

# **Signs of the Times Product Review**

by

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A report presented to the  
Product Strategic Planning Committee  
Pacific Press Publishing Association

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## INTRODUCTION

On April 12, 1990, the Product Strategic Planning Committee at Pacific Press met for the first time. The committee determined at that meeting that its first two tasks would be to review the production of the missionary magazine Signs of the Times and English-language trade books. Pacific Press's director of developmental research, who also serves as secretary of the committee, was designated the person responsible for collecting data needed by the committee to continue its evaluation.

This report will deal specifically with Signs of the Times. Specifically, the committee asked that the following information be obtained:

- 1) Work flow schematic for a typical issue of Signs from inception of ideas to fulfillment.
- 2) Hours budgeted versus actual time spent on an average issue of Signs.
- 3) Financial information for Signs; budgeted and average per issue--cost breakdown in dollars and percentage of whole.
- 4) Reliable subscription numbers for Signs back to merger with These Times. Need quantities of subscriptions as well as translated into actual dollar figures. Need figures on number of sponsors.

This information is provided in tables, charts, and narrative description on the following pages.

ANALYSIS OF DATA

The editorial staff of Signs of the Times provided the work flow schematic included in Table A. This information is based on the January, 1990 Signs, but the time intervals between steps in the work flow are generalizable across the board.

<u>Table A:</u>	<u>ROUTING STEP</u>	<u>TIME INTERVAL</u>
	1. Copy to Copy Editor	JUL 30
	2. Disk corrected	AUG 04
	3. Ad orders to art	AUG 05
	4. Proofreading--2nd	AUG 07
	5. Galleys to Designer	AUG 10
	6. Art Conf & Art Assignd	AUG 11
	7. Layout to Editor	SEP 06
	8. Layout & Copy to EP	SEP 09
	9. Soft Page Makeup	SEP 17
	10. Soft pages, proofed	SEP 23
	11. Soft pages corrected	SEP 29
	12. Pasteup to proofroom	OCT 02
	13. Pasteup to art	OCT 10
	14. Pasteup to litho +ads	OCT 15
	15. B/L to PR, Ed, Art	OCT 22
	16. Plates to press	OCT 27
	17. To auto trimmer	NOV 03
	18. To operations--mailing Labels due	NOV 07
	20. Final mailing date	DEC 01

Budget

Table B lists the departments involved in Signs promotion, how many hours they are budgeted for work on each issue, and the number of average hours they spent over twelve issues. It also tells what percentage of the whole their budgeted hours and average hours make up. It then compares budgeted hours and average hours to give an above or below budget percentage.

The effect on cost can somewhat be determined by comparing the third and fourth columns. For example, electronic publishing is shown to be 59% over budget, but their budgeted hours only

Table B:

<u>DEPARTMENT HOURS</u>	<u>1990 BUDGET</u>	<u>AVG HOURS SPENT OVER 12 ISSUES</u>	<u>BUDGET/AVG % OF WHOLE</u>	<u>ABOVE/BELOW BUDGET %</u>
Periodical Development	360.0	348.4	53%/48%	- 3%
Copy & Proofreading	32.0	29.1	5%/ 4%	- 9%
Art & Layout	185.0	208.8	27%/29%	+13%
Photo Studio	35.0	26.2	5%/3.5%	-25%
Electronic Publishing	15.0	23.8	2%/ 3%	+59%
Scanner	8.0	11.2	1%/1.5%	+40%
Camera	3.0	2.1	.4%/.2%	-30%
Stripping	35.0	39.6	5%/ 5%	+13%
Platemaking	1.5	1.1	.2%/.1%	-27%
Harris 200	17.0	15.7	2%/ 2%	- 8%
Harris 3-Knife	24.0	22.0	3.5%/ 3%	- 8%

comprise 2% of the total Signs hourly budget. On the other hand, art and layout is 13% over budget, while making up 27% of the total hourly budget for the issue. Savings in labor should be looked at in the same light.

**Table C** focuses on the dollars spent on materials and buyouts. The first column shows the budgeted dollar amount, the second the amount actually spent over a twelve-month period. The third column shows in percentages how the first two columns relate to the whole. The fourth column shows in percentages how much that item is above or below budget.

The two sections of this table show that materials are 2.5% below budget for the year, yet buyouts are 41% above budget. The buyout section further shows that art and photo expenses are 23% above budget. In addition, unbudgeted color separations added \$1,214.00 to the annual bill.

**Table C:**

**MATERIALS--DOLLARS**

	<u>BUDGETED</u>	<u>SPENT</u>	<u>% OF WHOLE</u>	<u>ABOVE/BELOW BUDGET</u> <u>%</u>
Art	\$ 150.00	\$ 119.00	.5%/.4%	-21%
Litho	\$ 600.00	\$ 1,096.00	2%/ 4%	+83%
Scanner	\$ 250.00	\$ 45.00	.8%/.2%	-82%
Press	\$ 1,600.00	\$ 1,688.00	5%/ 6%	+05%
Paper	\$27,500.00	\$26,408.00	91%/90%	-04%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$30,100.00</b>	<b>\$29,356.00</b>		<b>-02.5%</b>

**BUYOUTS--DOLLARS**

Editorial	\$1,900.00	\$2,043.00	38%/29%	+08%
Art & Photo Color Separations	\$3,000.00	\$3,699.00	60%/52%	+23%
Shipping	\$ 125.00	\$ 128.00	2%/ 2%	+02.4%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$5,025.00</b>	<b>\$7,084.00</b>		<b>+41%</b>

## Subscriptions

Table D shows how the number of Signs subscriptions, sponsors, subscription sales and net subscription sales compare by month from September, 1984 to April, 1990. The first thing you will note is that there are major gaps in the data provided. Much of the information sought was simply not available because it had not been saved. The sponsors list has only three entries, the last entry based on a computer run requested by the director of developmental research. Apparently those who had access to sponsorship information in the past saw no need to keep record of that information.

By taking the subscription rates figures for six consecutive Decembers shown in Table D, the downward progression of subscription rates becomes more obvious, as shown in Figure 1. Sponsors follow the same pattern, as shown in Figure 2.

Table D:  
SIGNS SUBSCRIPTIONS

<u>MONTH</u>	<u>SUBSCRIPTIONS</u>	<u>SPONSORS</u>	<u>SALES</u>	<u>NET SALES</u>
09/84	282,866			\$ 327,048
10/84	255,284			\$ 346,874
11/84	338,120			\$ 113,984
12/84	341,034			
01/85	353,481			
02/85	352,220			
03/85	350,808			
04/85	348,209			
05/85	344,435			
06/85	335,990		\$ 267,422	\$ 263,221
07/85	341,587		\$ 270,316	\$ 267,364
08/85	323,890		\$ 347,583	\$ 342,987
09/85	300,954		\$ 73,048	\$ 71,227
10/85	296,453		\$ 218,309	\$ 215,552
11/85	305,818		\$ 156,797	\$ 153,575
12/85	306,193		\$ 130,750	\$ 127,691
01/86	314,838			
02/86	338,114			
03/86	326,575		\$ 227,987	\$ 220,677
04/86	320,594		\$ 121,374	\$ 120,911

Signs Subscriptions--Continued

<u>MONTH</u>	<u>SUBSCRIBERS</u>	<u>SPONSORS</u>	<u>SALES</u>	<u>NET SALES</u>
05/86	314,175		\$ 267,206	\$ 264,548
06/86	328,414		\$ 208,748	\$ 204,609
07/86	325,153		\$ 180,137	\$ 177,503
08/86	347,181		\$ 223,897	\$ 221,675
09/86	313,852		\$ 172,317	\$ 168,275
10/86	305,939		\$ 271,582	\$ 267,838
11/86	311,808		\$ 150,300	\$ 138,678
12/86	300,007			
01/87	316,991		\$ 156,310	\$ 152,874
02/87	316,184		\$ 163,190	\$ 159,856
03/87	317,572		\$ 207,005	\$ 202,469
04/87	315,044		\$ 225,827	\$ 224,810
05/87	315,392		\$ 198,616	\$ 196,468
06/87	312,111		\$ 202,351	\$ 197,217
07/87	311,533		\$ 199,615	\$ 195,383
08/87	308,646		\$ 178,064	\$ 174,620
09/87	326,720		\$ 171,761	\$ 163,935
10/87	306,856		\$ 182,440	\$ 181,065
11/87	305,265		\$ 190,881	\$ 187,581
12/87	307,423		\$ 334,108	\$ 330,112
01/88	299,062		\$ 183,702	\$ 182,095
02/88	294,768		\$ 184,382	\$ 182,470
03/88	293,914		\$ 193,499	\$ 190,057
04/88	293,126		\$ 165,528	\$ 163,782
05/88	289,782		\$ 182,301	\$ 180,373
06/88	287,452		\$ 121,986	\$ 115,939
07/88	283,400		\$ 178,107	\$ 174,077
08/88	294,742		\$ 166,026	\$ 159,767
09/88	295,881		\$ 160,008	\$ 154,470
10/88	290,366	28,690	\$ 170,950	\$ 168,529
11/88	280,786		\$ 242,224	\$ 239,637
12/88	281,020		\$ 216,134	\$ 212,556
01/89	282,798		\$ 191,426	\$ 187,735
02/89	285,227		\$ 185,052	\$ 182,891
03/89	285,633		\$ 194,454	\$ 190,507
04/89	290,424		\$ 190,719	\$ 188,536
05/89	290,361		\$ 184,481	\$ 181,440
06/89	292,385		\$ 183,222	\$ 177,884
07/89	294,724		\$ 183,794	\$ 179,781
08/89	279,835	27,432	\$ 187,182	\$ 184,249
09/89	271,116		\$ 176,091	\$ 171,764
10/89	262,989		\$ 166,126	\$ 164,580
11/89	255,151		\$ 238,356	\$ 236,485
12/89	251,174		\$ 172,597	\$ 169,693
01/90			\$ 178,905	\$ 177,202
02/90			\$ 161,881	\$ 160,088
03/90				
04/90		24,435		

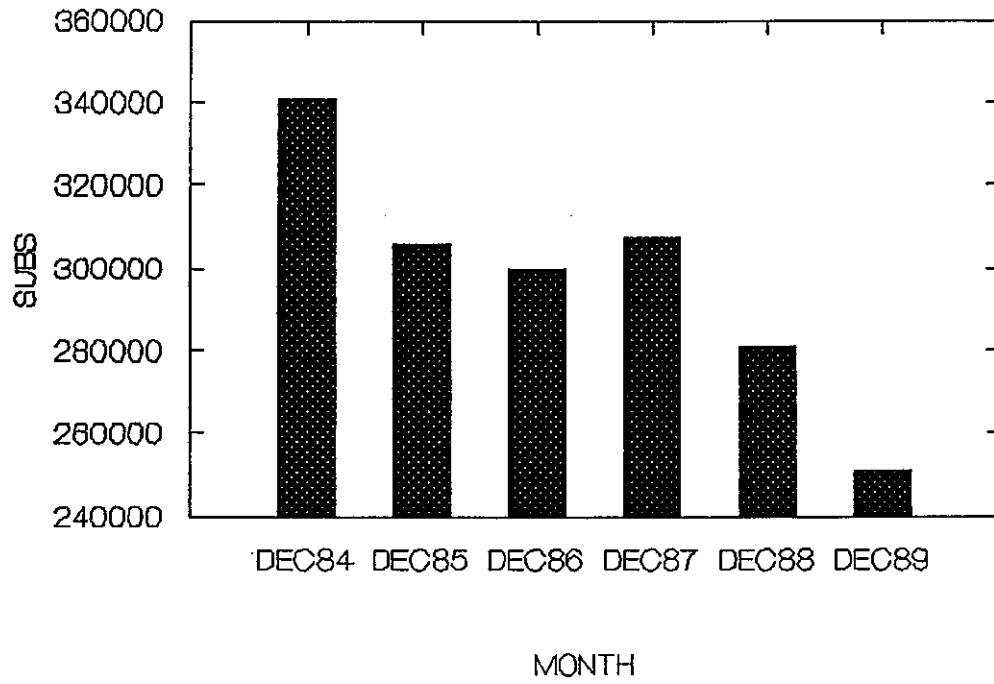


Figure 1. Subscription rates: December 1984 to December 1989.

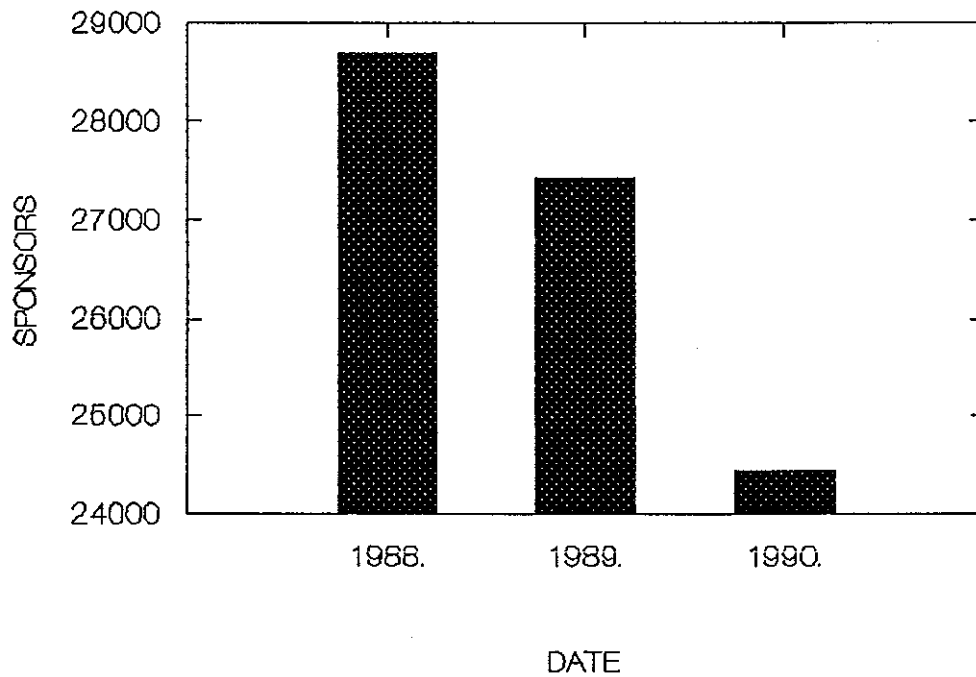


Figure 2. Sponsorship of subscriptions: 1988 to 1990.



## Sponsors

Signs sponsorship is examined more closely in Table E. The first three columns from the left indicate the three periods of examination: October, 1988, August 1989 and April, 1990. The fourth column shows the percentage of loss or gain between dates in the first and third columns.

Rows below indicate the number of active sponsors, inactive sponsors, active non-sponsored recipients (direct subscribers) and inactive non-sponsored recipients. Below that, sponsors are listed based on the number of subscriptions they pay for: one subscription, two or three subscriptions, four to six subscriptions, and seven or more subscriptions.

The column to the right indicates that the number of active sponsors has dropped by fifteen percent in the past eighteen months, and the number of direct subscribers has dropped thirty-three percent. At the same time, inactive sponsor figures have risen twenty-seven percent and inactive non-sponsored recipient (direct subscribers) figures have grown by twenty-three percent. There is a large gap between active and inactive direct subscribers, and it is quickly growing larger. Figure 3 shows graphically how that gap between active and inactive direct subscribers is growing.

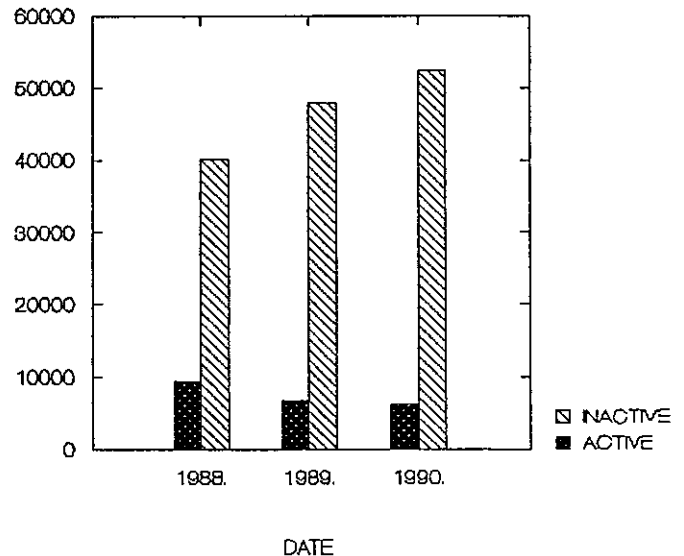


Figure 3. Active and inactive direct subscribers.

Table E:  
SIGNS SPONSORSHIP

	<u>Oct., 1988</u>	<u>Aug., 1989</u>	<u>Apr., 1990</u>	<u>Loss/Gain Over 18 Months</u>
Active Sponsors	28,690	27,432	24,435	-15%
Inactive Sponsors	29,026	35,109	39,876	+27%
Active Non-sponsored Recipients	9,481	6,839	6,395	-33%
Inactive Non-sponsored Recipients	40,156	47,824	52,454	+23%
Sponsors with One Subscription	6,066 (21%)	6,007 (22%)	4,868 (20%)	-20%
Sponsors with Two-Three Subs	6,788 (24%)	6,240 (23%)	5,785 (24%)	-15%
Sponsors with Four-Six Subs	6,311 (22%)	6,395 (23%)	5,592 (23%)	-12%
Sponsors with Seven or More Subscriptions	9,525 (33%)	8,790 (32%)	8,190 (34%)	-14%

Conclusions and Recommendations

All the figures reviewed here indicate that Signs of the Times circulation is dropping. From December, 1984 to December, 1989, subscriptions dropped 24%. Sponsorships have gone down 15% in 18 months. The number of active direct subscribers has gone down 33% during that same period.

Lack of statistical records made the development of this report difficult, and would seem to make long range tracking just as difficult. This study recommends that a permanent tracking system be created to

monitor Signs total subscriptions, active and inactive direct subscribers, and active and inactive sponsors on a regional and a monthly basis.

The system used for marketing Signs, and its relationship to editorial policy, should be reexamined. The present sponsorship system is designed with the sponsor as the primary customer, and thus the person most likely to affect editorial content. If Signs decides to continue in this approach, the primary focus of future research should be on the attitudes and expectations of past, present and future sponsors. If Signs determines to focus on the reader as the primary customer, then efforts should be directed at encouraging direct subscriptions and resubscriptions. Research should seek to determine if the editorial content is meeting the expectations of its target audience.

Future research is needed. But its direction depends on the objectives that Signs sets for itself.