

# Using the Night Sky to Cultivate Public Interest in Astronomy

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To many people, the word “astronomy” means “science, math, difficult”. They do not understand science or how it works, and some even fear it. Yet whenever there is a bright comet, a rich meteor shower, or a lunar eclipse, members of the public come out in droves to see it. And when they do, they want to understand what they are seeing. Widespread interest in the night sky therefore offers many “teachable moments” during which amateur and professional astronomers can share the wonders and methods of science with the public.

There is actually no need to wait for an eclipse or other significant astronomical event. The Moon, bright stars, and one or more planets are visible almost every clear night, even from light-polluted cities. The key is to get people outside to look at them.

As one step toward this goal, the publisher of Sky & Telescope – the world’s leading monthly magazine for serious astronomy enthusiasts – has created a new bimonthly magazine, Night Sky, especially for beginners and casual stargazers. We will relate some findings from our market research done before and after the launch, explain our editorial formula, and describe some of the things we are doing to maximize the magazine’s impact.

An estimated 2 million small telescopes are sold worldwide each year, but many of them go unused. We want to see more of them outside collecting starlight rather than inside collecting dust.