

Zeitschrift: Swiss review : the magazine for the Swiss abroad
Herausgeber: Organisation of the Swiss Abroad
Band: 25 (1998)
Heft: 3

Vorwort: Editorial
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Cover:

More and more Swiss newspapers
and periodicals, radio and TV
stations report in a similar way on
the same subjects. How welcome is
a new trend in this media landscape!
(Cartoon: Heinz "Pfuschi" Pfister)

IMPRESSUM

Swiss Review, the magazine for the Swiss Abroad, is in its 25th year of issue and is published in German, French, Italian, English and Spanish in more than 20 regional editions. It has a total circulation of over 320,000. Regional news appears four times a year.

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Publisher, Editorial Office, Advertising: Secretariat for the Swiss Abroad, Alpenstrasse 26, CH-3000 Berne 16; Tel: 41 31 351 6100, Fax: 41 31 351 6150, Postal Cheque Account (Swiss National Giro): 30-6768-9. Printed by: Buri Druck AG, CH-3084 Wabern.

Change of address: please notify your new address to your local Embassy or Consulate – do not write to Berne. Thank you.

Internet: <http://www.revue.ch>



My first editor-in-chief was at the same time a publisher and later president of the first local radio in the area. If the leading article was about a choice or a vote he pushed his own opinion through even if he was the only one who represented it. We, young members of the editorial committee, found that scandalous.

17 years later no-one worries anymore about such concentration of power. Today the scissors are out before the conversation begins. My retired editor-in-chief would today be out-voted, although not by us media people but by the advertisers.

Today most of the media in Switzerland belong to seven big groups with a turnover of between three million and two billion francs. This means that a number of marketing strategies mark the positions of many editors. Their aim is to maximize profit.

In 1997, sixteen newspapers and magazines could no longer resist the pressure and went under. The collapse of advertising had cut the ground from under their feet. Others limped along or had to apply with crutches for help to another publishing house. This merger process was disguised as co-operation. The "Bund" in Berne, once a newspaper with a national distribution, now mainly supported by the "Neue Zürcher Zeitung", is an example of this development.

In Western Switzerland, the fire of the "Nouveau Quotidien", also read on this side of the Röstigraben, was extinguished after only seven years. Also its more serious cousin "Le Journal de Genève" gave up the ghost. In both cases it was not a question of policy but of profit. With the merger product "Le Temps" which is striving for a necessary circulation of 50,000 copies for a supra-regional French speak-

ing daily newspaper, the proof of the pudding will be in the eating.

What is normal in economics, that the big eat the small, drastically weakens quality in the media landscape. With the disappearance of competition, journalistic vying vanishes. The papers lose their identity and start to bore. The monopolization of newspapers, radio stations and television stations leaves traces in the minds of media people. Formally autonomous but no longer really independent, these fulfill their tasks with resignation instead of passion. Demanded from them are not better performances but in most cases contributions about life-style without a sting. Instead of exposing and enlightening as used to be their journalistic obligation, they write "news you can use".

He who pays gives the orders: ever more advertisers expect to be informed about editorial decisions in advance, and insolently threaten advertising boycotts if they are not. They have no wish to place their advertisements between depressing contributions.

In the hunt for advertising money and readership markets, comes uniformity in the flood tide of information. Ever more media report on the same thing. Alternative ways of looking at things, nuances and background, hardly find any place in the columns and broadcasts.

If commerce wins the people lose. For the media is an indispensable instrument of the correct functioning of our democracy.



Alice Baumann