

## Mission Control: *Advocate*, *OUT* to Undergo Editorial Tweaks

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When Ellen Degeneres came out in 1997 on prime-time TV and on the cover of *Time*, it was a turning point for gay media and the community it served. At the time, only a handful of Fortune 500® company brands advertised in those media outlets. Ten years later, nearly 200 are active in the category, which now includes two cable networks (Logo and here!). Among the top advertisers are travel, financial services, automotive, fashion and entertainment companies, according to the **Gay Press Report**, an annual survey by ad agency Prime Access and rep firm Rivendell Media. All told, spending in gay titles has risen 205 percent to \$223.3 million since 1996.

Even so, two leading magazines in the category—*The Advocate* and *Out*—haven't shared those fortunes this year, with ad pages through March down 41 percent to 112 and 15.2 percent to 115, respectively, per Publishers Information Bureau.

To help boost pages, LPI Media, the print division of PlanetOut, which publishes both titles, is betting that its push to differentiate the two will help turn things around.

At *The Advocate*, a 40-year-old biweekly, editor Anne Stockwell has been introducing more cheeky political coverage since taking over the post last fall. She has also increased service, through more travel coverage, workplace advice and car reviews. With the Web site taking on the responsibility of covering news, Stockwell said, "We're sort of freed from the responsibility of being strictly the newspaper of record. We have felt free to express more opinion."

With the September anniversary issue, *The Advocate* will roll out a more vivid, sophisticated look under the direction of Luke Hayman, who recently redesigned *Time* and *New York*. It will feature a modern sans-serif logo and typeface, uncoated cover stock and bright, color-coded departments. "We feel now that we've got a design that reflects a mission to curate the news," Stockwell said.

Stockwell acknowledged making change carries risks. *The Advocate* has increased its coverage of transgender issues, but is challenged to serve multiple constituencies. It also has to appeal to younger readers without alienating older fans who identify closely with the gay rights movement. “*The Advocate* was founded by a generation and is cherished by a generation of people for whom the struggle was to have a separate identity,” she said. “[For] younger people, one of hallmarks of this time is, they don’t have to see their sexuality as some separate thing.”

As for *OUT*, it will continue to increase its focus on fashion and grooming, as editor Aaron Hicklin has done throughout 2006. At the same time, he has shifted events listings and relationship advice online and eliminated horoscopes altogether. With the September issue, Hicklin will introduce “Wish List,” a photo-rich fashion service section and increase the pages devoted to grooming to six from one. The October issue will bring a new home and industrial design section.

Bob Cohen, president, LPI Media, said that *OUT* has been somewhat buffeted by its dependence on the fashion and retail categories. But *The Advocate* relies more on pharmaceutical advertising, whose marketing against the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender market is seasonal, and entertainment, which is going up against an especially strong 2006, fueled by promotions for Brokeback Mountain and gay cable programming. With Ford Motor’s recent flight from gay media, the titles have suffered more than print in general in the automotive category. “The ad community is conservative as a whole about the stigma of the LGBT lifestyle,” Cohen said. “We should have every major upscale auto brand, financial service and telecom. Given the affluence and the leadership our audience has, we are not doing as well as we should.”

Fashion and auto advertisers including Cadillac have been slowly signing on to *OUT*; Cohen expects ad pages for the full year to be even with 2006. In the case of *The Advocate*, Cadillac and Lexus have committed for the second half and liquor and travel advertisers have expressed interest. “A combination of the redesign and look and feel of the publication and new content focus will start to generate some of the excitement *The Advocate* used to generate,” he said, although he stopped short of forecasting ad pages.

That both titles have been without a group publisher since Joe Landry left earlier this year for BlackBook hasn’t helped; Jay Adams, former FHM ad director, will be named group publisher June 25, with oversight of *Out* and eventually *The Advocate*. On the bright side, both *OUT* and *The Advocate* grew their circ in the second half of ’06, by 21.7 percent to 155,755 and 23.9 percent to 148,442, respectively, on sub gains, per the Audit Bureau of Circulations.

It makes sense for *OUT* to focus on high-end fashion, travel and financial services, while *The Advocate* courts packaged goods and other lower-cost products, said Howard Buford, president and CEO, Prime Access, which has placed ads for Hyatt Resorts and other clients in the magazines. “The challenge for PlanetOut really is to differentiate the two brands,” he said. “If they can provide a finer description of just who the readership is, it may turn some advertisers away, but it may attract others. Now it’s even more important because advertising is much more targeted to specific outlets.”