

Archant titles grow while the rest of overseas sector groans...

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If recent stories are a true indicator, publishers in the overseas lifestyle and property magazine sector appear to be having a tough time. Rumours of poor performance and potential closures hardly come as a surprise. The recent hysteria about the uncertain future of the Spanish property market as an investment choice, and the continuing concerns about the stability and risks of investment in a number of Balkan countries contribute to the malaise...

Yet there is one publisher who is thriving. Archant Life has dominated coverage of the one true proven country for investment – France – for over a decade now. Archant's market-leading portfolio of French sector titles continues to go from strength to strength in readership terms, with more exciting developments planned for French Property News, Living France and France Magazine. Circulation figures for the start of the year were impressive with the combined circulation of the stable of titles up 15% year-on-year. Living France started the year with 16% year-on-year growth in circulation. Subscriptions also increased by 5% in the first 4 months of 2007 to an all time high of 7,229. Newsstand sales were up year-on-year by an average of 9% on closed issues. French Property News started the year with a massive 34% year-on-year increase following strong sales through WH Smith, and the fact that the title is now being promoted in Marks and Spencer stores across London. Meanwhile, France Magazine's circulation is on the increase again both in the UK and US, with an average growth in the UK newsstand sales year-on-year of 4%. Miller Hogg, the new MD of the Archant France portfolio is confident that recent product innovations have contributed to these latest recorded figures. He explains, "Things are really moving for us right now. We cannot be complacent just because we are the market leader; we have to innovate continually and evolve the titles." All three magazines have undergone design improvements to offer a new look and easier signposting for readers, provide more added value than ever before in terms of content, and more pages, with French Property News increasing to 148 pages, and Living France and France Magazine up to 132 pages. France Magazine has a new Food and Wine section and the new Chez Vous pages showcases the very best French products, while Living France has an already popular New Build section. In addition to these developments, a 12-month programme of supplements is in full flow. These supplements have a well-targeted distribution strategy: they will be distributed with other Archant AB-profile "Life" titles and while appealing to readers via special interests – whether golfing, spa and active breaks, skiing or prestige property – will introduce the concept of France as the ideal destination. Special interests will also be catered for with the introduction of new branded "shops" such as the France Wine Shop (May), France Bookshop (May), France Property Shop (planned for the end of June), with other shops in the pipeline throughout the year – all of which will provide online sales opportunities at a time when each of the magazines will be launching new look versions of their highly active websites, including a high spec self-serve property portal. All this flurry of activity and innovation delights Miller Hogg: "I am convinced that we need to develop our titles both offline and online and that anyone trying to reach the Francophile market can find within our portfolio the solution to their promotional needs. Our sales team in Cheltenham has grown in size and experience, and we have also appointed a Client Services Manager in London and a Sales Representative based in Paris. Hopefully this sends out a strong message to our advertisers that the market leader will remain the No. 1 choice in the French sector, and the overseas property sector as a whole."