

Square Magazine

Proposal by: Erin, Meghan, Cameo, Tess, Peyton Sammons, and Nicole

Magazine Name: Cameo

The name *Square Magazine* comes from the idea of reclaiming the use of the word “square” to describe someone who may be deemed “boring” to others for not doing similar activities that they might engage in. The use of this label could be directed towards those living a sober lifestyle, especially at a younger age, so we wanted to take the label and reframe it which is reflected in the slogan we created as well: “be there & be square,” a riff off of the saying “be there or be square.”

The term “square” could be applicable to previous judgment of those who want to live a sober or sober-curious lifestyle. As years have passed, it seems as though living a sober lifestyle is becoming more common than it once was. Many factors can contribute to wanting to live a sober lifestyle, from alcoholism or family history of alcoholism or other addictive behaviors to simply not enjoying drinking and the feelings that come with consuming alcohol. With our publication we want to bring light to those who don’t drink or are curious about not drinking for reasons like not enjoying it or for lifestyle purposes (ie: physical health).

With the focus on alcohol, we will also not hold off on bringing light to those who may not be interested in using drugs. We are not focusing on a “straight-edge” lifestyle, but rather just a lifestyle that may be deemed “common” for younger people, especially those in college towns or towns with a major population of younger people.

We believe reclaiming this saying can reflect what we’d like to achieve as a brand: no longer making it “lame” to be sober, but making it fun, cool, and the new “it” thing today.

Mission Statement: Cameo

Our mission as a brand is to make the idea of sober living more comfortable and not a daunting thing to discuss. Sober people day-to-day can face small interactions of judgment once people find out that they're sober (ie: bartenders stating condescendingly that their mocktails on menu do not have alcohol, families assuming women who want to be sober are pregnant) and we want to contribute to making it more normalized that sometimes you just don't want to drink or partake in drug-use.

Living sober is becoming more of a "norm" as years go on, but a lot of data you can encounter with sobriety is focused on Alcoholics Anonymous. Though there is absolutely nothing wrong with a 12-step program, we want to shed a light on sobriety outside of reasons of addiction and outside of a support group structure. Our focus will be on those who are deemed "young people" (20s–30s) of any gender, as it is harder to stay sober if you're younger and seemingly surrounded by drug and alcohol use from peers.

We also want to give a voice to those who are sober-curious—those interested in a sober lifestyle, but may not themselves be sober at the current moment. We want to give tips and resources for those interested in this lifestyle, as well as those who are currently living it.

In summary, our mission is to debunk myths of sobriety and make it more of a normalized thing to talk about without being met with judgment.

Target Audience: Cameo

The idea for our target audience came from experiences and statistics relating to the demographic of people who are sober and in sober programs such as Alcoholics Anonymous. Our publication is targeted towards younger people (highest age: 35) of all genders and cultural

backgrounds. While we welcome readership from those in a 12-step program like Alcoholics Anonymous, we are also aiming our content towards those who want to be sober for reasons such as just not wanting to drink, improving their physical health, and simply because they do not like the taste of alcohol. We also are aiming our content to those who are looking into or are already living a sober-curious lifestyle, as programs such as Alcoholics Anonymous are dedicated to those who want to become completely sober.

In recent studies, researchers have found that 61% of Gen-Zers and 49% of millennials are trying to drink less in 2024. Some reasons for this lifestyle change that seem to be the most prevalent are to save money, improve their physical health, and to generally just make a lifestyle change. We wanted to highlight these reasons as part of Square's mission is to not just focus on those who may have a reliance on alcohol and want to change their behaviors in that sense, but to focus on those that may just simply not want to drink for other day-to-day reasons and concerns. Similarly, 28% of overall Americans did not drink alcohol in 2023, citing reasons such as they just didn't want to, they don't enjoy the taste of alcohol, and they want to improve their physical health. To circle back to what was said previously, we felt that these reasons should be highlighted for the support of *Square Magazine's* mission.

For "younger people," it seems as though they do not contribute to a large part of Alcoholics Anonymous' population: those who are the ages of 18-30 only contribute to 25% of Alcoholics Anonymous' entire demographic, meaning the other 75% are those older than 30. This can create a sort of intimidating and awkward atmosphere for those younger, especially those new to a program like Alcoholics Anonymous. We do want to also focus on those in a younger age range who may be going through a program like this, and we feel like these

numbers express why: they hold a small percentage in the overall picture of the program, and we feel that *Square* can help them through feelings of being isolated.

In these demographics, 84% feel like drinking is a big part of American culture and that, because of this, there is a pressure to drink even just socially because it's so common (or at least feels that way) in American society. With *Square*, we want to change that narrative and make it so that people who are younger don't feel the pressures of needing to drink and we can provide reasons why they don't "have" to and alternative activities to drinking.

Format: Cameo

Square Magazine will primarily be a digital publication. We aim to feature things such as mocktails (as a featured sidebar on the website), non-alcoholic brands that are fully non-alcoholic rather than those with small percentages of alcohol, and advertisements related to sober living. We are a non-profit publication and plan to not have a paywall for readers to access our content.

We'd like to incorporate welcoming and fun colors (think of *Apartment Therapy*'s brand) to appeal to those who are younger looking for that sort of aesthetic. We'd like to update daily, or close to daily, with articles pertaining to places to go and things to do while you're sober, alternatives to cooking with alcohol, and safe spaces for our readers who may be part of the LGBTQIA+ community.

We'd like to also feature stories from people who are sober to share their experiences while being sober and to give insight on sober living. We'd like to do general biographies and also topic-focused biographies from specific anecdotes of living sober.

As a brand, we will also rely on social media platforms like Instagram, Twitter/X, and Tiktok, but most specifically Instagram. We feel as though as a social media platform, Instagram has been the most viable for those who are younger so we believe we can reach readers successfully this way. Our Instagram will feature mocktail recipes that we will be posting on our website and the biographies we will feature as well. We aim to make our Instagram profile interactive with the use of polls and creative hashtags, and use this interactivity to figure out what our audience wants to see from our publication when it comes to content. We'd also like to include posts like sober events in bigger cities and highlights from articles that we will be publishing.

Once a year towards the end of the year, we would like to aim to create a Year in Review printed publication. This will serve to highlight those who wrote biographies for our publication (think of a Where Are They Now? sort of idea), highlight mocktail recipes we have published previously while also publishing recipes for the holidays as it will line up with Christmas and New Year's (arguably the bigger "drinking holidays" during the year), sober party ideas for the holidays, and other features. We feel as though only doing a print publication once a year will be the most viable option for our publication as compared to doing a print publication more frequently. We'd like to feature these print copies in safe spaces we advertise in our publication and locations such as student community centers.

Business Plan: Nicole

Square Magazine is an independent non-profit digital magazine, financially supported by a combination of member and donor contribution, fundraising efforts, and advertiser sponsorship. Our no-barriers approach means we want our stories to be free to read and that we

do not enact paywalls on any of our digital content. We pride ourselves on making our journalism accessible, which means we rely on support from our donors and advertisers to keep the publication running in lieu of subscription costs.

The money raised from our donors' support and yearly review print sales, circles back into our philanthropic and journalistic efforts. These contributions may be recurring monthly payments or single-time donations, at the discretion of the donor. We offer various "membership" levels based on the level of support. Donors who have contributed \$20,000 or more to our project will be listed in a designated section of our website, to offer transparency to our readership. A comprehensive list of our advertisers is listed as well by the size of their annual contributions, which range from up to \$20,000 to our largest advertisers of \$100,000–250,000.

Our founding donors discovered us via an early partnership with The Partnership to End Addiction. Although we are dedicated to promoting a sober lifestyle for a variety of individuals, and not exclusively people recovering from addiction, we found our platform by connecting with addiction and recovery programs. Our founding donors remain our largest, and include individual foundations, such as Bloomberg Philanthropies, which covers a wide variety of philanthropic efforts including Public Health and the arts, and foundations such as Empire Blue Cross Blue Shield Foundation, which seeks to address health inequity by focusing on socially vulnerable groups. Other donors include the Beautiful Boy Fund, and Hearst Foundations.

While advertising makes up a significant portion of our financial success, we limit our advertising sponsors to companies, brands, and partnerships that directly align with our mission and our audience. We often partner with non-alcoholic, trendy brands like De Soi and Ritual Zero Proof. We've also been sponsored by brands that are not directly related to the sober living

lifestyle, but that are relevant to our younger readership. Other sponsors in this vein include Bumble, Trixie Cosmetics, BeReal, Owala, Celsius, and so on.

After starting with a masthead of just a few names, we're proud to have seen enough financial success to grow to a slim but strong team of seven—Editor in Chief, Financial Director, Creative Director and Lead Designer, Social Director, Ad Director, Managing Editor, and Features Editor. Beyond pieces written by our editors, we rely on contribution from our bank of freelance writers and occasional volunteer pieces from readers.

None of our donors or members play a part in our journalistic process. Our storytelling is ours and ours alone.

Brand Building: Peyton

With our mission statement and our audience in mind, *Square* is starting out as a digital magazine format to reach our expansive audience effectively and interactively. Our focus will revolve around our followers to ensure that their voices are heard in this magazine. The goal is to create a safe and caring online community where people who are sober-curious or have no interest in consuming alcohol or drugs can feel welcomed, with zero peer pressure, and less like an outsider in this ever-expansive society. We will use our social media as an outlet for our followers to stay up to date on articles, feature spotlights, and new hang-out places or non-alcoholic beverages to try, that can be viewed on our website. With a quick summary provided and our website hyperlinked in our social media bios, we are hoping to increase foot traffic to our website and spread knowledge and awareness to the growing community.

Our Social Media Director will be taking on a majority of the work for our website after articles, blurbs, and recipes have been edited or revised. The Social Director will be responsible

for uploading the articles and staying up to date on the new stories being released. With the help of the rest of the masthead, the production should work smoothly, however, we are not neglecting the idea of expanding our social media team or freelancing individuals to run a social media application. To increase foot traffic and audience members, QR codes will be sent to colleges, universities, and other safe places for our younger crew.

Our social media platforms will be used to cover the wide range of our audience. You will be able to find *Square* on Instagram, Twitter/X, and TikTok. Through our Instagram account, we will be able to interact one on one with our followers by posting polls through the Instagram highlights, sharing fun hashtags for our followers to connect with us and others, and contacting our followers through a broadcast channel set up in the direct message portal of Instagram as well. With the help of all these assets, we will be able to hone our articles and magazine to better suit our audience to what they want or need. Our Instagram will serve as our main source of activity and/or focus to grow our readership and foot traffic for our magazine. We will also be posting key photos that correlate with new articles or spotlight features that will be published in completion on our website. The photo will be accompanied by a summary and description of what the article and/or spotlight feature will be centered around. This will be the same for our monthly mocktails as well as articles for safe and inviting places to hangout for the sober curious-minded individuals. We will also provide some sponsor posts for NA beverage companies made for Instagram to show our support for our sponsors.

Majorly, on Twitter/X repeat posts will be made with different hashtags, blurbs, etc but will contain the same content. On TikTok, we plan to take brief videos of the new hangout places that will be listed on our website, sponsor videos for our partners, and unique videos to gain

readership and followers. Below are examples of posts that can be found on Instagram and Twitter/X:



Sober Curious? *How to Answer* "Why Don't You Drink?"

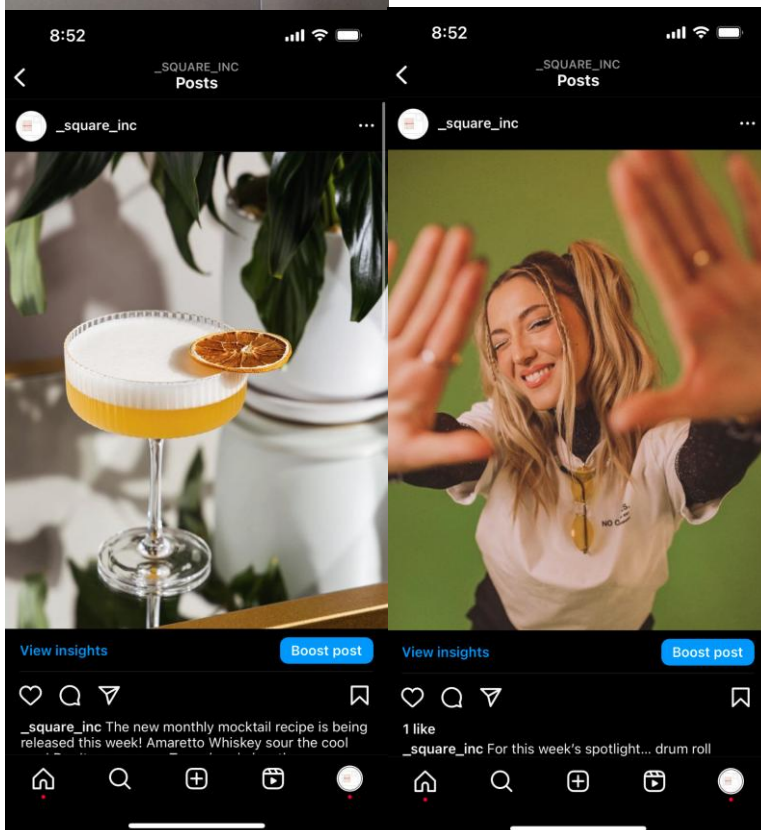
This first picture would be posted with a fun, lighthearted, caption to make sure our followers feel supported in a modern way! The second will be an example of how we will advertise for an article that was written based on an Instagram story poll. It will be an article completely honed toward what our

followers are looking for.

As for the bottom two posts that are visible on our Instagram now, these will be the blurbs attached:

"The new monthly mocktail recipe is being released this week! Amaretto Whiskey Sour the cool way. Don't worry guys, Tess already has the whole recipe posted on the site. Head over now for the in-depth, updated, and sober way to have this mocktail!"

"For this week's spotlight... drum roll please. ELSIE! Catch her feature story online at squareinc.com to learn about how her sober curious attitude led her to where she is today in the city of Boston. With great recommendations for sober activities, hangouts, and most of all her favorite things to do."



Article #1 and Pitch #1: Meghan

Embracing Sobriety: The Profound Health Benefits of Sober Living

In a world where the allure of alcohol and drugs can seem ever-present, the decision to embrace sobriety is a courageous one, often leading to profound transformations you may not expect.

Drug and Alcohol issues in the United States are much more present than they appear, especially in the younger population. The American Addiction Centers notes that 46.8 million (16.7%) Americans have struggled with substance abuse issues in the past year. In fact, 9.7 million (27.8% of the population) people between the ages 18 to 25 battled substance abuse issues ("Alcohol Use and Your Health", n.d.). With drinking and drug use so normalized within American culture, it is important to be mindful of your substance intake to ensure the use does not turn into abuse.

Whether you are on the journey to recovery or are simply sober and curious, there is no doubt that sober living has many health benefits.

Sober Curious: What is it?

In her groundbreaking 2018 book, "Sober Curious: The Blissful Sleep, Greater Focus, Limitless Presence, and Deep Connection Awaiting Us All on the Other Side of Alcohol," author Ruby Warrington is credited with coining the term "sober curious." Warrington's concept encourages individuals to adopt a more deliberate approach to their alcohol consumption and its potential impact on their well-being (Warrington 2018). Sober curious does not necessarily mean abstaining from alcohol altogether, but rather taking an introspective look at one's alcohol intake. The movement aims to be a change of lifestyle, whether through quitting alcohol or being

more mindful about drinking habits. While discussions surrounding sober curiosity often revolve around alcohol, the concept also extends to those seeking to be more attentive of their drug use.

The sober curious trend has made a significant impact, particularly among Gen Zers. Findings from a 2024 survey indicate that 42% of respondents believe Gen Z to be leading the charge in this movement (“Sober Curious and Alcohol Statistics | 2024 Survey Data” n.d.). Several factors contribute to the younger generation's reduced alcohol intake, including saving money, prioritizing physical and mental health, and embracing lifestyle changes

Physical Wellness

One of the most immediate and noticeable benefits of sober living is a renewed sense of physical health. Alcohol and drug abuse take a toll on the body, wreaking havoc on the organs and immune system. An article from the Aspen Valley Hospital notes that alcohol acts as a depressant, disrupting the neurotransmitters of the brain. While the immediate effects of alcohol often result in relaxation and giddiness, this is closely followed by depression, anxiety, sickness, and spouts of anger (“The Positive Effects of Sobriety on Your Health” 2023). Abstaining from drugs and alcohol can reverse damage to the brain and nervous system, improving cognitive function and overall physical stamina. As the body detoxifies and regenerates, individuals often experience increased energy levels, clearer skin, and a greater capacity for physical activity, paving the way for a healthier, more vibrant life.

According to the CDC, abstaining from alcohol significantly enhances liver health and regeneration. Without the burden of processing alcohol, the liver can optimize blood processing

and digestion support (“Alcohol Use and Your Health”, n.d.). Further, eliminating alcohol from your daily routine promotes cardiovascular health, lowering the risk of heart disease. Sobriety can lead to improved lung function and reduced respiratory issues over time.

Mental Health

Beyond the physical benefits, sobriety also brings on a newfound clarity to one’s mind.

Substance abuse can cloud judgment, impair cognitive function, and exacerbate mental health disorders such as anxiety and depression. However, it is never too late to turn this around. A 2019 study found that quitting drinking had “significant improvements” on an individual's mental health, particularly in women (Yao et al. 2019). After four years of no use, “the mental well-being of the former drinkers was nearly equivalent to people who never used at all” (“Benefits of Being Sober - Health Benefits of Sobriety” 2022).

Research indicates that abstaining from alcohol and drugs can lead to improvements in memory, concentration, and overall cognitive function. The 2019 study found that if an individual already has outstanding mental disorders such as anxiety, depression, or psychosis, alcohol usage may worsen the effects (Yao et al. 2019). Sobriety provides individuals with the clearness and presence of mind to address underlying mental health issues. As the fog of substance abuse lifts, individuals often report feeling more engaged, focused, and resilient in the face of life's challenges.

Pitch — Prioritizing Mental Health during Sobriety

This article explores the importance of self-care practices in maintaining sobriety through working on your mental health. From meditation and journaling to bubble baths and massages, readers will discover a multitude of self-care techniques that nurture the mind, body, and spirit. Expert advice on creating a personalized self-care routine with real-life examples of individuals who have embraced self-care in their recovery journey will inspire readers to prioritize their mental health and wellness.

Article #2 and Pitch #2: Tess

Article — In the Kitchen: Sober Substitutes

Home-cooked meals can be therapeutic, friend-gathering, and all-around delicious. In looking for a new dinner party entrée, easy weekly meal prep, or a date night dessert, it's easy to stumble upon recipes that involve alcohol. Whether for a simmering sauce or a soaked cake, the USDA notes that up to 40 percent of alcohol can remain after 15 minutes, and flambéing (or setting it on fire) only removes 25 percent.

Whether you're removing alcohol from a recipe because you're in recovery or cannot consume it, are cooking up a meal to share with children, or simply have no interest (or budget) to include alcohol in your dish, we have many non-alcoholic substitutions for you to utilize. And, for dinner guests familiar with a recipe's original ingredients, they'll never taste the difference!

Amaretto → Almond extract: use one half-teaspoon per two tablespoons the recipe calls for

Beer (light) → Chicken stock, white grape juice, or ginger ale

Beer (dark) → Beef stock or mushroom stock

Bourbon or Scotch → One part vanilla extract to two parts water

Brandy → Apple juice, apple cider, or white grape juice

Champagne → Ginger ale, sparkling white grape juice, or sparkling apple cider

Cognac → Peach, pear, or apricot juice

Curaçao or Orange Liqueur → Orange juice concentrate: use one half-teaspoon per two tablespoons the recipe calls for

Kahlua or Coffee Liqueur → Espresso or strong coffee

Port → Grape juice or grape juice concentrate

Rum → Mix together white grape juice, pineapple juice, and apple juice, apple cider, or water, plus a splash of almond extract

Sake → Rice vinegar

Tequila → Agave juice

Vodka or Whiskey → Small amounts of water; unfortunately there is no good substitute

Wine (red) → Beef broth, red grape juice, or unsweetened cranberry juice

Wine (white) → Chicken broth, apple juice, apple cider, white grape juice, or ginger ale

A small note on picking your substitutes: If a recipe calls for a flavored alcohol, try to match that flavor closely with juice or concentrate from the same fruit or flavor profile. If you are marinating a piece of meat, use soda, sparkling juice, acidic fruit juice, or vinegar. If a recipe is using alcohol as a leavener because of its yeast content, or for a flambé, unfortunately there are no suitable substitutes, so it might be best to try a different but similar recipe.

Remember, the alcohols added to a recipe are there for flavor, not as a function of the recipe itself. And a majority of alcohol is mostly water anyway! So stick with matching flavors—or go completely outside the box. The kitchen is under your control, so let's get cooking!

Pitch — Dealing with Dinner Parties

This article will cover different scenarios of gatherings you might be invited to where alcohol might be offered. We'll pass along strategies to decline a drink, inquire of the ingredients in a dish, or completely pass on attending, all while remaining respectful and polite—regardless if you want to disclose your choice to be sober. We will also discuss the importance of creating and maintaining boundaries, as well as how to handle situations where they're being pushed or stepped over.

Article #3 and Pitch #3: Erin

Bring Your Own Buzz (Non-Alcoholic, Please!)

When you think about having a “night out on the town” with your friends, the first thing that comes to mind is going out to have a few drinks, whether it be at a bar, dinner, or festival. We're here to tell you that it doesn't have to be this way. You can have fun without alcohol! Here are a few ideas for spending time with friends in the city—no pre-gaming required.

Bowling

When was the last time you went bowling? You can make it as competitive or not as you want, and you can take one friend with you or twenty! With pizza and soda on tap, who needs alcohol?

Batting Cages

Do you have pent-up stress from work or school? This is a fantastic way to work out some of your irritation, raise your heart rate, and get some quality conversation in with a friend. Breaking a sweat in exercise releases endorphins and spending time with friends releases dopamine, which means that you'll feel a *lot* better after a session in the batting cages!

Arcades

Old school arcade games can bring on some intense nostalgia, but the experiences of getting lost in Ms. Pacman or a locked game of air hockey are irreplaceable moments in the present. You can pretend you're eight years old again and invite twenty-five of your closest friends from the place where you spend at least eight hours of every weekday or you can go with one friend who enjoys the game whether they win or lose. No sore losers welcome here! Can't you hear the giant green plush bear behind the prize counter calling your name?

Hiking

Hiking is definitely more of a daytime activity, but sometimes you can meet up during your lunch hour or go after work or on the weekends. Fresh air and sunshine is good for you, especially after a long winter full of snow! There will probably be dogs on the trails, too, and, as we all know, dogs make good moments even better.

Mini Golf

No matter how many friends you bring, you're in for a good time with some neon lights, brightly colored windmills, and a casual race to see who can be the first to get a hole-in-one. Raise the stakes by having the person with the most strokes buy milkshakes afterward!

Cooking Class

Who says cooking classes are only for lovers? Grab a bestie and get ready for a mini flour fight! Learn from a professional how to nail a few dishes and be prepared to wow your future dinner guests. Afterwards, invite the rest of your friends over for a four-course meal and let the compliments roll in!

The rush of a good time with friends is heady all on its own. Arrive ready for fun and leave with the buzz that comes from a night of laughter and companionship—no substances required.

Pitch — Living Proud as an LGBTQ+ Person

This article will be a deep dive into LGBTQ+ safe spaces in the city that also offer alcohol-free experiences, whether in a mocktail-only bar or a bookstore dedicated to representing the diversity of the world. We'll examine the challenges of dating in the city, navigating shared spaces safely as a LGBTQ+ person, and the benefits of being true to yourself no matter where you are. The goal is to encourage everyone to get out and live their best lives (without liquid courage)!

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