



## RIP CMYK

As the price of ink increases, reporting the design industry is moving online. Alyn Griffiths traces the shift from paper to pixels – and tells us why it works

Words Alyn Griffiths

**Jill Singer**  
**SightUnseen**

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**Who**

Jill co-founded SightUnseen with Monica Khemsurov in 2009. They are both former editors of *I.D.* magazine

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**What**

SightUnseen offers a behind-the-scenes look at the lives of leading figures from the creative industries through studio visits, interviews and firsthand reports

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**Where**

Jill and Monica both work from home in New York City  
[sightunseen.com](http://sightunseen.com)

The current generation of young creatives would struggle to remember life without online magazines and blogs such as Dezeen, ArchDaily and Designboom drip-feeding them news and imagery of the latest products and buildings before the paint on them has even dried. Any questions over the credibility of online journalism or the viability of operating a digital design publication as a profitable enterprise are gradually being answered by innovative individuals with the passion and ability to share inspirational and novel projects with a global audience of millions – something that traditional print magazines can only dream of.

For practising architects and designers, students or anyone else with an interest in creative disciplines, the possibility to source coverage of the latest buildings and products outside of the pages of venerable journals and publications, such as *Building Design*, *Architectural Digest*, *I.D.* and *Domus*, has been revolutionary. It took time for the perception of digital media to evolve and for online resources to develop a reputation for quality journalism but gradually, as architects and designers began to entrust images and details of their latest projects to websites who could upload them immediately, legacy publications were left trailing in their wake.

“People’s acceptance of ways of consuming content online has changed,” explains Marcus Fairs, who founded online design news website Dezeen in 2006 after being fired from his position at *Icon* magazine. “When I told people I was thinking of starting Dezeen they said



**Marcus Fairs**  
Dezeen

**Who**

Marcus is the founder and editor-in-chief of Dezeen, former founding editor of Icon magazine and author of 21st Century Design and Green Design

**What**

Dezeen is an online design news magazine launched in 2006 that offers readers a regular and carefully edited selection of the latest architecture, design and interiors projects from around the world

**Where**

From its London headquarters, Dezeen runs its online magazine, watch store and jobs board. The company also curates pop-up shops and events, and exhibits at international design fairs [dezeen.com](http://dezeen.com)



Marcus Fairs and the Dezeen team hard at work

the internet wasn't as pleasant or profound as paper media, that it would never work." Dezeen now attracts more than one million unique visitors every month.

Fairs has been involved in design publishing since the mid-90s and has watched the industry change completely in that time, from an entirely manual to an almost completely digital process. "When I started my career it was old-school traditional print journalism: following up leads and getting quotes, speaking to people directly," he remembers. "What we do now is a different type of journalism that didn't exist even 10 years ago."

Last year the revered British news-focused journal *Design Week* announced that it was to cease publishing and that all future content would be free to view on its website. Angus Montgomery, the man tasked with overseeing the 25-year-old publication's transition to digital media believes that it was the only viable option. He says: "With the rapid development of blogs and other online sources of information, it became increasingly difficult to balance the demands of producing a weekly print title with the necessity of publishing news as quickly as possible. We decided to focus on online as the fastest, most immediate and most adaptable source of news for our readers."

As visual disciplines, architecture and design are particularly compatible with the format of online publication, which holds several distinct advantages over print media. The story of a great building or product can often be told through images alone, and the only real restriction as to what can be published online is the patience of the reader. "With print media you had to make decisions about

what images you would use and how to crop and present them, but with the infinite storage capacity of the web you can publish anything and everything," states Marcus Fairs.

Publishing design content online also has practical advantages for readers, such as the possibility to link articles to related content from previous features or other websites. "The ability to link allows you to build in a different kind of depth," explains Fairs. "With conventional publications, once you'd read them they went in the archive or the bin. Now you put a story up and a so-called rival can link to it within 30 seconds so the kudos of being first is diluted. It's led to less confrontational journalism."

Linking to external sites enables readers to follow the latest developments in design, wherever they are taking place, and discover inspirational ideas from unexpected sources. Good design has a global appeal, as demonstrated by the readership of Dezeen, which follows the pattern of internet penetration, although with a bias towards English-speaking countries. Recently Fairs has noticed an increase in the number of projects being submitted to Dezeen from Asia, and particularly Japan. "We've started to overcome the sort of language barriers that existed in the past," he believes.

Design fans around the world are clearly embracing the transition to viewing digital content (traffic on Dezeen is doubling year-on-year) although some purists lament the lack of a tangible experience that this shift involves. The announcement on the *Design Week* website that the magazine would no longer be landing on readers' doormats every





The walls of Architonic's offices are lined with inspirational books and magazines



Thursday provoked a backlash of disgruntled comments, such as those claiming “I won’t be half as inclined to browse endless web pages for inspiration” and “it will become another bookmark that would never be visited”. However, Angus Montgomery believes these dissenting voices are in the minority. “Design titles are incredibly fortunate to have a readership that is web literate, very forward-thinking and willing to embrace change.”

For the publishers, the main hurdle to be overcome is not acceptance of the new format but the unwillingness of readers to pay for it. Being unable to rely on revenue from sales and subscriptions means they are required to be more imaginative in the ways in which they generate income. “The written and image driven content that is the core of Dezeen is free and really acts as a loss leader,” explains Marcus Fairs. “The key thing is to put up an endless stream of fascinating and compelling con-

tent to attract an audience, and once you have the audience you can think of ways to monetise that, through advertising or other things.”

Alongside the free magazine Dezeen now runs a jobs page, manages editorial promotions, films and publishes video content for clients and has explored retail through an online watch store, a series of pop-up shops and its first book. “The big picture is that we can be delivering more services to make people feel they are part of a world that is aspirational,” Fairs adds.

As progressive, lifestyle-oriented people, designers and design fans are a potentially receptive market for more holistic service provision, but gaining their trust requires a strong and identifiable brand built around attractive content. Former *I.D.* magazine editors Jill Singer and Monica Khemsurov have managed to create such a brand with their website SightUnseen, which they founded after *I.D.* was shuttered in 2009. Working from their homes in New York City and utilising their extensive contacts and experience, the pair offer readers a behind-the-scenes look at the design industry, with visits to designers’ studios and homes and content written and photographed for them by inspirational creatives from around the world. “We wanted to do something that was about more than news,” explains Jill Singer.

The voyeuristic nature of the content and the unusual vantage point that it offers on the creative industries appeals to designers, but also to a general lifestyle audience with whom the pair are now exploring new ways in which to interact, such as events curation, publishing their own book and selling jewellery by designers they like. “People look at what we do as a curatorial thing,” claims Singer. “They like our point of view and who we choose to cover and that can translate into many different areas.”

In some cases, editorial content can take on a more subsidiary but no less significant



**Nils Becker**  
**Architonic**

**Who**

Nils is an architect and managing director of Architonic, which he founded and runs with his business partner Tobias Lutz. The website launched in 2003

**What**

Architonic is an online resource for architecture and design professionals, providing details of over 120,000 materials and products alongside an online magazine and database with profiles of practising professionals

**Where**

Architonic’s head office is in Zurich, Switzerland  
[architonic.com](http://architonic.com)





## Angus Montgomery Design Week

### Who

Angus took over the editorship of Design Week in late 2011 having been news editor since 2008. He was previously a reporter for the Press Association and managing editor at The Architects' Journal

### What

Design Week provides free, news-based content for design professionals and has an extensive archive accessible to subscribers. Having moved from print to online last year the website now attracts more than 62,000 unique visitors every month

### Where

Design Week operates from an office in central London  
[designweek.co.uk](http://designweek.co.uk)

role in online brand building. When architects Nils Becker and Tobias Lutz decided to launch a website in 2003, providing fellow architects and interior designers with a comprehensive and curated database of outstanding contemporary products, they recognised that including a section of trend-based articles on the site would help to engage visitors and enhance their profile as an intelligent and independent resource. "We don't make money from the editorial content but it is important for the brand," explains Nils Becker.

Architonic is now recognised as a market-leading network by industry professionals, employing more than 50 staff at its Zurich headquarters, and Becker is keen to make the most of the open-source opportunities provided by online publishing and potentially expand the types of content they offer alongside their core services. "In the future there may be more intelligent ways for a greater number of people to contribute content to the website, but always with us curating it," he says.

Controlling what is published while still keeping up with the demand for more open and cooperative content will be one of the main challenges for digital design publications in the coming years, as the evolution of hardware and software continues to enable increased flexibility and interaction within online media. Those publishers who are able to provide commentary on the current state of architecture and design in a form that is credible, useful and beautiful will establish brands that allow them to expand into new areas of service provision, offering a creative and receptive audience the chance to explore new digital and physical experiences.

"I often describe building a community around a blog as being a bit like the Wild West," proclaims Marcus Fairs. "It's anarchic and quite dangerous but we will build a civilisation there, we will figure out what's acceptable and what's not and then maybe it will become normal." The signs so far are clearly positive as pioneering publishers forge new frontiers in digital media that look set to redefine the ways in which we consume and engage with design.

Alyn Griffiths is Port's design editor

