

Parlez-Vous Advertising? Quebec Books Battle to Be Heard in Toronto

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When it comes to convincing Toronto-based national advertisers and agencies to place their ads in Quebec magazines, the two solitudes still exist. But, happily, that factor appears to be on the wane.

While it remains a challenge for popular French-language magazines with no English-language equivalent to convince national advertisers to do business with them, things are changing for the better, say ad reps and publishers interviewed by Masthead.

With a lot of hard work, publishers are slowly succeeding at convincing often conservative, sometimes snobbish clients to put their advertising dollars in lowbrow weekly magazines such as *7 Jours* and *Le Lundi*, which are totally foreign to them.

Take the case of David Richardson, of da Ponte & Richardson, a Toronto representative for the popular Trustar Ltée magazine *7 Jours*. Advertisers, he says, "can't relate to a *7 Jours* magazine at all. It doesn't look like anything that they're familiar with." That can make it a very tough sell.

Therefore, the task for Richardson is to explain why some 168,578 Quebecers a week (ABC, June 30, 1994) are willing to walk to their neighborhood dépanneur or newsstand and plunk down \$2.97 plus tax for a magazine that combines celebrity gossip with TV listings, games and all manner of gimmicks and gadgets – from toys to posters.

Realizing the reader appeal of *7 Jours* is not easily understood by English-Canadians, the magazine's ad reps regularly issue press releases extolling *7 Jours's* virtues. One press release noted that the defunct Telemedia Inc. publication *Qui*, which had "an editorial environment that many of you felt more comfortable with, lasted less than four months (sic). The readers clearly didn't like it enough to generate the kind of circulation needed to develop longer term support."

The failure of *Qui* in February 1994, six months after a glitzy \$1 million-plus launch in September 1993, provided proof that advertisers are pretty poor judges of what is and what's not going to be successful, Richardson says. "Toronto people said, 'Ya, if I was in Quebec and I spoke French I'd read that kind of magazine.'"

Richardson says he tries to break down people's ignorance or their media-and politician-created stereotypes and to get across the idea that Quebecers are little different from their so-called Rest of Canada counterparts. "We've tried to make people feel comfortable with the francophone."

Magazines such as Publicor's *Le Lundi* and Trustar's *7 Jours*, *Dernière Heure* and now *L'Officiel des artistes* serve Quebecers' needs for personality journalism, he explains. On the other hand, English Canadians, who unlike Quebecers are not big on their own stars, get their celebrity fixes by reading American products like *People* and *Vanity Fair*.

Richardson notes that English-Canadian planners and buyers have not been alone in expressing disdain for *7 Jours*. "I think French planners are snobs; they look at these books and say 'that's not something I'd read myself' and they just dismiss it." His attitude has been to tell planners he doesn't care what they think of the magazine. "Your job," he tells them, "is to understand why they're so successful with readers and why they can do a good job for your client."

The battle to convince advertisers to hop on board *7 Jours* is won once they accept that Quebecers' reading needs are similar to other Canadians, Richardson says. "We've spent the past two or three years hammering away at these basic points so that people felt really

comfortable with the magazine.” And the work has been paying off, he says. “We’re making very good money for our efforts.”

In fact, for the fiscal year ended October 31, 1994, Trustar’s national advertising revenue increased 260% over the previous year, the private company claims. Tracking reports from The Auditor show that *7 Jours* and *TV 7 Jours* combined had 823 ad pages from January to November 1994, behind only Telemedia’s *Coup de Pouce* and *Elle Québec*, Maclean Hunter’s *Châtelaine* and Publicor’s *Clin d’oeil*.

Despite such gains, the language barrier is a major problem faced by Quebec publishers hunting for ad bucks in Toronto. Quite a few agencies “can’t read your book,” says Alain Thibault, publisher of the Montreal-based computer magazine *Info-Tech*. While agencies are very good at analyzing magazine statistics, they’re far less successful at judging content and the position of the product on the local market, Thibault says. Since Toronto agencies are quite far culturally from the market, they can’t get a sense of what’s hot and what’s not so hot on the market.

“That’s a problem for every French-Canadian magazine which has to sell its publications to English-Canadian agencies in Toronto. We have a big job to do in trying to tell them that we’re better for this and that reason,” says Thibault, who has a part-time representative in Toronto.

There are ways to help get around the language gap, however, explains Micheline Jarry, director of sales for the Telemedia publication *Coup de Pouce*. For example, the magazine sends advertisers a translation of the table of contents, containing a synopsis of articles in each issue. “It enlightens them a little about the contents,” she says.

But that doesn’t solve still another problem. While English-Canadian magazines just have to sell their medium and their titles to national advertisers, French magazines have the added task of selling the Quebec market, Jarry says. “We have to talk a lot and sell the market and make sure that people don’t forget at least 20% of the population is here (in Quebec).”

“You have to practically give them a course in Quebec culture to sell them the product,” adds Jacques Hurtubise, publisher of the irreverent humour magazine *Croc*. “It’s very difficult.” One cultural difference Hurtubise has trouble selling is the comic strips that make up much of *Croc*’s content. Hurtubise has come to realize that many English-Canadians consider comics “as being for the mentally retarded,” whereas in Europe, they’re considered an art form.

Strangely enough, the same clients will invest in totally moronic TV shows without ever having seen them, because they look only at the shows’ demographics. “As a magazine, we’re handicapped, because they see the content and judge it within a different culture than ours,” says Hurtubise, who has a representative in Toronto.

At a seminar on magazine advertising organized by the Association Québécoise des Editeurs de Magazines during Quebec Magazine Week last spring, Alain Tardy of the Montreal ad agency Marketel said, somewhat sarcastically, that Quebec magazines have only two selling tools in Toronto: their Print Measurement Bureau numbers and the English equivalent. Tardy said he hears a common phrase in Toronto: *L’actualité*, that’s the equivalent of *Maclean’s*.

But most astute buyers realize there are some very different publications in Quebec, says Hugh Dow, president of Initiative Media in Toronto, a major buyer of magazine space. The real challenge is to keep on top of every single magazine. “A media planner these days has an enormous number of titles to contend with and a presence by a sales or marketing person is pretty important in terms of maintaining some top of mind awareness of the magazine.” When there’s an absence of sales efforts, magazines run a very real risk of not being considered candidates on media plans, he says.

Similarly, most media people can lift their eyes above looking at clones of English products in Quebec, responds Patrick Walshe, vice-president of Harrison, Young, Pesonen & Newell in Toronto, another major buyer. "I'm aware of no in-built bias that says because we have no English clone of *Le Lundi* I'll never buy it. Anyone who knows the French market knows that there are other monitors of health beyond gut feel."

PMB is one of those monitors, and many Quebec magazines post astonishingly good readership scores. *Le Lundi* ranks among the highest at 9.3 readers per copy in PMB '94. *7 Jours* scores 6.3 readers per copy (though with a higher circulation, has a higher total readership than *Le Lundi*.) Among English-Canadian PMB members, the highest score is 6.1, for the special-interest title *Outdoor Canada*. *Maclean's* ranks at 4.2.

PMB has made a conscious effort to improve its service to Quebec titles in recent years by boosting the sample size. The Quebec market sample has risen to 7,000, compared to 4,400 two years ago, while the Montreal sample has grown from 3,000 to 4,700, says Steve Ferley, president of the Print Measurement Bureau in Toronto. "Those are significant increases," Ferley says, noting Quebec publisher members and Quebec agencies are extremely satisfied with the increase. "There are real improvements to the basis of the data."

The high readership for both Publicor's *Le Lundi* and Trustar's *7 Jours* – which compete ferociously against each other – proves Quebec publishers know their market inside out and that's why they do very well, says Ruth Douglas, general manager of Quebecor Media Sales in Toronto, which represents all Quebecor products, including newspapers and the Publicor magazine division.

Yet Douglas admits the Toronto market is often unfamiliar with the potential of Quebec magazines and it's been a battle to raise their profile. She says it has taken up to four years for *Le Lundi* reps to convince potential clients to advertise in the magazine. None of Quebecor's magazines have an English-Canadian equivalent and convincing advertisers to buy into them remains a challenge, Douglas says. "It's definitely easier for those who do have an equivalent, like *L'actualité* and *Châtelaine*."

To help overcome the problem, Quebecor is actively courting the Toronto advertising community. The formation two years ago of Quebecor Media Sales helped raise the profile of Publicor magazines, Douglas says. Last June, Quebecor Media Sales hosted a lunch for 150 senior advertising executives, with CEO and founder Pierre Péladeau as the keynote speaker. Vice-president of marketing Lyane Blackman spoke about the magazines and where they fit on the publishing scene. "That helped us a lot and we're going to be continuing to do that type of thing to raise our profile," Douglas says. Another larger luncheon is planned for February, in which psychographic and demographic information on Quebecers' consumer habits will be unveiled.

Thibault, of *Info-Tech*, also says it's important for Quebec publishers to ensure they have anglophone sales reps selling for them in Toronto. "If you're a francophone, you're going to have some problems selling to those people." However, when you have a good case to make and you're aggressive on sales, you get the business, he says.

Meanwhile, Serge Therrien, publisher of *Le Journal de l'Assurance* in Montreal, suggests Quebec publishers should worry more about the contents of their magazines before overly concerning themselves with national advertisers. It's often forgotten the primary mission is to grab readers, he says. "You have to have a content that captivates people. Too many (Quebec) publications take only five minutes to read." He suggests advertisers should be more demanding and refuse to advertise in publications that have weak editorial content.

But no matter what efforts are made on the editorial or advertising sides, it seems Quebec magazines will always face an added challenge doing business in so-called English Canada – at least until the day comes that Torontonians are as adept at thumbing through *L'actualité* as they

are *Maclean's*. "Even if you have a full-time representative in Toronto," says Thibault, "you still have to sell your magazine to people who don't read it."

C'est difficile for us too, eh

French-language publishers are not the only Quebecers who feel like banging their heads against the wall in Toronto. Montreal's English-language media often face a challenge in convincing Toronto advertisers that Montreal is far from being an anglo-free zone. As one educational ad prepared by Montreal's *The Gazette* noted: "From Toronto, the best way to reach English Canada's third largest market is to head east on the 401 for four or five hours until you see the Bonjour! Québec sign at the border. Keep going for another 50 minutes and you'll reach Montreal, home to 760,000 English/ethnic adults."