constituted the most profitable market. Artists drew sketches of Parisian originals for transposition into patterns at the Butterick plant in New York. The patterns, priced between 25 and 75 cents, were not cheap but *were* affordable to middle-class women. And prices fell as production and sales increased [8].

The company recognized the need for a catalog to showcase its patterns and in 1867 began issuing *The Ladies Quarterly Report of Broadway Fashions*. The market increased so rapidly that another magazine picturing fashions was required, and in 1868 the *Metropolitan* appeared, edited by Wilder [10]. Middle-class women, thrilled that they could create for themselves the fashions previously available only to the wealthy, eagerly studied the Butterick catalogs. Customers bought 6,000,000 Butterick patterns in 1871 [4].

The firm merged its two earlier publications in 1873, giving birth to *The Delineator*, a monthly magazine devised to advertise Butterick patterns. This journal gained readers steadily, with sales reaching 200,000 by 1888 (see Table 1). It broadened its content under the editorship of Charles Dwyer (1885-1905), adding essays and covering all aspects of the household. Butterick also promoted related goods in the publication-- sewing tools such as embroidery scissors, button-hole cutters, and dressmakers shears, and beauty aids like manicure scissors and cuticle and corn knives.

To market the patterns and publications, Ebenezer Butterick and his partners created a huge distribution and sales network (see below) covering all of the U.S., Canada, and extending to Great Britain and France.

Ebenezer Butterick stopped participating actively in the firm in 1881, having earned a fortune. The company reorganized with Jonas Wilder becoming President and Pollard treasurer. The firm became Butterick Publishing Company, an indication of the importance of its publishing arm. By 1899, when George Wilder, son of Jonas, took over, the company was marketing its women's journals as magazines, not pattern catalogs.

Manufacturer of Customers: Curtis Publishing Company

While Ebenezer Butterick had been a tailor, creating publications to promote his patterns, Cyrus H.K. Curtis was first and foremost an advertiser. He had been involved in advertising ventures since he was twelve, and by the time he and his wife brought out the *Ladies Home Journal* in 1883, he was an experienced and savvy promoter of reading material [2]. Curtis was the first to recognize and then act on the idea that a publisher could sell his magazine

at less than cost and still make a profit by attracting significant amounts of advertising to the magazine. All the major mass marketers of magazines eventually copied this strategy, including the Butterick Company.

TABLE 1
CIRCULATION AND AD REVENUES, *LADIES HOME JOURNAL* AND *DELINEATOR*

	Circulation[1]		Ad Revenues	
	LHJ	Del.	LHJ[2]	Del.[3]
1876		30,000		
1880		85,000		
1881		130,000		
1883	25,000			
1884	100,000			
1886	270,000	165,000		
1888	350,000	200,000		
1890	400,000	300,000		
1891	600,000	393,000		
1892	719,000	400,000	258,972	
1894	712,000	500,000	314,540	
1896	647,611	500,000	448,054	135,000
1898	699,046	500,000	536,795	180,000
1900	854,000	500,000	1,000,000	

Sources: 1. N.W. Ayer, *American Newspapers Annual and Directory*.
2. Curtis Company, *Expenditures of Advertisers in Leading National and Farm Publications*.
3. John Adams Thayer, *Astir*.

Curtis had considerable understanding of advertisers. He had sold ad space for three newspapers in Boston, then began soliciting advertising for his own paper, *The People's Ledger*. He moved *The Ledger* to Philadelphia to cut costs, but the paper still failed to make a profit, so Curtis took a job as advertising manager of *The Philadelphia Press*. Here he used aggressive direct mail techniques aimed at rural and small town customers to increase circulation and advertising.

Bolstered by this success, Curtis started another paper, *The Tribune and Farmer*, targeted at the very customers he had reached for *The Philadelphia Press*. Curtis hired the head of *The Philadelphia Press's* agricultural department to serve as his editor. Curtis then turned to promoting the magazine and selling ad space. When the women's department of *The Tribune and Farmer*, edited by Mrs. Curtis, proved popular, Curtis met market demand by enlarging it to a monthly supplement, given away free with the paper. Upon its continued success, Curtis decided to turn the sheet into a separate paper, charging fifty cents for it. The first issue, *The Ladies Home Journal*,

appeared in December 1883. Curtis had benefited from his experiences and the *Journal* carried advertising from its beginning [30]. Readers did not disappoint Curtis; the magazine had a circulation of 25,000 by the end of its first year, and continued to gain subscribers (Table 1).

Curtis' great skill lay, as the Advertising Department of the Curtis magazines liked to say, in "manufacturing customers," in creating customer segments to sell to advertisers [29, p. 63]. More clearly than any before him, Cyrus Curtis saw the possibilities of the marriage between national magazines and national advertising [20].

Marketing Strategies

A comparison of the marketing strategies employed by the Butterick (particularly with respect to *Delineator*) and Curtis companies reveals the differences in approaches to marketing their products. While considered separately here, these marketing strategy variables (product, price, promotion, distribution and customer) are by their nature interdependent.

Butterick Company maintained several product lines, marketing at least five magazines, a related pamphlet series, cutlery, sewing accessories, and clothing patterns. Such clearly related goods, all targeted at approximately the same market (middle-class females broadly defined), led to an emphasis on a brand loyalty strategy, with the hope that purchasers of one Butterick product would be reminded of the other Butterick wares.

In its publishing division Butterick offered a variety of products. For fashions the company offered the *Delineator*, the refurbished *Metropolitan Fashion*, the *Quarterly Plate*, the *Ladies Review*, and the *Tailor's Review*. Patterns appearing in each of these differed slightly, depending on the targeted audience [3]. Butterick also published sets of quarterly pamphlets on topics of interest to women, which continued to appear throughout the 1890s [25]. Butterick provided patterns for the designs shown in the pamphlets.

Of the Butterick magazines, the *Delineator* was the best produced and most successful. By 1885 it had a professional journalist as editor. In the 1870s and 1880s it featured fashion and needlework, illustrated by woodcuts and prints. As in any good catalog, pictured styles were arranged in a manner conducive to easy discovery of the item sought, with fashions organized by age of the wearer and type of garment. Because the tissue patterns were a new product, about which users needed to be educated, *Delineator* printed careful "Instructions for Selecting Patterns" [9].

By the 1890s the content of the *Delineator* had expanded to include fiction, nonfiction essays, and full service departments. The *Delineator* was improved visually as well with the addition of an illustrated cover, half-tone engravings, and several color fashion plates [9, 26]. These changes in part reflected the tastes of editor Charles Dwyer. But the product modifications also resulted from competition with the general interest women's journals such as *Ladies Home Journal* and *Woman's Home Companion* (founded 1883). As the fight for circulation and advertisers heated up among the women's magazines, journals previously setting their own editorial course were forced to examine their rivals and to alter their own products' attributes based on this

assessment. For the *Journal* and the *Companion*, this meant adding patterns and fashions to their pages; for the *Delineator*, and other such pattern sheets, it meant broadening their products' content.

Butterick's diverse publications formed a point of competitive advantage. Women who remained uninterested in fashions still might desire needlework designs. Production of related goods also meant that when *Delineator* did expand its content the company had expertise and resources to draw upon and that readers had become accustomed to looking to Butterick for more than simply fashion news.

An integral part of product strategy is the name. Butterick Company originally thought of naming its new publication "The Civilized World," revealing the targeted audience it had in mind. Instead, it more descriptively used the name of a tailor's pattern used to cut clothes in different sizes: "The Delineator" [4, 26]. This important aspect of the product received much less attention from Cyrus Curtis. According to his son-in-law (and editor of the *Journal*), Edward Bok, when Curtis took the first sheets of the publication to the printer's, the printer asked what he should call the magazine. Curtis replied that it was "a kind of ladies journal." When setting the type, the printer added a little house for decoration between the words "Ladies" and "Journal." Readers writing in for subscriptions referred to the "Ladies Home Journal." From this serendipitous beginning an eminently successful name was born [2, 28].

For most of this period Cyrus Curtis had only one product, the *Ladies Home Journal*, to which he devoted all his energies. He did expand his product line in the late nineties. In 1898 how-to pamphlets on church sociables and model homes became available. A book series appeared [25]. And in 1897 Curtis bought another magazine, a struggling general interest journal, the *Saturday Evening Post*. Curtis would use many of the marketing techniques he had perfected on the *Journal* to make the *Post* a profitable magazine.

Curtis believed in maintaining a high quality product and spent willingly to improve the content of the *Journal*. He used expanding ad revenues to purchase better editorial material, paying for work from "Marion Harland" (Mary Virginia Terhune), Louisa May Alcott, and other well-known writers of the day. After Edward Bok took over as editor of the *Journal* in 1889 the content grew more diverse, covering world affairs, social issues, and politics. Bok devoted a number of columns to advice for readers and publication of their missives in attempts to become closer to readers, building product loyalty in the process [1, 21, 30].

Butterick maintained its product line of various publications at differing prices. Only infrequently did it change the price of publication. The *Delineator* had started at $1.00 annually, with some "club" discounts allowed. This translated into a modified penetration pricing policy. Butterick's chief competitors, *Godey's Lady's Book* and *Harper's Bazar* both cost significantly more, at $3.00 and $4.00 respectively. *Delineator* soon dropped the discounts, but its low price still attracted buyers. The *Metropolitan*, out of which *Delineator* had been born, re-emerged as *Metropolitan Fashions* at $3.00

yearly, targeting women in a different price range. Butterick's other main fashion catalog, *The Ladies Monthly Review*, cost 50 cents yearly.

For many years the purpose of the Butterick publications was to display the Butterick patterns. The publishing company wanted customers for its patterns, not a large audience to sell to advertisers (as did Cyrus Curtis). With several publications targeting different segments of the market, tampering with prices formed no part of the Butterick plan.

Cyrus Curtis went through three stages of pricing for his sole product during this period. He started with a deep penetration pricing policy, charging fifty cents annually for the *Journal*, but willing to discount even that to twenty-five cents for "clubs" of four readers. Then in spring of 1886, with circulation almost 300,000, Curtis eliminated all discount prices. This marked a major shift, as most of the subscribers had signed on at the discounted "club" rate. But readers continued to order the *Journal*, as Curtis constantly improved the magazine and made sure that readers knew the magazine was better. Curtis also began promoting the premiums (gifts) available to new subscribers, publishing a separate catalog to advertise them [13].

Curtis made another strategic change in 1889 involving product, price, and promotion. The magazine was enlarged to 32 pages with a cover added. At the same time, the price rose to $1.00. Curtis simultaneously stepped up his promotional efforts for the *Journal* to counteract the loss of customers from the price increase, placing ads in religious weeklies, general magazines, and other women's journals [20]. The *Journal* stayed at this price through the end of the 1890s.

Butterick used advertising, sales promotion techniques, and personal selling to promote not just the *Delineator*, but *all* of its products. In its early years, *Delineator's* promotion was closely linked to the other Butterick products. Ads for *Delineator* appeared in other Butterick publications. *Delineator* offered readers Butterick patterns as an incentive to take out a subscription. Giving away patterns as premiums increased brand awareness for both products. *Delineator* advertised itself in its own pages, printing testimonials from readers. In the 1870s and 1880s it placed ads for itself on its own back inside cover. This was a choice spot, one Curtis would have sold for a high price to an advertiser. At this point, however, *Delineator* was most interested in focusing readers' attention on its own pages, filled with pictures of the Butterick patterns.

By the late 1890s Butterick Company had switched to trying to attract advertisers. It began extensive advertising campaigns to promote *Delineator*, using newspapers, other magazines, and billboards. The latter were emblazoned with an advertising slogan devised by newly-hired ad manager, John Adams Thayer: "Just Get 'The Delineator'." Butterick spent $100,000 spreading this phrase [22]. All premiums (including patterns) were withdrawn, as advertisers wanted readers who paid full price for a journal [18]. Even so, *Delineator* circulation jumped after the turn of the century, in large part due to the efforts of Thayer.

The Butterick Company used a variety of promotional methods. When the Montreal stores opened, the enterprising Jonas Wilder put on a dress suit, stood across from Notre Dame Cathedral, and passed out handbills promoting

the new Butterick office. In New York, Butterick's Fashion Emporium, built in the late 1860s, displayed the latest styles (and the patterns to make them) [4]. Each of its publications advertised its other products, increasing name awareness among the public. Personal selling of Butterick magazines and patterns was achieved through the extensive network of Butterick agents.

Cyrus Curtis promoted the *Ladies Home Journal* in a very aggressive way, relying chiefly on advertising. Through his ad agency, N.W. Ayer & Sons, Curtis spent more money on advertising than any other woman's magazine publisher, viewing the expenditure as an investment [2, 11]. In 1883, the first year of the *Ladies Home Journal's* life, Curtis spent $400 promoting the product. He offset the 1889 price hike to $1.00 with a $310,000 advertising expenditure, borrowing from Ayer to do so [11].

Curtis used several other methods in addition to advertising. The discounted "club" rate of the 1880s drew new subscribers. He offered premiums for subscribing. And he participated in an exchange list, sending free copies of the *Journal* to newspaper editors, hoping for write-ups in the papers about forthcoming *Journal* articles.

Butterick distributed its magazines and patterns primarily through a system of local agents, often shop owners in small towns. This system offered the company a major competitive strength. Customers also could order the products by mail. As the company grew, so did its distribution network. Branch offices appeared in Chicago and Montreal in 1870. By 1873 the firm had over 100 branch offices and claimed 1,200 agents [3]. The Butterick Company also expanded overseas in the 1870s, to London, Paris, Vienna and Berlin, important centers for fashion [8].

The Curtis Company did not have the advantage of an established agency network. It relied instead primarily on the mails. The Postal Act of 1879 had allowed magazines to be sent at the second class rate, so this method of distribution proved economical. With Rural Free Delivery legislated in 1891 even the most remote customers could receive magazines. Curtis sent publications overseas, but did not establish offices outside the United States. Curtis Company did solicit for reader-agents to sell subscriptions. Recruitment efforts proved quite successful and by 1901 Curtis reported having 30,000 such agents affiliated with the company [21].

Through the end of the century Curtis Company sold only a small percentage of the *Ladies Home Journal* on newsstands. The American News Company (ANC) had a monopoly on magazine distribution to newsstands throughout this period. ANC insisted on such a high commission per magazine copy, and the price of the *Journal* was so low, that Curtis would lose money if it distributed the magazines this way. Curtis *did* encourage local agents to supply newsstands, cutting out the ANC.

Both Curtis and Butterick companies targeted the same group of readers: females with purchasing power. Butterick wanted women who could buy its patterns; Curtis wanted women who could buy the products advertised in its pages. These women could be classified generally as middle class.

Butterick initially had targeted *Delineator* to upper-middle-class readers, but by 1900, attempting to attract large numbers of readers, it looked to a more broadly-defined market. In the 1880s *Delineator* had claimed that, along

with *Godey's Lady's Book* and *Harper's Bazar*, it was read by the elite [5]. And in 1895 its advertising agency still wrote, "Is it any wonder that its circulation reaches a large proportion of the wealthiest and most appreciative feminine buyers of the country?" [12]. Some of Butterick's other journals targeted women lower down in the middle-class, as can be seen from the patterns. For example, no designs appeared for formal evening clothes in some [3]. *Delineator*, on the other hand, featured styles for elegant evening dress in its early years. But by the turn of the century these distinctions had all but disappeared, reflecting *Delineator's* expanded target market [9].

Cyrus Curtis initially tried to capture any readers he could. Then in the nineties he and new editor Edward Bok attempted to upgrade the *Journal* (reflected in the higher price) and to convince advertisers that *Journal* readers came from the very best classes. However, they eventually settled on targeting the market of middle and upper-middle-class readers who had played such as role in the *Journal's* success [7, 21].

Because of Curtis' aggressive promotional efforts, the *Journal* quickly outpaced *Delineator* in sales (Table 1). By 1886, just three years after the *Journal* was born, but when *Delineator* was thirteen years of age, the *Journal* had over 100,000 more readers than *Delineator*. As circulation jumped, production could not keep up; a slowdown in circulation in the mid-1890s is partially attributable to production limitations as well as to the general economic depression [21]. Even when circulation dipped, however, ad revenues, Curtis' chief concern, kept climbing.

Butterick company targeted advertisers later than did Curtis. It had little reason initially to try to attract advertisers. The *raison d'etre* for Ebenezer Butterick's journals had been to advertise *Butterick* goods. When the reader purchased a Butterick publication, she was exposed only to Butterick products, which did not have to fight through the clutter of other advertisers.

Advertising in the *Delineator* remained limited throughout the 1870s for anything other than Butterick products. Those ads which did appear promoted goods related to dressmaking: sewing needles, cotton goods, furs. By the 1880s the last three pages of the journal carried small ads interspersed with Butterick's own premium offers. Ads remained in the back of the magazine until the late 1890s when they began to be pulled forward through the journal and placed next to editorial pieces [9]. At the end of the 1890s *Delineator* began actively soliciting ads. The hiring of ad manager John Adams Thayer, former ad manager for Cyrus Curtis, in 1898 intensified this activity; in his first year, Thayer increased *Delineator's* ad revenue from $137,000 to $180,000 and had lifted it to over $600,000 by the time he left in 1902 [22]. Once the Butterick organization decided to aggressively pursue advertising revenues, it succeeded quite well. The November 1902 issue of the *Delineator* claimed to be carrying more advertising than any other woman's magazine had ever printed [20].

One result of *Delineator's* later entry into the competition for ads was that it remained flexible on ad rates longer than the Curtis Company; the latter maintained steady rates by the early 1890s (resulting in some lost

business). Butterick did not hold fast its rates until Thayer took over as ad manager.

Butterick used several marketing ploys to entice advertisers. It emphasized the desirable characteristics of its readers, middle-class women, the purchasing agents for their households [12]. Butterick offered advertisers spots next to related editorial material, a persuasive selling point. Several other women's magazines were doing the same [19]. However, Butterick had an advantage because its editorial material had a more specific consumption focus (fashion and dress) than the more generally oriented magazines like the *Ladies Home Journal*.

The company also offered its publications in packages, first selling the *Delineator* with the other fashion journals, then, after the turn of the century, the Butterick Trio (*Delineator*, *Designer*, *New Idea Woman's Magazine*) [17]. This allowed the company to be strategic about ad placement, as it had several back covers (a much sought after spot) to offer advertisers, rather than just one. Unlike Curtis, which expanded into different kinds of magazines (*Saturday Evening Post*, then *Country Gentleman*), and had to hire space salesmen with expertise in each area, Butterick, with its specialization in the female fashion market, could target potential advertisers more efficiently.

Convincing advertisers to place copy in his magazine was what Cyrus Curtis did best and he pursued advertisers from the *Journal's* very beginning. He had to sell not just ad space in the *Ladies Home Journal*, but the idea of advertising at all [16]. In part he did this through example, by advertising the *Ladies Home Journal* extensively [11]. Curtis also assured advertisers that the chief purpose of his magazine was to provide a medium through which they could sell their goods; as a former ad man he was able to speak their language and persuade them to place ads. Curtis also advised manufacturers on ad copy and design [21]. *Journal* editor Bok was the first in the industry to bring ads out of the back of the magazine, mixing them in the front pages with editorial copy [1]. Once this was done, Curtis Company too began to place ads next to related editorial material [19]. By 1888 the *Ladies Home Journal* generated more advertising revenues than any other women's journal, a top spot it would keep until the 1930s [6, 27].

Conclusion

As the century closed, the marketing efforts of these companies looked increasingly similar. Each company had influenced the other in some aspects of marketing strategy, although Cyrus Curtis, the man who first conceived the idea of high circulation, low price, and abundant advertising revenues for mass circulation magazines, exerted more influence on the Butterick Company than the reverse; this is not surprising, as Curtis showed the way to publishers of *all* kinds of mass market journals. In actively pursuing advertising, pushing for additional readers, and promoting the product itself, Curtis pointed the way to the modern mass market magazine industry. Butterick made changes in its marketing strategy to move in this direction as it changed its mission from pattern selling to publishing. Butterick Company influenced Curtis Company in terms of product content (forcing inclusion of the patterns female

customers desired), expansion of product line, and in showing Curtis the advantages of a widely developed system of agents selling the magazines.

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