

Rogers named CEO of Johnson Publishing

Plans expansion for Ebony, Jet mags and cosmetics line

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Desiree Rogers, President Obama's former White House social secretary, said Tuesday after being named CEO of Johnson Publishing Co. that she intends to expand Ebony and JET magazines' licensing and website presences, and grow the Fashion Fair cosmetics line.

Linda Johnson Rice, daughter of the company's founder who held the CEO title, will remain as chairman. The two women are good friends.

Rogers has no publishing experience, though she worked for a company 20 years ago that owned newsstands, and said she understands the workings of distribution, wholesaler relationships and positioning magazines to sell.

"I've been a generalist all of my career, focused on taking brands to the next level and integrating all of a company's functional expertise under one roof to move forward," she said.

Johnson Publishing Co. has licenses for sunglasses and greeting cards, but Rogers said she foresees more strategic licensing agreements for such things as books, TV shows, book-a-zines and online stores that sell Ebony and JET archival material.

"There are a number of ways we could go," said Rogers, a New Orleans native and Harvard MBA who became known locally as the Illinois State Lottery director and first female and African-American president of Peoples Gas and North Shore Gas.

Rogers said she intends to



Desiree Rogers (left) takes the Johnson Publishing CEO reins from her pal, JPC Chairman Linda Johnson Rice. | EARL GIBSON-AP

expand Ebony and JET magazines' popular features online and create communities around them. One idea: To highlight JET magazine's "Beauty of the Week" online, post a video, host an advertising sponsor, publish a question-and-answer column, ask readers to vote on whether this week's beauty is more exciting than last week's, and hold online contests around the theme.

As for Fashion Fair cosmetics, Rogers said she sees "great potential" for its product lines as they gain marketing support.

Rogers, 51, who left the White House early this year after two uninvited guests crashed a state dinner in November, had been working as a consultant to Johnson Publishing Co. since June 5.

She said she doesn't intend to bring her top-notch social connections to bear on her

new duties.

"I think that Ebony can stand on its own, and JET can stand on its own," she said. "People respond when they call."

Johnson Publishing, beset by falling advertising revenues, recently started a management reshuffling, beginning with the June 3 announcement that the company is no longer for sale and the hiring that same day of Amy DuBois Barnett as the new editor in chief of Ebony.

The newcomers face a daunting task: JET's circulation dropped 11.7 percent in 2009 from 2008, to 795,035, while Ebony's circulation declined 9.7 percent, to 1.17 million. For the first half of this year compared to the same period in 2009, revenues at JET dropped 29 percent, to \$6.4 million, while Ebony's slid 24 percent, to \$14.37 million, according to industry reports.