

Entertainment Mags Grab Teens' Attention

By MARTHA IRVINE, AP National Writer Tue Aug 16, 8:05 AM ET

They are among her most cherished possessions — magazines about celebrities, saved carefully in a box that she keeps by her bed. But we're not talking Tiger Beat, J-14 or any of the other entertainment publications specifically aimed at teens and preteens.

Instead, 11-year-old Audriana Rossano is an avid reader of Us Weekly, a magazine with a core audience in its 20s and 30s that's among a number of entertainment weeklies with an increasingly young readership.

"I read every article," says Audriana, a soon-to-be sixth-grader from Cherry Hill, N.J., who looks for stories about her favorite celebrity, Jessica Simpson. "I like her fashion, her voice," she says, pausing. "I think she's nice."

As traditional teen magazines have watched warily, and sometimes lost readership, the trend of young people seeking out older publications has grown in recent years.

A report issued by Simmons Research Group found that 23 percent of teen girls surveyed last year said they had read Us Weekly in the last six months, compared with 6 percent in 2000. Meanwhile, 16 percent in 2004 said they had read Star, which recently changed to a glossy magazine format, compared with 9 percent in 2000 when it was a supermarket tabloid.

Simmons did not include In Touch Weekly, which launched in late 2002, in its most recent survey. But Student Monitor LLC, which tracks the habits of college students, says In Touch "showed up on our map" for the first time during readership surveys this spring.

Part of the weeklies' appeal, experts say, is a newsstand price that's generally less than \$2. But dishing out more frequent doses of gossip — weekly instead of monthly — also plays a role.

"It's a celebrity-driven culture, but it's a culture where you get things quickly — and these weeklies provide that," says Tina Wells, the twentysomething CEO of Buzz Marketing Group.

It may not please some parents to know that young people are attracted to magazines that are intended for adults. But the appeal doesn't surprise youth marketers.

"Anyone who works in teen magazines understands that teens aspire to be older and want to read up (in age)," says Anastasia Goodstein, a San Francisco-based writer who publishes Ypulse, a blog about Generation Y for media and marketing professionals.

While magazines such as Teen Vogue and Elle Girl are still lauded for having a hold on teen fashion, entertainment weeklies also are making their way into that arena — in

large part because so many girls are interested in dressing like the stars.

"A girl 11, 12, 13 will see Paris Hilton wearing something and I'm told by shop owners that they'll bring the magazine with them and say 'I want to wear that,'" says Ken Baker, West Coast executive editor at Us Weekly.

That has led editors at his magazine and others to include details about where readers can buy clothing and accessories — some at relatively inexpensive prices.

"Celebrity has become the most powerful marketing tool," Baker notes. "Teens identify with them and maybe aspire to look like them. The celebrities are brought down to a human level now, and it almost makes them more powerful."

In the meantime, some monthly teen magazines are retooling their formats.

Samir Husni, a journalism professor at the University of Mississippi who publishes an annual guide to consumer magazines, notes that Seventeen — long a staple among teen readers — is shifting its focus to try to reach the college market and also creating a partnership with MTV. (According to the Simmons surveys, teen girls who read Seventeen dropped from 71 percent in 2000 to 60 percent last year.)

"It's a good gamble, but it's a big gamble," Husni says. "Can you really afford to lose your 13-, 14-, 15-year-old audience?"

An editor at another teen monthly says she's certainly noticed the increasing popularity of entertainment weeklies.

"They're making us rethink things a little bit — but that's not a bad thing," says Susan Schulz, who is the editor in chief of CosmoGIRL!, a monthly that has done well in the competitive teen market.

She says the trend has simply challenged her staff to become more creative in its entertainment coverage and go deeper into stories.

Amy Barnett, managing editor of Teen People, says the cheap newsstand price of entertainment weeklies is her magazine's biggest challenge.

"That kind of level of pricing does have some effect. But we're not changing anything to respond," she says — even with the entrance of several new entertainment weeklies, among them OK! magazine, Life & Style Weekly and Celebrity Living.

"I think celebrity weeklies are going to end up cannibalizing each other."