

A slick new science magazine that could turn it all around

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Over the past few weeks, a million copies of a new magazine called *Omni* have been bought from magazine racks in supermarkets, drug stores, bookstores, and just about everywhere magazines are sold.

The magazine is slick. The people who paid \$2 for it bought it, not to read about sex, movie stars or how to decorate their homes, but to read about science. The advertising is reported to be a first-issue record in the magazine publishing industry, over a half million dollars.

Slickness and science are parts of a formula developed by Bob Guccione, who owns the *Penthouse*, *Viva* and *Forum* magazine empire. He is also a man with a fascination for the frontiers of knowledge, and he calls himself an artist, who, in a way, is seeking the same goals as the objective scientist — "an absolute knowledge of our own special sense of reality."

The magazine is his compromise between the subjective world of the artist, and the objective world of the scientist.

The sell out of the first issue is a tribute to Guccione's knowledge of the business world, and to the power of a \$3 million advertising campaign. And to some of the material and authors in the first issue, which included a gallery of photos by Roman Vishniac, the dean of photomicrography; Alton Blakeslee, Associated Press science writer since 1946, writing on the efforts of astronomers to pick up intelligent signals from outer space; and fiction by Isaac Asimov, who has his 200th book coming out in February.

Guccione is editor and design director of the magazine. He is also very busy with his "empire," more new magazines (an all-science fiction magazine and another on business and technology,) and movies.

As executive editor, the man in charge of the "editorial package," Guccione hired Frank Kendig, author, former managing director of "Saturday Review of the Sciences," editor of "Science Digest," and a former staff writer for *Time-Life Books*. He calls himself a writer who also edits.

Kendig's background fits Guccione's artist/scientist concept like a space shuttle fits its docking platform. His education combines degrees in mathematics and fine arts.

Kendig, in Washington last week, talked about the magazine, its goals and his ideas for it. He is 37, and wears the beard of an intellectual.

He said the magazine is going to be about two-thirds science fact and one-third science fiction.

"When I first heard about the project," he said, referring to Guccione's existing magazines, "I laughingly referred to it as a stroke book without women. But when I thought about that, it's not a bad way to design a magazine.

"To have two or three major pictorials every issue, the same way *Penthouse* runs girl sets, is very effective.

"One of the great appeals here is the material is very visual, both in science and science fiction. In fact, the science fiction illustrations have as much draw as the story. Scientific material is normally very difficult to understand. It's one thing to talk about DNA, but if you can see a piece of it in color . . ."

The magazine's advertising and circulation people place their prospective readers in the 18-35 year age category. Kendig said his own feeling, though, is the demographics of *Omni* readers will break more by interest in the material, whether they be 35 or 80.

The difficulty of understanding new scientific material is one of the problems Kendig hopes to conquer with the new magazine. And, he said, one of the things that will make *Omni* different is it will be a mass circulation magazine which covers science "across the board."

"I don't think there is another magazine positioned this way," he said. "Scientific American isn't really a popular magazine, despite the fact that they portray themselves this way. No one can read it through. If anyone tells you they can, they're kidding you."

"Scientific American is very old," Kendig explained. "When it was first published in the 19th century, there was a character called the 'scientific American' they thought existed. Their idea at the time, in the 1890s, I think, was that if you were a science buff, you could read what was going on and make some sense of it.

"WHEN THE MATERIAL became more com-

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plicated, they tried to hold onto their idea of the 'scientific American,' but there stopped being such a person.

"It seems to me the public is cheated by that. The public has its science news made for it; told that it's news now, though the science has been going on for awhile.

"From this sense of conservatism, overcaution, science as a whole becomes like the AMA, a governing body of itself, which I don't think is good.

Kendig said Omni will be cautious with what it prints, "but will not wait until some other organ first justifies what we do."

"The key words for us are science, science fiction and future;" he said, "almost every story has some kind of future twist to it, and we go to great efforts to get the scientists to speculate what their work will lead us to in five, 10 years, or into the next century."

Kendig's plan is to get involved with a network of scientists. An exercise that has become a lot easier, he said.

"I have a computer terminal in my office," Kendig said, "and can get into an enormous number of data banks for scientific information. For example, I can run a man's name through the computer and find out all his work." With his computer, Kendig no longer has to wait for the publication of an article in a professional journal to find out what's going on.

KENDIG PREDICTS "if you have a television set now, I can almost guarantee, in five years, you'll have a computer."

Kendig plans to use both scientists who write, and non-scientific writers for Omni. "I'm hoping," he said, "that we will have people like Julia Child, for example, writing on the future of home cuisine."

The magazine's regular features cover earth, space, life (biomedicine), astronomy, science in the arts which covers films and books, interviews, articles on everything from test-tube babies to UFOs, a section of scientific "shorts" which covers the latest news in the many areas of science, and fiction.

In the next issue, which will be on newsstands in a few weeks, Guccione interviews futurist Alvin Toffler.

In that interview, Toffler discusses the problems arising from citizens being unable to understand the advanced technology that surrounds us.