

## **A New Culture of Covers: Slovenian Magazines in Transition**

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### **Introduction**

Ljubljana, the capital of Slovenia, is a cosmopolitan city whose history dates back to the Roman Empire, where Armani suits are sold in pricey boutiques in refurbished medieval shops, and where stylishly thin women navigate cobblestone streets in four-inch heels. On nearly every block in the city center, the visitor can expect not only an outdoor café or bar, but also a bookstore or newsstand. The magazines on sale throughout the city are as much of a mix of new and old as the city itself. *Mladina*, the leftist magazine that was an important voice of opposition to Communism in the 1980s, sells next to a sexy issue of the Slovenian *Cosmopolitan*. Residents of this tiny mountain nation are avid readers who even buy their magazines from street vendors as they sit in their cars at busy intersections.

Slovenia is a unique market for a study of magazine covers for four reasons. First, Slovene publications have a limited audience: They are written in a language regularly spoken only by the country's two million residents. Second, Slovenia is a transitional country that has moved from state-controlled media to a market economy, with expected acceptance in the European Union in 2003. Third, Slovenia has a high literacy rate and a solid tradition of reading. Fourth, most Slovenian magazines are sold on the newsstand – and occasionally the street – rather than through subscriptions, making the cover especially important.

Motomedia, a Slovenian magazine publisher with nine titles, provides an excellent case study for cover research, with four entirely Slovenian magazines, one Slovenian edition of a German magazine, and four Slovenian editions of American licensed magazines.

This study will analyze Motomedia's method of creating covers and will explain the cultural influences on cover design for the Slovenian market. Unless otherwise noted, all material comes from personal interviews conducted from November 2001 through April 2002 with Motomedia staffers, as well as other Slovenian and Croatian editors and publishers.

All circulation numbers come from Motomedia and are not audited. Slovenia

does not yet have a circulation auditing system, although the methodology for the audit is in place and should be implemented within a year. Motomedia and other major Slovenian publishers support the audit, as it gives them a competitive edge over publishers who inflate their numbers. Magazine readership data are reported through nationwide CATI (computer-assisted telephone interviews) done for all major publishers.

### **Slovenia: A Market of Two Million**

Slovenia is the northernmost country of the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and, in 1991, the first to declare independence. According to Benderly and Kraft, “Many from the former Yugoslav republics say that Slovenia started the dissolution process: not only by seceding on July 25, 1991, but also by succeeding in developing its economy and its civil society in the 1980s to the point where seceding may have been the only viable choice.” [1]

Slovenia’s independence was followed by a 10-day war waged by the Yugoslav federation. Some experts say Yugoslavia did not fight harder to keep Slovenia within the federation’s ranks because the country had always been a misfit, being more like Western Europe in its outlook. [2]

Originally part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Slovenia was rolled into Yugoslavia after World War I and came under Communist rule after World War II. It is now a nation state with a representative democracy. The transition from state control to a free market has been fairly smooth. Unlike other countries in Southeastern Europe, especially Serbia, Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, Slovenia is having normal transitional problems, says Mark Thompson of the International Crisis Group in Brussels. That means a more successful market economy and less state interference in media messages. [3] The country has a healthy economy and lively international trade, as demonstrated by thriving modern cities like Ljubljana and an interstate highway system that links the country with its Italian, Austrian, and Hungarian neighbors. Ironically, the only area of Slovenia without a four-lane highway is south of Ljubljana heading toward the other countries of the former Yugoslavia.

Slovenia has a language distinct from that spoken by its southern neighbors, Croatia and Serbia, although all have similar Slavic roots. The newsstand duel between the Slovenian and the Croatian editions of *Cosmopolitan* demonstrates the distinct but similar language and culture between Croatia and Slovenia – and illustrates the strength of the Slovene market economy. The Croatian *Cosmopolitan* was launched in 2000 and was sold successfully on newsstands in Slovenia, whose citizens can easily read Croatian. When the Slovene *Cosmopolitan* was launched in 2001, however, Slovene readers quickly deserted the Croatian version, and it was ultimately taken off the stands in Slovenia.

The Slovenian magazine market is booming, with more than 750 periodical publications. Slovenia has 32 weekly or bi-weekly publications; 41 occasional publications on current affairs, the economy, and politics; 178 academic and professional journals; 33 cultural reviews, mainly monthlies; and 40 entertainment tabloids and magazines. The country has more than 150 publishing houses, with the 20 most active in 1998 publishing 3,722 titles. [4]

Only a few narrow niche magazines sell more copies by subscriptions than on the newsstand. *Grif*, a hiking magazine published by Motomedia, sells 1,200 copies by subscription and 800 on the newsstand. By contrast, the country's oldest (since 1943) and most respected newsweekly, *Mladina*, sells 5,400 copies by subscription and 8,000 to 9,000 on the newsstand, according to circulation manager Darko Senjur. *Cosmopolitan* sells only 15 percent by subscriptions.

### **Motomedia**

Founded in 1994, Motomedia is one of the first privately owned magazine publishers in Slovenia. Ninety percent of the company is owned by Slovenian entrepreneurs and 10 percent is owned by Moto Press of Germany. The company's four American titles are published through license agreements with three publishers of consumer titles and one business-to-business publisher:

- *Cosmopolitan*, published since September 2001 with Hearst Magazines International in New York City.
- *Men's Health*, published since April 2001 with Rodale, Inc., in Emmaus, Pennsylvania.
- *PC Magazine*, published since March 2002 with Ziff Davis Media in New York City.
- *Playboy*, published since August 2001 with Playboy International Publishing in Chicago, Illinois.

Motomedia publishes four Slovenian titles and one Slovene version of a German title:

- *Auto Magazine*, a service publication for car owners and buyers.
- *Connect*, an information technology magazine, published under a license agreement with Moto Press in Germany.
- *Grand Prix*, about Formula One racing.

- *Grif*, a mountain hiking title.
- *Nova*, focusing on Slovene celebrities and on entertainment.

Motomedia magazines are currently dominated by single copy sales:

	<u>Subscribers</u>	<u>Newsstand Sales</u>
<i>Auto Magazine</i>	2,800	4,200
<i>Connect</i>	500	2,800
<i>Cosmopolitan</i>	2,000	20,000 to 23,000
<i>Grand Prix</i>	1,000	1,000
<i>Grif</i>	1,200	800
<i>Men's Health</i>	1,700	7,000 to 9,000
<i>Nova</i>	50	33,000 to 39,000
<i>PC Magazine</i>	150	2,700
<i>Playboy</i>	400	8,000 to 9,000

Bostjan Jevsek, editorial director and co-owner of Motomedia, says the company's goal is 50 percent to 60 percent subscription sales for *Cosmopolitan*, *Men's Health*, and *PC Magazine*. By contrast, *Nova's* 50 subscribers are a fluke, as the company's goal is to make the magazine a strictly newsstand title. *Playboy* subscription sales have been hampered by the strong family and religious culture in Slovenia, where several generations of a family still live under the same roof and where 75 percent of the population is Roman Catholic. [5] Men do not want to receive the magazine at home where their entire family can see it. The company is experimenting with a solid foil polybag mailer that would disguise the magazine's cover.

### **Slovenia's Publishing Challenge**

The economics of scale in Slovenia are difficult to comprehend using an American model. The Slovene *Cosmopolitan* is a healthy and successful title, even though it has a circulation of only 25,000. Its market penetration, however, is impressive, with one out of

every 80 Slovenes buying the magazine. Its pass-along readership of four means the magazine is read by one out of every 20 Slovenes. The Slovene versions of *Cosmopolitan*, *Playboy*, and *Men's Health* are in the top five percentiles for penetration of their respective brand worldwide, according to Tomas Drozg, publisher and majority owner of Motomedia.

The magazines survive through strict budgeting, Drozg says. Monthly costs for the entire Slovenian *Cosmopolitan* editorial staff total about \$20,000. The staff has four to five full-time editors and four to five part-timers, plus freelance writers and photographers, who produce 144 pages monthly. Editorial costs reflect the high work ethic and low average wage of Slovene workers. In September 2001, the average monthly gross wage per employee in Slovenia was 214,093 Slovenian tolar, or about \$890. [6]

The cover prices of the American titles are relatively high by Slovenian standards but low by American:

*Cosmopolitan*, 590 Slovene tolar, or \$2.35.

*Men's Health*, 800 Slovene tolar, or \$3.20.

*PC Magazine*, 690 Slovene tolar, or \$2.75.

*Playboy*, 980 Slovene tolar, or \$3.90.

Slovene magazine staffs typically work two to three months ahead – at most – and often have only a week to prepare a six-page article with photographs. They have little back-up content in case of mistakes or problems.

Slovenian editors also face a troubling publishing tradition relating to ownership of editorial material. Some magazines blatantly steal photographs from others. Marusa Penzes, current editor of *Nova* and a former editor of a television guide magazine, says that on her previous job, editors regularly worked with “one hand on the scissors and the other on the computer.” Motomedia buys or creates all its own photographs, which means its production costs are higher than other, less scrupulous publishers. It also means that other publishers might steal Motomedia's photographs. Slovenia does have an authorized rights law, which is similar to a copyright law, but it is seldom enforced. The country's top newspaper once even swiped an entire article from the Slovenian *Men's Health*. Motomedia sued and ended up settling for having the newspaper run a series of free ads for the magazine.

### **Cover Styles**

Most other publishers in Slovenia have not looked at cover design seriously, Jevsek says, and continue to throw together a cover at the last minute, dashing out make-do

cover lines and using stock images.

“We are trying to create a new culture of covers,” he says.

Jevsek lists the company’s rules for a good cover: It must be powerful and intriguing; cover lines must offer an exact promise that the magazine can fulfill; numbers are a staple in service magazines and celebrities are an option for lifestyle titles; images should reflect the content of the magazine and cover lines should reflect the editorial mix; and cover lines can highlight minor as well as major articles.

In this, he is following the lead given by the American publishers with whom he works. He is also challenging widely held Slovene magazine assumptions that only top stories should be listed in cover lines and that the cover should be the last thing created. He is striving to push cover development to an earlier phase of the magazine production process. It is no longer the last task Motomedia editors tackle, he says, but it is still “not at all the first thing.”

Each Motomedia edition of an American title has its own cover style:

*Cosmopolitan*: Scantly dressed beautiful women are always on the cover. So far, no Slovene women have been used as cover models because the cost of photography forces editors to use pick-up photos from other Hearst International magazines. Sometimes celebrities make the cover, but not always. Editors must send the covers to New York City for approval. Usually the only change is that the American staff “spices up” the cover lines, editor Lidija Petek says.

*Men’s Health*: This cover always has a handsome and fit young man, undressed from the waist up, looking at the camera. Covers show “the joy of life,” Jevsek says. Images come from Rodale – often from other international rather than American editions. Cover lines are written by Slovene editors, then translated into English for review by editors in Pennsylvania. Rodale strictly protects its brand and often changes cover lines. The Slovene brand has more emphasis on sex than on health, which matches the market need.

“Europeans are more liberal about sex. What is shocking to me is not shocking to them,” says Bill Stump, managing editor of International Editions for *Men’s Health* in Pennsylvania. [7]

*Men’s Health* is now facing some cover changes because readers have trouble telling one cover from another because all have striking black and white images. Designers are changing the background cover from white to black and using more close-up, full-face shots.

*PC Magazine*: This title was only on its third issue at the time of this writing, so it

is still finding its style. The first and second issues were not as on-point as Jevsek would have liked. The goal is to show high-tech products with service-oriented cover lines.

*Playboy*: Many cover models have been Slovenian, but other European and some South American women have also been featured. Editors prefer not to use women from the American *Playboy*. “They are plastic, artificial, always blond with big breasts,” Jevsek says. Brazilian models are a favorite as they are often shot in a natural setting such as the beach, as opposed to the studio shots regularly featured in the American edition.

Many Slovenian women are interested in posing for the American *Playboy* but not the Slovenian, where relatives, boyfriends and bosses would all know should she pop up in the buff on the corner newsstand.

### **Translating Cultural Differences**

American concepts do not always translate neatly into Slovene. For example, “Make Her Want You” works well on the American *Men’s Health*. The phrase, though, simply does not translate into Slovene. “Make” has only a pragmatic meaning in the Slovene language and refers to making a cake or a cup of coffee. It has no real meaning in the more esoteric and theoretical sense of influencing a woman’s heart. To get the idea of “Make Her Want You,” the Slovenian editors would have to invent a new construction that would be the length of a full sentence and would lack the punch and energy necessary for a cover line. [8]

“English is a media language,” says Vladimar Tomic, founder of the Croatian *Playboy* and now editor-in-chief of Sanoma Magazines in Zagreb. The more complex Slavic languages were created for poetry and books, not cover lines. Still, Slovene can be a simple tongue. The word for “I will” is the terse “bom.”

English words seldom are used on Motomedia covers beyond the names of the magazines themselves. “Seks,” however, is a staple on *Cosmopolitan* and *Men’s Health*. Slovene has no “x,” so the “ks” is required for the correct pronunciation. The *Playboy* interview is translated into “*intervju*,” as the “j” in Slovene has a “y” sound.

The biggest cultural difference is economic, however. Motomedia publishes nine titles with only 155 total employees, which includes editorial, marketing, advertising, and support staff. Drozg says he has no secretary, makes his own coffee, and does his own accounting. “I am the board,” he says.

*Cosmopolitan*’s tiny staff not only creates the magazine, but manages its promotional activities, planning launch parties and special promotions, according to Petek. Jevsek dreams of a day when Motomedia magazine staffs will be 60 percent of the size of a

typical staff in other industrialized countries. Now, he says, they are at about 20 percent.

Editors also do double duty. The editor of *Grand Prix* was also editor of *Playboy* for a while. Jevsek now is *Playboy* editor in addition to editorial director of all Motomedia magazines. The editor of *Nova* launched that magazine while still managing editor of *Cosmopolitan*.

Small staffs and limited budgets mean that when a magazine has a cover that does not work, it may hit the newsstands even against the editors' better judgment, as there is no back-up material and no staff to create it. A case in point was the March 2002 issue of *Playboy*, with an artsy cover showing only a woman's midriff, with a Venetian mask over her crotch. The concept could have tied nicely into Slovene culture, as Venice is only a three-hour drive from Ljubljana, and the Venetian carnival – as represented by the mask – is a favorite of Slovenes. However, the cover was not recognizable as including a woman. "It could have been *National Geographic*," Jevsek says. The magazine sold only 6,000 on the newsstand, a 25 percent drop from previous issues.

### **What Now?**

The Slovenian *Cosmopolitan*, with its promise of a more exciting life, continues to set sales records. The cover is an honest promise of what is inside, and the content resonates with young Slovene women eager to look good and have fun.

Petek says *Cosmopolitan* is a fit with Slovenia because it is sophisticated enough to meet young women's expectations. She says *Vogue* or *Marie Claire*, by comparison, might be a match for the Slovenian woman in a few years when the country has moved more into Western standards.

Theoretically, the country will have graduated from transitional status once it joins the European Union. According to Jurij Giacomelli, publisher of Slovenia's daily financial newspaper, *Finance*, the country has been through a growth phase since independence and will now start settling into a more stable economic pattern.

He sees only four Slovenian magazine publishing companies surviving in this climate, among them Motomedia. Gone will be the small publishers with only one title, such as *Glamur*, which is produced by a mother-daughter team with no connection to Condé Nast's title of the same – albeit differently spelled – name.

Giacomelli sees only minimal growth in advertising in Slovenia, which means that titles that need ad income to survive will have to retrench. Some monthly magazines, including those produced by Motomedia, he says, might become bi-monthlies.



He also hopes for an improvement in Slovenian newsstands. At present, the country's small news sellers all offer the same magazines in crowded kiosks – quantity rather than quality. Giacomelli wants to see more large stores with coffee shops where browsers can enjoy the full impact of a variety of covers, where the covers themselves become part of the ambiance.

Because *Cosmopolitan* has sold well in the past, it gets premium space in the kiosks and bookstores – it is difficult to walk through the center of Ljubljana without confronting the magazine several times. And, because it gets prominent display, *Cosmopolitan* continues to sell well, in the age-old cycle of success breeding success. Jevsek hopes for the same success for Motomedia's other American titles, and to boost single copy sales, the company employs a person to check newsstands and encourage owners to display the company's titles well, offering incentives such as bonuses and gifts.

After all, not even the best-designed cover can sell a magazine unless readers can see it, which is the pragmatic bottom line of the international culture of covers.

### **Endnotes**

[1] Jill Benderly and Evan Kraft, eds. *Independent Slovenia: Origins, Movements and Prospects* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996), ix.

[2] Tomaz Mactnak, "From Social Movements to National Sovereignty," in *Independent Slovenia: Origins, Movements and Prospects*, Jill Benderly and Evan Kraft, eds. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996), 108.

[3] Mark Thompson, "Media Reforms and Media Policy in South East Europe: What We Can Learn from the Past Decade and from Each Other?" (Keynote speech of the Perspectives of Media Policy in South East Europe Conference, Ljubljana, Slovenia, November 22, 2001.)

[4] *Facts About Slovenia* (Ljubljana: Government of the Republic of Slovenia Public Relations and Media Office, 2000), 107.

[5] *Facts*, 14.

[6] *Slovenian Economic Mirror*, No. 11, Vol. VII (Ljubljana: Institute of Macroeconomic Analysis and Development, November 2001), 20.

[7] Telephone interview, November 1, 2001.

[8] The translations of American film titles into Slovene demonstrates this point. "Extreme Measures" translates into "Za Vsako Ceno," which literally means "At All Costs." "Two

Guys and a Girl” is translated, inexplicably, to “Ti in Jaz,” which means “You and Me.”