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Magpie: Developing and Using Buyer Personas

In March 2017, during their final semester in an MBA program, Magpie's co-founders—Damjan Korać, Gerrit Orem, and Andrea Fantacone—sat on a bus from New York to Boston and discussed the next steps for their venture. Magpie delivered a single-click shopping experience to any image, video, or app on the web, letting publishers natively tag products in their content and letting consumers purchase those products without needing to leave the page.

In less than a year, the co-founders had bootstrapped their student startup, focusing on product development relevant to all players in their multi-sided platform: retailers, publishers, and consumers. They were developing a consolidated catalog of all products on the internet with up-to-date pricing and inventory information, an API that would allow Magpie to inject orders directly into any retail system, and a consumer interface that removed almost all friction from the online shopping experience.

The founders believed publishers were a key driver for initial adoption. By leveraging existing pages and apps where consumers already interacted with content, Magpie could minimize costly consumer marketing expenses. Other companies had tried to tackle this space and had stumbled with publisher acquisition. Magpie had brought in online content creators for product development input from day one. They were ready to focus on publishers as launch partners in June 2017. Magpie's offering had received enthusiastic responses from those contacted, but the team knew that excitement during an exploratory interview or focus group would not necessarily translate to a signed contract.

Based on the interviews, the team had created four publisher personas in their initial launch segment. They hoped to use these personas to determine priorities, the order in which to target different types of publishers, and the messaging and media needed for marketing to each group. The team also wondered if they had generated the optimal breakdown of publishers into distinct personas. Was their analysis missing any key characteristics of publisher's goals, motivations, and behavior?

Market Opportunity

The global market for retail e-commerce in 2016 was \$1.915 trillion, about 8% of total retail sales. Analysts predicted that retail e-commerce sales would be \$4 trillion by 2020, with growth driven heavily by the Asia-Pacific region's growing middle class, heightened competition among e-commerce

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players, an increasingly robust internet infrastructure, and greater mobile and internet penetration.¹ Strong growth was also predicted in North America, the world's second-largest market for retail e-commerce, where 2016 sales of \$385 billion were expected to grow to exceed \$600 billion by 2020.² Although most retailers' e-commerce sales were growing, they were far outpaced by Amazon, which accounted for 55% of US e-commerce growth in 2016. Many analysts attributed this in part to Amazon's success in streamlining its checkout process while offering unrivaled product selection.³

A number of trends had emerged. First, while desktop browser-based shopping had long reigned supreme in e-commerce, mobile shopping was becoming increasingly salient due to growing smartphone penetration across the globe. Many brands and retailers were seeking better ways to engage consumers and increase conversion rates on mobile devices.⁴

Second, online influencers and social shopping (sales driven by influencer channels) were becoming important. The top 500 retailers generated \$3.3 billion from social shopping by 2014, a 26% more than the prior year,⁵ and commissions to online influencers were growing. U.S. affiliate marketing spend was expected to grow at a 10% CAGR to \$6.8 billion in 2020,⁶ a rate higher than that of the e-commerce market. Retailers were interested in how to capture the power of influencers and social shopping.

Finally, an estimated \$4.6 trillion worth of online shopping carts were abandoned by consumers in 2015 and about 60% was potentially recoverable if retailers improved the e-commerce experience.⁷ Studies found that, of the \$2.8 trillion in potentially recoverable carts, 27% of sales, or \$756 billion, were specifically lost due to friction in the purchase process.⁸ This represented a big opportunity, especially as more shoppers used mobile where the potential for purchase friction increased significantly.

Online Publishers

By "publishers" Magpie's founders meant anyone that provided content, ranging from magazines to bloggers, social media personalities, and app developers. Examples ranged from small, growing fashion blogs like *What Would Kiki Wear?* to the print and online versions of magazines like *GQ* or *Vogue*. Most typically provided their services free to users and traditionally relied on display advertising and sometimes commissions as a source of revenue.

From the early days of e-commerce, retailers recognized the influence of publishers on their readers' shopping behavior. Any website owner could put a hyperlink in their content in the hope of earning revenue by directing traffic to a retail site. What started as a mechanism to reward an external site for redirecting a consumer to a retail website became a common way for publishers to monetize their

¹<https://www.emarketer.com/Article/Worldwide-Retail-Ecommerce-Sales-Will-Reach-1915-Trillion-This-Year/1014369>, accessed March 2017.

² <http://www.businessinsider.com/ecommerce-online-retail-monetization-strategy-planning-2016-11>, accessed March 2017.

³ <http://fortune.com/2016/05/11/retailers-stocks/>, accessed March 2017.

⁴ <http://www.businessinsider.com/ecommerce-online-retail-monetization-strategy-planning-2016-11>, accessed March 2017.

⁵ <http://www.businessinsider.com/ecommerce-online-retail-monetization-strategy-planning-2016-11>, accessed March 2017.

⁶ <http://mthink.com/affiliate-marketing-industry-grow-6-8-billion-next-five-years/>, accessed March 2017.

⁷ <http://www.businessinsider.com/shopping-cart-abandonment-merchants-now-leave-46-trillion-on-the-table-and-mobile-is-making-the-problem-worse-2016-11>, accessed March 2017.

⁸ <https://baymard.com/blog/checkout-flow-average-form-fields>, accessed March 2017.

content (so-called “affiliate marketing”). When a reader clicked on an affiliate link, a tracking cookie was placed on their computer, and if that reader completed a purchase on the retailer’s website, the retailer paid a commission to the original site that contained the link.

By 2013, an estimated 40% of Amazon’s revenue came from affiliates.⁹ In some luxury-good categories, an estimated 80% of consumers purchased products based on the recommendation of a trusted online publisher. Brands also paid for influencer marketing, which included sponsored posts where a publisher was paid to showcase a product. Both types of marketing continued to grow with the rise of social media celebrities and a waning TV viewership among younger demographics.¹⁰

Magpie: Company Overview

The inspiration for Magpie first came to Damjan Korać while he was studying engineering at Princeton and began observing shopping behavior among friends and family. He noted that people frequently opened dozens of tabs and added items to various carts and wish lists without completing purchases. He continued thinking about this problem during his time as a software engineer at a large advertising exchange in New York. Korać commented: “As a consumer, I saw what was missing from the shopping experience, and as an engineer I knew what was possible with new technology.”

Korać came to business school with this problem in mind and quickly worked to build a team with the complementary skills necessary to tackle it. In late 2015, he recruited Andrea Fantacone, a member of his discussion group, to join Magpie. Before business school, Fantacone had been a program manager in the US Air Force with experience in operations, procurement, and program management. Korać also approached classmate Gerrit Orem, who had worked as a product manager at an education technology company. The three co-founders, armed only with market research and an idea, signed up for the 2016 New Venture Competition and placed as semi-finalists. Encouraged by positive feedback from industry experts attending the competition, they decided to assume formal roles: Korać became CEO, Fantacone the COO, and Orem the CPO (Chief Product Officer).

In the summer of 2016, Korać and Orem worked on Magpie full-time while Fantacone was at the Boston Consulting Group. Korać and Orem focused on product development: the product recognition algorithm, self-service plug-in tools for publishers, the consumer interface, and the software required to integrate multiple retailers and a wide product catalog onto the platform. “We also contacted publishers and did A/B testing of different outreach messages,” said Orem. “We reached out to magazine writers, fashion bloggers, and social media personalities in any way possible: through email, by contacting agents, and messages on Instagram.” Korać commented: “We started by talking to publishers to learn more about how they thought about the monetization and reader acquisition portions of their business. We would then show a custom demo of Magpie tags and a shopping cart running on a mock-up of a recent post. The publisher typically got excited and raised questions, and we took notes to see what parts of the demo resonated most and what gaps we still needed to address.”

The founders were initially surprised by what they heard. According to Orem, “We forgot that not everyone thinks first about the bottom line! We knew the economic value that our product could provide, but most of these fashion influencers did not think this way. They were more excited by ease of use and data on reader engagement with each post. Instead of convincing them to think from an ROI

⁹ <http://www.prweb.com/releases/dekh/news/prweb10816600.htm>, accessed March 2017.

¹⁰ <http://mediakix.com/2015/12/influencer-marketing-5-10-billion-dollar-market/#gs.qT0f2Yc>, accessed March 2017.

perspective, we began to show them how Magpie could minimize the time they spent on operations and let them focus more on the creative elements of their job that they enjoyed most.”

Several fashion bloggers agreed to provide ongoing reactions to new product design decisions, a process that also helped the founders collect information about different publishers. By the end of the summer, the team had identified a small group of adopters for a beta and also filed a provisional patent to protect key aspects of Magpie’s back-end infrastructure and user workflows.

During their second year at business school, the team secured meetings with several major multi-brand retailers. All expressed interest if Magpie could develop relationships with the “right” publishers and generate consumer traffic and sales. After listening to the Magpie idea and functionality, an SVP at one large retailer ended the meeting by saying, “I don’t see why we wouldn’t do this.”

Value Proposition

Exhibits 1, 2, and 3 outline Magpie’s solution, business model, and introductory go-to-market sequencing. The founders believed Magpie provided value for consumers, publishers, and retailers.

For *consumers*, Magpie offered a superior online shopping experience. With a single Magpie account, consumers could seamlessly transition from discovering a product to buying it, without needing to leave the page. Also, with a retailer-agnostic product catalog, Magpie could display the lowest-priced option currently in stock for a product, further reducing effort for online shoppers. Korać noted, “Today, for example, if a consumer sees shoes in an online article they must click through to the retail page for that product. If it’s out of stock in their size, they must search for it somewhere else and do multiple price-comparisons to ensure they are getting the best deal. Magpie’s back-end keeps track in real-time of all retailers that carry a given item and can programmatically determine which store can fulfill an order with the right size and color in stock and that the price is as low as possible.”

Orem added that “Magpie can also integrate natively with sites and apps that consumers already like to visit. Unlike competitors’ offerings, a consumer does not need to download a Magpie browser extension or other software to interact with the product tags and complete purchases. Instead, publishers can add it to their content just like they add social media icons—for instance, a Facebook “Like” button that appears in articles to encourage users to share the content with their social network.”

For *publishers*, Magpie offered a means of monetizing their content and increasing reader engagement with minimal effort. Magpie’s product tagging process involved much less effort for publishers than generating affiliate links to place in their content. All current solutions required content creators to update the actual underlying HTML code of their websites, while Magpie provided them with a tool that made adding tags and searching for products as simple as dragging a tag over an image.

Also, because consumers could buy from multiple retailers in a single click, publishers should see higher conversion rates and larger average basket sizes from their readers. Magpie also offered publishers valuable data about readers’ interactions with product tags that they could use to optimize their content, including tracking how long people spent with each part of a post and whether they hovered, clicked, and/or bought an item from a tag. Moreover, as Korać noted about the beta tests, “Magpie enables consumers to purchase directly from product tags, so readers remain longer on publisher pages instead of leaving to find products for sale at retail sites. Publishers consistently told us that when readers leave their page they feel that it reduces their ownership of the user experience. A third-party retail page has a different design aesthetic, and a cumbersome checkout process there can impact a reader’s opinion of the publisher’s content that sent them to the site.”

Other companies that had tried to create shopping cart solutions in this space had failed because their solutions were too technically demanding for smaller publishers with limited coding experience, while sites like Facebook and Pinterest had rejected these solutions because they did not align with their CPM-based monetization models. Magpie was perfecting self-serve plug-in tools for publishers.

For *retailers* who partnered with Magpie the benefits included an easier way to reach consumers than through affiliate links and display advertisements, reduced cart abandonment and increased online sales. Orem emphasized that “Magpie offers retailers sales coverage outside their own site by making it easy for consumers to purchase as soon as they encounter their products. This functionality can help retailers better engage existing customers and acquire new ones. Also, our retail meetings indicated they are excited about the data Magpie could provide versus what they now get from their affiliate: better insights into the consumer’s product discovery journey outside their e-commerce website – right now, that’s a black hole for most retailers. With Magpie, they could capture click, hover, and other interaction data for consumers who complete purchases *and* for those who saw a product but decided not to buy it. They also get data on which posts and images contributed most to sales during a given time period, allowing retailers to better target the growing influencer marketing channels.”

Korać noted that “As well as a shopping cart for publishers, consumers, retailers, and app developers, we are also engineering a shift in behavior. So we must make it a great experience for all parties from day one.”

Publisher Segmentation

By early 2017, the product was nearly complete and a pilot scheduled for the summer. The co-founders debated how to approach publisher acquisition. Korać noted that “publishers are key to consumer acquisition, since their readers will discover Magpie natively on the sites they already visit.”

The team’s experience thus far had uncovered differing motivations and priorities among publishers. They decided to work on developing a deeper understanding of publishers, with a specific focus on fashion bloggers. They hoped this would help them categorize these potential customers into distinct personas that they could target with tailored sales and marketing activities.

As a first step, they built a list of 100 fashion bloggers, including a sufficiently diverse set to avoid significant bias. Bloggers included in the list varied on many attributes, including gender, ethnicity, location, age, size of readership, price point, brand focus, and current monetization strategy.

Next, a standardized email script was created (see **Exhibit 4**) to reach out to 48 bloggers, 7 of whom agreed to be interviewed. In-depth discussions were held with those 7 bloggers, with one team member taking notes while another ran the interview. In each case, a list of standardized questions was used to act as a guiding framework (see **Exhibit 5**).

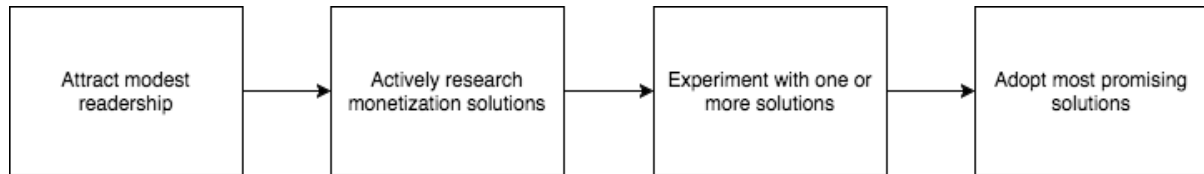
Notes from the discussions (see **Exhibit 6**) were then evaluated to uncover key similarities and differences between the interviewed bloggers. The team used the resulting analysis to outline a fashion blogger’s buying journey and define four personas as potential Magpie customers.

Buying Journey & Publisher Personas

In the team’s analysis, there were two main trends that characterized bloggers’ decision to incorporate a given monetization solution and that two different buying journeys – one inbound and the other outbound – were common among these bloggers.

The “outbound” journey was typical of bloggers who proactively searched for ways to monetize their content as soon as doing so became a feasible possibility. Once customers in this group set up their publishing platform and achieved a sufficiently large readership, they proactively researched options that went beyond display advertising. They regularly read materials in publisher forums, vendor websites, and industry overviews. These bloggers typically had a higher degree of technical knowledge and willingness to experiment. The team sketched the outbound buying journey as follows:

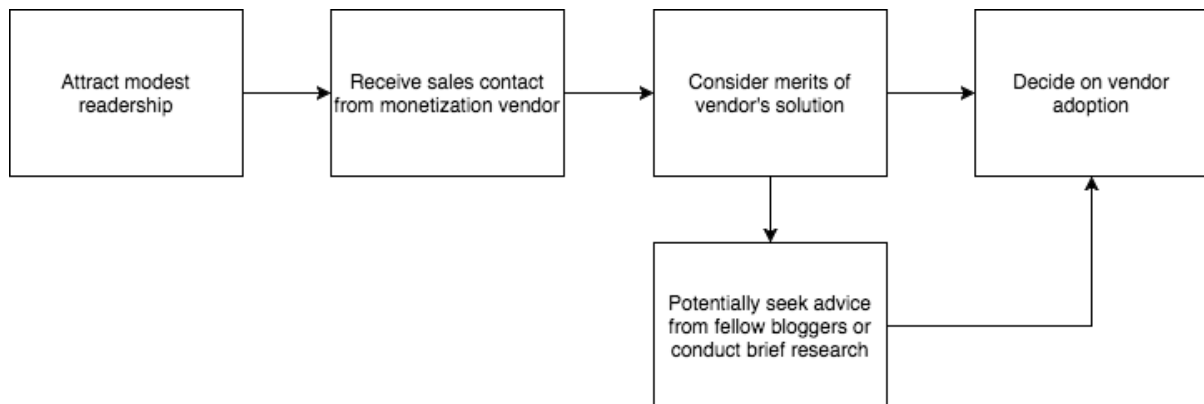
Figure 1



Source: Company documents.

The “inbound” journey included bloggers who were more reactive about monetization. This group commonly started fashion blogging as a hobby and did not consider profiting from their content. Once they reached a broad readership, these bloggers generally caught the attention of affiliate networks, such as rewardStyle, and became the targets of sales activities. It was only at this point that these publishers generally became aware of their monetization options and began considering different opportunities. In some cases, these bloggers sought advice from fellow publishers, or did some sporadic research on their own. The team outlined the inbound journey as follows:

Figure 2



Source: Company documents.

These buying journeys served as a basis for the development of four customer personas. These personas were delineated based on attributes including their place in the blogging lifecycle, motivation, top asks, most salient value proposition, current monetization strategy, buying journey, and how each blogger viewed him/herself. The team described the customer personas (see **Exhibit 7**) as follows:

1. **Hobbyist Harry, early stage hobby blogger:** A publisher in the early stages of blogging with only a modest readership. Blogging is a part-time endeavor, motivated by a love of fashion, styling, and writing. They value integrity and authenticity more than building a business. They

do not yet monetize their content or have limited experience with monetization, and a low degree of technical know-how.

2. **Web Wendy, tech-savvy entrepreneur:** These bloggers view themselves as entrepreneurs running an SMB in the fashion industry. They are in the early or middle stages of the blogging lifecycle and could be working on a blog either full- or part-time. Their key motivation is earning money while enjoying the process of fashion, styling, and writing. Broadly, these bloggers are more technical and willing to experiment than other fashion bloggers.
3. **Full-time Faye, hobby blogger making income:** These are mid-to-late stage bloggers, some of whom have made the transition to full-time blogging. They have often achieved their goal of turning their passion into a sustainable job, and currently monetize their content with one or more affiliate networks. They value low-effort means of monetizing content and want to increase their readership. Moreover, these bloggers acknowledge that they are not as technically savvy as the second persona and spend less time than they should in actively researching novel monetization opportunities.
4. **Big-League Beth, successful large scale blogger:** This persona includes publishers who have acquired a large following, blog full-time, and have experienced enough success to necessitate hiring a staff to manage operations. These bloggers generally use multiple monetization solutions, from the creation of sponsored content to the incorporation of affiliate links and display advertisements. In general, they are wary of deviating from the monetization strategies with which they have found success. Technical know-how is less of an issue for these bloggers, who generally employ at least one tech-savvy employee.

Assessing the personas they had generated, the team considered a few issues about their process. On the one hand, sticking to a predetermined list of questions would have made it easier to compare insights across publishers. On the other hand, the team worried that a list of the *wrong* questions might generate personas centered on issues that were not salient with publishers. Ultimately, the team had adopted a hybrid approach: a standardized list of questions was used to guide the conversation, but the interviewer deviated from those questions if the blogger seemed eager to talk about other issues. After each interview, the team circulated notes so that any new insights were discussed on future calls.

The team also learned that their initial ideas about publisher categorization may have been too simplistic. The founders had expected certain metrics (e.g., number of social media followers, preferred affiliate network, price) to play a large role in determining how a publisher made this kind of buying decision. The interviews suggested that other factors (e.g., how bloggers view themselves, their comfort with technology, and their goals) were more relevant. This informed the distinction between the Web Wendy and Full-Time Faye personas, which differed mainly in their self-concept. Orem commented: “Wendy views herself as a techy entrepreneur hungry for growth, Faye still sees herself as a hobbyist, albeit one that has morphed into a full-time role. Messages that involved new and exciting technical solutions might therefore resonate strongly with Wendy, while language about making it easier to monetize engaging content might be more successful with Faye.”

Finally, the process had motivated a renewed appreciation for direct customer interaction. Korać noted that “We got insights from research reports and analyzing publisher sites, but conversations with real users revealed information that would have gone unnoticed otherwise. We also realize that any buyer personas are starting points for marketing, not definitive answers. Are there tests or other things we should do to validate these personas before launch?”

Next Steps

With buyer personas for the publisher segment, Magpie needed a marketing plan to target them. The team was especially concerned about how to prioritize the different publisher types they had identified, which to target first, and how. “You only get one chance to make a first impression,” said Orem, “We want good early adoption and positive word-of-mouth among these bloggers about us in the initial roll-out of our technology and business model during the summer.” Which persona would be the best to target? After a full launch later in the year, which personas would they target next, and in which order? What would be the business implications down the road for such a decision?

Some argued for Web Wendy as the initial primary target. “Wendy is technically sophisticated, understands the value that our data can bring to her business, and she participates actively in the blogging community,” said one team member. “Wendy researches best practices, and can become an effective evangelist for Magpie’s solution.” However, others argued that Magpie should simply target the largest bloggers, irrespective of the characteristics implied by the ascribed persona. “We want to raise a seed round this summer, so we need proof of volume activation and engagement. These bloggers vary significantly in terms of number of readers,” argued a team member. “Each large blogger with Magpie represents that many more readers with immediate access to our product and more potential sales for retailers and brands on our platform.” Another said that Magpie should also prioritize large fashion magazines at launch. These publishers would have an even larger reader base.

The team also had to clarify messaging and the vehicles for that message. Should communications emphasize the positives that Magpie could bring to a publisher, or highlight problems with the status quo? Should the core message be about a better monetization strategy or something else? How should they think about linking each target persona with relevant marketing vehicles, given their limited time and even more limited budget? The team considered the following marketing vehicles, among others:

Content marketing. “Publishers are bloggers: they write and read daily, and our only cost would be the time we spend producing the various forms of content,” argued one team member. “This approach also keeps us in control of the message, and we can target specific stages of a given persona’s buying journey: for example, target publishers still in the awareness stage with vendor-neutral research on topics like blog monetization best practices, or target those at the consideration stage with webcasts or white papers comparing the merits of specific monetization solutions.”

But another noted that “The clock is ticking on our personal finances and ability to develop this venture. We must balance the time required to produce content with other priorities. Creating a credible white paper, for instance, could entail surveying hundreds of publishers. And where should we publish any content: try to build our own online presence, or try to place guest posts in sites like *Independent Fashion Bloggers* online magazine?”

Online ads and search engine marketing. The team considered Google AdWords and Facebook, but was unsure how to think about setting up ad campaigns. Some worried that an investment in ads at this stage would yield too few clicks to be worth it; others wondered whether ads would bring too much traffic to Magpie’s website before the product was ready for a wide audience.

Channel partnerships. Another option was to try and develop a partnership with organizations like Digital Brand Architects (DBA), an agency representing some of the top bloggers in the fashion space. With a partner like DBA, Magpie could reach multiple prominent influencers who trusted their agency’s recommendations. But did Magpie currently have the credibility and brand to pursue a high-profile partner? And while this approach might secure meetings with large, established publishers, some argued for targeting early-stage personas at this point in Magpie’s development.

Organic marketing. Another option was to rely purely on word-of-mouth referrals from early beta-test bloggers which, in turn, might help to build a larger group of launch customers. “That approach certainly fits our budget,” noted one team member. “And smart SEO tactics might put our website near the top of targeted search results related to blogger monetization.”

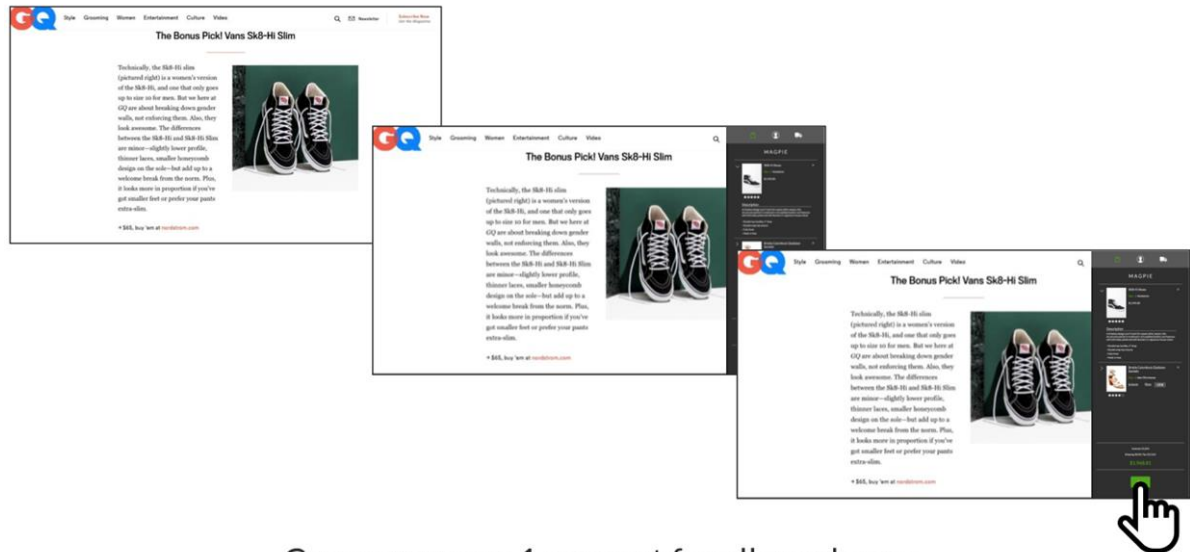
Finally, in constructing personas for the crucial fashion blogger component of their business, the team had focused primarily on readership levels, self-concept, and technical sophistication as key variables to differentiate these customers. Were they missing other, perhaps more important criteria relevant to understanding buying and relevant marketing to this segment? Would a set of fresh eyes on the interview notes determine another, better way to segment and approach the blogger landscape?

Exhibit 1 Magpie's Solution

Magpie's Solution

Native single-click buy

Browse publisher content → View in same-page cart → Click buy



Consumers use 1 account for all purchases

 **MAGPIE** | Redesigning E-commerce.

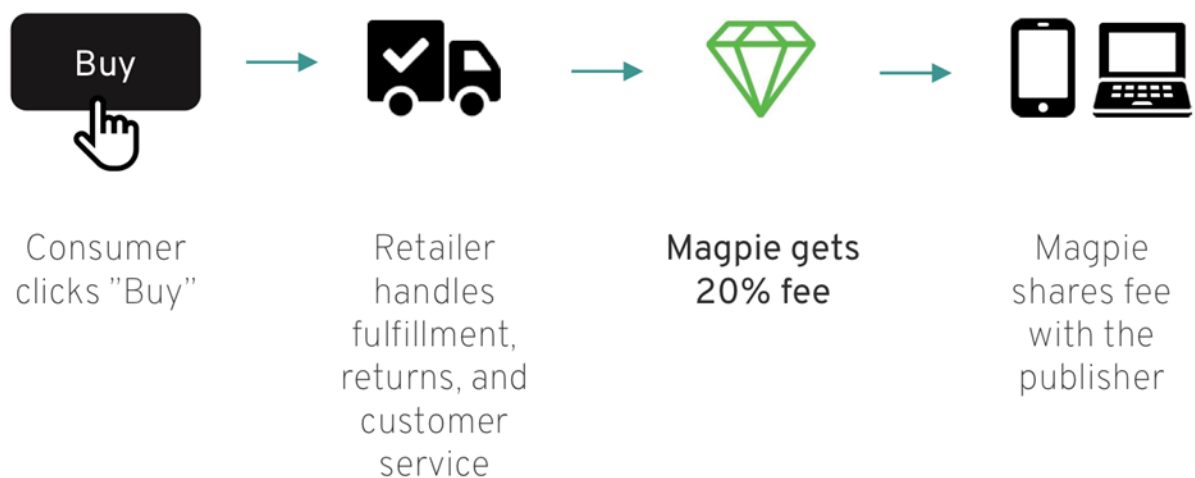
Strictly Confidential

Source: Company documents.

Exhibit 2 Business Model

Business Model

We take 20% of every transaction, and share it with the publisher



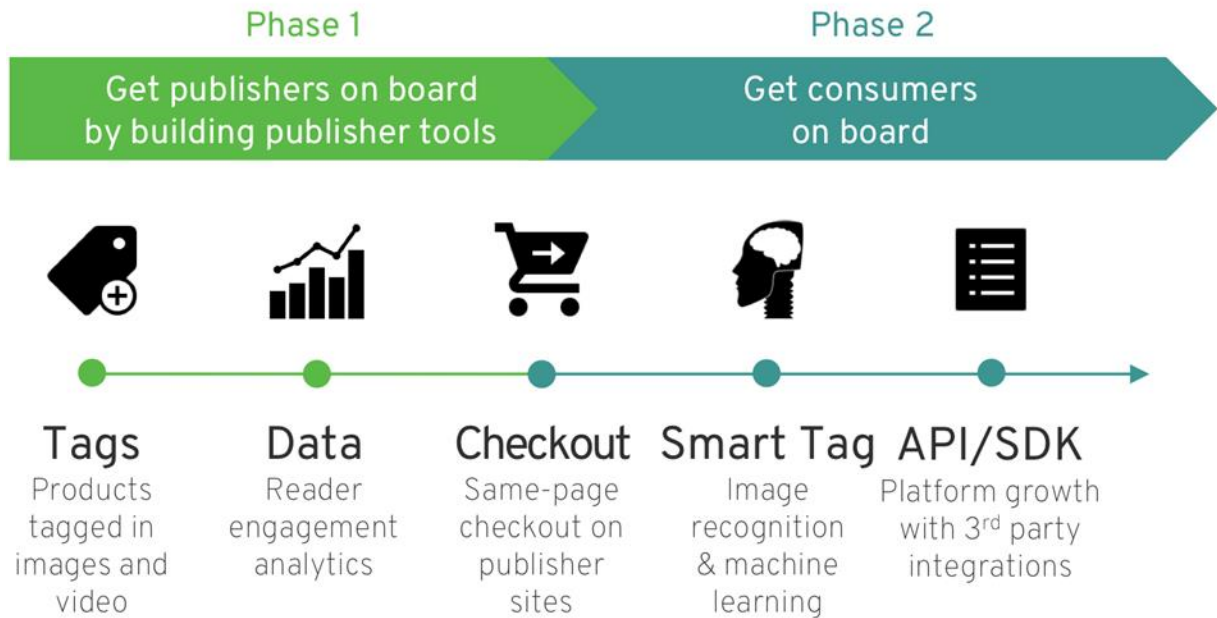
 **MAGPIE** | Redesigning E-commerce.

Strictly Confidential

Source: Company documents.

Exhibit 3 Go-to-Market Strategy

Go-to-Market Strategy



 **MAGPIE** | Redesigning E-commerce.

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Source: Company documents.

Exhibit 4 Initial Cold Email Script

Hi **[Blogger Name]**,

My name is **[Student Name]**, and I'm currently an MBA student. We're working on a project with a student start-up called Magpie. We have been researching the fashion blogging industry to understand the massive influence it has on e-commerce buying behavior. Specifically, we are interested in learning more about how bloggers interact with affiliate networks like rewardStyle and ShopStyle.

We were particularly impressed by **[Blog Website Name]**. **[Insert laudatory comments based on blog specifics]** We think we can learn a lot from you and would love to get 20-30 minutes on the phone over the next two weeks.

You must be busy, so we greatly appreciate your time and insight. We look forward to hearing from you!

Best,

[Student Name]

Source: Company documents.

Exhibit 5 Interview Questions and Guidelines

Introductory Blurp

Magpie is a new way for you to make money from your content, that

1. Makes it easy and fun for consumers to buy directly from your posts. This means that you will earn more and readers will spend more time on your site.
2. Saves you time, so you can focus on creating great content for your readers.
3. Offers valuable data to help you better understand your readers and improve purchase rates.

Interview Questions

- How did you initially get started with blogging?
- Could you please walk us through the steps you take when you write a new post?
 - How long does this entire process typically take?
 - Do you design your own website?
 - It must be so difficult to create all this content and be tech savvy, how did you learn?
 - Do you take your own photos?
 - Do you have a team that helps manage anything?
- What is your favorite part about blogging? What is your least favorite part
- Aside from personal style, what factors lead you to pick a certain product?
 - (If using affiliate links) If a product is carried by more than one retailer, how do you select the retailer to link to?
- What are the different ways you make money off your content?
 - Which is your favorite / least favorite? Why?
 - What makes up the bulk of your income? What is the relative importance of affiliate link revenue?
 - Do certain types of monetization require a lot of effort?
- Do you have any experience working with affiliate networks (like *RewardStyle* or *Commission Junction*)? If so...
 - What has that experience been like?
 - Do you use multiple affiliate networks?
 - How did you select your current affiliate network(s)? Who was involved in the decision?
 - How / when do you consider switching your affiliate network or monetization decisions? How do you evaluate performance?
- Do you interact directly with brands or retailers? If so, what do those interactions look like?
- What type of data do you have access to regarding your readers and how your site influences their purchases?
 - Is there data that you would like to have, but currently do not?
 - If you work with an affiliate network, what type of data do they offer? How helpful is it?

Source: Company documents.

Exhibit 6 Discovery Notes**Alexandra – Women's Fashion Blog #1**

- How did you initially get started with blogging?
 - I was in University getting a psychology degree, and became interested in fashion journalism. As I pursued a career in fashion journalism, the blog became a way to hold myself accountable to my field. The blog was always a hobby; my career path was fashion journalism to communications manager, last job before full time
 - As the fashion world began evolving, my blog changed as well.
 - My blog began growing, and two years ago I decided to move to blogging full-time.
- Could you please walk us through the steps you take when you write a new post?
 - I begin the process by finding Inspirations for shooting photos.. I then work with a few partners (all bloggers who support one another) to stake out locations and shoot photos. Then the editing process begins. If it's a great outfit, for instance, then tighten the written content. Once I format the blog and finish editing, I look for and add affiliate links for the products in the post. Adding social promotion is the last step.
- How did you learn the tech?
 - I never had much experience in tech, and my site isn't too technical even today. My partner (note: personal partner, it seems) is an SEO specialist and helps me out.
- Favorite part of blogging
 - I just love having an idea and seeing it come to fruition. Promoting her post involves things she isn't fond of - like SEO and more technical aspects - but they are important, as they drive heavy amounts of traffic.
 - I find it rewarding to provide real value to readers.
- Pain point
 - Blogging is very time consuming. I was shocked how long it takes to get a blog post or instagram post out. Interacting with fans also takes a lot of time, but is essential. The more you cover different channels, the more time consuming it is. You're glued to your phone or laptop. Glued to technology.
- Monetization strategy?
 - Bulk of revenue comes from sponsored posts across different channels.
 - Affiliate links are my least favorite way to earn. I don't come from a marketing or sales background, and would rather just tell a story with my posts. I don't want to give readers the impression that I'm pushing products on them. At the same time, I don't have a problem with getting credit for the product referrals I do make.
- Process of adding affiliate links?
 - Pain point: Some brands that I want to write about aren't in the affiliate networks I use.
 - I find RewardStyle quite cumbersome and technically glitchy. Very tough to use, but it works.
 - It takes too much time to find an entire outfit on one platform, sometimes have to diversify across platforms.
 - For affiliate links, I use shopstyle and rewardstyle primarily.

Exhibit 6 (continued)

- How to evaluate affiliate network choice
 - I'm starting to learn more about the differences.
 - Rewardstyle has higher commission rate on same products than shopstyle.
 - Shopstyle offers great data insights. Lets you compare data with other users,
 - RewardStyle offers data too, but mostly limited to clicks and total commission.
- Discovery process of monetization strategy
 - Blogging 4-5 years as pure hobby
 - By the time I started integrating partnership strategies, I was already quite far along, started with local shoots.
 - Then learned about sponsored posts organically
- Interaction with bloggers and readers, community
 - In-person friends, how much you're charging, how to talk to PR companies – insights and knowledge to make better decisions
 - Blogging 101 – connect with bloggers around the world. It's a highly generous, active community.
- Interact with readers
 - Know readers and their names now
 - Different relationships on different platforms
 - Make an effort to always leave a comment on Instagram when she can
 - Used to spend more time on snapchat – gave communication
 - Formal surveys and questions

Exhibit 6 (continued)**Jerry – Men's Fashion Blog #2**

- Started blogging during gap year in college, was really into fashion and didn't like the other blogs.
- Read up a lot on how to make your blog big and make it large and commercial → leverage social media.
- Been working with influencer agencies since coming to NYC. Tries to think strategically about how to grow his blog.
- Google everything he could find about fashion blogs.
- Went to places like Pinterest, found huge communities of bloggers committed to helping other bloggers
 - Found out about rewardstyle, put in a request
 - Currently using shopstyle, likes the organization of it, not necessarily the monetization. He likes the carousel widget with additional pictures of products to engage readers, notes that it is not hosted on his site but rather on shopstyle's server.
 - Shopstyle, but not rewardstyle, lets him know when a link has stocked out.
- Also make money with sponsored posts. Work with brand to come up with a story.
 - Time permitting, will do a mood board
 - If not sponsored content, then will let imagination run a bit more wild. Process is more organic and he enjoys that (but makes less money just from affiliate links).
 - Do a little bit of SEO to see what the best words to use are. Tests periodically. He finds it best to frame a topic using SEO and then to write the content. For instance, "5 hats you need right now" type posts are on the rise.
 - Adding affiliate links and promoting on social media are the final steps.
 - Each posts takes 5-6 hours, trying to take more time and do long form posts
 - Shoots take 1-2 hrs then + editing
 - Trying to take more time proofreading
 - **Affiliate links? "At that point, I just want to get it over with, I'm tired."**
- Shopstyle
 - Pretty easy to find the items
 - They just updated their website a few months ago so now it's easier
 - Bloggers say a big problem is that your clicks earn less and less as time goes on, the pricing isn't transparent and how their algorithm calculates how much you earn is opaque.
 - Has a lot of features in the data, struggling a bit to make optimal use of it. Still investigating.
 - Just added H&M, which is huge since H&M didn't work with any affiliate networks before.
- Will pick products for the "gift" articles based on commission, but usually just goes with whatever he likes. Doesn't want to do this too much and appear to be a "shill" for retailers. He would prefer just to post outfits that he genuinely likes.
- Also do sponsored posts, also contribute to Mens Health blog / website / network and other websites.

Want to use affiliate links more, but trying to get readership and engagement back up recently.

Exhibit 6 (continued)**Olivia – Women's Fashion Blogger #3**

- Opportunity to turn her passion into a full-time business when demand rose.
- * Demand is very high (from readers) → blog is doubling in size every months.
- Biggest frustration: looks so easy to external people. It's actually very technically complex and time consuming to grow readership this fast.
- Coming from tech / husband was at LinkedIn.
- * Feels like running a fashion tech company
 - Manages people
 - Sales (to brands to work with them, to readers to buy)
- IG and blog are main ways to monetize
 - < 20% to liketoknow.it, an instagram monetization service offered by rewardstyle.
 - Sponsored posts are large chunk of her revenue
 - Brands reach out to fashion bloggers
 - Coca-Cola, etc. (non-fashion brands) also reach out
 - Usually through ad agencies (scale of influence dictates how closely they work with brands)
- "RewardStyle was the first to market with tools specifically for fashion"
 - "Founder understood the fashion market"
 - "Made it simple to post"
 - "Technology could be better" but "good enough"
 - * Mobile = Failure
 - App crashes, hard to find products on your phone
 - Desktop plug-in is good, so why can't they make it mobile?
- Thought about switching to LinkShare, but it was too slow (old company that doesn't understand modern tech)
 - LinkShare was not designed for fashion blogs
- Uses RewardStyle dashboard and blog analytics (google analytics) to understand what consumers are drawn towards and buying

Exhibit 6 (continued)**Jess – Women's Fashion Blog #4**

How did you initially get started with blogging?

- Contributing to larger fashion website 4 years ago, wanted to start something of her own
- Started posting 2-3x / week
- Within a few months, developed local relationships, then expanded to national brands

Could you please walk us through the steps you take when you write a new post?

- Brands will reach out when they have campaigns, let her know of products, she opts in
- Lay out the calendar, shooting the post/outfit with nice camera
- Still has a FT job, does this mostly on weekends
- Adobe for editing
- Draft up post, submit draft for approval
- Promoting it is harder

What are the different ways you make money off your content? **In priority**

- Brand partnership - they come with budget, negotiate based on readership, agree on number, sign on contract, helps acquire new partnerships.
- Brands for just instagram posts - not as profitable.
- Affiliate links on blog and liketoknowit on IG. Need to consistently publish to make money. Lots of consumers don't convert.

Experience with Affiliate Networks

- RewardStyle - 1. Tag items for kickback, 2. partner on instagram for liketoknowit.
 - Liketoknowit: Not a great experience for readers who don't have liketoknowit - big *education process* on top of having "personal connection" with the audience
 - Rewardstyle is a much simpler process, but does not have all brands - not partnered with Zara. Straightforward platform.
 - "Set in my retailers", have my "go-to"s
- Stockouts
 - Have to go in and change manually on your end
 - If can automatically swapping out of same item on another seller, would be super helpful

Multiple affiliate networks

- "I find it to be quite annoying to use Mavatar and Rewardstyle." Wants it to be simpler. Fewer manual steps, from searching for products to adding links, to replacing stocked out links.
- Mavatar didn't have all the glitches worked out.
- Rewardstyle is a big name in fashion and one stop shop - that's largely why she selected them.

Helpful data?

- Rewardstyle provides top-line data, not very granular.

Exhibit 6 (continued)**Jane – Women's Fashion Blog #5**

- How did you first begin blogging?
 - I started the blog in 2012 while I was working at Blank Magazine. I really wanted another outlet to talk about what I wore, specifically for people like me who can't buy designer clothes. The blog grew and I felt I'd got to the point where I couldn't do the magazine and my blog at the same time 100%. I didn't want to compromise on either job and I enjoyed the blog so much that I left to become a freelance stylist. It allowed me to not have to worry about making money while giving me the freedom to spend more time on content.
- What role does blogging have in your life? (e.g. full-time job, hobby, part-time)
 - I am primarily a stylist working freelance doing jobs for brands including Blank Magazine, The White Company, Monsoon and many more. I work on the blog part time.
- What is your favorite and least favorite part about blogging?
 - I love the fact that I am able to be on my own schedule but find it frustrating that people really don't understand how many hours it takes to make good content.
- How do you monetize your blog today?
 - I monetize my blog using a mix of sponsored posts, brand collaborations and affiliate links.
- How did you find out about rewardstyle and other affiliate networks?
 - RewardStyle approached me to join them as they work on an invite only basis.
- Why did you choose the ones you use today?
 - I like RewardStyle as it is user friendly and time saving.
- What would you change to rewardstyle / other affiliate networks?
 - Conversion rates are very low. I also don't like that consumers leave my page when they click the links. I would rather keep engaging my readers for as long as possible.
- Would you ever switch to a different affiliate network?
 - I would if the right platform came along but I do believe you can use more than one affiliate network at once.

Source: Company documents.

Exhibit 7 Personas

BUYER PERSONA – HOBBYIST HARRY



"I love spending time on my passion, but wish it were simpler to make money off of my work. It seems very daunting and technical."

Primary Motivators

- Maintaining authenticity and integrity in terms of personal style.
- Sharing their personal style and engaging with readers.
- Growing readership and beginning to monetize content are goals for Hobbyist Harry, but not at the expense of his integrity or enjoyment.

Demographic Characteristics

- Blogger could be male or female
- Typically between ages 21 and 45
- Blogging part-time with a modest readership
- Lacks technical sophistication
- Values integrity and authenticity highly

Key Pain Points

- Blogging is time consuming and can be technically demanding.
- Unsure how to grow readership and monetize content.

BUYER PERSONA – WEB WENDY



"Sometimes it feels more like I'm running a small fashion-technology company than a style blog. I like to test out different solutions and see what works best."

Primary Motivators

- Eager to experiment with new technical solutions that make money and engage readers.
- Authenticity and integrity of style is less important than for Hobbyist Harry.
- Growing readership and monetizing content are primary motivations.

Demographic Characteristics

- Blogger could be male or female
- Typically between ages 21 and 45, skews younger
- Blogging full-time or looking to transition from part-time
- High degree of technical savvy
- Eager to experiment with different solutions

Key Pain Points

- Technical limitations of some products (such as RewardStyle's mobile offering) fall short of expectations.
- Lacks deep data insights to understand reader preferences and what makes some content more successful.

Exhibit 7 (continued)

BUYER PERSONA – FULL TIME FAYE

"I love that my passion has become my job, but I don't want to spend so much time on the tech and business parts of my site."

Primary Motivators

- Seeking a low-effort means of monetizing content and increasing readership.
- Fatima began blogging because it was her passion, and would rather spend time on the style rather than technical aspects of her site.

Demographic Characteristics

- Blogger could be male or female, skews female
- Typically between ages 30 and 45
- Larger following than Hobbyist Harry
- Less technically savvy than Web Wendy
- Does not spend much time researching solutions

Key Pain Points

- Some monetization solutions are too technically complex or time consuming. Fatima prefers a more hands-off approach to monetization.
- Does not understand the pros and cons of various monetization solutions.
- Does not have – or necessarily know how best to utilize – data on reader engagement.

BUYER PERSONA – BIG LEAGUE BETH

"I love that I get to focus on style and fashion, while my team handles the technical aspects and sponsorships."

Primary Motivators

- Want to protect existing readership and monetization solutions. Wary of integrating new solutions that might jeopardize either.
- Would like to make content more engaging for readers as a way to grow readership.
- Increase efficiency of monetization solutions.

Demographic Characteristics

- Blogger could be male or female, skews female
- Typically between ages 30 and 45
- Full-time blogger with a staff
- Wary of integrating new solutions that jeopardize existing readership and monetization
- Access controlled by an agent

Key Pain Points

- Does not like that readers leave her site when they click affiliate links. Would rather keep them engaged for longer.
- Needs better data on reader engagement and affiliate conversions, so that her team can analyze it and she can create better content.

Source: Company documents.