



Creating Great Covers

ARGUABLY, THE MOST IMPORTANT ELEMENT OF YOUR MAGAZINE

Are covers really that important?

- ▶ Unequivocally, yes!
 - ▶ No matter what your distribution method (newsstand / single copy sales, subscription, or “free with newspaper”), cover execution will determine the long term viability of your magazine product
- ▶ Why?
 - ▶ Because everyone’s busy. And if you don’t give the reader a reason to pick up that magazine, they won’t read it. If they don’t read it, sales will suffer. If sales suffer...
- ▶ But my magazine is delivered for FREE to our newspaper subscribers!
 - ▶ **EVEN MORE REASON** to execute great covers... your magazine is an uninvited guest. That reader didn’t select you from the newsstand and didn’t choose to subscribe to you – so you better **WOW** them and make sure they take notice!

How do I execute a great cover?

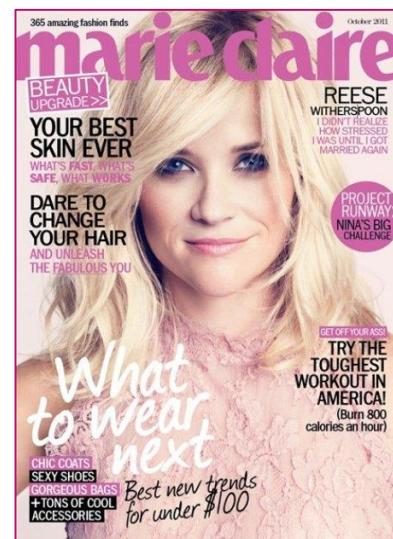
- ▶ There is no secret formula, but there are a number of things you should think about when considering your cover image...
 - ▶ You can't go wrong with people. If you're not using a person, why? It better be an amazing shot (think Coastal Living)
 - ▶ The photo needs to illustrate the personality of the subject
 - ▶ You can't get too close! The most common mistake is trying to get the entire subject in the frame (from head to heels), don't do it unless there's a really good reason!
 - ▶ Piercing eyes! Looking straight at the camera (and thus, the reader)
 - ▶ Leverage Photoshop techniques that the best national magazines use every day... Filters and Re-touching

Can't Miss Option: OPESS

One Person

Eyes Straight

Smiling (can also be a Smirk)



Can't Miss Option: OPESS

There are a few rules to successfully pull off this time-tested winning formula:

#1 Tight crop



Women: From the waistline up unless it's showcasing fashion, then rarely below the knees



Men: From the chest up

Can't Miss Option: OPESS

There are a few rules to successfully pull off this time-tested winning formula:

#2 Perfect Lighting



Whether shot in studio or outdoors, fill lights have to be used to get perfect light balance especially on the subject's face

Can't Miss Option: OPESS

There are a few rules to successfully pull off this time-tested winning formula:

#3 Depth of Field or Silo the subject



If this was shot outside, the aperture is so small that the background is obscured and not distracting from the subject. This effect was likely enhanced in PhotoShop

Can't Miss Option: OPESS

There are a few rules to successfully pull off this time-tested winning formula:

#4 NO stiff "say cheese" poses



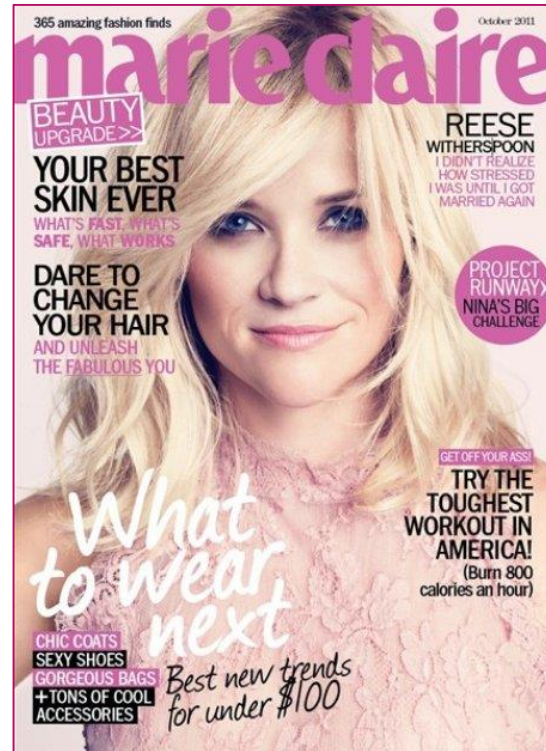
A slight head turn, different positioning of the arms, or torso twist can provide a much more interesting pose

Can't Miss Option: OPESS

There are a few rules to successfully pull off this time-tested winning formula:

#5 Use Photoshop to remove blemishes, smooth skin tones, adjust tonality and “brighten” the overall composition.

See “Photoshop Essentials” slide for tips you should use on every cover.



Even the most beautiful people in the world need help pulling off that perfect look. Don't be bashful about leveraging Photoshop to help out the locals!

Can't Miss Option: OPESS

There are a few rules to successfully pull off this time-tested winning formula:

#6 Rules are made to be broken

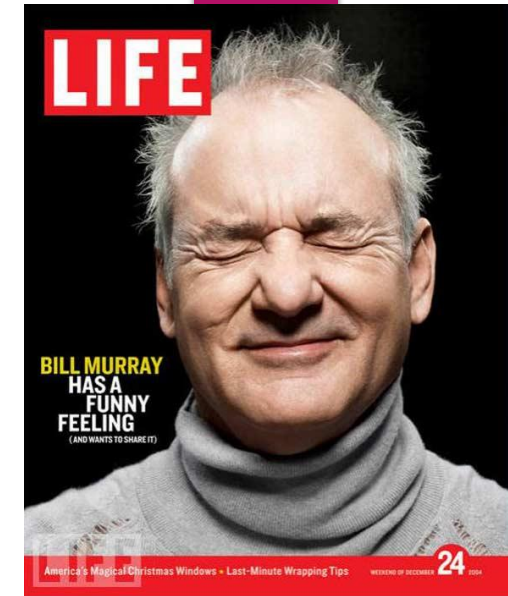
As you MASTER the basics of OPESS... experiment to fit the mood of the story or subject



Leo striking a powerful stare for a powerful movie. No smile, but all the other “rules” are in place.



Looking askance of the camera, the frame pulled back from the typical “statue bust”... aligns with his aloof yet insightful nature



Super tight, super bright and eyes closed! We're literally getting up close and personal to this funny man.

What about multiple people?

In general, the more people in a photo the harder it is to create an impactful cover

Here are some tips to help pull it off...



Two person covers: There needs to be some sort of interplay between the two subjects. Ask yourself, why should both be on the cover? If it's a partnership, maybe try to represent visually the different attitudes they bring to the partnership. If it's a relationship, try to illustrate a moment that gives the reader insight into their personalities. Are they representing opposing views or sides? Try to reinforce that with the spacing or wardrobe or facial expressions.

What about
multiple people?

Still believe that 2 is better
than 1???



Two person covers: But when in doubt... remember... A single person cover subject is better than multiple people on a magazine cover – every day and twice on Sunday.

To wit... The April 2012 cover of Forbes magazine... With the coverline "Inside The Koch Empire" still features only 1 of the Koch brothers (Charles)

What about multiple people?

Group photos for a cover are the worst option available...

If it's a must, make sure it passes these three guiding principles...



Three+ person covers: So what about 3 (or more!) person covers? The guiding principle is... you better have a really REALLY good reason...

1. They're all part of a band / group / team
2. They have distinct personalities that can be displayed with the appropriate photoshoot / setup
3. You change the camera perspective to reinforce the idea that this is a GROUP / TEAM (shot from below, shot from above)

Does your cover shoot idea pass ALL THREE criteria? No? Then figure out another cover option...

Objects (Stuff) as a Cover Subject...

While it's tempting, you should always err on the side of putting the person behind the object on the cover instead of the object itself...

UNLESS... You can bring it to life with a great illustration. Then, and only then, it might make sense.

You might argue:

"I understand that shooting people, real live HUMANS, in an interesting and compelling manner will provide me the BEST cover image options imaginable... BUT this glass of beer is really critical to my cover story..."

While this impulse is completely understandable, there are two critical considerations...

- 1) Is the object (product) best presented as an illustration? (time consuming, expensive, difficult) The answer is almost always YES.
- 2) If the object/product is the star of the show and worthy of a cover... Is the photography on par? Is it dramatic? Interesting? Intriguing?

Objects (Stuff) as a Cover Subject...

Arguable whether these examples are great covers...



Places / Landscape as a Cover Subject...

You might also argue:

“Many of our stories feature local businesses or events or historical places, and we feel it would be powerful to portray these locations on the cover to bolster interest in our cover story.”

Perfectly valid. What’s so special about CNHI’s local publications is that we cast a focused lens on the most interesting places in our communities. If a location is your cover subject, make sure...

1. It is NOT a news photo of the location
2. Ask for a publicity photo of the location, they usually have them on hand
3. The location is shot from a UNIQUE angle... not easily replicated by a passerby with a digital camera
4. The image has been photoshopped to highlight dramatic shadows, scale, or architectural differences
5. Photoshop out power lines, garbage, unsightly markers, etc.

Places / Landscape as a Cover Subject...

Context and Composition are
CRITICAL to successfully using
a location/landscape as a
cover image...

Notice that sight lines are
extremely important for cover
lines... (if you line up 100
Coastal Living covers, the
ocean horizon will break at
the same place in 80% of the
covers)



Wildlife Vs Pets

Rule of thumb... if the cover story is about an animal that is part of the local wildlife, you need to get an image worthy of National Geographic. Otherwise, shoot a tight and lighthearted image of the animal.

Last resort... Owners posing with their pet.

- ▶ As Cover Subjects, wildlife and domesticated pets need to be treated very differently...
 - ▶ **WILDLIFE**
 - ▶ Should be relevant to the local market
 - ▶ Shown in its natural habitat
 - ▶ Dramatic composition... think National Geographic
 - ▶ **DOMESTICATED PETS**
 - ▶ Should be avoided
 - ▶ If CRITICAL to the cover story, make sure it's a TIGHT composition and the eyes are front and center
 - ▶ Otherwise, focus on the owner and have the animal play a secondary role in the image's composition.

Your Magazine's Nameplate

(aka "Flag", masthead,
logo, etc.)

QUICK TIPS FOR THE RIGHT
NAMEPLATE LOOK

MAGAZINE NAMEPLATES



MAGAZINE NAMEPLATES

Common “premium” nameplate fonts found
in national magazines...

- ▶ Archer
- ▶ Chronicle
- ▶ Gotham
- ▶ Hoefler
- ▶ Knockout
- ▶ Mercury
- ▶ Requiem
- ▶ Whitney

Gotham **JOHNSTOWN**

Archer JOHNSTOWN

Knockout
FullBantamweight **JOHNSTOWN**

Knockout
FullWelterweight **JOHNSTOWN**

Knockout
Lightweight **JOHNSTOWN**

MercuryText
Roman **JOHNSTOWN**

MAGAZINE NAMEPLATES

But... there's TONS of great "standard" options

- ▶ [The "30 Best" Serif Fonts](#)
- ▶ [The 30 Best Sans-Serif Fonts](#)

MAGAZINE NAMEPLATES

North of Boston group uses
“Playfair” (a free Google font)
for many of its nameplates for
a clean yet traditional
nameplate look

THE **ANDOVERS**
North of Boston Life

Relay condensed bold

NORTH OF BOSTON
WEDDINGS

Playfair (Edwardian Script “W”)

Peabody
MAGAZINE

Playfair

MARBLEHEAD
HOME AND STYLE

Birch

Danvers
MAGAZINE

Playfair

Windham
MAGAZINE

Playfair

Newburyport
MAGAZINE
Edwardian Script

Londonderry
MAGAZINE

Playfair

CAPE ANN
North of Boston Life

Gloucester MT Extra Condensed

The Readings
NORTH OF BOSTON LIFE

Glasgow Bold

Middleton
MAGAZINE

Playfair

AYERS • BRADFORD • ROCKS
Haverhill
MAGAZINE

Playfair

NORTH OF BOSTON
BUSINESS

League Gothic (Google)

MAGAZINE NAMEPLATES

Some general “rules of thumb” when laying out your nameplate...

Final Thoughts / Quick Tips:

1. Generally, avoid script or “comic” based fonts
2. All caps is usually the most legible
3. Strokes can help the nameplate stand out from the cover images and add visual interest to the nameplate
4. Include the Month and Year underneath the nameplate (or Vol, Issue)
5. “Sub-heds” can be effective above the title to help focus the reader on what the magazine is about (i.e., “The Ohio Valley’s Premier Lifestyle Magazine”)
6. Modify the font parameters to position the title about 2.5 inches below the top of the magazine and CENTERED horizontally. Cover portrait images should extend slightly into the letters of the title

Cover Lines

**DON'T TRY TO BE
CUTE OR CLEVER!**
TELL THE READER
WHY THEY
SHOULD READ
THE STORIES IN
YOUR MAGAZINE

COVER LINES

Top Cover line Tips:

- 1) Change the font size and color to draw attention to important features or departments
- 2) Color is a good way, along with positioning, to associate the cover story cover line with the cover image
- 3) Avoid using different fonts (gets messy)
- 4) Don't touch the face(s)!

▶ 7 Words, 10 seconds,
Why read this story?



COVER LINES

DRAW THE READER IN!!!

Doesn't matter if the magazine is for sale on the newsstand or delivered free as part of the newspaper subscription, you **HAVE TO GIVE THE READER A REASON TO OPEN THE MAGAZINE AND READ YOUR FEATURE STORIES**

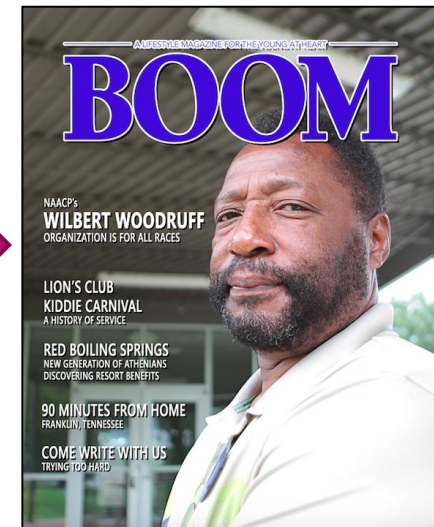
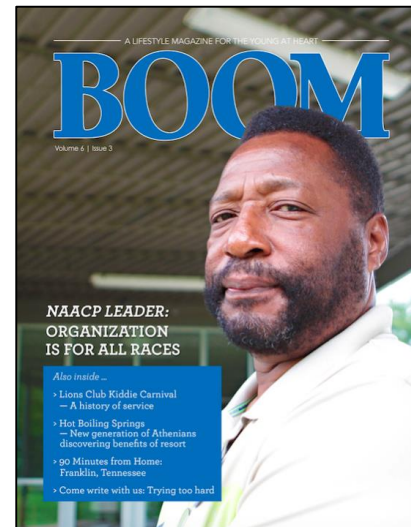
Quick Tips for Great Cover Lines

- ▶ Highlight “trigger words” by increasing font size or changing color
- ▶ Default to ALL CAPS and sans-serif fonts
- ▶ Very tight drop shadows can help lift cover lines off the cover image
- ▶ Never encroach on a cover subject's face. Hair? Maybe.
- ▶ Create a gutter guide on the left and right to help a reader quickly scan the cover lines
- ▶ Commit to promoting at least 7 stories every issue (7 different cover lines)

COVER LINES

Quick Word on “Also Inside”

- ▶ Many magazines try to organize the rest of the stories inside the magazine by leveraging an “Also Inside” box that is usually filled with a different color and then the cover lines are bulleted
- ▶ Best practice is to AVOID this technique and instead find places to squeeze cover lines on to the cover image





Cover Images

**WHENEVER
POSSIBLE...**

HAVE YOUR
COVER PHOTOS
PROFESSIONALLY
SHOT

COVER IMAGES

MAKE SURE YOU GET THE RIGHT SHOT!

- ▶ Requires EARLY PLANNING
 - ▶ You should choose your cover story of your upcoming issue WHILE STILL IN PRODUCTION for your current issue
 - ▶ Provide your photographer with examples of existing images that match your vision of what you want for the cover
 - ▶ Have back ups! Ideally, you should assign a minimum of three (3) stories as potential cover options. The ultimate choice should come down to what is the BEST PHOTO
 - ▶ Get the best photos from the session back early and review with your team to agree on 1-3 “selects”
 - ▶ Have your design team mock up covers with the selects

COVER IMAGES

TIPS FOR YOUR PHOTOGRAPHER...

- ▶ Get uncomfortably close... nice, tight portrait shots are extremely effective cover images
- ▶ Depth of Field... Focus on the subject and blur the background using small apertures
- ▶ Re-touch the photo before submitting it back to your team... At a minimum, color correct the image with basic photoshop techniques.

COVER IMAGES

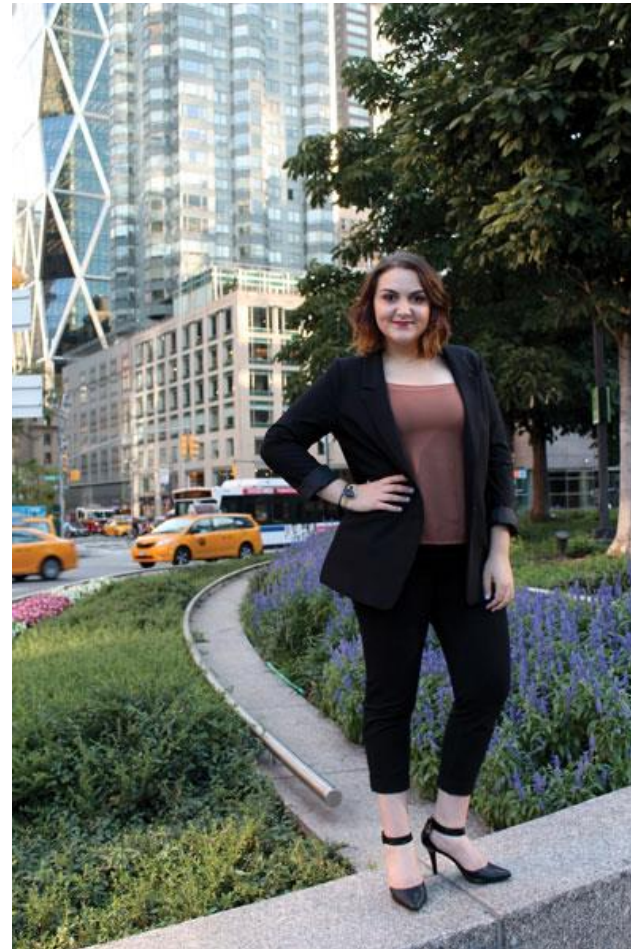
USE THE HIGH PASS FILTER TECHNIQUE

- ▶ Makes good cover images GREAT cover images, through
 - ▶ Color Saturation
 - ▶ Sharpness
 - ▶ Sheen
- ▶ While not effective for newsprint, it is CRITICAL to leverage the “high pass filter” technique for cover images that are printed on glossy magazine stock
- ▶ Not familiar with the technique? The good news is... it’s easy! There are several great tutorials on YouTube for how to implement the filter, including:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6QrSTeji_Ok

COVER IMAGES

Let's walk through an example...

EXAMPLE COVER WALK THROUGH...



- ▶ Great image to start with... fun pose for cover subject and interesting background
- ▶ In a perfect world, the aperture would be smaller so the background would be more blurred
- ▶ But she's way too far away... and that won't work because SHE is the subject of the cover story

COVER IMAGES

Let's walk through an example...

EXAMPLE COVER WALK THROUGH...



- ▶ Zooming in gives more importance to the cover subject without losing the urban background (also key to the story)
- ▶ Now we have a much better cover image and a natural gutter along the left side for cover lines

COVER IMAGES

Let's walk through an example...

EXAMPLE COVER WALK THROUGH...



- ▶ But getting UNCOMFORTABLY CLOSE really brings the reader into the cover subject and the focus is ALL ON HER
- ▶ Urban background still understood, even if abstract (could be any city, any street corner)
- ▶ Cover line gutter is now along the right hand side,
- ▶ In final production, her head needs to be laid over the "ws" in the nameplate