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CAMPAIGN SPOTLIGHT

## What Next, the ‘Citizen Hearst’ Game?

By [STUART ELLIOTT](#)

There is a saying, popularized by the sports reporter Grantland Rice, that it’s not whether you win or lose, it’s how you play the game. The digital division of Hearst Magazines is rewriting the expression to declare that it’s not how you win or lose, it’s whether you play the game.



Hearst Magazines Digital Media is introducing two custom-made games for visitors to the Web sites of two of its popular publications, Cosmopolitan and Seventeen. The games are sponsored by advertisers like Bioré, Tresemmé and the footwear retailer Underground Station.



The Cosmopolitan game, Boy Toy, can be played at [games.cosmopolitan.com](http://games.cosmopolitan.com). It offers the chance to score points by controlling a virtual boyfriend whose only goal is life is to take care of the player’s every wish — provided the player can successfully keep him away from his sketchy ex-girlfriend.

The Seventeen game, Editor’s Assistant, can be played at [games.seventeen.com](http://games.seventeen.com). It takes advantage of the interest in “The Devil Wears Prada” and “Ugly Betty” by presenting the player with an opportunity to see what a work day can be like as the right-hand person of a busy magazine editor.

The games were created for Hearst Magazines Digital Media, part of the Hearst Corporation, by Arkadium, a New York company that specializes in developing software for online games. They are indicative of the

growing interest on Madison Avenue in what is known as advergaming, or games that seek to help sell products to those who play them.

Among the marketers playing the advergaming game are Fandango, the online seller of movie tickets, with a new Fandango Fun section of its Web site ([games.fandango.com](http://games.fandango.com)); the cable TV network GSN, which offers on its Web site ([gsn.com](http://gsn.com)) topical games like “The Prison Life: Paris” and “Rosie vs. Trump”; Jack Link’s Beef Jerky, with games based on its “Messin’ with Sasquatch” ad campaign, which can be played at [jacklinks.com](http://jacklinks.com) or [sasquatchgames.com](http://sasquatchgames.com); and Orbitz, with a variety of games, travel-related and otherwise, on its Web site ([orbitz.com](http://orbitz.com)).

The [Paris Hilton](#) prison game, introduced in early June, had about a million plays in less than a month, says John P. Roberts, senior vice president for digital media and interactive entertainment at GSN, and spawned a sequel, “The Prison Life 2: Full Release.”

Advergaming is increasing as computer users spend more time playing what are called casual games, to distinguish them from more elaborate online entertainment like video games. Casual games, which are popular with women as well as with men, are typically free and fast to play and usually do not require the concentration required by so many video games.

“They’re ‘conference-call killers,’ ” says Chuck Cordray, vice president and general manager at Hearst Magazines Digital Media in New York, in that “most of the play happens during office hours.”

“I will admit there are conference calls when I have done this,” he adds, laughing, under the rationale that “I’m not wasting time; I’m multitasking.”

Casual games include puzzles like Tetris, card games like solitaire, word games and online versions of board games like checkers, chess and mahjong.

Offering computer users a chance to play casual games on a Web site has two purposes: expanding the amount of content on the site, thereby providing more places to run ads, and keeping the visitors at the site for longer amounts of time, the better for them to potentially be exposed to more ads.

Playing games is “an activity the audience enjoys and it gives them a reason to come to a site,” Mr. Cordray says. “And then they can find the depth of content while they’re there.”

Of the 12 Web sites operated by Hearst Magazines Digital Media, “virtually all of them have games, or will,” he adds. In addition to Cosmopolitan and Seventeen, there are sites for magazines that include Country Living, Esquire, Good Housekeeping, Harper’s Bazaar, Marie Claire, Redbook and Teen.

For instance, [esquire.com](http://esquire.com) is to introduce games later this summer, Mr. Cordray says, which will be mostly poker-related, to fit the magazine’s reader profile.

In creating games for the magazines’ Web sites, “customization seems to help” in terms of drawing players, he adds. “There’s just a little bit more interaction when it’s specific to the brand, because it’s then more specific to the audience.”

For instance, on the Good Housekeeping Web site ([goodhousekeeping.com](http://goodhousekeeping.com)), “a jigsaw puzzle with Good Housekeeping covers works particularly well,” Mr. Cordray says, even better than a puzzle with “a generic picture.”

Arkadium was chosen as the Hearst Magazines Digital Media partner for games, he adds, based on the positive experience he had with the company “in a prior life,” when he was senior vice president for consumer marketing at the TV Guide Publishing Group and worked with Arkadium on the games for [tvguide.com](http://tvguide.com).

Arkadium, which was started in 2001 by Kenny Rosenblatt, the chief executive, and his wife, Jessica Rovello, the chairwoman, now has 125 games in its library.

The company develops two to four new games a month, Mr. Rosenblatt says, for which customers are charged about \$25,000 to \$500,000, “based on the complexity and the time spent” to create them.

Some Arkadium games are “reskinned,” he adds, meaning they are reworked versions of classic library staples, but the demand for customized and custom-made games is rising.

“If people just want to play games, they can go to big portals like [Microsoft](#) or [Yahoo](#), where they have huge libraries of standard games,” Mr. Rosenblatt says.

“But they will never be able to play Editor’s Assistant or Boy Toy on those big sites, because they’re customized for, and relevant to, the Hearst properties,” he adds.

Each game took about three months to create, Mr. Rosenblatt says, compared with the three weeks or so that it takes to produce a reskinned game. Both were tested in beta phases before being introduced.



“It all starts with creating a great game that’s fun to play,” Mr. Rosenblatt says. “We want to make it a good experience for users because if it’s good, they talk to their friends about it and that helps spread the word.”



“You know you’re pushing too much if a game’s not fun to play anymore,” he adds.

It is especially important to monitor the fun quotient when a product or brand is integrated into the plot line or background of a game, Mr. Rosenblatt says, because if it is deemed too

intrusive, “it can kill the buzz.”

Neither Boy Toy nor Editor’s Assistant integrates ads within the game. The ads appear on screen before the game begins, during a 10-second countdown to the start, or at the bottom of the page while the game is being played.



“If we can do it in a way that’s not too intrusive, we’re open to that,” Mr. Cordray says of interweaving brands or products into the games.

For instance, in the scenes in Boy Toy that take place in a bar, “you could see a sign for a particular brand or a logo on a tap,” he adds.



And the bottle in the game called “espin-the-bottle,” which computers users can play on [ecrush.com](http://ecrush.com), a Web site acquired by Hearst in January, “could be a logo-ed bottle,” Mr. Cordray says, noting that in real life the bottles used to play spin-the-bottle almost always

have labels bearing brand names.

Hearst Magazines Digital Media has presented customized games on its Web sites for teenagers for advertisers like Kotex and Pottery Barn.

Since the time that Boy Toy and Editor’s Assistant made their debuts in June, Mr. Cordray says, he has been pleased with the results.

The week that Editor’s Assistant went live, about 20 percent of the page views on [seventeen.com](http://seventeen.com) were devoted to games, he recalls. By comparison, for a typical Hearst Web site, 8 percent to 20 percent of the page views are for games.

And of the page views devoted to games that week on the Seventeen Web site, Mr. Cordray says, 75 percent were for the new game.

Also, “half the girls who played Editor’s Assistant spent 10 minutes or more with the game,” he adds.

The statistics for the first week of Boy Toy were similar, Mr. Cordray says.