

'Grace' magazine caters to women wearing size 12 and up

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Little by little, fashion magazines have been breaking a longstanding taboo by picturing models in sizes that actually resemble most American women. A new magazine called *Grace* is going even further, honing in exclusively on the most underserved group of readers: Women who wear sizes 12 and up.

It seems like a great business plan, but previous efforts to reach this market have run into trouble. Last fall *Mode* magazine closed after five years when its parent company, Freedom Communications, couldn't find a buyer for the title.

This time around, the editors of *Grace* — many of whom came from *Mode* — think things will be different. They've got new financial backers and a different editorial formula that goes well beyond beauty and fashion, a limited scope that many blame for *Mode*'s downfall.

"Last time, readers were telling us, where's my food, where's my sex, where's my travel," says *Grace* editor Ceslie Armstrong, who was the executive editor at *Mode*. "*Mode* stuck to beau-



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'Grace' magazine editor Ceslie Armstrong poses in front of a poster-size copy of the magazine's premiere issue. The magazine is aimed at 'plus' size women.

ty and fashion, but now we're much more into lifestyle."

Put another way, *Mode* came to be seen as a magazine for big women who had trouble finding clothes that fit them. Hoping to avoid that pitfall, *Grace* is being positioned as an all-

purpose women's title with entertainment news, horoscopes, fitness advice and other typical magazine fare, but with models who happen to look more like typical American women, more than half of whom wear size 12 and up.

What's more, *Grace* has

a far larger base of potential advertisers than *Mode* did when it launched in 1997. Several leading fashion houses have launched new lines of large sizes in recent years, and sales of "plus" size clothing at retailers like Chico's are growing rapidly.

"There's a real need for a magazine that speaks to that customer," Kristine Westerby, advertising director for Marina Rinaldi, said. "We felt it was interesting because it didn't just address fashion concerns. . . . There are so many other facets to a woman's life besides getting dressed every day."

The fashion world has long held up the waifishly thin model as an ideal of feminine beauty, but cracks have begun to appear in this long-standing axiom. *Vogue*, a powerful arbiter of fashion trends, caused a stir with its April "Shape" issue, which offered advice on "What to wear when you're tall, short, thin, curvy, athletic, pregnant."

Other forces in the fashion world are also very gingerly reaching out to plus-size women. The May issue of *Glamour* carried swimsuit photos of Mia Tyler, the full-figured sister of model and actress Liv Tyler.

Perhaps the most dramatic challenge yet to fashion orthodoxy came in an article that Kate Betts, a veteran editor of *Harper's Bazaar*, wrote in *The New York Times* recently head-

lined "The Tyranny of Skinny." Betts apologized to Renee Zellweger for pulling her photo off the cover after Zellweger gained weight.

But if fashion magazines have been slow to catch on, clothing designers certainly haven't. Liz Claiborne has had a plus-size line for 10 years called Elizabeth and is launching another one, *Woman*, this spring. Other major designers, including Donna Karan, Tommy Hilfinger and BCBG, have all come out with lines of large-size women's clothing in the past two years.

Sales of larger sizes are holding their own despite an overall drop in the women's clothing market last year. NPD Fashionworld, a leading tracker of clothing sales, found that unit sales of plus-size clothing rose 0.3 percent in 2001 despite a 4.3 percent decline in all other types of women's clothing.

Still, *Grace*'s editors have their work cut out for them. For one thing they need to strike the right tone with their articles and make sure that their readers don't feel like they're a marginal part of the clothing market that has special needs.