

association

# publishing

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## stand out from the others

3 characteristics of a powerful brand

21 strategies to ring up more sales

10 tips for developing  
a publication's personality



WANT TO GENERATE MORE AD SALES? FIRST, STRENGTHEN YOUR MARKETING EFFORTS.

# getting the word out TO ADVERTISERS

Recently, I spoke with an executive director who is frustrated by having to spend member dues to produce and mail her association's publication. She believes that the magazine should generate enough advertising sales to break even, at the least. But advertising buyers—even within the industry—often pass up this association's magazine in favor of smaller "paid" magazines published by for-profit companies.

Exacerbating this executive's frustration is the fact that the magazine isn't well-known outside of its specific marketplace. Plus, she knows that members of her association possess more buying power than readers of many other publications carrying hundreds of pages of ads per year—but her magazine has very little general or non-endemic advertising.

"Why," she wondered, "are ad sales so much lower than the quality of the publication and the audience might lead one to expect? Aren't the salespeople doing their jobs?"

First, I checked to see if something was wrong with the publication itself. However, I found the magazine rich in content, timely, and well-written. It contains layouts, graphics, and articles that are at least as good as those found in competitive publications. In fact, the commercial publishers in the field receive much of their information from the association. Next, I asked what kind of marketing the association does to increase the awareness of its publication among advertisers and their agencies. The answer: Marketing is handled by the sales organization. Because money is tight, staff is lean, and the sales and marketing functions lead to the

same end, the executive director explained, it seemed logical to combine the two functions.

Aha! It is easy to see why this association magazine is having problems in the marketplace despite its strengths: Its competitors are winning the marketing battle.

## DEFINING THE DIFFERENCES

Sales and marketing are not the same. Marketing includes many functions, including research, product development, pricing strategy, exposing a product or service to a large group of people, and developing sales leads. Positioning, or defining the special place in the constellation of all publications, is marketing's job. Along with establishing the magazine's positioning, marketing must remind people that the publication exists as a viable advertising medium, refresh their memory of the benefits of reaching a unique audience through this unique vehicle, and build excitement and credibility.

In addition, marketing must demonstrate that the publication influences the audience whom advertisers want to reach. Marketing tools may include product advertising in other publications, direct response advertising, preparation of collateral pieces, and other promotional activities.

Marketing is, essentially, pre-selling. It encompasses all those activities that not only set the stage but also warm up the audience for the main act—the salesperson. If the buyer has not been made aware of a magazine's unique strengths before a sales call, much of the face-to-face presentation may be wasted, as the "actor" must first try to set the stage.

Salespeople have different skill sets than marketing people. Salespeople take the general

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strengths and features of a publication and its audience and make them relevant—and compelling—to a specific buyer. In our business, salespeople must show the prospective advertiser how advertising in a given magazine will either increase sales or establish more influence within a desirable audience. They succeed by finding out objections and providing satisfactory answers to specific questions from individual buyers.

### LEVERAGE YOUR ASSETS

Association publications possess tremendous assets compared to most commercial ventures. Many of these assets—if marketed properly—could be leveraged to pre-sell advertising effectively. For example, most associations have a strong relationship with their members, who are also their readers. Those subscribers invest a lot of time and money in their association, even though they may not always write a check for the publication by itself.

There is a common perception among media buyers that “free” association magazines—those included in the cost of membership dues—are not as well read as their “paid” competitors. It’s easy to see why if you look at the circulation statements of association publications: They usually assign a free or low value to the magazine subscription. Trying to compare “apples to apples,” media buyers observe that commercial publishers charge three, ten, or even twenty times more for a subscription than the portion of dues assigned to the association publication.

Marketing has not given media buyers enough background to understand that association dues may cost hundreds of dollars; that publications are among the principal benefits of association membership; and that association magazines may be read more regularly, and for a longer duration, than those of commercial competitors. The

research needed to prove these assertions is another job of marketing. Yet all too often the salesperson arrives armed only with a shoeshine and smile, to confront a media buyer who has been bombarded with marketing messages from the competition “proving” the superiority of their paid circulation.

Here’s another problem common to many association publications: Media buyers do not understand or value the special ability of the association magazine to convey content developed for the members. Often, timely information that runs in association magazines will appear a month or two before in their commercial competitors. In many instances, the commercial magazines simply rewrite information they receive from the associations! One association magazine, for example, has been quoted every month in a large, general interest, business magazine. In fact, the lead article in one issue of this competitive magazine quoted the association more than a dozen times.

### ESSENTIAL TOOLS

Given the realities of budgeting in most associations, marketing departments must fight for every penny. When budgets are cut, do all you can to preserve the funds necessary to design and produce a professional media kit. Media kits often represent the first exposure of an association and its magazine to potential advertisers.

Oftentimes, the media kit is the only aspect of marketing a buyer will have seen when a salesperson calls, so ensure it is written by people who have experience in communicating with advertisers—not by people inside your organization who specialize in communicating with association members.

The advertising field employs its own jargon. Not only will advertisers more quickly understand the information if it’s written in their language, but also professional presentation of materials will show that your asso-

ciation is interested in doing business with the advertising community.

Most associations are of vital interest to their members because they are the best at what they do. The trick for marketers is to translate that expertise and authority into something the salespeople can use. This can be accomplished through custom reader studies and, for larger magazines, syndicated study information.

Another option is to establish reader panels—groups of association members who agree to be surveyed periodically. A large sample is not required because the information is not presented as being conclusive or fully representative of the association but simply as a sampling. You can conduct reader panels through the mail or the Internet and quickly tabulate responses for advertisers. Use these panels to ask your readers questions about new products, existing products, and new applications, or to obtain feedback on advertising that currently appears in your magazine.

Ultimately, a skilled sales force is responsible for bringing advertising pages to an association publication. But even the best salespeople cannot use tools they do not have. They need media kits, brochures, research, and other marketing tools. For greater sales success, resist the temptation to view marketing simply as a cost. Instead, invest in marketing to get the word out to advertisers before you send in the salespeople. ■



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