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Despite Ad Drought, Vibe Magazine To Relaunch With Digital Focus

BY RUSSELL ADAMS

Vibe, the hip-hop magazine that folded six weeks ago under a pile of debt, is being resurrected with a new spin—as a Web-focused publication with a greater emphasis on Vibe's roots.

A group led by the private-equity firm **InterMedia Partners** and InterMedia's luxury magazine publisher, Uptown Media, has reached an agreement to acquire Vibe and its Web site. The new owners say they plan to relaunch Vibe.com in the next few weeks.

They intend to bring out the print edition only at the end of the year and then publish it quarterly rather than monthly, possibly increasing the frequency after 2010. They declined to disclose the transaction's financial terms.

Ad pages at Vibe fell nearly 40% in the first half of this year, compared with a 28% decline for the magazine industry, according to the Publishers Information Bureau. In this environment more publishers are reducing their focus on print, uncertain how much of the lost advertising might re-

turn as the economy recovers. The new owners of Vibe hope their emphasis on the online edition will help offset their risk.

The acquisition allows InterMedia to capture more of the African-American market for advertisers, said David Koff, a senior partner at the firm, founded by cable-television veteran Leo Hindery Jr.. In addition to Uptown, Intermedia owns "Soul Train," the long-running music and dance television program, which Intermedia plans to relaunch in the fall.



Leo Hindery Jr.

Vibe's new owners said they think the brand has been "under-exploited" in recent years and that there are opportunities to showcase it on TV and through product licensing. In its prime, Vibe brought journalistic heft to articles that closely followed urban music and culture.

Uptown executives say the relaunch is a return to Vibe's original ambitions after having recently narrowed its focus to hip-hop music. The magazine and Web site now will cover a wider spectrum of musical genres and entertainers, including athletes,

said Brett Wright, Uptown's co-founder and chief creative officer.

Vibe and Vibe.com will be sold to advertisers as part of a package with similarly themed publications. Uptown publishes an eponymous magazine targeting affluent African-Americans. Blackrock Digital, a Web sales and marketing company that is working with Uptown and InterMedia in the acquisition, sells ad space for Web properties of media outlets like Spin magazine and BallerStatus, an urban lifestyle publication.

Another hip-hop magazine, the Source, emerged from bankruptcy protection under new ownership last year. Earlier this year, **Alpha Media Group** closed the print edition of the music magazine Blender.

Wicks Group, a private-equity firm that bought Vibe in 2006, announced at the end of June it was closing the publication after it was unable to secure financing or restructure its significant debt. **CapitalSource** Bank foreclosed on Vibe's assets.

Vibe's new owners said they will distribute about 300,000 copies per print issue. Previously, Vibe had a guaranteed circulation of 600,000.