

ORIGINS OF *ELEMENTS* MAGAZINE – PART II: PLANNING (NOVEMBER 2003–DECEMBER 2004)

J. Alex Speer

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At the Fall MSA Council Meeting on November 1, 2003, *Elements*' pioneer Rod Ewing (FIG. 1) provided an update on the magazine's development, reviewed the latest proposal, and distributed several mock-ups of the magazine's cover and interior. He reported that printing and mailing the magazine would be most cost effective in Canada or the USA. While Rod believed the project was feasible with just MSA and MAC on board, he noted that if the Mineralogical Society and the Geochemical Society also participated, the magazine could certainly be produced. Specific cost details couldn't be finalized until it was clear which societies would participate.

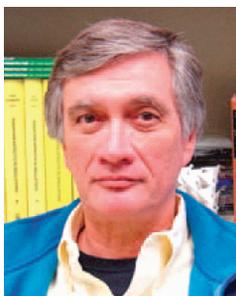


FIGURE 1 *Elements* Founding Editor, Rod Ewing

Rod proposed establishing an Editorial Board with members from other societies. While the magazine would require a dedicated editor, Rod was not interested in taking on this role but was willing to serve as a founding editor to oversee the magazine's development. He suggested Pierrette Tremblay from the Mineralogical Association of Canada as a potential editor, highlighting her well-regarded work on the MAC newsletter.



FIGURE 2 *Elements* Founding Managing Editor, Pierrette Tremblay.

The MSA Council had many questions, among them: the level of interest from other societies, distribution logistics, managing members who belong to multiple societies, subscription options, advertising, the magazine's appeal to non-professional members, its potential as a communication channel to scientists in other fields, and whether it would compete with existing society journals.

Rod sought Council's approval to delegate the printing and editorial responsibilities to others. The implication was that Pierrette Tremblay from MAC (FIG. 2) would serve as editor, the magazine would likely be produced and printed in Canada, and MSA would handle the legal, financial, and mailing aspects. He stressed that MSA's involvement should be on equal footing with the other societies and that the magazine was not simply to be a large newsletter.

The Council unanimously agreed to discontinue publication of *The Lattice* effective January 1, 2005, and reallocate the funds previously used for its printing and mailing to support MSA's involvement in the multi-society magazine. MSA's participation was contingent on reaching agreements with other societies. The MSA Executive Committee could approve the magazine's title, editorial board, and business plan as they evolved.

At the same November 1, 2003, meeting, MSA Council unanimously approved MSA's participation as a founding member of GeoScienceWorld (GSW) and agreed to include *American Mineralogist* and *Reviews in Mineralogy and Geochemistry*. GSW was aware of the proposed magazine, but it could not be included in GSW as publication had not yet begun. The earliest it could be considered for inclusion would be in the magazine's second year. Acknowledging his role in GSW's development, Alex Speer (FIG. 3) was appointed as MSA's representative on the GSW Board of Directors.

On December 1, 2003, unofficial word was that the MAC Council had unanimously voted to join the new magazine. This was confirmed on December 12, 2003, when it was also announced that the Geochemical Society had joined as well. On that same day, Rod wrote that the "critical

mass" had been reached, and that detailed planning could now begin. The goal was to launch the publication in 2005. In his message, Rod outlined the key tasks required to finalize the business plan. Foremost was obtaining quotes for layout, printing, and mailing costs. Each participating society was asked to provide their membership lists to assess overlap between societies and determine the number of domestic versus international mailings. Each society should also appoint a

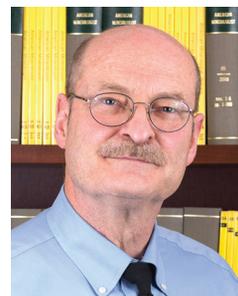


FIGURE 3 Former MSA Executive Director, J. Alex Speer, who has played a crucial role in *Elements* development and operations since 2001.

representative to the Executive Committee, which would be responsible for making financial and organizational decisions related to launching the magazine. This representative should be closely connected to their society's governance structure to ensure effective communication between the magazine and the societies. Additionally, suggestions for candidates for the positions of Principal Editors in the areas of mineralogy, petrology, and geochemistry were needed. The Executive Committee would make the final selections. Principal Editors would then identify Guest Editors for thematic issues, ensure balanced topic coverage, and oversee the editing process to maintain high-quality articles. A name for the magazine was still to be determined.

Determining how to distribute the publication to members of the participating societies had begun in October 2003. One option was for each society to submit its mailing label file directly to the mailing house. The other was to maintain a central database managed by the magazine, with each society providing member information. This central database would help avoid duplication but would require programming and staffing. Evaluation started on November 10, 2003, with an analysis of the MAC (688 members) and MSA (2,200 members) records to determine the numbers of unique members and subscribers.

By March 30, 2004, the member databases of the now five participating societies (CMS, GS, MAC, MS, MSA) had been reviewed. These lists included individual members, institutional subscribers, complimentary mailings, record fragments, and non-member customers, totaling 6,762 records across 77 countries. Surprisingly, the membership overlap was much lower than anticipated, with less than 15% of members belonging to more than one society. Of the total records, 4,820 individuals were members of only one society, 710 belonged to two, 146 to three, and 21 to four societies. Rod was particularly struck by this low level of overlap and noted that it highlighted the fragmentation of the mineralogy community.

The society databases included many individuals and organizations receiving complimentary issues. *Elements* would only bear the cost for abstracting services like *GeoRef*, *Chemical Abstracts*, ISI, and *GeoAbstracts*. Abstracting in *GeoRef* was the first step toward eventual inclusion in GSW.

For mailing to U.S. addresses, the most affordable and fastest option was USPS periodical mail. To qualify for this service, U.S. addresses had to meet specific standards, which few society databases did. Non-U.S. postal services had their own formatting requirements for address labels, necessitating the standardization of membership lists. To streamline this process, Alex Speer suggested that the most cost-effective and least labor-intensive approach would be for each society to send an updated membership address list before each mailing. These lists would then be compiled into a central database, where addresses would be corrected to meet the required standards, and duplicates eliminated.

During 2003, the *Elements* Steering Committee concentrated on refining the magazine's editorial scope, content structure, printing, and distribution to expand and strengthen the initial proposal to the possible participating societies. Upon joining, each participating society was asked to appoint a representative to an Executive Committee tasked with preparing for the magazine's anticipated launch in 2005, with the first issue of *Elements* to appear at the 2004 MSA Annual meeting at the Geological Society of America (GSA) meeting in Denver, Colorado on November 7–10, 2004.



FIGURE 4 *Elements* Founding Principal Editor of Geochemistry, Mike Hochella.

By March 18, 2004, five societies had officially joined as participating societies: The Clay Minerals Society (CMS), the Geochemical Society (GS), the Mineralogical Association of Canada (MAC), the Mineralogical Society of Great Britain and Ireland (MinSoc), and the Mineralogical Society of America (MSA), when at that point, the Executive Committee succeeded the Steering Committee. It started work with Kathryn Nagy (CMS), Jeremy B. Fein (GS), Norman B. Halden (MAC), James G. Blencoe (MSA), Peter Treloar (MinSoc); and included the Principal Editors Rod Ewing, Mike Hochella (Fig. 4), Ian Parsons (Fig. 5), and Managing Editor Pierrette Tremblay.

The task of developing detailed editorial plans was entrusted to the founding principal and executive editors Rod Ewing, Mike Hochella, Ian Parsons, and Pierrette Tremblay, who met in person for the first time in Ann Arbor on April 22–23, 2004, to discuss and approve editorial and operational matters. This was described by Pierrette Tremblay in the February 2025 issue of *Elements*. They did reach a consensus on naming the magazine *Elements – An International Magazine of Mineralogy, Geochemistry, and Petrology*.

It became clear that the term “Editorial Board” was misleading and the dual role initially envisioned was impractical. Consequently, the term was changed to “Advisory Board.” This group would suggest topics for thematic issues, recommend Guest Editors, review content and format, and offer improvement advice. The Editors selected 15 members for the Advisory Board from nominations by participating societies, ensuring a balanced representation in terms of society affiliation, geographic distribution, disciplines, gender, and age. Attention was given to including members from diverse nationalities, given that over 2,000 society members were from countries outside the USA, Canada, and the UK.

Each Society was tasked with appointing a news editor responsible for timely submission of society news to the Managing Editor. Andrea Koziol was the news editor for MSA but also took on the role of the magazine's overall “News Editor” for what would become the “Calendar.”

A report from the Principal Editors' meeting highlighted several unresolved issues, which Rod addressed on May 23, 2004. The production costs of the magazine would be shared among the participating societies, with contributions based on the number of members, subscribers, and complimentary copies each society had. Each society must commit to supporting the initiative for a minimum of one year. MSA would create a website where each society could upload and update their membership lists. MSA would then consolidate these lists, eliminate duplicates, ensure proper address formatting, and generate the final mailing list. Participating societies could send complimentary copies of the magazine by including the addresses in their membership lists and would pay for these copies based on the per-member/subscriber rate.

The new magazine would need to be owned by a legal entity. Establishing a separate organization would entail considerable bureaucratic challenges. Instead, MSA became the legal owner of the magazine, overseeing contracts and holding the copyright. This allowed the magazine to launch quickly with minimal additional workload.



FIGURE 5 *Elements* Founding Principal Editor of Petrology, Ian Parsons.

MSA set up separate bank accounts to handle payments and expenses. MAC managed the financial accounts, while MSA included the magazine in its tax filings and audits. While these arrangements carried some financial risk for MSA, in the worst-case scenario, MSA could recover any losses from the participating societies, distributing the financial impact accordingly.

On April 30, 2004, Rod noted, “It's quite gratifying to enter the second phase of this project and start working on *Elements*.” As Rod became more engaged in the creation and editorial responsibilities of the magazine, he requested that the Executive Committee appoint a Chair to take on some of his tasks. The Chair's primary role would be to encourage the Executive Committee to participate actively in email discussions and ensure timely decision-making.

During the summer and fall of 2004, preparations for the inaugural issue of *Elements Magazine* were well underway, with plans for publication by the end of the year. Rod and the editors were handling routine editorial challenges. To gain insights and reassurance for the similar setup of *Elements*, Rod requested information on how extensively the MSA outsourced the layout, printing, and distribution of its publications. During this time, MSA also acquired the domain name *elements-magazine.org* for the magazine's website, replacing MAC's previous domain, *www.elements.com*. The new website host was simpler and more user-friendly, unlike the old one, which was complex and required a professional for any updates.

That summer, Rod, Alex Speer, and Pierrette Tremblay discussed how to handle institutional subscribers. Initially, it was hoped that institutional subscriptions could become a major revenue source, similar to the societies' journals. It was suggested to offer free trial subscriptions to libraries during the first year. However, there was skepticism about whether this strategy would successfully convert into paid subscriptions. At \$100 annually, an institutional subscription seemed unlikely to attract many libraries, which were constrained by budget and acquisition limitations and would likely view it as subscribing to a new journal. Additionally, managing these subscriptions separately from the journals would be both costly and labor-intensive.

As societies with institutional subscribers had been including their newsletters as part of their subscriptions, it was decided that societies should include institutional subscribers in their *Elements* mailing lists. Distributing the magazine to libraries that already subscribed to the societies' journals would significantly boost its visibility. Each society would need to decide whether to send the magazine to their subscribers, but if all societies participated, the costs would be greatly reduced due to expected overlaps.

By August 25, 2004, MSA needed the participating societies' mailing databases to create the mailing address list for the first *Elements* issue. This enabled Alex Speer to conduct a study on the overlap of institutional subscriptions across the society databases. The magazine would be sent to upward of 1,300 libraries. By September 21, 2004, it was decided that each society would be charged \$2.50 per copy based on the number of copies they were responsible for, including those for members, libraries, and complimentary copies. Rod came to realize that, with the current number of library subscriptions through the participating societies, there was no immediate benefit to establishing a separate subscription process.

At the Fall 2004 MSA Council Meeting on November 6, 2004, Rod Ewing (as Editor) and Pierrette Tremblay (Managing Editor), reported significant progress on the production of five issues slated for 2005. The inaugural issue of *Elements* (volume 1, number 1) was scheduled

to be mailed in December 2004. A total of 9,000 copies were printed, and the initial 48-page format was expanded to 56 pages, supported by \$6,000 in advertising revenue. Copies of the first issue were available at the GSA meeting, distributed at the MSA Council Meeting, and at the MSA booth in the exhibit hall.

Rod re-iterated that the primary objective was to make *Elements* self-sustaining by leveraging contributions from the societies for its newsletter function. The long-term goal was to generate general benefits for the societies and support their missions. While individual subscriptions would eventually be available, the immediate focus was on serving the members and institutions of the participating societies.

On November 23, 2004, Rod contacted the presidents of the participating societies for *Elements*, requesting that they appoint or confirm their representatives to the Executive Committee in time for the magazine's launch. He emphasized the need for representatives who were closely connected to their society's governing structure, enabling them to respond swiftly and effectively to any issues that may arise throughout the year. Rod also sought representatives who would be thoughtful and efficient advocates for both their society's interests and the overall success of *Elements*.

By the end of 2004, seven societies had joined, and the Executive Committee now consisted of:

- Kathryn Nagy – The Clay Minerals Society, Chair
- Eric Oelkers – European Association for Geochemistry
- Harmon Russell – International Association of Geochemistry
- Jeremy B. Fein – Geochemical Society
- John M. Hughes – Mineralogical Society of America
- Norman B. Halden – Mineralogical Association of Canada
- Peter Treloar – Mineralogical Society of Great Britain and Ireland

One of the most pressing tasks for the Executive Committee was drafting a Letter of Agreement among the Participating Societies. Discussions revealed that many governance issues remained unresolved, and it wasn't until mid-2006, well into the second year of *Elements* being published, that a finalized Letter of Agreement was completed. The most debated issue concerned how to structure decision-making fairly, ensuring balanced representation for both large and small, as well as longstanding and newer societies. After considering several models, the committee favored a voting system based on membership size, for example, one vote per 500 members, with a veto mechanism by two or more societies to protect minority interests. Other key goals included designing a structure that could easily incorporate new participants, handling institutional subscriptions, and allowing organizations with limited financial resources, such as umbrella groups, to join as effective partners in promoting the magazine.

Members, subscribers, subscription agencies, and libraries needed to be informed about the launch of *Elements* and the discontinuation of the Societies' newsletters. It was crucial to clarify to subscription agencies and libraries that this was not a new publication requiring a separate subscription, but rather an inclusion in their existing subscription, like the previous Society newsletters. Rod believed that *Elements* would be an attractive member benefit or an extension of Society publications for libraries. The message to MSA members is shown in FIGURE 6.

The inaugural issue of *Elements* was mailed on December 2, 2004, to 6,100 (CMS, GS, MAC, MinSoc, MSA) members in 82 countries, and to 1,300 libraries. The printing bill was CA\$11,722.88 (= US\$9,957.43) and mailing costs were US\$3,097.82.

Rod's term as Editor of *Elements* was set to conclude at the end of 2005, in line with his original vision for the magazine. He intended for the publication to thrive independently and develop its own identity

From: J. Alex Speer <j_a_speer@minsocam.org>
Date: Mon, 06 Dec 2004 10:15:58 -0500
To: <MSA=Announce@lists.minsocam.org>
Subject: "Lattice" and "Elements", the publications

Dear MSA member:

Shortly you will receive your copy of the inaugural issue of "Elements" - An International magazine of Mineralogy, Geochemistry, and Petrology. This is a cooperative publication among the Mineralogical Society of America, Clay Minerals Society, Geochemical Society, Mineralogical Society of Great Britain and Ireland, Mineralogical Association of Canada, European Association for Geochemistry, and the International Association of Geochemistry and Cosmochemistry.

You will receive one more issue of "The Lattice". It is a combined August-November 2004 (volume 20 numbers 3 & 4) issue and is at the printers now. It has all the information those issues normally contained. With that combined issue, publication of "The Lattice" will be suspended in favor of "Elements". MSA will communicate with its members using "Elements", as well as electronic postings and mail.

"Elements" was mailed to 6,100 mineralogists, geochemists, and petrologists in 82 countries. 1,300 libraries that subscribe to "American Mineralogist", "Canadian Mineralogist", and "Clay and Clay Minerals" also received copies. It is unlikely that all duplication was eliminated, but this is a much larger audience than the 3,300 "Lattices" that MSA usually distributes. One attractive feature for MSA's participation in this project was the possibility to inform a wider audience about what MSA members are doing, in a more interesting way, and at a cost comparable to "The Lattice".

"Elements" was ready for the 2004 MSA Annual meeting at the Geological Society of America meeting in Denver, Colorado. The response has been tremendous. MSA and the Managing Editor of "Elements" (Pierrette Tremblay), look forward to getting your feedback as well.

//J. Alex Speer//
MSA Executive Director

FIGURE 6 Communication to MSA members regarding the 2005 launch of the multi-society magazine, *Elements*, and discontinuation of MSA's newsletter, *The Lattice*.

without his direct influence from the outset. At the Tucson Gem & Mineral Show on February 10–13, 2005, Pierrette Tremblay and Alex Speer discussed keeping Rod in an advisory editor role. Future editors may also want Rod's input, recognizing the importance of having the original visionary maintain an overarching view of *Elements*. New editors would likely get mired in day-to-day tasks, and Rod's broad perspective would be crucial for addressing big-picture questions and providing guidance. It was recognized that Rod was sensitive enough that he would not meddle, but would be an invaluable resource. Rod agreed to continue to play a role. He had concluded that he ought not leave the boat too quickly.

Rod's expertise proved invaluable in addressing several key issues: finalizing the business plan with the Executive Committee, setting budgets and financial forecasts, managing affiliated organizations, securing a robust advertising base with the help of the Executive Committee and participating societies, and establishing a mechanism for individual subscriptions.

A more challenging issue was quantifying the in-kind contributions from MSA and, to a lesser extent, MAC and financially covering them going forward. During the startup phase, there had been significant in-kind support, including office support (salaries, benefits, and overhead), mailing list generation, including *Elements* in MSA's audited activities, UBIT (unrelated business income tax) from advertising revenue, copyright registration, website hosting, and storage of back issues. *Elements* needed to plan for the eventual end of such contributions.

By 2006, Rod had largely stepped back, allowing *Elements* to operate independently. However, his most crucial ongoing role was to encourage the addition of new societies. His stature, extensive travel, interactions, belief in the project, credibility, and effective salesmanship helped significantly in expanding its reach.

