

NEWS MEDIA



Bumper crop: Gays, garlic and a gushy quest for mass readership

Something for Everyone

"At last," says the advertising blurb for a slick new monthly appearing on newsstands this week, "a magazine dedicated to the most exciting, fascinating, fastest growing special interest in the world! YOU." Not surprisingly, the magazine is called YOU—and it is typical of a fresh and not-so-fresh new batch of periodicals angling for a slice of a burgeoning market. The magazine industry is moderately bullish this year: total circulation is up 2 per cent, revenues an average 22 per cent. But while the surest audience grabbers are specialty publications catering to arcane tastes—from backpacking to bondage—ambitious new entries, like YOU, are pitching for general readership. And even the specialty magazines seem convinced that they offer something for everyone.

Thus Christopher Street, a stylish homosexual monthly launched last July, bills itself, optimistically, as "The Gay Magazine for the Whole Family." A November arrival, I AM—The National Magazine for Italian Americans, features Italian success stories, Italian cars, Italian wines—and a first-issue spread on garlic—but hopes ecumenically "to bring a bit of the Old Country to our non-Italian amici." I AM already has a co-ethnic competitor, Identity, which, despite editor Raffaele Donato's claim to have compiled "the first pure Italian-American mailing list" (around 1.1 million names), promises to be a nonchauvinistic "humanist magazine in the specific sense of being concerned with people."

The bimonthly Quest/77, scheduled to appear next spring, calls itself simply "The Magazine of Excellence." It will offer inspirational text and pictures for affluent adventurers—including a sixteen-page takeout on "the practice of bravery in all forms and all times." But in the sample issue editor

Robert Schnayerson (formerly of Harper's) casts his net for positive thinkers of any stripe. "I'm fed up with publications that appeal to our worst instincts," he says. "Let other editors drag readers through cesspools of mediocrity. I'm interested in people as they really are—and could become."

Magazine publishing is not for get-rich-quick schemers. The average profit margin for a general-interest magazine is 5 per cent. But it is an "easy entry" field, requiring little initial capital, and by one trade estimate some 400 new magazines of all descriptions have started up in 1976, nearly twice as many as last year. Stephen Kelley, president of the Magazine Publishers Association, attributes the current growth to an improving economy and "perhaps, and I say this guardedly, some TV disenchantment on the part of advertisers." And it's true enough that magazine ad space is more easily available and lower-priced than time on TV. Even so, there is a problem in selling a magazine that does not yet exist, and once it does exist, in getting it off the ground. Christopher Street has been leaning heavily on excerpts from literary works in progress to fill its pages, because it has not yet built a contributor's roster of its own. Silver Foxes, a glossy monthly "For Men And Women," is evidently reaching too few of either. After five issues, the magazine has laid off most of its staff.

Aegls: The more promising infant magazines are those born of wealthy parents. Quest/77 is funded by the Ambassador International Cultural Foundation, a goodwill and good-works arm of the Fundamentalist Worldwide Church of God. High-powered test mailings have already brought in 175,000 subscribers—"far beyond expectations," according to the publisher. The first test issue of US, marketed in ten cities, looks like an undisguised ripoff of Time

Inc.'s successful People. But it sprang to life under the august aegis of The New York Times Co., and Times executive vice president Sydney Gruson claims the 90,000 copies achieved a healthy newsstand sale of 69.6 per cent. Rolling Stone four weeks ago enfolded a sampling of its planned outdoorsy Outside, a kind of "National Geographic for this generation," according to publisher Joe Armstrong Jr., who reports that the start-up financing of "several million dollars" came from Stone's assets.

Other new magazines hope to tap into ready-made mass markets. Working Woman targets an estimated 38 million working mothers, wives and single women for the sort of survival-manual features it has dished up in its first two issues. ("Dos and don'ts for working mothers: Don't expect a perfect child. Don't expect a perfect household. Set up a sound backup system.") Mother Jones (named for a United Mine Workers organizer) began last January as a successor to the defunct Ramparts, and is playing to this decade's descendants of the counter-culturists who kept Ramparts going strong in the '60s.

No Bounds: The new publications might do well to emulate the verve, if not the portentousness, of their promotional copy. US, says editor Reynolds Dodson in an introductory message, "is a panorama of people caught in the moment of change... attuned to the inner feelings and emotions we all share." A blurb for YOU declares it is "filled with all the discovery, anxiety and body-tingling sensuality of getting close to someone you really want to know." And Quest knows no bounds. "It relishes life and challenges despair," writes editor Schnayerson. "Those of us whose privilege it is to shape and launch [Quest] are barely able to contain our enthusiasm." Now if only readers have the same difficulty...

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Approved For Release 2004/10/12 : CIA-RDP88-01314R000300430006-0

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