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Newsletter M&A activity is brisk

As is evident in the three significant acquisitions reported in this issue, merger and acquisition activity in the newsletter and specialized-information field is moving at a brisk pace these days..

The Jordan, Edmiston Group Inc. announced in its *Client Briefing* newsletter that 16 deals in its Newsletter Publishing category completed between January and September 30 accounted for \$128 million.

Regarding all 11 JEGI media categories, *Client Briefing* states, "The vibrant M&A market for the media and information industry saw \$52 billion in transactions through the first three quarters of 2005....

"The drivers of this remarkable acceleration in the market include: the convergence of traditional media and interactive media, as traditional media companies continue to look for growth through internet-based business models; the drive for growth by strategic companies, which are well past their cost cutting initiatives; strong debt markets, led by the persistence of low interest rates; and a very active private equity market, due to exceptional liquidity in the marketplace."

—Inside—

Acquisitions David Foster and McMurry both buy 2
View from the bleachers Fred Goss on NEPA 3

Eli Research acquires Lee McFadden's OneOnOne Computer Training franchise

Fresh on the heels of its purchase of Element K Journals (*NL/NL* 7/5/05), North Carolina-based Eli Research Inc. has bolstered its IT properties with the acquisition of OneOnOne Computer Training, publisher of the *Working Smarter* newsletters, from Mosaic Media Inc. The *Working Smarter* bi-weekly training bulletins currently focus on Microsoft Office applications.

Lee McFadden founded his company back in 1976 as Math House, publishing cassette and worksheet instructional materials for junior high and high schools. Incorporated a year later as Mosaic Media Inc., the company published the first cassette tutorial for the Apple II Plus in 1981, "primarily for the schools, but when Apple got wind of it, they purchased in bulk to train their own field sales reps." McFadden told *NL/NL* in 2001.

"The computer training business took over from there and soon eclipsed the school business, as we sold through dealers to consumers and direct to a b-to-b market," Lee said. "When CD-ROM technology came along, we repurposed the cassette courses in the new format and marketed them under the name OneOnOne Computer Training, beginning in the early '90s."

Eli Research's IT offerings

Greg Lindberg, founder and CEO of Eli Research Inc., said, "We see wonderful synergies in being able to offer our customers not only the leading self-improvement journals for IT topics, but also proven workforce training solutions for employees using Microsoft Excel, Word, PowerPoint, Outlook and Access."

Other fields served by Eli Research's 30-some newsletters include health care, education, banking, law, and travel.

Terry Gambill & Associates, of Las Vegas, represented OneOnOne in the transaction, the terms of which were not disclosed. Both companies are privately held.

Lee McFadden told us, "We initiated the transaction, having sold the Professional Training Associates side of our business to McMurry a year ago. [*NL/NL* 11/16/04]. This leaves us with the corporate shell which, with a name like Mosaic Media, could redefine itself as almost

Newsletter Press 30-year-old printer joins The Allied Group 4
Editing Saying the same thing twice 4
Publisher Profile Ed Coburn of

Harvard Health Publications 5
DM Notebook Renewal "rules" and who's breaking them 7
Who, what, when & where 8

—Publisher Profile—

Ed Coburn—with a background in large, middle-sized and small publishing companies—now heads Harvard Health Publications

By Fred Goss

Every summer in high school and college Ed Coburn worked for a landscaper until one day, seriously pondering his future plans, he decided that his goal was a job that was “inside and had air-conditioning.”

Remembering that his sister-in-law Karen Coburn was director of the newsletter center at Cahners Publishing (Walter Cahners was a founding member of the newsletter association), Ed inquired.

She told him she could certainly “find something” for him to do for the summer (1982) and his newsletter career was underway. “For that summer I did ‘whatever,’ I ran the copy machine, I collated special reports ... but before long I fell in love with newsletter publishing.”

Ed stayed at Cahners for two years until, in 1984, he was one of seven employees (of about 15 in the Cahners newsletter division) who left with Karen when she acquired the titles that became Cutter Information, based in Arlington, Mass.

Ed stayed with Cutter for nine years beginning in marketing, but “we shifted to the Group Publisher organization model and I had charge of two groups, Oil Spill (*Oil Spill Intelligence Report* was Cutter’s flagship title) and software.” Over the time, Cutter grew from the Original Seven to a staff of about 35.

The two Coburns

For some period during that time Ed and Karen shared an office and I think they both

enjoyed the confusion it caused among colleagues learning that he wasn’t her husband or her brother, or even, as time went by, her ex-husband, but her former brother-in-law.

I visited them at one point when the Cutter offices overlooked a graveyard. “Peaceful,” Ed said. “It gives you perspective about worrying too much about getting the next marketing campaign out on time.”

Launches own newsletter company

Succumbing to the urge to run his own show, in 1994 with a (more or less) silent partner who ran a consulting business, Ed launched Circadian Information specializing in information for companies employing shift workers.

They published reports on intriguing subjects like “How to Nap Effectively.” (I should have been interviewed, since I regard myself as something of an authority as befits a man who learned to sleep standing up holding a submachine gun during his Vietnam adventure.)

“Goes to Harvard”

Then in 2001, after experi-

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ence with large, middle-sized and small business newsletter publishers, Ed made a big change to a very large consumer publisher when he took the position as publishing director at Harvard Health Publications in Boston.

Harvard Health Publications works with the Stamford, Connecticut-based Consumer Health Publishing Group division of Staywell for its marketing. “By marshalling the expertise of the 8,000 faculty physicians at Harvard Medical School and its world-renowned teaching hospitals,” the website proclaims, “the partnership produces five monthly newsletters”:

- *Harvard Health Letter*,
- *Harvard Heart Letter*,
- *Harvard Women’s Health Watch*,
- *Harvard Men’s Health Watch*, and
- *Harvard Mental Health Letter*.

Anthony L. Komaroff M.D. is editor-in-chief of Harvard Health Publications. (Harvard Business School Publishing, which publishes five newsletters, is a separate entity—headed by Paul Szymanski.)

“It’s been a fascinating experience,” Ed said, “working with large-scale consumer letters offers so many opportunities for things like really effective testing that just aren’t possible in the business-to-business world.”

“On the other hand, in our marketing, we are constrained by the prices for consumer health publications (four of the Harvard Five are priced from \$24 to \$28, the other, *The Harvard Mental*

Health Letter is \$59). At those prices we can't do telemarketing or forced-free-trials on any cost-effective basis.

Marketing

"I would never underestimate the value of having the Harvard Medical School logo on our publications but, at the same time, compared to some competitors in the consumer health area, we are somewhat 'constrained.' There are copy platforms we won't use; our materials will never 'promise' to cure heart disease or high blood pressure," Ed told me.

"You mean," I asked, "no magalogues featuring photos of a vigorous silver-haired senior (picture John Hurley) with his arm draped over a younger woman who might be his 'niece' and subheads about Enjoying a Vigorous Sex Life into your '70s and '80s?"

"An excellent example," Ed said when he stopped laughing, "of copy you will never see in a Harvard Medical School promo. In fact, we have not used the magalogue format extensively because it appears the copy platforms that are most effective there are often the ones we won't use."

"Our bread and butter are #10 packages and oversized 9x12s created largely by outside consultants."

Mailing volume

For the five newsletter titles, Harvard mails 14-15 million pieces annually. They also maintain a list of about 50 (54 at present) special report titles, updated every 2-3 years, that sell for \$16-\$18. Efforts to existing subscribers cross-selling the newsletter titles and offering the

Over the course of a year Ed Coburn estimates 300 Harvard faculty members may have some involvement with the publications—"about two dozen extensively, involving a substantial chunk of their time."

reports add another 10 million pieces annually.

(For those of us brought up in the b-to-b environment where 30,000 is a BIG mailing, Ed's operation averages 100,000 pieces of mail per day every business day of the year. Whew!)

In addition, Harvard markets their books (15 listed) formerly with Simon & Schuster, now with McGraw-Hill; offers a syndicated weekly newspaper column; and has a continuing arrangement to provide health-related editorial materials to *Newsweek*.

And, finally, Harvard Health Publications has two websites, Itelihealth.com, which offers consumer health information, and health.harvard.edu "which mainly sells the editorial products," Ed said.

Editor's Note. One of 54 special reports, "Sexuality in Midlife and Beyond" does include descriptive copy offering that it "may help you develop a richer, more satisfying sex life."

Staff of 25—plus "Helen Hoart's organization"

And, all of this with an in-house staff of 25. "We handle all the marketing through Helen Hoart's organization, The Consumer Health Publishing Group, and McGraw-Hill handles the books," Ed said.

"We handle production and the business side and we have people who do 'editing,' but the

editorial materials are all produced by Harvard Med School faculty members ... all of whom also maintain clinical practices. We think it's a very important selling point that the editors actually see patients as well as teach."

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NEPA

Over the course of the many years Ed has been involved in various newsletter enterprises, he has also been extremely active in the Newsletter & Electronic Publishers Association. His conference presentations are very popular, particularly on editorial audits. He even found time to redesign NEPA's website. And he co-chaired the association's 2004 marketing conference in New Orleans.

He is also a director of several non-profit organizations in the Boston area.

I asked Ed about being the recipient of the NEPA Volunteer of the Year award this past June. "I guess I'm just a girl who can't say no," he laughed, "but the activities I've done for NEPA and its program committees, and running the New England Chapter, have more than repaid themselves in the opportunities I've had to meet people, make connections, find opportunities for collaborations."

"When they announced the award I was speechless, which a most unusual condition for me."

Ed Coburn, Harvard Health Publications, 10 Shattuck Street, #602, Boston, MA 02115, 617-432-4714, fax 617-432-4719, www.health.harvard.edu.