



The arrival of the east European media

Not content with beating England at football, Russians are transforming the British mediascape, along with Poles, Czechs and Lithuanians. Meg Carter reports on the arrival of the east European media

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There are now an estimated 250,000 Russian speakers in Britain and well over a million Poles – enough to merit a personal visit from politicians campaigning for Poland's snap general elections on 21 October. But it's not just Russians and Poles who are swelling the number of east Europeans coming to live and work here, and a burgeoning media group is now seeking to serve them.

In May 2004 the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia and Slovenia – who, together with Poland, are known as "the accession eight" – joined the European Union and got unfettered access to the UK job market.

Between May 2004 and June 2007, 683,000 people from these nations registered to work in the UK, Home Office figures show (although unofficial estimates suggest that the number of eastern Europeans now living in Britain is far higher).

Although Poles remain the largest group – a legacy of historic links between the two countries which were strengthened during the Second World War when the Polish government was established in London – the number of Russians, Bulgarians, Latvians and Lithuanians are growing fast.

Small wonder, then, that entrepreneurs, established media players, advertising agencies and brand owners are queuing up to cash in on the eastern European pound.

The London-based Russian media entrepreneur Elena Ragozhina, founder of Russian-language newspaper London-INFO, was one of the first to identify the potential market represented by the UK's half a million or so Russian speakers.

Three years ago, she launched New Style, a Russian-language lifestyle magazine aimed at affluent expats, part of a stable of titles produced by her firm, Russian Media Company. "When people arrive in the UK they want to fit in with the English way of doing things, but they also want to keep in contact with their traditions and what's going on in their old country," Ragozhina explains.

Bulgarians in the UK have their own newspaper, too. Budlinik has been published fortnightly since 2002 and is a digest of political, trade and cultural stories from back home plus tips on acclimatising to life in the UK. Lithuanians here have infoZONA, while Czechs and Slovaks have Echo Magazin.

But it is the UK's Polish community that is best-served with print media. The morning newspaper Dziennik Polski has an estimated 30,000 readers. Other titles include the weekly Polish Express, published by Fortis Media, which recently launched an entertainment tabloid, Laif, and a glossy magazine, Panorama. Another popular magazine is Gonicz Polski.

Dublin's Evening Herald has introduced a Polish-language pullout, the Polski Herald, and other titles, including the Reading Chronicle, have since followed suit.

Traditionally, expat media set up to serve migrants have evolved out of local newsletters created and circulated in areas where new migrants first settle – typically, places close to churches or cultural centres.

The internet has accelerated this process, however, enabling the rapid development of a range of online media – from community websites such as the Latvian portal www.labrit.co.uk and www.pohyby.co.uk, a website for Czechs and Slovaks in Britain, as well as online versions of the Russian London Courier, online radio and even internet TV.

What's more, expats can easily access online spin-offs from familiar TV and print media brands and news wire services from back home.

Interest from Czech migrants living overseas, for example, was one factor in the recent expansion of Aktalne.cz, the Czech Republic's first exclusively online daily news service, which was launched by Centrum.cz in November 2005. It offers multimedia coverage in partnership with Czech Television and Reuters. Internet TV serving eastern European migrants is another growth market. Already, Poles in Britain can access the web channel PL-TV. "This is an information service for what's on and where to go, to help Polish immigrants in the UK and help challenge stereotypes," according to PL-TV.com's editor-in-chief, Tom Tyranowicz.

Radio Orla, one of two Anglo-Polish radio stations – the other is Radio Hey Now – attracts 25,000 listeners a week with programming in English, Polish and Slovak.

The station launched in May last year on the internet, and last month began transmitting on FM following a tie-up with the west London local radio station Hayes FM 91.8, in whose catchment area live an estimated 30,000 Poles.

"We saw an opportunity when the BBC realigned the World Service in 2005 and scrapped many of its eastern European language services – services many eastern Europeans in the UK listened to via the internet," says Radio Orla's managing director George Musgrave, who was born in Britain to Polish parents.

"Today, we are encouraged by the growing interest in what we have to offer, and are now in discussion with Slovaks and Romanians to develop their own radio language services for expats in the UK," he says. "Although, until the numbers of each nationality reach critical mass, the best route is podcasting rather than launching a full-blown radio service."

Established broadcasters, too, are waking up to the changing make-up of their audiences. BBC Coventry and Warwickshire, for example, airs a weekly show called Poles Apart, aimed at first-generation Polish immigrants. The British market for eastern European TV is also growing. Earlier this year, a service called Simply Global TV was set up in the UK, offering eastern Europeans packages of broadcast channels from back home relayed live via the internet.

Meanwhile, a Latvian business called Baltic Media Alliance has received a TV licence from Ofcom for two services: the First Baltic Channel and the First Baltic Music Channel. Although both are yet to launch here, First Baltic already operates satellite channels in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.

The British research consultancy Ethnic Focus/STRC is one of a number of marketing service agencies gearing up to advise clients on the UK's emerging eastern European market. Earlier this year, the company set up an eastern European research unit and now conducts a monthly consumer survey called Eastern European Tracker.

"The demographics of ethnicity are changing rapidly," explains its research director, Saber Khan. "By 2012, we estimate that 51 per cent of the London population will be from an ethnic minority – and eastern Europeans will

account for a significant chunk of this."

For ethnic marketing specialists such as Mediareach, Media Moghuls and the mainstream media consultancy Vizeum, targeting eastern Europeans in Britain involves a mix of community marketing and promotions, postcode-targeted direct mail and outdoor advertising, as well as eastern European language ad campaigns.

Money-transfer services and government departments tend to be the first advertisers to target each new wave of migrants arriving in the UK.

Today, though, high-street banks, led by HSBC and Barclays, and the mobile phone company Orange are actively recruiting staff from and targeting advertising to eastern Europeans working and living in the UK. Meanwhile, retailers including Tesco and Sainsbury are stocking a range of eastern European food products in their stores.

"Media is limited for some of these groups, but growing fast," says Patricia Macauley, head of black and ethnic minority communications at the Central Office of Information, which has run eastern European campaigns promoting the minimum wage and LearnDirect.

"Outdoor is also good, as we can now pinpoint sites down to the exact streets where people live and the specialist shops – delicatessens, for example – that they regularly use."

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