

Telegraph-Mirror Zine Questionnaire answers

late 1994

[Someone from the Tele-Mirror was writing a feature on zines, the grunge hotness of 1994, and sent a questionnaire to a bunch of zine editors. These are my answers for Party Fears and Lemon. The eventual article was pretty decent.]

Answers for **PARTY FEARS**

The theme or interests of your fanzine:

Independent music; specifically the Perth scene in some depth (including news), but covering anything else I may personally be interested in — books, film, analysis of popular culture, any goddamn thing. I'm a card-carrying Generation X-er (twenty-eight, damn-near unemployable, one hell of a record collection), so it cuts a pretty wide swath.

I've recently moved to Melbourne, so the Perth angle will obviously decline. I'm also considering changing the name.

The type of reader it caters for:

Anything from the hip alternative teenager to the aging vinyl junkie. Anyone interested in popular culture beyond what bobs up and down in front of their noses — and remember that 'alternative' is just a marketing term denoting 'mainstream number two' and zines should go beyond that, unless they're *Spunk*.

Subscription rates and retail price:

#19 is expected to be \$3.00–\$4.00.

Approximate circulation:

Variable. Print run of #19 will be 500 and I plan to sell 'em all in about three to six months, which is pretty fast for a zine.

The extent of the circulation (national/local):

Used to go across Australia and nationally, but indie record distributors and indie record shops can be goddamned criminals sometimes, particularly when you're four thousand kilometres away. #18 was Perth

only. #19 will go to Perth, Adelaide, Brisbane, Melbourne and Sydney. I have subscribers and a mailing list around the world (mainly Aust/US/Europe; none in the UK).

Advertising rates:

\$200 FPM cash up front, which is exorbitant, but take it or leave it. Alternately, I run ads free for my friends.

Selling ads is probably *the* shittiest task in zining, personally speaking; I also despise (and ridicule in print) advertisers who try it on with the faintest hint of advertorial or corruption. (None have ever offered enough money.) Fuck these people.

Do you release supplementary material with your fanzine (e.g. record, tape, CD, booklet, computer disk)?

Never.

Is supplementary material every issue, or is it sporadic or a one-off?

N/A.

How is distribution handled?

I do it myself or through trusted personal friends in each state. I've been ripped off by too many interstate distributors and shops to do it direct to them by post (with maybe a couple of rare honest exceptions) — this thing does cost money, you know.

What is the cost of producing your fanzine, and how is it paid for (advertising/sales/etc)?

God only knows. Sales and advertising keep it from being a total financial black hole, but mostly I just throw money at it. #19 is eating a packet already and it's not even out yet.

How is your fanzine produced?

I put it onto a Macintosh (pirated word processor, pirated DTP program — sue me!) and do my laser-printing wherever I can (my work, other people's work, universities) depending on circumstances. I get the printing itself done offset — looks one thousand times better than photocopying. I give 'em camera-ready artwork and get back collated and stapled magazines — *I never* want to do either of those two jobs by hand again in my life.

I used to do it by typewriter, reducing the type on a photocopier, sticking it all down, etc., etc., but it was such a pain in the arse that I'm never doing it again without a Macintosh. (Windows is *not* good enough. PostScript all the way — TrueType is a typical Microsoft product and sucks butt.)

Is your magazine expanding or does it have a static readership?

It's actually been pretty steady in numbers, but I think the actual readers themselves fall away and are replaced. I keep bumping into ex-scenesters who are surprised I'm still doing it — they seem to have their back copies filed away with their 7" records and the other memorabilia of their youth, and are somewhat upset that life has continued without them. Heh.

Do you collaborate with other fanzines, either in Australia or overseas?

I write for other zines myself and did a lot of work for *Lemon* #16½. I used to do a lot of evangelising of Perth music for zines around the world, but that's dropped away in the last few years.

How many issues have you put out and how frequently do you publish?

Twenty, including two one-page 'half'-issues. Next one is #19. #18 came out in April 1992 and #18½ in April 1993. #18¾, a collaboration with *Lemon*, was meant to come out in October 1993 (and I even finished my side), but Louise from *Lemon* never got her side together. #19 is due any week now. #20 should be four to six months after that.

Did you break even or make a profit from your first issue, and if not when did you?

'Break even'? ¿Qué? Never heard of it. See above re: financial black hole. *Real* zines send their editors bankrupt. Huh.

How many people work on, or are contributors to, your fanzine, and are any of them paid employees?

One full-on regular writer, several occasional contributors who will chuck in something. All receive no money, as compared to me losing money.

Answers for Zines in general

(warning: all answers from one viewpoint only)

The theme or interests of your fanzine:

Most of the zines I encounter are music zines of one sort or another, though there are lots of science fiction, role-playing games, horror and film zines out there.

The type of reader it caters for:

The essential point of a zine, I think, is that it expresses a personal viewpoint without reference to what an advertising department might consider marketable to its clients (or reference to any other damn thing, for that matter).

That is: a zine's customers are its *readers*, not its *advertisers*.

Better yet: a zine's customer is its *editor*, or it's got no *soul* — that special quality money just can't summon up.

Subscription rates and retail price:

Many zines don't offer subscriptions because they just can't predict their schedule or don't want a schedule. Retail price is typically \$2.00 to \$4.00 for twenty to forty pages; if it costs more than that, it'd better be pretty fat or pretty special or have a record on the front.

Approximate circulation:

From under a hundred (starting out), a few hundred (most that manage to go nationally) to a couple of thousand (*Lemon* did 2,500 of #16 and they sold as expected).

The extent of the circulation (national/local):

Many only go to their city; most people with a decent zine try to send it nationally (to independent record and book shops), though this can vary (and some shops are goddamned crooks — never send a zine to Phantom, for example). Some try to go through record or book distributors, though I wouldn't recommend it — I was almost a victim of Manic Ex-Poseur (books) and Shock (records) and in both cases only got my money by threatening to denounce them as criminals to all and sundry. (How I got Phantom to cough up too.)

The most reliable way to get your dollars nationally is to use trusted friends, though that depends on the quality of your friends.

People generally seem reluctant to send away for zines by mail sight-unseen — there's too much dreadful shit out there.

When I went on holiday recently to Melbourne and Sydney, I spent about two hundred dollars on fanzines and magazines I couldn't get in Perth. Get the picture?

Advertising rates:

From 'free for my friends' (an increasingly feasible one as cover prices go up) through \$20–60 FPM (typical) to \$100 or more. The tendency is to assume your advertisers can tell what sort of readers you're going to have and then to lie about your circulation.

Do you release supplementary material with your fanzine (e.g. record, tape, CD, booklet, computer disk)?

Used to be pretty rare, but a tape, record or CD is becoming more common. (*Harvey* zine are surprised at how many shops are suggesting they put a record or CD on the front, just like *Lemon* do.)

Is supplementary material every issue, or is it sporadic or a one-off?

Some are every issue (*Lemon*), some are sporadic (*Eddie*, *Woozy*).

How is distribution handled?

See 'extent of circulation'.

What is the cost of producing your fanzine, and how is it paid for (advertising/sales/etc)?

Printing is cheaper than photocopying above about 200 copies; this can cost a couple of hundred dollars or more. Then you put 'em in the shops. Then maybe the shop pays you within six to twelve months. (See above.) Advertising is difficult to sell unless you actually have some skill in this field or your zine is obviously the hot thing at that time.

How is your fanzine produced?

Most people use a computer (either for DTP or just as a typewriter-substitute), though an increasing trend is to use handwriting (*Woozy*, *Salty & Delicious*) — *Woozy* is significant for showing how a zine can use handwriting to look *good* and put personality across as opposed to looking inadequate. A manual typewriter is fine.

Really, the most important thing is something individual to say. I can see a newspaper article on 'zines' leading to an explosion of completely crap fanzines from people who desperately crave attention but haven't a clue. Expect the phrase 'the Pearl Jam of zines' to achieve currency. (From independent-cum-'grunge' music: Nirvana as genuine clued-up talent, Pearl Jam as clueless corporate whores who don't even know they're whores. Hence Courtney Love's outburst: "*You fucker, Kurt! You're dead and Eddie Vedder's gonna live to be 98!*") Then we can look forward to shops starting to restrict their zine intake due to the flood of sheer garbage. Oh well.

Most zines have no infrastructure or capital works to speak of; the only concrete evidence of their existence is a small amount of paperwork and what comes straight out of the editor's personal work ethic. That's why it's much easier to shoot your mouth off than to actually do the shitwork.

Is your magazine expanding or does it have a static readership?

Most zines tend to go slowly and steadily up in circulation as they progress, *i.e.* as long as the zine remains the editor's prime obsession in life. You can coast on a reputation for a while (I've coasted on mine for over two years), but only a while (I certainly shouldn't have been able to).

What tends to happen is that editors get a life and the zine goes on hold for six months or a year or two years. Or something goes out of fashion. Or there's a distribution blowout and suddenly you can't feasibly reach a whole bunch of readers (as happened to *Lemon* with its European distributor, though MDS helped cover).

Do you collaborate with other fanzines, either in Australia or overseas?

Most zine editors end up writing for other zines, typically providing local coverage. Full-on 'collaborative' zines (split issues) are pretty rare in Australia — I've heard of many that were planned, but I can't remember any that have actually come out.

How many issues have you put out and how frequently do you publish?

Zines sometimes last into the double figures; reaching issue #10 is usually the mark of a zine 'lifer'. (There are exceptions.) Frequency of issue is rarely more often than quarterly, and every six to twelve months is fine if you can keep it steady and are good enough to be worth bothering with.

Did you break even or make a profit from your first issue, and if not when did you?

Zines are financial black holes and you have to be the world's greatest tightarse to keep it anything like in check. Many (like me) just say 'fuck it' and throw their money to the four winds. Some have set up a structure for the zine as a proper small business and hence a tax loss — how to get the ATO to pay for your hobby.

In Australia, the zine market is insufficiently large for a money-making enterprise to be worth the hassle involved. A typical goal is to *not quite* break even. Although even this usually flies out the window.

How many people work on, or are contributors to, your fanzine, and are any of them paid employees?

Most zines are almost completely written by the editor — one million people will promise the world, and three down to none will actually lift a finger. However, zines that stick to it tend to attract contributors (people who like the idea of a soapbox).

In receiving nothing, contributors get paid more than the editor, who not only loses money but has the pain in the arse of the publishing functions to deal with.

(I would *love* to stop zining and just be a contributor to someone else's zine ... if I could find a zine with staying power.)

Personally speaking, I think that if you have 'employees', you're getting out of the 'zine' sphere and into the commercial zone. 'Paid employees' work for commercial magazines, typically driven by the advertising department. But I know that in the US, for instance, the market is big enough and commercialism so incredibly deeply ingrained in the culture that a thoroughly idiosyncratic publication can (a) make a buck and (b) not feel relatively 'commercialist'. But not here it bloody can't.

Answers for LEMON

(all answers unofficial, as known by me and not guaranteed)

The theme or interests of your fanzine:

(no official answer available) — if you have the *Australian Music Industry Directory* to hand, it'd be a good source to quote from.

The type of reader it caters for:

No official answer available, but I'd say it hits the full-on indie record nuts — it comes with an eminently collectable 7" and costs the same as a 7" does now.

Subscription rates and retail price:

No subscriptions available. #16 (including 7") is \$7 cover, \$9 post. #16½ is free, or Aus\$1 or 2x45¢ stamp by post.

Approximate circulation:

2500 (#16). #16½ did six or seven hundred — photocopied 'free'.

The extent of the circulation (national/local):

National (independent record and book stores around Australia) and international (US through Tower Records). Used to go to Europe via Exile (Germany), but there was a distribution blow-out (the guy didn't pay for issue #15 and disappeared owing *Lemon* quite a chunk of money; though a German friend finally nailed him with a registered letter and he paid up). Some international distribution via MDS (Mushroom Distribution Services).

Advertising rates:

\$150 FPM, I think — but not sure. Suggest you check the AMID.

Do you release supplementary material with your fanzine (e.g. record, tape, CD, booklet, computer disk)?

Most issues include a 7" hard vinyl record. #17 is projected to go CD.

Is supplementary material every issue, or is it sporadic or a one-off?

Every issue (except this most recent free issue).

How is distribution handled?

Louise herself sends/takes it to most indie shops in Australia; Shock do non-independent record shops plus export, MDS does export, a large parcel goes to Tower Records (US) and a *lot* go out by mail (US and Europe).

What is the cost of producing your fanzine, and how is it paid for (advertising/sales/etc)?

It costs about six to eight thousand dollars in actual manufacture (printing a 52-page magazine with colour cover, cutting and pressing 2500 records) plus God knows what in production and is paid for by cover price (mostly), some advertising and by Louise being an unbelievable tight-arse and not touching the zine's working capital no matter what, which is pretty amazing considering she's not employed. It still loses money (price to shops and distributors is \$4 to \$5), but not much.

#16½ was laser-printed and photocopied 'free' (stolen) by a friend of Louise's at work. One ad on the back paid for postage costs.

How is your fanzine produced?

The writing and layout is done on the *Lemon* Macintosh Classic 4/80 (that and the CD player being the 'capital works' the zine owns); the music for the record is selected by Louise from the many tracks record labels try to talk her into including and those she herself asks bands for, then the record is cut and pressed by All Music Manufacturing in Sydney (last vinyl press in Australia). The magazine is printed on 80gsm white bond with a glossy full-colour cover.

The zine has no 'offices' or similar and its only 'equipment' is the computer.

Is your magazine expanding or does it have a static readership?

Getting bigger and better all the time.

Do you collaborate with other fanzines, either in Australia or overseas?

Louise writes for zines all over the place, typically Australian news for overseas fanzines.

How many issues have you put out and how frequently do you publish?

Seventeen issues so far (#16½ being a 36pp A5); every six to twelve months.

Did you break even or make a profit from your first issue, and if not when did you?

Zines don't do this in Australia. *Lemon* sells 2500 copies at \$7 an issue and still doesn't.

Incidentally, financial arrangements for the recording: *Lemon* doesn't pay the bands/labels, they don't pay *Lemon* and *Lemon* has exclusive rights to the track for six months (but doesn't actually own it as such) and then the band/label get it back. A decent and reasonable mutually-beneficial relationship. For the CD, *Lemon* will be asking bands for a hundred or so dollars to subsidise the pressing and keep the price down.

How many people work on, or are contributors to, your fanzine, and are any of them paid employees?

Several regular contributors. All unpaid — writing for love of music.

[[Party Fears](#)]