

## Company news

**Leslie Palmer** has rejoined the company as Detroit Manager. Previously, Ms. Palmer handled numerous publications for the Elliott Company. She was also the first Detroit Manager for Parenting Magazine covering the Michigan/Ohio territory. She is a member of the Detroit Magazine Representatives Association and the Adcraft Club of Detroit.

### ACT2 EXPERIENCE

The Magazine Innovation Center at The University of Mississippi's Meek School of Journalism has released three videos from the ACT 2 Experience last October. They asked Jim Elliott and 16 other media experts their opinions about the future of the printed word in a digital age. View all three videos online at [jamesgelliott.com](http://jamesgelliott.com) or: [micactexperience.wordpress.com](http://micactexperience.wordpress.com)

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## Selling Print in a Digital World

### President's Letter

by Jim Elliott

At the end of October, I attended the ACT2 Experience. Hosted by Dr. Samir "Mr. Magazine" Husni, the conference was held at the University of Mississippi. This event was different from other publishing meetings, as Dr. Husni's university students were very involved. Speakers had a student assigned to them, while other students were interspersed among the attendees.

The ACT2 Experience took place over a three-day period in Oxford, MS, a remote location off the usual circuit for people in the publishing business. This remoteness gave participants an opportunity to get to know each other. Participants included b2b publishers, a custom publisher, publishers from Europe, special interest vertical consumer publishers, editors and executives from several consumer magazines, and a large media company that owns magazines, newspapers, and radio. There were also support companies such as printers, ad reps, and providers of various types of tools for publishers, both digital and print. Many of the sessions are available for viewing online. You can see mine at <http://bit.ly/w6BNvh>.

Upon conclusion, a number of speakers commented that this event had a broader appeal than the usual conference because of its entrepreneurial bent and international flavor—it wasn't just another corporate obligation. Not surprisingly, ACT2 has been getting a lot of press recently, including mentions by BoSacks.

Several members of my staff and I attended each of the sessions. We concluded that no single strategy applies to all of the various interests that were represented. However, the common elements facing everyone in the room were change and the need to adapt to change. For example, for those companies that are primarily circulation driven, the issues are very different from those driven primarily by ad sales. The strategies are quite divergent.

We found it very interesting that a presenter based in the Netherlands has so few of the prob-



lems we encounter in the United States. Her business is fully integrated and it appears she is getting a reasonable return on her print products. I concluded that people in this industry should avoid being totally wedded to any particular tactic. Instead, they should try to become more attached to the brand. For magazines, this just means the community they are serving.

Publishing companies may also need to create a position like "Chief Idea Director." This would be someone who could keep up with the newest trends in media and make a determination as to whether or not those trends will last. The industry didn't have to do much of this in the past but the constantly accelerating pace of change will require some new thinking.

I encourage anyone who can to attend the upcoming ACT3 Experience in October 2012. For details, stay tuned to: <http://micactexperience.wordpress.com> ■

## Why Our Customers Advertise

by Joe Rafael

We have turned another page and are embarking upon a New Year, which leads me to ponder our current media marketplace. Again, we have been burdened with a continuing tough global economic climate. Our media industry is still in transition, changing rapidly into digital and e-based solutions, with print properties struggling to create a well-balanced integrated package that effectively puts the advertisers' messages out. Selling advertising has become a complicated balancing act.

One of my first thoughts during this reflection is how much we as advertising salespeople get caught up in the minutiae of recommending one advertising vehicle or another rather than the substance of the message itself as it relates to our particular audience. It seems in this cost-conscious environment we worry more about cost of delivery than we do about the message and perception we want to create and convey.

I ask our salespeople to always keep in mind the question, "Why do successful companies advertise?" Is advertising a luxury and a waste

of budget in this current economic marketplace? Or, is advertising fundamental to growth and success of a business? These are questions that we must return to and answer to reinforce our commitment to grow and prosper our organizations. Again, it might not be about the way our customers advertise but the reason they advertise to our audiences and the message they want to send out.

Why do successful companies advertise? They advertise to brand, direct, inform, entice and procure interest for their product and/or service. We ask, is it fundamental to our clients' business? Only if they want to survive today's marketplace. Why else would long established companies such as Coca-Cola continue to advertise and spend the amount of money they do on a product so well known internationally? Whether our clients rely on brand advertising or direct response, the only way they can convey their value proposition to their potential customer base is to market it to the right people. Advertising opens the door, makes the phone ring and creates online opportunities.

The most important and practical back-to-basics approach is to be more concerned with the message the advertiser wants to relay than the method of relaying it. What advertisers accomplish with the right kind of messages about their companies and services is to create a perception in the minds of their potential customers. That perception becomes the customer's reality. We emphasize to our salespeople that an advertiser may have the most insightful, cutting-edge technologically advanced product or service, but if the perception of value is not there, neither will the sales be.

We as salespeople must be a conduit to our audiences, and we must not be fearful in expressing our thoughts and reservations about the advertisements we place. When the decision is made to advertise in our media vehicles, we have entered into a partnership as an extension of our advertisers' marketing departments. We owe it to them to give the best possible advice we can so they can get the most favorable results for their advertising investment. We must help our advertisers make their messages count to create a solid value proposition.

These days, it is too easy for salespeople to get caught up in the many competing media options. I contend that, until we agree that we need to get back to the fundamental understanding of why customers advertise, we cannot be any value to them much less to our own business. Why else would successful athletic coaches and prominent business leaders, always in times of concern, voice that "we need to get back to basics."

May this 2012 bring you all the promise and accomplishments of your projections and goals. ■

Joe Rafael is Western Sales Director of James G. Elliott Co., Inc.

## It's a New Game

by Dennis Connaughton

Do you have any senior salespeople who are less productive than you think they should be? Despite access to the latest technologies, are they lagging behind newer colleagues? Assuming your stars of decades past are physically and mentally agile and capable, do some seem to have trouble adapting to today's reality of media selling? If you see senior salespeople struggling, trying hard without success, it may be time for a hard reboot.

There is an old saw that generals always fight the last war. Economists fight the last depression. What about magazine salespeople? It's the same story; people tend to cling to strategies that have made them successful, even after conditions change.

Those outstanding consultative magazine salespeople (mostly salesmen) in their wingtips and suits who "sold to the client and serviced the agency" really did have the world by the tail. They were the aristocracy of the advertising sales profession. Unlike their broadcast counterparts who rarely met the advertisers and spent most of their time negotiating the sale of very general demos (e.g., women, 18-49) with agency buyers, magazine sellers knew their audiences inside and out. They knew the demographics, psychographics, VALS and Claritas PRIZM Clusters. They had subscriber studies, Opinion Research, SMRB, TGI, ABC, BPA, and PIB. Magazine people brought their readers to life.

Top-notch magazine salespeople "surrounded the sale," and presented their stories to clients and media directors as well as planners. Everyone knew that persistence and creativity were key, and hammering away would eventually pay off. Then, with a heavy dose of entertaining, the salespeople would, "make friends; make sense; make money." Many magazines funded country clubs and lavish expense accounts. Forbes had the Highlander; Time, Inc. had the Jet; Petersen had the Ranch. When publishers wanted to make calls, there were plenty of reasons for buyers to take the meetings.

Magazine salespeople needed to have not only sales skills (prospecting, presentation, closing, etc.) but also high general intelligence and high emotional intelligence. Often, the salesperson would send little tidbits of information, tear sheets and articles to various people within the buying

chain (client and agency) to demonstrate interest and awareness of client objectives. Preparing for a sales call meant learning everything possible about the client's business in order to do consultative selling. That preparation took time, just as building relationships did, but it was required.

Relationships were essential. Trainees learned that "nobody cares how much you know until they know how much you care." Over lunch, salespeople and agency account and media people bonded by trading information about the industry and jobs. Many agency people yearned to jump over to sales. Selling space was not just a job; it was a prestigious career.

These days, not so much. Confronted with the kaleidoscopic changes in the industry each day brings, today's media salesperson must have a working knowledge of many different kinds of media, including magazines, mobile, digital and social media. Salespeople may sell all of these, or just one or two. In any case, they must know about all of these, as well as emerging trends. Media are proliferating, and most clients and agencies drastically limit the time they make available to meet salespeople. Buyers have all the information they want at their fingertips.

Selling space for most magazines, e-newsletters, websites and other digital media requires a very different set of skills now. Speed, not depth, is of the essence. There is rarely enough time to find research and data that the buyers do not already possess. Instead, the issue is to package the publications' offerings effectively, present the package, follow up, close quickly, and move on to the next opportunity.

At the Elliott Company, we have found that some senior salespeople can make the change to a much faster transactional environment once they reach that "Aha!" moment and realize that the wonderful old ways are gone, gone, gone. For them, more training can help them jettison the elements of their experience that are hurting their competitiveness in today's market.

Some, who are unable to abandon their "deep-diving" approach in order to adapt to the up tempo pace of today's new advertising sales game, can still fit into other sales assignments where the old-school approach is still required. When we can, we try to fit them in. To make sure our evaluations are as accurate as possible, we obtain employee evaluations from a firm that provides in-depth work style and personality assessments, Lighthouse Consulting, LLC. Our goal is to put everyone where they can contribute the most. ■

Dennis Connaughton is General Manager of James G. Elliott Co., Inc.