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New magazines hit the region

Two new publications will focus on the region's and the state's arts community and wine destinations.

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Sam Dean | The Roanoke Times

Elizabeth Parsons (from left), Christina Owens Knapp and Joey Coakley Beck have started the periodical Vennue to focus on the arts community.

The rearing of Roanoke's new art museum and awareness of the state's wine destinations have fostered the birth of two specialty publications set to cover Southwest Virginia -- but different audiences.

Vennue, a periodical targeted at the arts community, arrived in newsstands earlier this month, while Virginia Wine Lover, a magazine with offices in Forest and Virginia Beach, will begin publication in May.

Both periodicals are poised to compete for local and state advertising. But unlike the fledgling print media sector, whose advertising revenues increasingly are squeezed by Internet competition, niche publications have a better chance at success, according to a media expert.

Advertising revenue was flat last year for print newspapers, and circulation declined, based on a 2007 State of the News Media report by the Project for Excellence in Journalism.

But print publications that focus on a niche market have a better chance of prospering.

Magazines that reach certain kinds of readers are key to attracting advertisers rather than general content publications, said Rick Edmonds, media business analyst at the Poynter Institute, a journalism training organization in Florida.

"It gives the advertiser more bang for their buck in terms of who's actually seeing it," he said.

Also, lifestyle companies usually are not trying to find advertising space on the Internet. That's because a print publication provides a larger layout on which to splash colorful images and advertisements, Edmonds said.

Vennue will be aided by success of Bella

Perhaps Vennue's success at appealing to new advertisers will be spurred by the already established Bella Magazine, a monthly publication aimed at women that launched in June 2006.

Beck Media Group publishes Vennue and Bella, which has a circulation of about 20,000 and recently expanded into Charlottesville.

Joey Coakley Beck, publisher at Beck Media, did not disclose Bella's annual revenue, but she said the company has "made a profit from the second issue on. It's doing very well."

The company's magazines target Central and Southwest Virginia, though Vennue may expand statewide sometime this year.

But the goals set for Vennue might not be as high as those for Bella.

"As long as it pays for itself, I'm happy," Beck said. "It's not going to be the money-maker. It's really just to fill a void for those readers."

The 31 pages of Vennue's winter edition, a tabloid with its cover splashed in shades of blue, pink and purple, contain profiles of area artists and places to travel.

Its stories also touch on some hot-button issues in art and society, such as how musical quality fits into the digital age. Freelance writers will fill much of its pages.

Vennue is free and available at businesses that are more likely to reach an arts clientele.

"We thought that arts coverage in the area was a little lacking," said Elizabeth Parsons, Vennue's editorial director.

"We wanted to offer something more, and we wanted to try to represent those people, not only the established artists ... but also creative voices that might not necessarily have an outlet yet."

Parsons also is a freelance writer for The Roanoke Times.

To build a relationship with the region's artist types, Vennue is inviting people to submit their work to be splashed across the magazine's pages in future editions.

"We really want the magazine itself to be an art object," Parsons said.

The rise of artists and galleries throughout Roanoke's downtown as well as this year's expected debut of the Art Museum of Western Virginia's new building have put the arts movement at the forefront in this community.

The museum's new home "definitely fueled our inspiration" for Vennue, Parsons said.

Magazine highlights state's 127 wineries

As another statewide publication, Virginia Wine Lover is taking shape and preparing to launch in May through subscriptions and sales at retailers, including grocery stores and bookstores.

Frank Britt, who heads a marketing and public relations firm in Forest, dreamed up the idea for the publication in 2003.

He's working with a Virginia Beach firm, VistaGraphics, to publish the magazine that will highlight the state's wineries and feature areas as tourist destinations.

Patrick Evans-Hylton, a food writer and editor in Virginia Beach, is editor of Virginia Wine Lover.

"The start of the magazine is definitely a need in the market," Britt said. "There's so little info about the wineries out there."

But the connection to Virginia and its wineries has been marketed in the past year.

Last year, Virginia was named one of the top five states worldwide for wine tourism by Travel and Leisure magazine.

Virginia has 127 wineries, including several in Southwest Virginia such as Amrhein's Wine Cellar on Bent Mountain and Chateau Morrisette in Floyd County, Britt said.

Britt, a South Carolina native who studied in France as a young adult, is a wine enthusiast who recently had trouble naming his favorite wine, because he said he enjoys different kinds.

"You can't nail me down to a particular one," Britt said.

He expects Virginia Wine Lover's first issue to have a circulation of 80,000. The quarterly publication already has some subscribers who signed on for a special annual rate of \$9.95. Britt did not know how many have subscribed so far.

In stores, the magazine will sell for \$4.95.

As for revenue goals, Britt said it's too early to name specific figures.

"It depends on how many ads are sold," he said, explaining that ideally 50 percent of a magazine's content is advertisements and the rest is editorial content.

Because he believes that Virginia Wine Lover will fill a niche, Britt said he isn't concerned about launching the new enterprise in the midst of a downward cycle for print media.

In a phone conversation, Britt ticked off the distribution points where he hopes to debut Virginia Wine Lover, including bed and breakfasts, visitors centers and possibly jewelry stores.

"Distribution is key," he said.