The American Legion Weekly magazine debuted on July 4, 1919.

In that first edition, President William Howard Taft wrote, “The American Legion is organized to preserve the memories of the late war, to maintain the spirit that prompted sacrifices in
it, and to keep high the ideals for which the members of the Legion fought, bled and died.”

As a weekly journal for an organization of veterans that barely eclipsed 650,000 members in its formative years, the magazine was a source of pride but financial strain until 1926. That was when the National Executive Committee decided to publish it monthly rather than weekly.

Thus, the right balance was struck.

The change in frequency influenced the publication’s philosophy as much as its cash flow. The editorial scope broadened. The American Legion audience grew, and grew ever more valuable to advertisers, who now had just 12 opportunities a year to reach this critical mass of patriotic veterans and their families, the backbone of America. The magazine became a monthly expression of the Legion’s core values – support for veterans, strong national security, patriotism, opportunities for children and youth, remembrance of military sacrifice and the general state of the nation, for which they had fought. Such interests gave the magazine an almost limitless supply of material for decades to come. Top authors, photographers, artists and national figures have populated its pages, contributing conversation after conversation in respect for the Legion’s values.
Rather than a monthly news and information source for members, in 1926 the magazine truly became what its founders said it should be – an “enduring monument” to veterans, their families and communities nationwide.

Nearly a century later, *The American Legion Magazine* continues to be that “enduring monument.” As others in the information industry have struggled for equilibrium in a fast-changing media landscape, *The American Legion Magazine* has held its ground and then some. The May 2012 issue will be the seventh straight month of above-budget advertising page count. This may be a hopeful sign of recovery in the industry, but perhaps something more is at work.

With a stable circulation of nearly 2.4 million households and a readership of more than 3.6 million, *The American Legion Magazine* remains, overwhelmingly, the largest and most-read veterans publication in the United States today, by more than double.

Moreover, *The American Legion Magazine* ranks first among all U.S. titles for readers having read four of the last four issues. In market survey after market survey, Legionnaires report that the reason they so loyally read the magazine and engage its advertisers is that they trust the message inside it, as they would the words of a fellow veteran, a comrade.
Endurance. Loyalty. Trust.

Veterans will tell you that these three qualities are essential to military service, the one common denominator among all Legionnaires. If *The American Legion Magazine* fails to live up to those qualities, the readership, which is the membership, it’s a reflection on the entire organization. That is why the Magazine Division places a high premium on quality performance, shared values and integrity when choosing suppliers, contractors and other outside vendors.

The division’s three primary contractors – Bulkley-Dunton, R.R. Donnelley and the James G. Elliott Co. – represent *The American Legion Magazine* in paper, printing and advertising, respectively. Over the years, these companies have proven their business acumen by controlling The American Legion’s manufacturing costs and out-performing the industry in advertising sales. These companies have also proven their integrity in ways that go beyond the bottom line and timely delivery of product to market. They have come to understand the moral obligation we all share to do our best on behalf of our nation’s veterans.

Through James G. Elliott, for instance, we have come to understand the veteran audience better, in part due to quality market research, and in part because of a story Jim has shared
with us about his father, a World War II Marine and Legionnaire who fought on Iwo Jima. Jim revealed that his father, now in his 80s, would never ask anyone for help understanding how to use a computer. But if The American Legion were to offer information to help him, he would gladly take it, and get started. He would trust The American Legion. With this insight, The American Legion Magazine Division has produced a series of printed booklets – a *Legionnaire’s Guide to Computers and the Web* – which has been a rousing success at our national conventions. Older veterans unfamiliar with computers, and somewhat afraid to ask about them, have gladly scooped up thousands of these booklets because they came from a trusted source, The American Legion.

When our former sales representative from R.R. Donnelley, Eugene Johnson, retired after a long and storied career in the printing industry, he circled the room at The American Legion Magazine Commission meeting, shaking hands with each member, thanking each individually for the opportunity he had to serve them. When he returned to the podium to receive a plaque of gratitude from the commission, his eyes were streaked with tears. Through the years, as other companies have bid for *The American Legion Magazine*’s printing business, that kind of sincerity has mattered. The Legion and Donnelley have now been loyal to one another for more than 25 years.
And last spring, as *The American Legion Magazine* made arrangements for the national commander’s official visit to Normandy to honor the 67th anniversary of the D-Day invasion, we invited our representative from Bulkley-Dunton, Greg Hull, to come along. We spent an unforgettable time in Normandy, walking among the grave markers of heroes, and meeting some of those who made history in 1944. Greg’s appreciation for military sacrifice, and his respect for those who have served in uniform, was on full display as we commemorated this most important event at one of the world’s most hallowed places. As we have worked with Greg over the years, we have appreciated the fact that he shares such values with The American Legion.

The Normandy trip provided a unique opportunity for Greg and me to spend a few days prior visiting the Sappi mill in Kirkniemi, Finland, and the port at Rauma. My goal for this visit was to see for myself the true economic impact of *The American Legion Magazine* at the local level, and to better understand all that goes into it. Having grown up in a pulp and paper town in northern Idaho, as the grandson of a logger, I appreciate the economic importance of a well-run mill.

That is exactly what I found in Kirkniemi.
Our guide through this massive paper-making plant was Henrik Damen, the chemical engineer who fathered Galerie Fine and continues to be involved in the making of our body stock, Galerie Lite.

At the mill, we saw firsthand the pride with which 540 employees produce 740,000 tons a year, enough paper to print 2.6 billion magazines, on the three largest machines of any kind that I have ever seen in my life. The only possible exception are the great hydroelectric dams of the American west.

At Kirkniemi, I watched as timber harvested from nearby forests was fed into a debarking process and conveyed – a river of logs – to be reduced to chips, mulch and then pulp. I saw heated liquid squirted into one end of a colossal machine that spins and dries it into bright, white sheets the width of ship sails on the other end. I watched the calendering process, the cutting, rolling and packaging. I saw how robots and people work together, with extraordinary efficiency, to manufacture the canvas upon which The American Legion Magazine is printed each month.

Since the May 2010 issue, when Bulkley-Dunton and Sappi began doing business on behalf of The American Legion Magazine, we have purchased 4,820 tons of Galerie Lite from the mill at Kirkniemi and 505 tons of 60-pound cover stock from the Sappi mill in Skowhagen, Maine. This does not make us the
biggest buyer of coated free sheet in the Sappi galaxy, but we’re not a small one either, and right now, the good news is we are heading in the right direction. Advertising sales are running 13 percent ahead of budget, which has compelled us to add 12 more pages than projected so far in 2012.

Furthermore, the magazine is getting as much or more attention than ever. In the 11 years I’ve worked at The American Legion Magazine, the paper and printing quality has never been better. The magazine simply looks good, better than its competitors. That pushes ad sales. And those ad sales indirectly help veterans. American Legion programs that help veterans find jobs, start businesses or file VA claims are easier to fund when the magazine is better able to pay its own way.

In Finland, I was delighted to tell The American Legion story to about two-dozen front line managers of the mill. I will never forget the sincere interest these managers showed as I explained the roots of The American Legion, its values, services and advocacy. For trusting, loyal relationships to endure, it matters to The American Legion that everyone from the forklift operator in Finland to the mail bagger in Kentucky have an understanding of the audience we serve and why. (I am reminded of a recent trip to the RR Donnelley plant in Glasgow, Ky., and how every veteran who worked there lined the hallways to greet the The American Legion Magazine
Commission when we came in for a tour. To the commission members, seeing how many veterans had a hand in printing the magazine was as important as watching the press run.)

Those of us who toured the Kirkniemi mill – Bill Pluto, Mark Odgers, Greg Hull and myself – were greatly impressed by the immaculate condition of the plant, the obvious dedication Sappi has for employee safety and the camaraderie the workers show for one another.

The trip also featured a visit to the Euroports stevedoring and shipping complex at Rauma, where our Galerie Lite is packed into a 220-meter-long cargo vessel that takes about two weeks to cross the Atlantic before landing in Baltimore, Maryland, where it is loaded onto trucks and delivered to the Donnelley plant in Kentucky.

At various intervals throughout the Finland visit, we discussed the economic importance of efficiency and timing – from the moment the log is cut from the forest, to the time it waits for pulping outside the mill, to packaging, shipping and delivery. As global demand for coated paper has shrunk in recent years, it stands to reason that profit margins for mills depend on continuous motion and no wasted steps. Having seen the pace and precision behind the paper-making and shipping process in Finland, I have new respect for the importance of timely, accurate paper orders from my office in
Indiana. Much depends on keeping the entire chain, from tree trunk to mailbox, moving smoothly.

I learned that the port in Rauma employs 553 workers, and uses 200 specially designed forklifts that waste no time moving the rolls of Galerie Lite onto the cargo vessel. There, we met Capt. Richard Hartsema and saw some of the 17 crewmen he employs, all of them Filipino, all of them “good seamen,” the captain said. These seamen monitor our Galerie Lite as it crosses the ocean. They stay keenly aware of any condensation – unwanted moisture being the enemy of paper – and make sure that the massive airbags between rolls are firmly in place so the paper is not damaged en route. The captain told us they work every day except Sunday, when they take time out to play darts or video games, watch TV or sing karaoke somewhere out on the ocean, with our month’s order of Galerie Lite safely tucked away in the hold.

Our body stock is packaged into 2-ton rolls, stacked six high and 12 across, in the belly of this massive sea carrier. It takes about 130 rolls of Galerie Lite to print one issue of *The American Legion Magazine*. It is one thing to see that much paper on an invoice at the end of the month, and quite another to watch Finnish forklift operators stack it from floor to ceiling as fast and efficiently as possible, so our shipment can get under way.
The trip to Kirkniemi was eye-opening in many ways but incomplete, knowing that *The American Legion Magazine’s* cover stock – Somerset – is made in rural Maine. To visit the mill in Finland without seeing its counterpart in the United States would be difficult to defend to The American Legion Magazine Commission, which often asks why we do not buy more of our paper from mills in the United States.

The Somerset mill area of south-central Maine reminded me of the paper town where I grew up, where logging trucks navigate narrow two-lane highways, surrounded by beautiful forests, frequently threatened by severe winter weather. We visited the Sappi North American Tech Center and were shown the chemical processes of paper-making. We learned about pigments and binders, dispersants, thickeners and release agents.

By visiting these mills and the port at Rauma, I learned about yet another level of *The American Legion Magazine’s* economic impact in the United States: the white clay pigment used in the coating process of our paper comes from mines in the U.S. state of Georgia. It struck me as fitting that it is common for our ocean-crossing vessel to drop off Galerie Lite in Baltimore and then cruise down to Georgia, fill up with white
clay, return to Finland, and use that in the pigmentation of our next batch of Galerie Lite.

The Somerset mill in Skowhegan, Maine, employs 835 people and contracts with about 200 others, and it is remarkable to me that the facility – despite the condition of the global paper market – has been running at capacity around the clock for nearly eight years, manufacturing about 2,400 tons a day, generating its own energy, earning national awards for environmental stewardship and, interestingly to me, even recycling felt roller pads to be used as driveway and road-base material because water easily soaks through them. Nothing is wasted at the Somerset mill.

As it was in Finland, the Somerset mill was impressive in its attention to detail, especially employee safety, staff dedication, cleanliness and efficiency. These things are difficult to quantify – like endurance, loyalty and trust – but seem to be essential ingredients for success in today’s changing information industry.

The point of this is that not everything – whether it’s magazine publishing or paper-making – can always be boiled down to measurables. Foremost, The American Legion Magazine Commission, leadership and staff are extremely satisfied with the opacity, strength, brightness and weight of the two Sappi papers we purchase. When we switched to
Galerie Lite, we were astonished that such a rich 32.4-pound paper could even be made. As postage prices continue to climb, the ability to ship a lighter book that does not compromise quality is extremely important to *The American Legion Magazine*.

As I said in Finland and again in Maine, I would not have come there if not for our immense satisfaction with the quality of the product. By digging a little deeper and seeing the kind of operations run in Kirkniemi and Skowhegan, I was able to open up the hood and see what these mills are truly made of, and the impact they have on their communities and the lives of their employees. It is something much more than tons per day and dollars per hundredweight.

In 1978, the social scholar F.W. Lancaster famously predicted that a paperless society would be upon us by the end of the 20th century. He warned that “we cannot bury our heads in the sand” and “now is the time for responsible organizations to study the implications of the rapid technological changes that are occurring for the operations of publishers ... if we do not plan now for the years ahead, we may find that transition to be one of disruption and chaos rather than one of ordered evolutionary progress.”
The American Legion launched its website – www.legion.org – in 1996, and chaos ensued. The problem from the very beginning was that no one really knew what to do with it. For over a dozen years, it languished, bouncing from one division to the next, never very well defined, sometimes acting as an information organ, sometimes as a member benefits promoter, never as an enduring monument. It was what Jim Elliott called a collection of tactics in search of a strategy.

In the fall of 2008, I was named to chair a committee to create that long-missing strategy, to give the site meaning and make it a valuable destination for our members. It would, from that point forward, become a media asset under the umbrella of The American Legion Magazine.

It is important to note that in most modern organizations, a magazine is subordinate to a larger communications program that is increasingly focused on the development of electronic channels. In our case, the electronic channels folded in under the enduring monument, the magazine.

From the very first meetings to begin crafting a fresh strategy for The American Legion website, we did so as a complement, not a replacement, for our print magazine. As our work progressed, we came to realize more and more the
fundamental differences between print and electronic media channels, and how to use them to cross-promote one another.

In November of 2009, The American Legion Magazine Division re-launched the national website. It would become the mothership of an electronic media program that now has revolving it around it a system of information satellites – e-newsletters, social media pages, Twitter accounts and mobile apps.

The whole electronic media program would be designed to engage four desired audience groups: non-members eligible for membership, new members at risk for non-renewal, loyal members (five years or more in The American Legion), and non-members, like media, government agencies, participants in youth programs and the public at large.

This strategy worked well enough that in a span of two years, visitation to the Legion's website more than quadrupled, a new revenue stream was opened, online membership applications soared, e-commerce for American Legion merchandise spiked, and member interaction increased dramatically through social media. The ability to solicit and collect donations online was introduced, opening previously unavailable streams of support for programs that help veterans and their families. By the end of 2010, our first full year of an electronic media program driven by a true strategy, we could
easily identify $1.3 million in new revenues. In 2011, that revenue stream doubled.

The American Legion's e-marketing campaign began in February 2008 with an alpha population of 86,000 subscribers (this was before the Magazine Division managed the organization's website). Today, The American Legion Online Update has more than 360,000 weekly subscribers, the flagship of a fleet of e-newsletters that now include The American Legion “Dugout” in support of American Legion Baseball, the American Legion Flag Alert (which explains why the U.S. Flag is flown at half-staff on particular dates, among other flag-related information), and now the Veterans Career Center e-newsletter that provides a massive calendar of job fairs for those who have served in the military, and their families.

Altogether, The American Legion's electronic media presence has gone from a bunch of tactics in search of a strategy, with no capacity to even accept advertising let alone quantify any monetary performance, into a robust new lattice of interconnected platforms designed to do what The American Legion Magazine could not between 1919 and 1926 – be all things to all stakeholders on a basis frequent enough to matter, and pay for itself.

Thus, a new balance has been struck. The electronic media program of The American Legion works separately, but in
harmony, with its printed publications. The magazine is used to drive traffic to specific programs and interests, videos and photo galleries, that give the audience an opportunity for deeper engagement. This audience has grown from an average of about 104,000 monthly visitors to about 600,000 monthly visitors since 2009.

The magazine, which is offered as a benefit of membership, maintains its own, distinct place in the Legion’s communication program. The enduring monument. And its audience today remains more than four times that of the website.

Today, as we are drafting yet another roadmap in communication – into the mobile platform, for smart phones and electronic tablets – we are employing the same philosophy. We began by researching the costs and benefits of developing an electronic tablet version of *The American Legion Magazine* that can be downloaded on, for instance, an iPad. But as we reviewed the many possibilities of the mobile and app market, we concluded that an electronic facsimile of our enduring monument was not the right place to devote our resources.

Instead, we are developing apps to meet the interests of a younger veteran audience. Our market research shows that young veterans are not really interested in reading *The American Legion Magazine*, or even joining The American
Legion. They are looking for jobs. They want help filing their claims with VA. They want to know what the Legion is doing on their behalf. They might join later. Our research showed that we should not expect these younger veterans to join the organization until at least 15 years have passed since they were discharged from the military. Our mission in the mobile and app market, then, was not to add members or magazine subscribers, nor to replace any of our existing media assets. It was to serve veterans in need – a core value and a moral obligation for our organization – with a media product specially designed to do just that.

With that, as we develop apps and mobile products to provide real services and helpful information to veterans, yet another new balance is being struck.

So, without disrupting the conscience of the printed magazine, we have developed, and are developing, an electronic media program to exist alongside the magazine, whose primary qualities remain unchanged more than eight decades since it went monthly. Endurance. Loyalty. Trust.

The paper industry, as I see in the e-mails Greg sends to update us about the market, is in the midst of a great recalibration of its own. A new balance is certainly being struck as mills close and some file bankruptcy, inevitably driving toward a new global supply and demand chart.
As on any battlefield, there will be casualties. If The American Legion offers any kind of illustration of where this is all going, I think it is that the victors will be the companies whose devotion to values and quality runs deep. From what we saw in Finland and Maine, Sappi is certainly one of those companies.

Later in his career, F.W. Lancaster began to lament his prediction of a paperless society. “The fact that I have written about an electronic future does not necessarily mean that I endorse such a future or that I enthusiastically look forward to it. A new technology may improve an existing situation but bring with it its own set of problems. It can be used to benefit society or to impair it. The impact is determined by the qualities of the humans who exploit it.”

We are now a dozen years into the 21st Century, and Lancaster’s prediction did not come true, thankfully for all the little paper-mill towns around the world, like my hometown, that depend on well-paying jobs to sustain them. Only time will tell if the electronic media revolution will someday drive print to extinction.

In the meantime, The American Legion Magazine is proudly defying the futurists, mothering a young family of electronic media channels, raising them right, with much help
from some well-chosen vendors and suppliers who share our values.