

Company news

NEW CLIENTS

Kalmbach Publishing has recently hired the Elliott Company to manage sales, research and marketing for **DISCOVER magazine**. Kalmbach acquired Discover from Discover Media LLC in October 2010.

NEW EMPLOYEES

Bob Vitriol has joined the New York sales staff of the Elliott Company. Previously, Mr. Vitriol was with SourceMedia, The Washington Post and Investor's Business Daily.

RESEARCH

The James G. Elliott Co., working in conjunction with GfK MRI, has recently introduced a new, low cost online based panel "cooperative" available to Elliott Company clients. Our clients now have the opportunity to share in state of the art online reader panel research at a lower cost than is normally charged to individual media brands. Comparisons to GfK MRI national indices are provided when available.

This unique service is already being used by several client publishers including The American Legion and Discover Magazine.

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ADS & IDEAS 2.0

President's Letter

Things are getting better in the advertising world—and by extension, magazines. But when you examine the numbers carefully, you will see that it's a spotty recovery, peaking by category rather than across the board.



The recession, obviously, was not just a recession for magazine companies but included all sorts of media. So it makes sense that nervous advertisers now have a preference for just-in-time, low-commitment media (i.e., cheap, fast-close, short-term/easy-cancellation media). This of course is great news for digital and certain broadcast outlets, but may not be so great for magazines in the near future.

With market changes happening as we speak, we've decided to increase the frequency of this *Ads & Ideas* newsletter. You have requested it, and as we update and invest in our content, will now deliver it as an eNewsletter with a bi-monthly frequency, so please feel free to forward it. We're also thrilled to introduce Samir Husni as a regular columnist. Dr. Husni is known around the world as "Mr. Magazine" for both his years studying magazines as a professor at the University of Mississippi and now as Director of the Magazine Innovation Center.

We're very excited at this time to announce that Dr. Husni will be involved with every issue through a dialogue of sorts. He will examine an idea through the lens of our readers, present it to the industry for open discussion, and then report back. For instance, we might ask agencies: Do you actually use the information that you get from the RFP process? Which parts are the most important? Do you follow up on the merchandising part? Then we might ask publishers: Which is the hardest part of your selling? How many advertisers ask you to fulfill added-value programs? Is there a way to keep your selling tools sharp and up-to-date? And because the Elliott Co. has such a wide base and large number of advertisers, publishers and agencies, we are uniquely positioned to cover all sides of an issue.

In working with Samir over the past year, I came up with some web-based solutions which I offered at the ACT Experience in Mississippi. Since then, a number of publishers have asked me for copies, so here are four key points:

- 1. Present a unique audience.** Advertisers pay for "uniques," and if your audience isn't unique in one category, create another category. It's the #1 rule of marketing. Show the unique ways you serve your audience and clients.
- 2. Create a more complete, integrated brand.** Develop your assets, bundle them in price, and sell them together. Think like Time Warner Cable. Do in print what you're willing to do online. How come you never see "sponsored by" buttons scattered through a magazine like you do on thousands of websites?
- 3. Believe in advertising again.** With fewer people on both the selling and buying side, prospects are harder to see than ever before, yet there are plenty of very low-cost ways to efficiently reach your market. (And going door-to-door isn't one of them.) Email is not a substitute for an in-person visit or phone call and should be used accordingly. No magazine has ever sold advertising through direct response marketing, so set realistic objectives and expectations for your efforts.
- 4. Selling now means really, really selling.** The days of fact-finding calls are over—that work can be done in other ways. Few, if any, people on the client side will take a call to hear about your property—it has to be all about them and what your "unique" value is. Every account wants a custom idea. Your sellers need to think and present in these terms.

This newsletter previews our new endeavor with an article by Bob Holmes of Sudden Industries, one of the most respected digital advertising agencies in the U.S. We've asked him to take a look at how some companies are using the web and to give us some advice on what to do and what to watch out for. In this issue he focuses on Associations. I hope you enjoy his article. ■

Ads & Ideas is DIGITAL! Sign-up for the email version at: <http://www.jamesgelliott.com/adsandideas>

Whose Site Is This Anyway?

Balancing the online goals of your association with the needs of your members

By Bob Holmes



If you're in charge of developing or maintaining an association website, you've probably asked yourself many times: *Whose site is this?* Does it belong to all the departments within your organization or does it belong to the members who visit it?

How many requests sitting on your desk ask you to add this press release, slot in this event reminder, or post this story without any strategic thinking behind the value of these posts to your members? Does your site feel like it's become a file cabinet for everything people within your organization feel like posting? Or worse, is it starting to look like one of those cluttered bulletin boards that you find in the company breakroom, filled with flyers, memos and reminders for events last month?

If your answer is yes, you're not alone. This is a common problem for association sites serving two (or more!) masters. Balancing the online needs of your organization with those of your members can be confusing and difficult, but you can start fixing this problem by defining the goals of your organization and then aligning them with the needs of your members.

Here are some high-level goals that most associations want to achieve in their web presence:

- Public Relations wants members and the general public to have easy access to the latest press releases.
- Programs and Services want to promote their latest offerings to existing members.
- Membership wants to find new ways to connect with a new audience.
- Donations is looking for ways to attract donors.
- Ad Sales wants to have a site that is attractive to marketers and advertising partners.

And that's just the top of the list for a site that each of these stakeholders feels is primarily in the service of their needs.

But if you only look at the needs of your organization without considering the site visitors, you have a perfect internal-facing platform that doesn't address the needs of your members or general audience.

So let's look at the needs of your audience. Right from the start you'll see similarities to the goals of your organization, but with distinct differences.

- The largest segment of your site audience comes to get the latest and most relevant news about your organization and relevant topics.
- Most likely, many of your visitors are eligible potential members who are interested in your organization's general news, because even if they're not members, the news is usually still relevant to their needs.
- A subset of this audience is eligible potential members who are actively or passively looking for reasons to join your organization. These decisions are usually based on a combination of factors, including price point (membership dues), available services and programs, access to other members, and word-of-mouth recommendations.
- Many visitors are members looking to connect with other members to share views and ideas—or to reconnect with old colleagues and offer business resources, etc.
- Unfortunately, last in this list is the small group of visitors who may come to your site to donate. Most organizations only see a bump in their pledge numbers during specific events or drives.

While there are similarities between your organization's outward-reaching goals and the needs of your audience, unless you balance all aspects carefully, your site can end up looking like "Jackson Pollack's Nightmare" (as one of our clients likes to call his site on a bad day).

In order to avoid this problem, let's look at each of your organization's goals in light of what your audience is looking for.

1. Public Relations wants to post lots of news stories and your audience wants to read news stories, so this seems like a "no-brainer," right? Wrong! Remember, you have an association site, not a news site. Too many updates and too much news can flood your members, and more importantly, the overall message and mission of your organization can be easily lost. For associations, sometimes the evergreen story that best illustrates your organization's mission is more powerful than the latest news.

2. Programs and Services want to post information about their latest offerings, and this is exactly the type of information

both members and potential members need most. But if you're like most organizations, you have a lot to offer a broad constituency and if you don't keep your message focused, your audience can be confused. Try to pinpoint and illustrate the "need" and then offer the program or service that will solve that need. Match a career-related need with a career center that's easy to find and use. A health need should lead to advice and services in health. Just make sure that you don't mix the two (or many others) together as you'll once again end up with the cluttered bulletin board effect.

3. If loyal members find your site hard to navigate or use, imagine how hard it must be for non-members or potential members, who offers the opportunity for future growth. Don't be afraid to address them in a different way than you would your members. In fact, cater to them, like guests at a party where everyone else knows each other. Use some special "hand holding" to make them feel part of the crowd. A great way to engage both loyal members and potential ones is to let them market your services and the power of your organization amongst themselves through commenting or community forums. Word-of-mouth and peer support have always been the lifeblood of any association, so allowing your members to meet online and discuss a topic is a great way to promote the dialogue as well as monitor it.

4. Though few of your site guests visit with the active intent of donating to your organization, it's amazing what a clear content strategy and easy-to-understand messaging can do to alert these potential donors to all that your organization does for your members and the communities.

5. Finally, if you have done all these things correctly, the natural outcome will be more site traffic with more members enjoying the content and services that you are providing online. That will be good news for the Ad Sales Department and audience alike. One thing we have found is that members are generally much more interested in the products and services offered by marketers who support and sell to their organization, and a good ad sales team will know exactly, based on site traffic, demographics and overall needs, just which products and services to offer.

If you follow these simple guidelines, it will be a win-win for everyone. And the next time someone asks "Whose site is this anyway?" you can easily answer: ours. It's for the organization and members alike. ■

Bob Holmes is the founder and CEO of Sudden Industries, a digital services agency based in NYC. Sudden provides strategic, creative and technology services for major media companies as well as associations and non-profits. www.suddenindustries.com.