The Atlantic's Jeffrey Goldberg Deftly Captains His Team While Breaking Explosive News

Even in a conversation, albeit over Zoom, Jeffrey Goldberg is first and foremost an editor:

"There would be a comma there, by the way. Sorry, I tend to punctuate my sentences, and sometimes I go out loud."

"When you join The Atlantic … and, you know what, let me word this right."

"Tell me when I'm rambling off the rails here."

That attention to detail has served Goldberg well during his four years as The Atlantic's editor in chief, a position he landed after proving himself time and time again as a talented reporter and remarkable writer. Adweek's Editor of the Year has led by example, continuing to write thoughtful, provoking stories that break national news (including his explosive September report that President Trump had called Americans who died in war "losers" and "suckers"), even as he smoothly manages the newsroom during these chaotic times.

And even during a pandemic, when many readers bought into the idea of subscribing for news, no media company has seen success quite like The Atlantic. The website had a record-breaking traffic month in March, when 66 million unique visitors landed on its stories, according to Comscore. And that started paying in droves: Within two months of the

crisis, The Atlantic grew its subscriber base by 70,000. With the demands of daily journalism, it's a "complicated organism," Goldberg says, but he admits, even this year, the newsroom is operating "pretty damn well."

That's due in large part to Goldberg himself, who joined The Atlantic in 2007, following stints at The Washington Post, The New York Times Magazine and The New Yorker. His strong reporting background has helped him navigate a whirlwind four years of the Trump administration, Atlantic Media chairman and owner David Bradley selling a majority stake to Emerson Collective in 2017 and the unprecedented Covid-19 pandemic. Under Goldberg's leadership, the magazine got a new look, Caitlin Flanagan was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize for commentary, subscriptions swelled to 650,000 and traffic to the site increased nine times from what it was four years ago.

Pivoting to pandemic coverage

Before Covid-19 began rapidly spreading throughout the U.S. in mid-March, The Atlantic had already written about the coronavirus, with a February piece by James Hamblin. "My provisional conclusion is that we're just very lucky in that we have a lot of really smart, great journalists on our team. And so we came into this difficult period prepared for this," Goldberg says.

In those early Covid-19 days, Goldberg pivoted the 125-person newsroom to covering the pandemic. His staff quickly began producing noteworthy pieces that provided context and insight into what the country was experiencing, from Ed Yong's "How the Pandemic Will End" to exclusive reporting from Robinson Meyer and Alexis Madrigal on how coronavirus testing was botched.

"We're not here to sell subscriptions," says Goldberg. "We're here—and I apologize for sounding a bit pretentious—but we're here to serve our readership and publish things that are true

and important.”

After all, while its year-old paywall—which Goldberg calls an “experiment”—is “new and exciting and risky,” The Atlantic has had readers pay for its journalism for its entire 163-year history. “If we make the best stories, the readers will come and the readers will like the stories and then decide to become subscribers,” he says. “It’s just as simple as that.”

(Despite its success, The Atlantic hasn’t been immune to pandemic staff cuts that have swept through most media companies. It laid off 17% of staffers companywide in May, as it dealt with the effect Covid-19 had on advertising and, notably, live events, which the publisher had turned to as a valuable revenue driver in normal times.)

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