Radar covers news, trends, and celebrity culture with a bracing honesty and irreverence increasingly absent from other magazines. Like our readers, we're fascinated by both Bill Clinton and Bungalow 8, Martha Stewart and Modest Mouse, "Entourage" and Iraq. In a sea of bland magalogs, celebrity weeklies, and cookie-cutter clones, we stand out by taking a stand.—Radar press kit, 2005

It was January 2005, and Maer Roshan had just reopened the offices of Radar magazine on West 23rd Street, a block from Madison Square Park. Mort Zuckerman, the real estate developer who owns the New York Daily News and U.S. News and World Report and Wall Street money manager Jeffrey Epstein had agreed to put $10 million toward the fledgling magazine. To a drumbeat of buzz in print and online, Roshan, the editor whose mischievous genius made Radar what it was, began to shape the magazine's tone and design. "The spirit will be here—honest and irreverent and kind of fun and smart," Roshan told The New York Sun in October 2004, "the kind of magazine we all wanted to work at."

The magazine's new incarnation, christened with a gala at a Midtown hotel last May, was a triumph for Roshan. In Zuckerman and Epstein, he had found backing from two men who, it seemed, could afford the risk of a new magazine in an uncertain, shifting media climate. Epstein pledged $5 million in cash and services, drawing on his U.S. News business and production staff while housing the magazine in office space he owned. The launch was slated for May 2005, and the plan was to publish four times in 2005 and 10 times in 2006 before moving to a monthly schedule when advertising jelled.

"I thought we had a talented editor, though I hadn't worked with him before, and I thought it would be an interesting magazine in a new area for me," Zuckerman said. "I had not been in this social zeitgeist area before. I thought it was great art and could make money."

Despite its financing and its ambitious editorial vision, Radar didn't survive long. On Dec. 14, almost exactly a year after Roshan opened Radar's new offices, Zuckerman and Epstein pulled the plug, citing a lack of "advertising traction." Yes, it was true that Radar hadn't attracted a solid base of advertisers, but the shuttering left Radar staffers and some media observers mystified. Just three issues had been published, and the magazine had secured $1.7 million in ad commitments for 2006, including $390,000 for the February/March issue and $420,000 for the April/May issue. Radar's revenues were on the upswing, and even the most successful magazine startups take three to five years to turn a profit.

The simple math of ad numbers didn't explain why Zuckerman and Epstein gave up so soon. There were certainly market forces working against Radar, but for someone like Zuckerman, who once
owned the money-losing *Atlantic Monthly* and is known to invest in pet projects that give him cachet, the cold logic of business never tells the whole story. When *Radar* folded late last year, much attention was given to its bottom line, but its obituary was never fully written.

“I don’t know with certainty what happened,” Roshan says. “It’s puzzling why after the money and time and passion invested into this project, it seemed like it was closed almost on a whim.”

Roshan, 38, was born in Tehran, moved to Long Island in 1979 and attended NYU before rising through the magazine ranks at *New York* and then at *Talk* under Tina Brown. He conceived *Radar* in 2002. Shortly after *Talk* folded, Roshan was by then a star editor, having earned a reputation for revamping *Talk* during its final six months. He could easily have taken a high-on-the-masthead job somewhere, but he chose a less traveled road instead, throwing all his passion and skill into a new magazine.

The magazine’s first version, in the form of two test issues in 2003, had made a splash. On the cover of the inaugural issue was a menacing photo of a pursed-lipped Jennifer Lopez, who was called out in its pages for her “cynical bid for urban authenticity.” It was a celebrity magazine for people who dislike annoying celebrities—those uppity types who mistreat their underlings. At the same time, it was an enterprising political magazine, publishing an early profile of presidential hopeful Howard Dean and a story about antia war activists who became human shields in Iraq.

After the first version ran out of money in the summer of 2003, Roshan spent nearly a year courting investors. The first inklings of a second incarnation of *Radar* came early in 2004, around the time when Zuckerman and Epstein, along with a cadre of wealthy friends, tried to buy *New York* and make Roshan its editor. Bruce Wasserstein won the magazine with his $55 million bid, but Zuckerman and Epstein remained interested in Roshan. When he suggested that they help him resurrect *Radar*, they agreed. “This is essentially about talent,” Zuckerman told *The Wall Street Journal*. “More than anything, I’m backing Maer Roshan.”

When the magazine’s new offices opened last January, Roshan thought he would have two or three years of unflinching support from Zuckerman and Epstein. While there was no formal agreement to keep the magazine afloat for that long, the investors appeared committed and excited. Zuckerman even said in a *New York Times* article last April that he would give *Radar* “whatever it needs” to get to profitability. According to its business plan, *Radar* would need a $20 million investment to get there. “There is no formula for these things,” Zuckerman said in the article. “The good news for them about my business history is that the average real estate project takes seven years” to start making money.

Zuckerman later told Roshan he was misquoted by the *Times*, which had earlier reported that Zuckerman and Epstein were “committed to spending up to $25 million” on the magazine, according to “two executives involved in the negotiations.” The misstated figure propagated in the media throughout *Radar’s* brief run.

Epstein and Zuckerman originally wanted to buy *New York* and install Roshan as its editor.

*Radar’s* new website launched in early May 2005, and the first issue hit the stands on May 24. On the cover, beneath the big red *Radar* logo, was a doctored picture of George W. Bush clasping a medal around Paris Hilton’s neck. Inside was the typical *Radar* mash-up, including an article on anti-gay politicians with gay children and a piece on behind-the-scenes sex, drugs and booze among Disney’s character impersonators—the people who don Mickey Mouse or Pluto costumes and roam the park. “Several told me that marijuana, cocaine, and other psychopharmaceuticals are common at character gatherings,” Tyler Gray wrote, “and that sneaking out to smoke pot between sets is de rigueur among a few.” Some design kinks were left to be worked out, but for the most part, *Radar* was what it set out to be: funny, serious and interesting. It was a good read, and it sold 71,000 copies on newsstands, about half of its initial rate base of 150,000.

“I think everybody was really excited about the editorial promise of the magazine,” said Remy Stern, who worked closely with Roshan on the business side. “Everybody was pumped up early on.”

*Radar’s* editorial team functioned harmoniously, but weaknesses on the business side and in the art department dogged the magazine from the beginning. The art director, Lisa Steinmeyer, hired by Roshan in January, wasn’t working fast enough to prepare for the launch in May, and there were complaints that Linda Sepp, the publisher, wasn’t selling enough ads. Steinmeyer eventually left and was replaced briefly by Richard Christiansen and then permanently by Mark Michaelson and Nicholas Rhodes, who did an excellent job, according to several former staffers.

Sepp, meanwhile, was a friend of Zuckerman’s who had been publisher of *Fast Company* when Zuckerman owned the magazine, which netted him more than $350 million when he sold it in 2000. Nevertheless, she was forced out by *U.S. News* and *Daily News* higher-ups in April, after a long-running argument with Elinore Carmody, the magazine’s advertising director, over low ad sales.

Carmody “had a terrible relationship with the people in the ad department and with Linda Sepp, who I’ve worked with for 15 years,” Zuckerman said. “She was a person who was not delivering.”

Bill Holiber, the president of *U.S. News*, briefly took Sepp’s place before Grayle Howlett, formerly associate publisher of *Sports Illustrated*, came on board in May.

The magazine also suffered from a difference in philosophy between *Radar’s* editorial staff and the *U.S. News* people in charge of business and marketing. Zuckerman had saved a lot of money by shoveling *Radar*’s work on his own staff, but it soon became clear to many *Radar* staffers that the people at *U.S. News* didn’t understand the magazine. They came up with a media kit—later scrapped—illustrated with antique line drawings, an aesthetic that didn’t fit with *Radar*’s splashy, modern feel. Advertisers weren’t buying it, and Roshan soon found himself doing double duty, editing the magazine and also going out on ad calls to explain what the magazine was.

“My agreement with Mort and Jeffrey specified that I was strictly an editorial employee, with no authority over *Radar’s* business side” Roshan said. “But after Linda left, the magazine was basically left to
run on autopilot. They provided little day-to-day management or financial oversight. By the end I was spending over 60 percent of my time on advertising and marketing and everything else."

Three issues of Radar hit the stands in 2005—in May, August and October—and despite the internal problems, it appeared to be doing well. By the second issue, newsstand sales continued to be healthy and even Gawker, the Manhattan media-gossip blog that had savaged the magazine while giving it a ton of buzz, was starting to dig it. "We finagled a copy late last week," says an Aug. 15 post, "and we have something astonishing to tell you: We kind of like it."

As October approached, however, there were signs behind the scenes that the magazine was in trouble. Bill Holiber, appointed by Zuckerman to oversee the magazine, told staffers to stop sending him e-mail about Radar. In November, Roshan said he got a call from Zuckerman saying that Epstein was pulling his investment and Roshan would have to raise more money to keep the magazine afloat. Zuckerman didn’t give a deadline, but Roshan figured he’d need at least a few months to secure new backing. At this point, he was working almost nonstop to save the magazine, sleeping a few hours a night, if at all. He defiantly concealed all the turmoil. Only Remy Stern and Julie Bloom, Roshan’s editorial assistant, knew what was going on.

Roshan offered to cut the budget by $1 million to appease Zuckerman, a deal the owner accepted. Later, they agreed to cut an additional $2 million, to go into effect the following January. Those cuts came too late, though, according to Zuckerman. "We said costs were too high for revenues," he said. "If he had made cuts earlier, he may have been able to save it for a couple more issues."

Although Zuckerman appeared to be impressed with ad projections in two meetings with Roshan and the advertising staff in November, he began to get antsy as December drew closer, telling Roshan he had three months to find new money. By the beginning of December, the deadline was reduced to a matter of weeks, and then, after another meeting at the end of the first week of the month, Zuckerman said he was closing the magazine.

"He was worried about ads being soft, so [the advertising staff] went to his office to show him how much things had improved. They showed him the new ads we had signed up and the revenue we were bringing in, and he seemed thrilled," Roshan said. "That night Bill Holiber called to say that Mort was so impressed that maybe we could prevent Radar from closing. But then at 8 a.m. the next morning their security people were on their way to shut the magazine down. I called Mort and traded in my salary to buy us an extra week."

On Dec. 14, however, Radar closed for good. "I was devastated," Roshan said.

Most of the staff didn’t know the magazine was shutting down until its last day. That afternoon, Roshan called everybody into his office and broke the news. Two days later, Zuckerman came to the office—it was the first time he had visited, as good an indication as any of the extent of his attachment to the magazine—to answer questions and justify his decision. A lack of ad traction, he told the staff from the head of the conference room table, was the reason he could no longer support Radar—it had brought in an average of $143,000 per issue, far short of $500,000 per-issue projections. He also said he had told Roshan of the magazine’s uncertain future months before. "English is the language I know best," Zuckerman said. "I made it clear to Maer that costs were at the upper end of projections and that circulation and ad revenues were going down." It’s an account Roshan vehemently disputes. "The idea that I would wait for four months after being told the magazine was going to go under without raising hell, which I did when I was informed, is ludicrous," he says.

Circulation was "a big problem" for Zuckerman. He put self-through—the percentage of magazines that sell on newsstands—at 25 percent and declining, well short of the 36-percent target. This directly contradicts Roshan’s assertions—and the healthy circulation numbers cited by Radar in press releases and given to advertisers.

As soon as the magazine closed, theories on the real reasons Zuckerman and Epstein pulled out began to circulate. According to one, they wanted to close it before the end of the year so they could claim it as a tax loss. Some of Zuckerman’s powerful friends, including Mike Ovitz, David Pecker and Ron Burkle complained about articles in the magazine, another theory went, and Zuckerman soon grew tired of having to placate them. Radar’s website had picked up the story that Pecker, whose company publishes the National Enquirer and Star, made a deal with California governor Arnold Schwarzenegger to “lay off” him in the tabloids in exchange for adding the ex-bodybuilder’s name to the mastheads of such Pecker-owned magazines as Flex and Muscle & Fitness. Burkle, meanwhile, reportedly threatened to sue over a story in the magazine about his friendship with Michael Jackson. “They definitely received many complaints,” Roshan said. “But whether they were too many for them to deal with, I don’t know.”

“We got maybe three complaints,” Zuckerman says. “We get three complaints a week at the Daily News. I have no problem saying I leave decisions to the editors.”

Zuckerman admits, though, that he once interceded with Radar, blocking the publication of an item he objected to. “I do want fair and accurate reporting,” he said, “and there was one case where I was able to come to the conclusion through reporting that we did not have all the facts in the case. In that particular case, it wasn’t published.”

But what was even stranger to Roshan was that while he had found investors interested in taking over the magazine, he said Zuckerman wouldn’t return their calls and seemed intent on shutting it down. “It was very strange. They could have made some calls,” he said. “But even when we did find interested investors, they weren’t called back. It didn’t seem like a good-faith attempt.”

While it is possible that Zuckerman grew tired of assaults on his friends and wanted to be done with Radar, it’s also possible that Zuckerman did make a purely economic decision. “I do not think it was anything where if only Zuckerman had committed another $5 or $10 million it would have been successful,” Sam Schulman, a media investment advisor with DeSilva & Phillips, said. “I think that (Continued on page 46)
Radar (Continued from page 23)

Zuckerman decided that there was no amount of money that could protect the investment.” Zuckerman says that’s an accurate portrayal of his position. “We got to the point where we looked at the situation and found that if we put in another $10 million, it wouldn’t make any sense,” he said. “Sure, advertising would have gone up slightly, but we would still lose $6 or $7 million a year, which is not a good way to go forward.”

Most likely, though, the whole range of problems factored into the decision: missed ad-revenue targets, complaints from powerful readers, problems in the business and art departments, taxes and uneasiness with Roshan’s editorial independence, something he had fought for in his contract. Zuckerman and Epstein probably didn’t foresee that Radar might take digs at their friends, and they balked when it did. Zuckerman dropped a hint to that effect when I asked him why he thought the magazine wasn’t selling: the magazine’s biggest problem was the small gossipy items, he said.

“There was an attempt to provide humor or wit, but too much of it came across as sarcastic or mean-spirited. This was a problem with the magazine. The larger pieces were very good, but the smaller items in the front weren’t [working].”

The purely financial theory doesn’t make as much sense. With the business side in constant turmoil, the fact that ads didn’t come quickly to Radar shouldn’t have been surprising to a man as astute as Zuckerman.

But even if the precise reasons behind Radar’s shuttering are never known, its demise speaks to a wider trend in the magazine industry—the near-insurmountable challenges independent startups face. In this age of conglomerates and big bucks, it’s hard to go it alone, especially with a general-interest magazine, and especially when it’s not perfectly managed.

“The reality is that the days of independent publishing—being a Jann Wenner or a Hugh Hefner—are gone,” said Aaron Sigmond, who was Radar’s first publisher in 2003. “Basically, being a competitive independent in this marketplace is impossible, which is why the failure rate is something like 90 percent.”

Since Radar folded, Roshan has been taking it easy, writing and working on various projects. “I’m enjoying the brief hiatus,” he said recently. “When I raise the possibility of bringing back Radar my friends suggest I take a vacation instead.” And indeed, he went to Morocco to cool off after the magazine closed.

But get this: Roshan is back in New York, and word was that he was in talks with, of all people, Ron Burkle, to resurrect Radar, phoenix-like, for a third run. Yes, that’s Zuckerman’s buddy Ron Burkle, the supermarket magnate who reportedly threatened to sue the magazine. And that was even before Burkle threatened to sue Page Six in an extortion scandal this April, which led to his soapboxing on the air.

Radar may have just as much genius and energy as Hef or Wenner, but he hasn’t proved it yet, and the fact that it’s 2006, and not 1956 or 1966, might be the one hurdle that even energy and genius can’t overcome.◆

Price of Truth… (Continued from page 41)

not require each and every book manuscript to be scrutinized in its entirety. Book editors merely may need to develop a more critical eye.

The high-end, $8,000-a-book ideal of The New Yorker or Vanity Fair isn’t the only model of fact-checking available to magazines—or book publishers and authors—who want to put a premium on accuracy without being left penniless. The Nation employs a battery of nine fact-checkers but pays them a stipend of only $150 a week. They’re interns, getting experience in the world of journalism in three or four-month shifts (in addition to fact-checking, they do original research, proofread, serve as messengers and write occasionally). And The Nation is not alone in creatively harnessing the enthusiasm of young people. Among other magazines, the Chicago monthly In These Times hires unpaid interns who each work a couple of days a week. “We have five to six at any one time. They do the fact-checking,” says editor Joel Bleifuss.

Using The Nation as a model, breaking down costs (including the interns’ stipends and the costs of a full-time director to co-ordinate intern employment and training), the cost to fact-check a 120,000-word manuscript would fall to roughly $3,000. Roane Carey, a senior editor at The Nation who previously worked for the book publisher Alfred A. Knopf, says publishing houses could easily adopt this model. Young, dedicated people would be attracted to books for similar reasons that The Nation’s interns dedicate a few months of their lives to journalism. “There are young people who care about books, who want to get into publishing and want to get into the industry,” says Carey. “And the publishing industry really needs to address this problem. There’s a gaping hole in their quality control.”

William Bastone, whose website “The Smoking Gun” broke the damning evidence that discredited “A Million Little Pieces,” believes that fact-checkers—staffers or interns—could spare book publishers another James Frey. “Would a fact-checker have caught this? I assume so,” he says. But, he adds, what book editors need to do is rediscover their “bullshit detector.”

“Th e editor is the choke point. When something doesn’t smell right, they’ve got to put the author against the wall and get him to provide and confirm sources.” Book editors routinely query passages of text that might be defamatory, and publishers pay lawyers for the subsequent libel read. Vigilant editors, deploying intern fact-checkers, would mean fewer lawsuits and, in the end, would save publishers money and their reputations.

Samuel Freedman emphasizes that it’s not enough for book editors to limit their scrutiny to statements that might be libelous. “You could expect editors to be more skeptical, to ask questions, to require more source material. There’s way too much trust extended now,” he says. Worried about a chapter in own his book “Jew vs. Jew,” the Columbia professor took the intern route, paying a former student $400 to check one-tenth of his manuscript.

This combination of spot-checking and increased editorial scrutiny might be a way out for the besieged book publishing industry at a fraction of Entrekin’s estimated cost. Ignoring this option will fail to deter the growing concern over works of nonfiction. After all, Frey wasn’t the first. In 1991, Steve Weinberg, writing in the Columbia Journalism Review about Kitty Kelley’s biography of Nancy Reagan, noted a persistent problem with nonfiction books: It was, “publishing’s dirty little secret—few nonfiction books are checked for accuracy.”

Now it’s an open secret.◆