

SUNDAY PROFILE

Building an empire of gay media

Paul Colichman, already a cable mogul, has ambitious plans for the Advocate and other publications.

By CLAUDIA ELLER
Times Staff Writer

Cult filmmaker John Waters calls him "the gay Citizen Hearst."

Though Paul Colichman is by no means as well known, rich or powerful as the legendary newspaper magnate William Randolph Hearst, he's trying to forge his own maverick path in the media world.

Five years ago, Colichman and his business partner launched *Here*, television's only premium gay cable network. Now, with an eye toward building their empire, they recently made a \$6.5-million deal to buy the popular news magazine the *Advocate*, style monthly *Out* and other sister publications.

Colichman, who also owns the gay entertainment Internet portal *GayWired.com*, plans to expand the online presence of his new publications once the acquisition closes.

"People say, 'Why would you buy a print publication when you're really in the television business?'" said Colichman. "But our point of view is that everything is cross-platformed now — we are in the content business, and to generate profit you need to be everywhere."

Colichman, 46, and his odd-couple business partner, Stephen P. Jarchow — a straight family man from the Midwest — also produce and distribute low-cost films and TV shows at their 13-year-old company, Regent Entertainment. They work from a penthouse in Westwood, just blocks away from where Colichman was born.

Colichman, whose father was a nuclear chemist and

mother a bacteriologist, had no family connections in Hollywood. After earning an MBA at UCLA, he worked briefly at Fox before partnering with music impresario Miles Copeland in film company I.R.S. Media. Among their releases was the 1992 crime thriller "One False Move," the first produced script from a little-known actor named Billy Bob Thornton.

In 1995, entertainment attorney Peter Dekom introduced Colichman and Jarchow, 57, a tax and real estate lawyer who was hunting for business opportunities. Polar opposites in demeanor and lifestyle, the two nonetheless clicked over lunch at Barney Greengrass in Beverly Hills.

"Their differences made it work," Dekom said. "Paul's a visionary and dynamo, and Stephen is someone who knows how to get things financed and structured."

With a few million dollars of their own money, they formed Regent, and three years later they made a splash with the drama "Gods and Monsters," about the last days of "Frankenstein" director James Whale. The low-cost film won director Bill Condon the best-adapted-screenplay Oscar.

"It really built our reputation, and that gave birth to the idea of Here Networks," said Colichman, who along with Jarchow says they have to date invested about \$40 million of their own money and profit from Regent into the cable network business.

"We realized that if you're self-financed, we had to pick a niche if we were going to truly be successful," Colichman said.

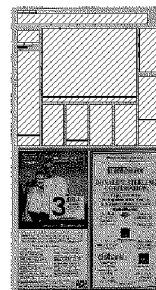
"We knew that going head-to-head with the studios, we'd get our head handed to us sooner or later."

Indeed, Colichman faces tough competition in the lucrative gay market, whether it's PlanetOut Inc.'s *Gay.com* or the advertiser-supported gay cable network Logo, owned by media giant Viacom Inc. Although no one knows the actual size of the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender market, one analysis estimates it at 15 million to 16 million adults with a buying power of \$712 billion.

Colichman believes *Here's* competitive edge rests in the quality and diversity of its content — including original TV series about gay families, movies, documentaries and reality shows — which is available on video-on-demand services through cable operators such as Comcast Corp. and Time Warner Cable. Nearly 500,000 subscribers pay \$7 to \$8 a month for the programming.

Much of the content in *Here's* most popular shows, including the supernatural adult soap opera "Dante's Cove," is highly sexualized. Colichman, however, resents any suggestion that he's peddling soft porn. "It's the same that other premium TV networks like Showtime and HBO are showing."

Among the assets in his pending acquisition of the *Advocate* from PlanetOut Inc. are three "adult" magazines — *Freshmen*, *Men* and *Unzipped* — whose websites link to the e-commerce site *BuyGay.com*, which sells sex toys and adult videos.



But Colichman says once the acquisition closes that will cease. "We're not going to be selling those things," he said. "That's not our business." He added that he has asked the current owners to remove all adult advertising from the sites. Although Regent will retain the BuyGay.com domain name, it will be used to sell the Advocate and his other publications.

Those who know Colichman laud him for pushing the boundaries. When Waters, known for such films as "Pink Flamingos" and "Polyester," was hired by Here to pick movies for his film anthology series "John Waters Presents Movies That Will Corrupt You," Colichman gave him free rein.

"Paul let me do the show the way I wanted and let me pick

films that even gay networks may have been alarmed at," said Waters, citing such titles as "Irreversible," a French thriller he calls "the most harrowing movie about rape ever made."

"He was brave to do a gay TV station and he's driven and obsessive in the best sense of the word," Waters said. "He doesn't consider that anything won't work."

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Putting it together

Who: Paul Colichman

Age: 46

Job: Co-founder and CEO of Here Networks and Regent Entertainment

Born: Westwood

Residence: Bel-Air

Family: Partnered for 15 years with David, an actor

Education: Bachelor's and MBA degrees, both from UCLA

Hobbies: Restoring historic buildings

Favorite program on rival gay network LOGO: "Exes & Ohs"



KEN HIVELEY Los Angeles Times

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