



PROFILE

THE CLASSIFIED AD KING

John MacBain, born in Niagara Falls, Ont., keeps a low profile in Geneva, but he has definitely hit the big time in the business world. Over the past few months, media giants Yahoo, Google and News Corp. have all been named as possible suitors for a classified advertising and Internet business that MacBain and his ex-wife built, now worth as much as \$1.8 billion. With that kind of interest in MacBain's Netherlands-based publishing empire, Trader Classified Media NV, it's going to be hard staying out of the limelight.

The success of Trader since its founding, in 1987, has landed MacBain—who owns 72% of the company's regular and multiple-voting shares—an enviable spot on the Rich 100, at No. 27 with a net worth of \$1.23 billion. His ex, Louise Blouin MacBain, has won her own place at No. 89. She sold her portion of the business back to MacBain for well over \$300 million in the years following their divorce in 2000, and is estimated to now have a net worth of \$414 million. (See profile opposite page.)

In August, Trader—with annual revenues of €413.3 and profit of €253.2 in 2004—announced the launch of a strategic review with advisers about selling all or part of the company. Industry analysts suggest Google, Yahoo and News Corp. are interested. Trader then announced in November that it was pursuing an initial public offering,

on the London Stock Exchange, of the company's central and eastern European classified advertising business. The announcement "signals the completion of the first stage of our strategic review and is a clear and visible step in maximizing value for all our shareholders," MacBain said in a news release. Industry watchers suggest the IPO is a way to lure potential bidders who didn't want the whole company, which has assets in North America, France, Italy, Spain, Latin America and, most recently, China.

Trader got its start when MacBain, a Rhodes Scholar who also has an MBA from Harvard, purchased *Auto Hebdo*, a publication for buying and selling cars. The business grew steadily, with *Auto Trader* its best-known title in Canada. In 1989, Torstar Corp. purchased half the business and helped it expand. In 1997, U.S.-based marketing firm CUC International Inc. (now called Cendant Corp.) purchased Torstar's stake, but when CUC got into financial difficulties, the MacBains took the stake back. They renamed the company in 1998 and took it public in 2000. Trader has been on a tear since, with more than 500 print titles and 57 websites in 20 countries. The future ownership of Trader is up in the air, but MacBain, as controlling shareholder, is bound to come out of any sale with millions in hand. Given he's only 47, don't expect him to rest on his laurels.

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