

Strength in NUMBERS

FIVE ASSOCIATIONS JOIN FORCES TO CREATE A UNIQUE
ADVERTISING SALES INITIATIVE.

A little more than a year ago, a new concept was launched by five major U.S. associations whose collective members are defined as professionals. By selling one or more of their magazines in combination with others in the group, these associations figured that they could approach new categories of advertisers.

The idea for a network was conceived by Bob Brouwer, associate publisher of the *ABA Journal*, published by the American Bar Association, Chicago, IL. "Over the past 15 or more years, the legal marketplace has experienced a contraction due to heavy merger-and-acquisition activity similar to most other marketplaces," Brouwer explains. "Unlike most other market segments, however, the legal market was relatively small to begin with. *ABA Journal* management realized that, to maintain sales levels, we would have to find a way to penetrate consumer product categories better than we had in the past."

After evaluating several approaches, the *ABA Journal* decided to pursue the idea of a network of magazines that were specific to the "professional marketplace"—in other words, careers that required a certification

and, most often, advanced college degrees. Four other publications teamed up with the *ABA Journal* to form the Pro 5 Network:

- *American Medical News*, published by the American Medical Association, Chicago, IL.
- *IEEE Spectrum*, published by the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers, New York, NY.
- *Journal of the American Dental Association* and *ADA News*, published by the American Dental Association, Chicago, IL.
- *REALTOR Magazine*, published by the National Association of Realtors, Chicago, IL.

STRIKING SIMILARITIES

These five associations have several characteristics in common. First, they are all large circulation magazines that dominate their fields, usually with corresponding mastery of the endemic advertising in their respective categories. With individual readership ranging from 153,000 to 798,000, they are all considered large circulation magazines in association circles—but several are small when compared to some consumer

and many general business magazines.

Second, all of the publications are interested in attracting advertising revenue from other categories of business that are somewhat of a stretch for them. Several of the books already had some success in certain non-endemic areas but believed improvement was possible.

In addition, their members are not prone to read the conventional business books such as *Fortune*, *Forbes*, *Inc.*, *Business Week*, or even the *Wall Street Journal*. In fact, none of the association magazines has more than 10 percent duplication in readership with those well-known business publications. Finally, these magazines have readers whose businesses are similar in scope—the members practice their professions either on a local or statewide basis.

NOTHING NEW TO MEDIA BUYERS

The concept of networking or combining magazines into a group buy is not unique in the consumer magazine world. Over the last 20 years, advertising agencies have become familiar with a number of networks created by special interest publishers wishing to create more mass circulation.

BY JAMES G. ELLIOTT

For example, the old Times Mirror Network consisted of magazines such as *Field and Stream*, *Outdoor Life*, and *Popular Science*. It was known as the "Mass Network" (of men). A second network, called the "Class Network," consisted of titles such as *Yachting*, *Golf*, *Saltwater Sportsman*, and the Times Mirror skiing titles.

Dennis Connaughton, now general manager of the James G. Elliott Company, recalls his days as the publisher of *Field and Stream* and its part in that network. "The Times Mirror Network made buying a large male audience somewhat easier and more efficient—on a CPM basis—for agencies. And it helped some of the weaker Times Mirror titles get advertising they normally would not have gotten because they were able to ride the coattails of the stronger books," he explains. "Naturally, some additional discounting was involved in the network buys, but virtually every buy today is discounted."

Jim Kopper, founder and former president of the Ziff-Davis Network and later senior vice president for advertising for the Times Mirror Company, is probably the best-known builder of networks in consumer publishing. According to Kopper, "Networking of appropriate media forms affords the advertiser selectivity and flexibility in reaching the target market and can be the most effective way in investing the advertiser's dollars."

WORTH CONSIDERING

These days, associations are always looking at non-dues revenue initiatives, including the acceptance of advertising relationships—provided that they are done tastefully.

One association recently told me that its members would not tolerate any advertising. Upon researching that premise with readers, we learned that the members already thought the association accepted advertising because of all the "house" ads that appeared in the publication. When this organization launched an advertising initiative, it did not receive a single letter of complaint from readers.

Most association members understand that advertising helps offset the costs of publishing a magazine or other communication. Yet the advertising arena is getting much harder to compete in because of industry consolidation, media buying services, and increased competition from new types of

Five Publications, One Buy

A joint media kit offers media buyers easy access to readers of *ABA Journal*, *Journal of the American Dental Association*, *American Medical News*, *IEEE Spectrum*, and *REALTOR Magazine*. Advertisers can use any combination of three or more publications in the Pro 5 Media Network to receive a group discount.

media. Networking is one way to compete in this complex environment.

Your publication might be a good candidate for establishing a network if it has reached maturity in its endemic market and if the association has become dependent on the revenue it generates. Then the real work starts, beginning with an investigation of other associations that have similar characteristics and would be of interest to marketers and advertisers.

You'll need to answer this question: "Does this proposed network bring anything unique and marketable to any new group of advertisers?" And you have to keep your expectations realistic. For instance, you have to offer a significant mass of readers to be of interest to a particular advertising category. Two association magazines, each with a circulation of 15,000, will have a hard time creating a meaningful network unless they join with five or six other groups.

Also determine whether your association could work with other associations or with an outside sales and marketing group that could coordinate the project and overcome or minimize the various differences that exist between organizations. Some organizations just can't.

Another issue to resolve is whether you can make changes within your sales force to accommodate a new selling structure. If all your salespeople are already selling to endemic advertisers exclusively, you are probably in a good position to proceed. Then the next step would be to bring in people who have experience in non-endemic advertising to strategize and create a plan aimed at accomplishing your goals.

ADJUSTMENTS REQUIRED

In the association and trade magazine worlds, forming a network to attract advertisers is a relatively new concept. Although some non-consumer magazines have tried it,



most of them have not spent the time or committed the resources necessary to make a truly compelling story for advertisers. Nor have they presented the network buy to advertisers in ad agency language. Most have simply taken their existing data and the promotions they use to sell to their endemic markets, make a few cosmetic changes, and then approached the new market. A network effort, however, calls for a completely different approach and presentation.

In the early stages of the Pro 5 Network, the five participating associations signed a joint operating agreement and approved a distinctive media kit written in the language of consumer media buyers. They also funded production of a PowerPoint presentation that the sales force could customize.

The biggest accomplishment, however, was having Mendelsohn Media Research—a syndicated research company well-known to and trusted by advertising agencies—measure the network's audience. We discovered that the research was rich with data that substantiated our various claims.

Although the Pro 5 Network comprises distinctively different associations, all five have a targeted reason for being part of the initiative and all five could either separate their sales forces into endemic and non-endemic categories or had one sales entity to represent both areas. By forming the network, the associations gave advertisers a single point of contact for a massive infusion of professionals into their media mix. Combined, the five associations offer 1.8 million readers, all in one buy.

Although the Pro 5 Network is new, it has already generated revenue from new advertisers such as American Express, T. Rowe Price, State Farm, and The Broadmoor Hotel. One reason for the network's early success is that all five associations understood the importance of using the tools of the consumer magazine market-

place, which most buyers of advertising space demand. They knew that a successful network is built on the concepts of efficiency, simplicity, and uniqueness to the buyer. And they realized that the idea of a "professionals' media network" needed to be advertising- or client-centric rather than association-oriented.

It takes time to form such a network and then sell the concept to agencies, which are slow to react to new ideas. But the effort can be fruitful. Forty years ago, magazines such as *Business Week* and *Forbes* were regarded as trade books and carried little consumer business. They adopted a consumer "uniform"—and look at them today. ■



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