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Diversity Pays Off in a Babel of Yellow Pages for Specific Immigrant Groups

By DOREEN CARVAJAL

At two inches thick, the Russian Yellow Pages has a familiar look and heft with some basic refinements: Russian translations, a Russian information line and a critical section mapping the locations of Manhattan's better public toilets.

"Someone once said we are united by the Constitution and television," said Ilya I. Levkov, officially the publisher of the 800-page Russian Yellow Pages, but more often its chief writer, editor and salesman. "I thought I could unite the Russians here by the Yellow Pages."

Others had the same idea in a different language; in the last five years foreign-language telephone directories have multiplied so rapidly that it is possible to choose a Portuguese driving instructor from the Lista Telefonica Luso Americana in Newark, or an Israeli psychotherapist from the Jewish Israeli Yellow Pages, which is published in Kew Gardens, Queens, and printed in Israel.

Two forces have contributed to the growth of a united nations of telephone directories: desktop computer publishing programs and a rising number of prosperous immigrants who have attracted the attention of small entrepreneurs as well as AT&T and Nynex.

"Today you have Macintosh computers, laser printers, programs for making ads, programs to paginate the books," said Assaf Ran, president of Dapey Assaf Publication Ltd., which will publish 250,000 copies of the Jewish Israeli Yellow Pages next year. "It's very easy to do." In the New York region alone, besides the Portuguese, Russian and Israeli directories, there are telephone guides catering specifically to Cubans, Dominicans, Filipinos, Koreans and Colombians. Across the country, the Yellow Pages Publishers Association in Michigan lists at least 27 Spanish directories and 11 Chinese guides.

In February, the Chinese Yellow Pages, based in Northern California, will expand to New York with the publication of a 1,000-page edition with a 24-hour telephone information service and a catchy Chinese slogan, which translates as "You use these Yellow Pages and you can go anywhere."



Linda Rosier/The New York Times

Immigrants look over the Russian Yellow Pages, being distributed last week in Brooklyn. Besides advertisements by Russian doctors, lawyers and merchants, the directory has pages of tips for new arrivals.

"It's difficult to start because you have to spend a lot of time with the advertisers to explain who we are," said Helen Tay, an account executive for the Chinese Yellow Pages in New York. "They want to know more because this is the first time that we'll publish. But I'm proud that

National advertisers and industry experts said the ethnic telephone books started emerging in the mid-1980's after the break-up of AT&T, but many failed to survive through business downturns. Then in the early 1990's a new wave of foreign language directories appeared that tried to offer more benefits — such as business referral networks and tips on surviving in a new country — than traditional telephone books.

"You could argue that the traditional phone book is under the very types of pressures that make these ethnic books possible," said Carl Mercurio, who tracks trends in Yellow Pages for Simba Information

the professional services of local Spanish-speaking travel agents, doctors and lawyers, some of whom tout their expertise in recovering forfeited property. Plastic surgeons in Cali, Colombia, also advertise there, offering low rates, liposuction and implants, and showing results in fulling at the University of Colorado, said the evolution of American society is reflected in the Yellow Pages, which he analyzes for the rise of new trends from the popularity of espresso to racquetball.

"I think these foreign language directories are significant," he said. "It underscores the greater diversity in our country today. And along with that, we are recognizing this development in ways that we never did before."

National advertisers like AT&T are using the phone directories to promote themselves in Russian, Hebrew, Spanish, Portuguese, Tagalog and Chinese for customers likely to be phoning overseas. In New York, AT&T has essentially sponsored the Russian Yellow Pages, which it buys in bulk from Mr. Levkov's publishing company and distributes to Russian immigrants on the street corners of Brooklyn.

Like other foreign language directories, the Russian guides are also circulated in community centers, bookstores, banks and travel agencies that cater to that particular ethnic group. The Russian book's 1995 cover is a delicate rainbow streaking over clouds and a placid sea. The AT&T logo is displayed in the corner with a Russian slogan: "Oceans separate. And we connect."

Of all the local foreign language directories, the Russian guide is the least traditional, with a high percentage of its pages devoted to tips for newly arrived Russians. The guide includes capsule histories of the 50 states and Russian crossword puzzles devoted to American trivia. Its slogans are quirky appeals with whimsical cartoons; "If your goldfish has a runny nose, find the best veterinarian in the Russian Yellow Pages."

The directory is top heavy with advertisements from Russian doctors, lawyers and "forwarders," who ship containers of goods to Odessa or St. Petersburg for fees topping \$3,000. The publisher, Mr. Levkov, has also explored his own interests, including a list of thrift shops and the location of public toilets.

"I tell them, don't be afraid to go to big and fashionable hotels. Primarily they cater to the rich, but anyone can go there."

The efforts of entrepreneurs like Mr. Levkov have not gone unnoticed by Nynex, the company that supplies the vast number of New York customers with its Yellow Pages.

Nynex, which already distributes a Spanish-language edition of the Manhattan directory, is preparing to introduce two smaller neighborhood telephone books in Spanish, aimed at customers in Washington Heights and East Harlem. Company executives are also exploring the potential for books or inserts in Russian, Korean and Chinese, according to Niall Connor, the director of product marketing for Nynex.

Mr. Connor has trouble pronouncing the name of the company's Spanish-language telephone book, *Paginas Amarillas*. But he said the company has no doubt that it will press forward with foreign language publications; he said advertising sales for the Washington Heights telephone book exceeded expectations by 50 percent.

"Frankly," he said, "there was a time when Nynex was not paying as much attention as it should have to the ethnic market. It's no longer just socially correct to put out a foreign language edition. If you look at the growth of the marketplace — the Hispanics, Russians and Arabics — it's becoming more of a competitive marketplace. We can no longer serve the market with simply an Anglo product."

Many directories offer help lines and survival tips for newcomers.

Inc. in Connecticut. "The culture that sat down and watched 'The Ed Sullivan Show' doesn't exist anymore. That one product doesn't exist."

The foreign-language Yellow Pages typically feature glossy advertising in full color and information in two languages. In the last year, some began displaying their wares by computer, on the Web pages of the Internet.

Much of the advertising placed in the Directorio Telefonico Colombiano, which was started five years ago by a Colombian businessman, is local. Most of its slick four-color ads are placed by Colombian professionals and merchants concentrated in neighborhoods of New York City and northern New Jersey. They promote homestyle Colombian restaurants or

