



BY CYNTHIA COTTS.

## **Brill's Contempt**

The Media Watchdog Has No Teeth

THIS PAST NOVEMBER, STEVEN BRILL PREDICTED THAT 'BRILL'S CONTENT,' HIS MEDIA MAGAZINE FOR CONSUMERS, WOULD BREAK EVEN THIS YEAR, 1 DON'T WANT TO PROMISE ANYTHING . . . BUT IT'S LOOKING GOOD," HE TOLD THE

'DAILY NEWS," AND WENT ON TO CLAIM 400,000 READERS. AT LEAST ONE OF BRILL'S EMPLOYEES BELIEVED HIM AND WOULD OPEN THE MAGAZINE EVERY

month expecting a spike in ad pages.

But things were not looking good. Last year, Brill's sold only about 20 percent of the issues he hoped to sell on the newsstands. His Web site. Contentville.com, failed to catch line. Across the industry, ad pages remained flat.

Then on April 2, the cocky CED told the world that his company had marged with Powerful Media. To hear Briff spin it, the merger is yet another victory -- year-old inside.com will continue to produce edgy reporting on antertainment, media, and technology, and three-year-old Brill's Content will be reintroduced this summer as Inside Content, a concept that has been widely described as a business manazine.

The reality is that Brill's tenure as media watchdog was a commercial flop, but he won't admit it. Appearing last weekend on Reliable Sources, Brill repeatedly dedged the question of whether he had failed at his original mission, going so far as to claim that his mag was never really intended to be a watchdog at all. His refusal to come to terms did not surprise his staffers, one of whom said, "Steve would change [the magazine] into Maxim before he would admit defeat."

While Brill's employees seem to understand his decision, they're the ones who born the brant of it - he laid off on estimated half of them as a result. Management has "handled this thing horrendously," said one victim last week.

The first alarms rang on March 29, when reportors from The Industry Standard began calling staffers to discuss rumors of a possible merger and layoffs. Later that day, when the same rumors surfaced on the Web, a Brill employee popped the accestion to editor Eric Effron, who reportedly said, That's news to me."

On the morning of April 2, Brill invited media reporters to an impromptu press conference at the New York Palace Hotel, but he left his employees on the 16th floor of 1230 South Avenue in the dark. Then the mail-room guys dropped off a bunch of packing boxes on the 16th floor, inspiring someone to warn, "Look, we're all getting fired today." Around the same time, a source at inside told a staffer about the press conference, and someone e-mailed media maven Jim Romenesko to ask. "Do you know when the press conference is?"

Ever intropid, one staffer snuck into the press conference, where he heard Brill tell a reporter there could be layoffs; "but we haven't worked out." the details." Soon after, Brill's assistant welked eround the office handing out the press release, and Effron followed, summoning eight people to meet in the conference room. The eight had already assembled when their bosses arrived; Brill, Effron, editor in chief David Kuhn, and the head of human resources.

The meeting has since been described as a "throat slitting" and "group gassing," with Kuhnhis "usually incoherent self at big moments." Onesource e-mailed Romenesics that Kuhn "supposedly got a tear in his eye," while Effron "held his head in his hands." But Brill blithely took off for the Yenkees opener that aftornoon, and by day's and a so more staffers had been campetist in blog \$45,07,1855,then a year got two wooks of south

year they had worked.

The layoffs included writers Elizabeth Angell, Jim Edwards, Eve Gerbar, Gay Jervay, and Kaja Perine; and aditors Susan Ellingwood, Paul Schnee, and Eric and Ellen Umansky, Writers Mark Boal and Austin Bunn were told their existing contracts would not be renewed. The laid-off. were asked to work until friday, but when managers realized they needed more time and aditors. to close the final issue, they asked Ellan Umansky to stay another week. Her refusal left them frentically recruiting writers and assistants to function as editors. "It was like giving the cooks the guns after the front lines have been broken." said one source.

Office conversations quickly degenerated into "gossip and backbiting." A favorite topic was the June issue of Brill's Content, which will contain several pieces scavenged from Inside, a magazine that had been written in a recy style and was not fact-checked. One day, Kuhn was overheard talking to the editor in chief of *Inside* , saying, "I really like that feature by David Carr. I think we'll be able to use it as a sideber '

Another subject of speculation involved not who got laid off, but why. The victims were told the decision was not about talent, and they were prone to agree. Said one, "It's clear that Steve protected some people (such as Abigail Pogrebin). but David didn't have that power." (Bos) and Bunn were Kuhn favorites.) Throughout the week; the managers seemed to avoid eve contact with those who had been laid off, and no one bothered to take the soon-to-be desaparecides out to lunch or

Given that six women got laid off, two staffers contis@villagevoice.com

detected further evidence of allegedly presideting male chausinism. "It's most certainly a place where man have thrived awar waynen," sold one. A male staffor added that it's a "sign of the column" that the place is dominated by "big-swinging dick types." that is, swoggaring mon who are highly confident of their talent.

Inevitably, talk turned to the face of the bosses. Said one stuffer, "There's an unofficial pool on when (Effron) and (Kulm) will leave." It's widely balleyed that Kulm, who knows how to package a narrative but is no expert on media business, will bell. "Here's a guy who wented to take Brill's from being too insidery and turn it into a cultural vehicle," rays one source. Says shother, "Now he finds himself at easentially a trade magazine, whith is not really David's style,"

Office gossips have two theories about Effrom One has it that "there's a bullet with his name on it," because he now has four bosses; the other holds that he will be protected, because he's been lovel to Brill

Finally, no one tires of discussing the blo man's psychology. "Brill's Content was never cool," says one steffer, and now Briff would rather be the "popular kid" then the "plans buily." According to this source, "Steve wanted not only to do 'getche' [journalism], but wanted people to care."

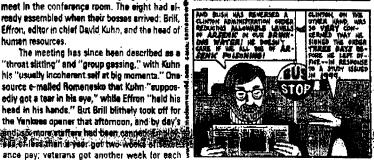
Of nourse, Brill's desire to be liked may not extend to ex-staffers. "I respect him," says one, "but I don't know that I want to work for him again. I don't think you can count on not having the rug pulled out from under you."

Another departing staffer access Brill for abandoning the role of press critic, when the boss had long maintained that the magazine was apersting on a five-year plan. 'The truth is that he was hypocritical?" says this source. "He made it round like it was a real jihad on his part."

Brill declined to comment. (1)

## THIS MODERN WORLD BY TOM TOMORROW









Henri Box, Slynd, 200 lolder विकास के जिल्ला के स्थाप कर के जिल्ला के स्थाप के स्था Blank (J. 15) Lambir Design, Describes Amelides Mill beffert up Met fars HEDIA SOLUTION 212-734-3541

YOU'VE PRESS YOUR CDI NOW WHAT AllA MIND MIS Radio Promotion Publicity/Lunal Ren Web Design

Call for FREE consulto 212-564-461

MiMikius@coi.com www.Mighlindillusic.c

InternetM From the like Butter to a

CKY (II TE NIPL MIN ពលទ្រផ្សាស់ មេទី៤ OPPISM

THE BEST IN THE

BEST QUALI

de kot mala Lase to recu

100 Rael the sparte water Me A strain Shi

50 LBs on specialis Day Bernardeni Cis WE WILL BEAT

The World's Sast Read Ch VILLAGE VOICE CLASSITIED