



# FIRST DAY

*Tom Harty, formerly with Reader's Digest, McCall's, the New York Times Magazine Group and Forbes, has been named associate publisher of TV Guide.*

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## **MRI Receives MRC Approval; Simmons to Follow in Early '99**

Mediamark Research Inc., one of the top two audience-research companies serving the magazine industry, has received accreditation from the Media Rating Council, a nonprofit industry association that aims to maintain the credibility of such research. That makes New York-based MRI, which conducts research for 237 consumer magazines, the only national multimedia audience-research service--and the sole national print-research service--currently carrying the MRC sanction.

Lou Bender, president of MRI, says, "What it means is we do what we say and we say what we do....It's made our clients happier and more confident." He notes that MRI has modified its research as a result of the MRC audit. Richard Weinstein, CEO and executive director of MRC, says of MRI, "They have been through a very extensive audit process that examines every aspect of their service, from sample design to the issuance of data."

In 1996, MRI competitor Simmons Market Research became the first in the field to hold MRC accreditation. Simmons declined to submit to an audit this season because it has been in the process of changing its methodology following the company's March 1997 acquisition from Kantar Media Research by Deerfield Beach, Fla.-based Symmetrical Resources. "We are committed to MRC accreditation," says Josh Chasin, who was appointed president and CEO of Simmons three weeks ago. Simmons has moved from integrating two separate studies in favor of using one cohesive study, eliminating the need for "benchmarking or ascription," Chasin says. He adds that the new methodology will take effect this fall, and he expects that Simmons will be MRC-sanctioned again by early 1999.

## **After Botching Operation Tailwind, Time Issues Retraction, Apology**

The inauspicious June 7 debut of Time Inc.'s television collaboration with Time Warner sibling CNN triggered firings, resignations and a rebuke at the cable network, but the *Time* magazine principals involved in the "NewsStand: CNN & *Time*" debacle are getting off--at least in public--with a mere apology. A lengthy *mea culpa* from *Time* managing editor Walter Isaacson appears in this week's issue of the magazine (cover date July 13) and follows CNN/*Time*'s July 2 retraction of the "Valley of Death" segment, which charged that U.S. military forces used a deadly nerve gas and sought to kill U.S. Vietnam War defectors in a secret 1970 mission in Laos code-named Operation Tailwind.

The TV report, which appeared in modified form in the June 7 issue of *Time*, came under immediate attack from a number of well-informed sources questioning its accuracy. That prompted CNN and *Time* to probe the story further--with Isaacson promising *Time*'s readers in the magazine's June 29 issue to correct any mistakes turned up [FIRST DAY June 24, 1998]. First Amendment lawyer Floyd

*continued on page 2*

## **Omni Spawns Event Horizon: Web Production Team, Sci-Fi E-Zine**

*Omni*, the science/technology magazine that premiered in 1981, relaunched as a Web site in 1995 and held on for three years until it was discontinued in April by owner General Media International (which apparently turned a quicker buck with its *Penthouse* site), has undergone a reincarnation of sorts. Four key architects of the *Omni* site have established a company called Event Horizon that specializes in the creation of Web sites with science, technology and medical content and is about

*continued on page 2*

**Event Horizon...***(continued from page 1)*  
to launch its own Webzine of science fiction, fantasy and horror.

Pam Weintraub, the former *Omni* editor in chief who now serves as VP of marketing for Event Horizon and publisher of its forthcoming Webzine, says members of the *Omni* group had been girding for a start-up of their own because they knew General Media was about to fold their operation. "We learned a lot together and we invented a lot together," Weintraub says. "We felt we were a unique, creative team."

Their inventions included acclaimed live shows that were Webcast six nights a week from September 1996 to April 1998 and are serving as a business model for the Webzine. (Yahoo! named the Webcasts, which included coverage of the 1996 presidential election, as the best live programming in cyberspace.) "We don't believe banner advertising is the wave of the future for the Internet," Weintraub says. She adds that for the most part, Event Horizon will engage sponsoring partners by "creating high-profile events for them that launch from our site."

The New York-based company has already landed *Newsweek* and Avon Books as clients and enlisted a lineup of prominent sponsors--including publishers HarperPrism, St. Martin's Press and Marvel Comics--to contribute prizes for a contest publicizing the early-August launch of the e-zine, also called Event Horizon. Noted sci-fi editor Ellen Datlow, a long-time *Omni* editor, is overseeing Event Horizon's content, which will include nonfiction columns in addition to short stories. "The community for science fiction is one of the most tightly knit and highly trafficked communities on the Internet," Weintraub says. She's optimistic about the business, remarking, "We feel we can do better with this site unencumbered by corporate bureaucracy." The Event Horizon URL is <http://www.e-horizon.com>.

**Time Retracts...***(continued from page 1)*  
Abrams, assigned by CNN to oversee an investigation into the "NewsStand" team's reportage and decision-making, issued a damning report saying, in part: "A decision was made by CNN to broadcast accusations of the gravest sort without sufficient justification and in the face of substantial persuasive information to the contrary." Following the release of Abrams's report, CNN producers April Oliver and Jack Smith were fired, "NewsStand" executive producer Pamela Hill resigned and CNN correspondent Peter Arnett, who was bylined in the *Time* article, was reprimanded.

One media observer, referring to similar bloopers in recent years at *Time* magazine, says the publication "is always trying to hit a three-run home run with one runner on base. They're suckers for stories that are simply too good to be true." He says the case most analogous to that of Operation Tailwind was *Time's* April 1992 cover story on the Lockerbie plane crash, in that the editors let their eagerness to hype the title's redesign cloud their editorial judgment. That piece, "The Untold Story of Pan Am 103," raised suspicions that rogue factions in the CIA had a role in the bombing and that CIA agents aboard the plane were the plot's real targets. *Time* won a lawsuit filed by a man identified in the story as a double agent, but the conspiracy theory turned out to be a hoax and was widely discredited. A few years ago the magazine settled a lawsuit stemming from a 1992 article in which a former Moscow bureau chief for the *Washington Post* was accused of taking payments from the KGB.

Steve Rendall, senior analyst with FAIR (Fairness and Accuracy In Reporting), says the nerve-gas piece "was not ready for air" and had "glaring technical problems." CNN and *Time* "fell in love with their story, and that's something journalists should avoid," Rendall adds. "I'm afraid the total roll-over by CNN might extinguish any part of the story that might have been true."

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