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Airbnb Teams With Hearst on Magazine Guided by Travel Site's Data

New print publication will roll out May 23 with a \$3.99 cover price

By Jeffrey A. Trachtenberg

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When the new travel publication *Airbnbmag* hits select newsstands and mailboxes later this month, many of the stories, including the cover feature set in Havana, will be sourced from billions of anonymous data points collected by the home-sharing service.



The cover of the new *airbnbmag*, featuring Havana. PHOTO: HEARST MAGAZINES

Those data are expected to enable editors to assign stories for an audience eager to learn about local hot spots. Since Savannah, Ga., is one of Airbnb's top search destinations, one piece in the first issue includes barbecue recommendations from a Savannah barbecue pit master.

There is also a piece about Porvoo, a city on the southern coast of Finland, because Airbnb data show an increasing number of people are interested in that destination.

"We know how many people are searching to stay in Havana, Detroit or

Tokyo, and we know how many people want to go based on search dates for future trips," said Brian Chesky, chief executive of Airbnb Inc. "No one has billions of demand search data points for nearly every country in the world. That gives us a leg up." The Airbnb data will inform editors on ways to shape future content, although not every story will be data-driven.

The print-only publication, a joint venture between Hearst Magazines and Airbnb, will launch May 23 with a guaranteed circulation of 350,000, 45 pages of advertising and a \$3.99 cover price. A second issue is slated for September. If readers and advertisers like what they see, the magazine will have a more robust publishing schedule in 2018.

Mr. Chesky said that while Airbnb is a tech company, he embraced the idea of a print travel publication because "there's the possibility that it can be saved. It isn't ephemeral, as opposed to content on a feed that expires." Back in 2014, Airbnb published one issue of a print travel publication called *Pineapple*, which Mr. Chesky described as a "niche, bespoke magazine."

Airbnb and Hearst Magazines are co-owners of the new joint venture, sharing equally in the costs. Joanna Coles, chief content officer at Hearst Magazines, said that staffers at both companies were involved in creating the publication.

Both Mr. Chesky and Ms. Coles declined to say how much their companies were investing in Airbnbmag.

Michael Clinton, publishing director at Hearst Magazines, expressed confidence that the publication will continue to attract major marketers, noting that the first issue pulled “big corporate advertisers as well as some new people who haven’t advertised with us before.”

Mr. Clinton said all of the advertising in the first issue was paid for but declined to discuss ad revenue. On the subscriber front, he noted that Airbnb has a large built-in community. “We think they’ll support this magazine from a subscription point of view because it reflects their community,” he said.

Print advertising and newsstand sales are largely declining industrywide. Time Inc., for example, the country’s largest magazine publisher, saw its print and other advertising revenue decline 9% in 2016 while its circulation revenue, which includes newsstand sales, also fell 9%.

Profits, at least for Mr. Chesky, aren’t an immediate priority. “From my point of view it’s successful if more people experience Airbnb and talk about it,” he said.

That view wasn’t shared by Ms. Coles of Hearst Magazines. “I want to make money,” she quipped.

The new magazine will be distributed in the U.S., with the exception of a small number of copies that will be available for sale in London.

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Should it prove a hit, the magazine could roll out globally, since two-thirds of Airbnb’s business is done abroad. Mr. Chesky noted Airbnb was quick to spot that Americans

were interested in traveling to Cuba and today has 19,000 hosts there.

Hearst Magazines is an old hand at joint-venture publications, starting with O, The Oprah Magazine in 2000 and including such publications as Food Network Magazine and HGTV Magazine. In June, in partnership with Food Network majority-owner Scripps Network Interactive, Hearst Magazines will debut The Pioneer Woman Magazine, named after the brand created by food blogger Ree Drummond.

Mr. Clinton of Hearst Magazines said 50,000 copies of Airbnbmag will be sold at airport and bookstore newsstands, supermarkets, and mass retail stores. Another 200,000 will be distributed without cost to some Airbnb hosts and the service’s most frequent guests. An additional 100,000 copies will be sent to Hearst subscribers who have stayed previously with Airbnb hosts.

“For example, a selection of Esquire subscribers who have used Airbnb may receive a complimentary issue,” Mr. Clinton said.

The Airbnb data should be a difference maker, said Samir Husni, director of the Magazine Innovation Center at the University of Mississippi. “The content is going to be targeted to cities where they know Airbnb customers are visiting,” he said. “You’ve got a very involved audience that wants to interact with the brand.”

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