

# JOURNALISM AND ADVERTISING: CENTRAL ASIAN MEDIA IN FOCUS

*Gulnara Babajanova, Director, Journalists' Retraining International Center (Uzbekistan)*

**The transition to market economy now taking place in the Central Asian countries has brought journalists face to face with PR publications and the need to search for advertisers. However, these survival practices are affecting print media standards - which are increasingly tailored by advertisers.**

After independence the post-Soviet media found itself confronted by a survival problem. Government news outlets are still subsidized by the State in most Central Asian republics while the rest of the mass media has to turn to investors, wealthy sponsors and advertisers. The previously foreign notion of "PR" is no longer a novelty for the journalists.

## **ADS' LEGAL ASPECTS:**

Advertising in the media of Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan is governed by the laws on advertising passed in 1998 by these countries. The laws set forth basic criteria for advertisements; their preparation, language, etc. To monitor compliance with national legislation a number of special organizations have been established. Uzbekistan, for example, means by advertisement any information, author's or editorial material purposefully attracting consumers' attention either to a particular product brand (modification, make) or to the producer, with the aim of provoking public interest in the product and promoting sales as well as containing basic data about its producers or promoters.

All such publications are supposed to be marked as advertisements. Nadezhda Stepanova, a reporter from

Uzbekistan, writes that her country's media does not strictly comply with the laws in force. As regards Kyrgyzstan, experts believe the Law on Advertising needs serious revision (see Veronika Komarova's article), since many of its provisions are outdated and give room to indirect advertising.

## **INDIRECT ADVERTISING**

The development of market relations and, consequently, the rise of rivalry among entrepreneurs has spawned active advertising markets in the Central Asian countries with the media resorting to indirect advertising as a source of extra revenue. These revenues are frequently what yields the media means of subsistence and, consequently, jobs for the journalists. In Tajikistan, advertisements are often disguised as news, writes Gulchekhra Mansurova, a reporter from Tajikistan. Revenues the media gets from such publications account for 10% to 15%, with the rest going for the remuneration of the reporter who has found the advertiser. As regards the Uzbek media, ten years ago advertisements and promotional material would be placed only on back-pages occupying pretty insignificant space. Today, though, various companies' trademarks

are the darlings of the front pages. Editors would willingly give any page provided the advertiser loosens the purse strings. A similar situation exists in the press of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan where the fight for space is fueled by papers' economic interests. It's no secret that promotional publications are predominantly idle and dull, frequently exasperating readers and causing media popularity ratings to drop. Many readers complain that there is nothing to read in them and it takes just five minute to look through the headlines.

As regards the roots of advertising legislation violations, it can be said that the major point absent in the law is clear-cut criteria for indirect advertising. For example, in Kyrgyzstan many commercial publications are carried unmarked as advertisements, which is definitely against the law (see Veronika Komarova's article). As follows from most articles of this issue, general incompliance in media advertising throughout Central Asia is connected with the journalists being low paid, on the one hand, and their constantly having to choose between journalism itself and economic priorities.

## **THE NATURE OF PR:**

With the rise of advertising as a kind of business the media has increasingly made use of the notions 'advertising' and 'public relations' every now and then confusing and mixing them up. In recent years, the term PR along with its various interpretations, has

been introduced into the Russian language. Experts say it's difficult to distinguish PR from advertisements as both deal with business communication. They compare advertising to solo singing and PR to a dialogue involving two parties. Advertising helps step up sales of goods and services while PR sets the consumer's attitude to product brands.

PR practices involve a variety of methods and instruments. There is a wide range of rules and recommendations governing the way media reports and materials should be prepared. One of these has it that a report should not contain indirect advertisements, otherwise

the effects would be negative as the audience can see the trick at once. If there is a very strong desire to deal with indirect advertising one should follow expert recommendations and accordingly highlight the real merits of a product in strict agreement with proven facts provided with references to well-known experts.

Advertising is generally identified as public relations because there is no profound understanding of PR as such, and of the way it differs from related sectors, says Erkinbek Jamanbayev, the executive manager of the Training and Consulting Center in Kyrgyzstan. The Tajik media frequently carries publicity materi-

als poor in quality and journalist skills (see Gulchekhra Mansurova's article). In her view, this is because the reporters find it boring to write publicity stories. Yet, they have to fall in with the advertisers' wishes and whims.

Actually, this kind of business is what really pays and helps the journalists and media survive. For the time being, though, it is readers who lose from this kind of 'cooperation' between reporters and advertisers. Papers are full of dull stories praising one company or another. That's why the journalists must be able to write competent, thoughtful and interesting promotional materials, informative and unbiased.