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2000 CONFERENCE ISSUE:

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SCREEN TESTS

Bringing Your Web Site Into the 21st Century



ATTRACTING NEW ADVERTISERS

Hoping to diversify your advertising with some consumer-oriented insertions? With some adjustments, it may well be possible.

BY JAMES G. ELLIOTT

By their very nature, association publications are the ultimate special interest business medium. They can provide a way for advertisers to reach a very specific audience with very little waste. Generally, in the trade or profession they serve, association publications reach a much larger percentage of a specific category of people than do their for-profit counterparts. And associations have other assets that appeal to advertisers, including trade shows, Web sites, and direct mail lists.

Some association magazines—for example, the *ABA Journal* and *Realtor*[®] magazine—have circulations large enough to attract the interest of consumer product advertisers such as Mercedes Benz or Toyota. Other publications, although they may be smaller, certainly can attract other business products and services if sold correctly.

The advertising industry is changing dramatically, as evidenced by the media coverage surrounding mergers of high-profile companies such as America Online and Time Warner. Another trend is that advertisers are looking at target groups in more depth and searching for more media artillery.

The new buzz word for this latter trend is “convergence.” In other words, advertisers want to put together programs that cross various types of media. The Internet is one driver of this trend because of its ability to deliver highly

targeted groups. But it isn't the only one. Even advertisers who buy space in a magazine often want more: They want programs integrated with multiple media delivery vehicles. Advertisers want a *relationship* with your association, not just pages in a magazine.

Branching out

Many associations have enormous potential to deliver advertisers' messages in multiple forms, to specific and targeted markets. In addition to their flagship magazines, associations typically have trade shows, Internet sites, targeted smaller magazines, newsletters, special events, and so forth. Some are open to working with other associations or to working with consumer magazines.

A good example is *Realtor*[®] magazine, published by the National Association of Realtors (NAR), Chicago, IL.

Frank Sibley, NAR's senior vice president of communications and publisher of *Realtor*[®] magazine, has instituted a number of cooperative projects. For instance, *Realtor*[®] magazine has featured special sections that draw on the expertise of *Remodeling* and *Home Office Computing* magazines.

Sibley says, “It is important for us to reach out to other areas of expertise that we can share with the real estate community—like the people who know a lot about remodeling projects (*Remodeling*

magazine). Or *Home Office Computing* magazine, which offers expertise on what is necessary to set up an efficient business operation for an independent contractor from his or her home location."

One obstacle preventing many associations from enjoying similar synergies is their tendency to segment and compartmentalize various communication functions. Different departments handle print publishing, Web publishing, event sponsorships, and so forth. This organizational structure can create problems in integrating resources, either because of "turf wars" or the simple lack of an internal mechanism for working together.

Cars, computers, and more

Advertising presents numerous challenges for associations. The first issue is whether top management and the board of directors will accept advertising at all. Then, the question becomes what type of advertising is acceptable.

More associations are accepting, even pursuing, consumer advertising and other types of partnerships. Why? Because they need additional sources of revenue. In today's world, few association leaders can object to advertising when they consider the advantage—keeping down costs, including the cost of membership.

The trend among associations today is to accept most types of advertising, provided the products and services are in good taste and not a health risk to the association members. If your association has been reluctant to go down the path of non-endemic advertising—pursuing advertisers unrelated to your particular trade or profession—reconsider that decision. The economic climate and the association's philosophy might have changed.

If you have the desire (and the green light) to pursue consumer advertising, take a hard look at your publication and



Author James G. Elliott: To compete for consumer ad dollars, you'll have to learn the lingo of advertising agencies.

consider making some changes before you start making sales calls. Here's what you'll need to do if you'd like to get in the door at an advertising agency:

- **Produce a professional-looking magazine with high-quality editorial content.** Many association magazines need to be re-formatted and remodeled to attract major advertisers. They must be updated graphically to reflect contemporary style. A magazine designed in the 1980s

without significant, ongoing changes doesn't work in 2000. And the president's page? Please ... if you must have it, make it in good taste. Remember, your competition for consumer ad dollars are well-designed newsstand publications.

Often association leaders are reluctant to undertake a redesign or repositioning because of editorial traditions, such as in-depth coverage of association news. Or perhaps they fear losing editorial independence or offending the readers by change. However, those who take the plunge usually find their members expect the association publication to keep contemporary and relevant.

In most associations, members consider their magazine to be one of the strongest, if not the major, benefit of membership. I've never found that a professional "remodeling" of an association magazine resulted in any short- or long-term reader attrition.

- **Rewrite your media kit.** As with your magazine, write for the reader—in this case, media planners in large advertising agencies who may have little or no knowledge of your industry or profession. Interpret industry-specific jargon for them, and package your association's information in the lingo of the advertising world, using terms such as composition, coverage, and audience CPM.

Too often, association media kits are written and edited as if they were being sent to the reader of the magazine in-

stead of the advertising community. Specialized help is valuable in this area; consider hiring a professional copywriter to tailor your material to today's decision makers in the general consumer or business-to-business agencies. These buyers tend to be young, not particularly well-educated, not always print-friendly, poorly paid, and in a hurry.

- **Revamp your research results.** Regardless of how current or credible your research, media buyers won't use it if the information is not presented in a format they're accustomed to.

For example, one association's media kit reported the age of its audience in decade segments, such as 20-30 years old and 40-50 years old. However, advertising agencies and major research companies use standard industry age breaks (25-34 years old, and so forth). Had it hired an advertising consultant to interpret the data, the association could have made its materials conform to agency standards.

For a success story in courting affluent consumer advertising, look to the *ABA Journal*, published by the American Bar Association in Chicago, IL. Although it is a professional magazine edited for attorneys, the *ABA Journal* has gone to great lengths to present itself as a magazine that covers both the business and lifestyle aspects of its audience. All of its advertising information is in the language that advertisers and agencies can understand.

For example, the *ABA Journal* is one of only two association magazines whose sales are reported monthly in the *Media Industry Newsletter (MIN)*, which tracks ad lineage for America's largest consumer magazines. It is the only association magazine included in the prestigious Monroe Mendelsohn Affluent Survey (MMR). MMR is a syndicated research service measuring the upscale audience of many consumer magazines.

Sales adjustments

Bob Brouwer, associate publisher of the *ABA Journal*, says, "As part of our long-term strategy to secure non-endemic advertising, such as automotive and other consumer advertising, our

marketing staff has worked long and hard to get the *Journal* noticed in areas often overlooked by association magazines, like MIN and MMR.”

Granted, these advertising tools aren't available to or appropriate for most association magazines. The point is to find ones that are and to make your story understandable for the average agency.

Even with a quality publication, a well-written media kit, and solid research results, you still need a sales force prepared to attract advertising beyond your current sphere. Association sales representatives may be reluctant to sell advertising space or programs to companies manufacturing automobiles or other consumer products, perhaps because doing so is outside their comfort level.

Traditionally, representatives of association publications have sold the editorial product and their own knowledge of the industry or profession—but that may be irrelevant to media buyers in advertising agencies. In addition, many sales representatives are used to working directly with a client and avoiding an advertising agency completely. They may prefer to continue servicing people who already have an understanding of their product.

This approach is becoming less effective, even with traditional advertisers, because of the free flow of information over the Internet. Word-of-mouth knowledge of the industry or profession, delivered by the sales representative, is becoming less important. More essential is a clear understanding of why the particular association has value to its members and thus to an advertiser.

In the world of consumer advertising, an agency is the place to start. Otherwise, you're assured of not getting the business.

The right fit

Some association magazines are simply too small to go outside of their traditional advertising categories. Still, specific categories of non-endemic business—such as office equipment, computer software, and so forth—may be worth pursuing. And sometimes these association magazines can be packaged

Tailor your material to today's media buyers, who tend to be young and in a hurry.

with others to increase the critical mass of readers, making the larger buy of interest to certain advertisers.

The world of media is changing rapidly. Associations can capitalize on these changes through their magazines and other assets by embracing change. You might have to do some internal restructuring, modify the sales tools you use, improve the look and content of your magazine, and probably adopt a more buyer-friendly sales approach—but the opportunity is enormous. It's just a matter of seizing the part that is right for your association. ●

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