



**Nine Lessons from**  
*Black+White*

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## Introduction

It's always good to draw lessons from your experiences, the positive *and* the negative ones. There are plenty of lessons to be learned from *Black+White* magazine – I was involved in it for such a long time and very deeply for much of that period.

Here are the top nine lessons I learned!

### 1. One Person Can Change the World for the Better

**A** single individual *can* change the world, or at least a country, though not single-handedly. You need to inspire others so much through your vision that they jump on board and contribute to the change you've started.

History is festooned with examples of people who have inspired thousands, millions of others – Gandhi springs to mind – but the popular belief is that one person can do little or nothing to change the world, or their own country. How wrong that is!

I had one powerful vision that ran through everything I did for *Black+White* – I wanted to help kill off the Great Australian Cultural Cringe. That was my motivation for *everything* I did. It may not have been blatantly obvious all the time, but it was always there, beating away like a heart, the heart of the whole enterprise.

*I had one powerful vision that ran through everything...*

## 2. People See What They Want, At First

I knew, from studying human communications, as well as my own observations, that people will focus in on what they are most interested in, and may ignore or misinterpret everything else you present to them. That might worry you, especially when you want to get your message across quickly and clearly .

However, if your message is powerful enough, it will sit there, in the background, patiently waiting. Then, after a while, your message will seep in to their consciousness. You just need to be subtle about it, and avoid shouting it out loud. Instead, it should be like a constant whisper, running through it all like an underground river. Then, one day, your readers will hear the whisper. “Ah, so *that’s* what it’s about!”

*Black+White* drew in many readers through its photography, or the design, or the celebrities photographed in the nude, and they fixated on those things until my number one message finally got through. Success!

## 3. Expertise Comes by Association

When I began making late night phone calls to famous photographers all around the world, asking them to be subjects and contributors to the magazine, they saw me as a complete nobody because *I was!*

I had no track record, no examples of other magazines I’d created or articles that I had written, to demonstrate my expertise. But once the brilliant German-Australian fashion photographer Helmut Newton agreed to be my first interviewee, I gained instant credibility because I’d bagged a terrific subject everyone always wanted to know more about.

After that all doors opened easily, and I was seen everywhere as an expert on photography and an accomplished magazine writer. Before too long I become both because I *believed* in myself. And I believed in myself because others did!

#### 4. The *Right Exposure* Builds Careers

**W**ithout *Black+White* I would never have been invited into the top end of the brand image advertising business in London. I worked for some of the most desirable clients ever, and three of the very best agencies. *Black+White* had exposed me to the world as someone with big visions and the heart and soul to bring them into the world.

Some of my colleagues' careers got big boosts too. *Black+White's* editor went on to a multifaceted media career in New York. Many of the young photographers I wrote about used being published in *Black+White* to kick-start their careers, and went on to photograph for the big glossy magazines and the top advertising agencies.

When I moved into advertising, I continued to give young photographers a leg-up in their careers. Once, I asked a young Australian still life photographer to shoot a football shoe for me. I didn't have an ad to use it in or a budget, but she soon became one of the world's top advertising photographers. A brilliant photograph of a mundane shoe – her perfect exposure!

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## 5. Niches *within* Niches are the New Key to Success

**B**lack+White was one of the last semi-generalist magazines. Its subject area was Australian arts and culture, within a global context, placing Australian artists on the same podium as their foreign counterparts, with a special emphasis on photography.

Generalist and semi-generalist magazines have had their day. This is the era of niche publishing. The shelves are far too crowded for broad-range magazines to stand out – every magazine store is now subdivided into a vast range of specialties. Just look at the Photography section and you’ll see how specialized magazines have become – the other day I spotted a one about using Photoshop for digital landscape photography in black and white. Can’t get much more niche than that!

Niches within niches are the way for publishers to succeed now, whether they are publishing in print, online, or both. Your readership can only process so much information, and just so much variety!

## 6. Every Ego Wants Its Way

**M**agazines are the home of over-inflated egos. People who work for them are often would-be artists, novelists or gossip-mongers who know they wouldn’t have succeeded in the field they write about.

Working for magazines means they gain a notoriety they wouldn’t have got any other way – so they can go overboard in exerting their egos and often do. They’ll do it at each other’s expense, bringing down colleague’s careers through rumours and outright lies, and sometimes at the expense of the magazine itself.

Large, well-established publishing companies are less prone to clashing egos than small, new ones. If you are working in a small one, go to work each day wearing a suit of armour while carrying a parachute and a very big stick!

## 7. The Money Men *Will* Get Their Way Even Unto the Death

**T**he money men – most often publishers but also anyone else who is in financial control of magazines - generally have the biggest egos of the lot. After all, it takes plenty of grit, determination and self-belief to get a magazine off the ground. It takes bucket-loads to start up a whole publishing company!

Sometimes though those oversized egos blind the money men to their own limitations – they can end up giving themselves titles and responsibilities beyond their ability to handle. That certainly happened with *Black+White*, and it was the biggest reason the magazine went down the tubes.

I wasn't there at the time, but I most certainly would've advised against it. No magazine is the sole province of one individual – far too many specialist skills are involved.

## 8. Always Own It *Outright*

**I** didn't own *Black+White* magazine. I didn't even own a percentage of it. In retrospect, I should have – it might've made enough money for me to retire on. I might even have saved the magazine, transforming it into something that would've endured to this day.

I had to make plenty of big compromises for the magazine to see the light of day. I gained and I lost by that. But if I hadn't done it then I would never have achieved what I did. At the same time I failed to fulfil all my ambitions for it, and I failed to create more than just one little bitty old magazine.

I will never know what might have been, but if I had been able to keep full ownership, or even a hefty percentage, then my life would've been very different and probably far more rewarding!

## 9. Mediocrity *Kills* in the Global Marketplace

**W**hen the money men were granted titles and responsibilities they weren't capable of carrying, by interfering in too many aspects of a project they never really understood, *Black+White* turned into a mediocre magazine without purpose or direction.

The aims I'd formulated for it when I conceived it were soon forgotten after I left Sydney for London. Others' main aims were to get rich quick and trot around the globe bedding beauties entranced by apparent sophistication and a flashy magazine.

Readers new to the magazine were amazed by the first copy they saw, but that amazement wore thin after seeing the second or third one. *Black+White* first appeared wildly innovative – it certainly was when it began – but many readers lost interest after too much repetition. The mediocrity that set in under one man's total editorial control ensured it was never as big overseas as it was in Australia. Soon enough, *Black+White* died completely, and it is no longer published.

Yet, the legend lives on. I still come across people who insist that they still see new issues on the newsstand, and they cannot accept the fact that the magazine is defunct and has been for some time now. Even if it has gone on to the great magazine graveyard in the sky, *Black+White* lives on in the hearts and minds of those Australians around when it was new, fresh and exciting.