



tactics & techniques

IDEAS YOU CAN USE

WORKSHOP

Growing Revenue for Your Association Pub

Many associations are simply using their publication as a member benefit, but with a little time and money, it could be much more. **BY SCOTT OSER**

You could be sitting on an awareness builder, an audience driver, and most importantly a money maker. Believe it or not, I am talking about your association publication.

Your publication may look great and have content that members want to read, but what about the potential readers who are interested in the content but have not heard of your publication, your organization, or who aren't joiners? Here are a couple new ways to reach potential readers that you may not have thought about yet.

Complimentary Distribution

Public-place distribution is now available in many locations, including doctor and dentist offices, beauty parlors, fitness centers and travel agents. The biggest provider of public place distribution is Waiting Room Subscription Services but Synapse, Ebsco, Segment Subscriptions Services, SWA International and magazines.com all have similar programs.

A good example of the impact that public place can have on the awareness and reach of your publication is *AARP Magazine*. AARP has used public place for a few years now and the exposure it's received is one of the

primary reasons why MRI results have shown that title's reader per copy number growing from .75 readers per copy when the publication was still known as *Modern Maturity* to 1.19 readers per copy in the latest wave of MRI data.

The benefit of public place is that it is relatively affordable, because the publisher chooses the number of copies and number of issues it wants distributed. Some programs are more flexible than others, so check with your vendor before signing a contract or authorization.

One warning: Public-place programs have been, and continue to be, under intense scrutiny from advertisers, as well as ABC and BPA. Rules continue to evolve, so if you are audited, or are considering being audited, you'll need to stay on top of this situation.

Another opportunity for association publishers who focus on advocacy and want to influence public policy is to provide complimentary copies to



opinion leaders and people on Capitol Hill. The list of recipients doesn't need to be large, but it does need to be targeted.

Another way to leverage complimentary distribution is at trade shows and meetings. Almost all associations either have their own meetings or exhibit at other organizations' meetings. These events provide you

with an opportunity to show people your publication and give them complimentary copies.

Just make sure you have enough copies for the entire show. Trade-show distribution has a number of benefits, including easy access to your target market and controllable costs, because you can pick which shows you want to participate in. If money and staff are an issue for your organization, there are firms that will display your publications at a booth for a fee.

Newsstand Distribution

According to its June 30, 2004 ABC Publisher's Statement, the National

Geographic Society sold 158,064 copies of *National Geographic* on the newsstand. At a price point of \$4.95 per copy, this resulted in an additional \$782,416 in revenue for the society. There are several small distributors, or niche distributors available to help publishers (including associations) reach their target audience.

You can work with a company like Source Interlink or Ingram to target bookstores or join the Independent Press Association, which has great resources and newsstand distribution capabilities. These groups are the experts at getting small publishers in front of the eyes they want to reach.

Subscription Sales

Selling subscriptions is another option to think about. Subscription sales can be tested without costing a lot or impacting your core business.

One quick and easy way to test subscription sales is in newsstand and/or complimentary copies. Assuming that you are mainly reaching your non-core audience with this distribution these people may not be interested in joining your association.

Since they have your publication's great content in hand, they could be interested in subscribing and receiving it regularly.

The best way to test this is to place insert cards inside these copies. You can easily and relatively inexpensively split your print run and see whether an insert card presenting a membership offer or a subscription offer pulls better. But response rate is not the only thing to consider. Be careful not to cannibalize your membership efforts with subscription efforts.

An organization that has had great success selling subscriptions recently is Arthritis Today. Under the guidance of ProCirc, the publication of the Arthritis Foundation was able to sell 258,471 subscriptions above and beyond the copies they send to members. This was a financial and branding boon for the Foundation.

If you are not ready to commit to newsstand or complimentary distribution, there are other avenues to consider. Subscription agents are an inexpensive way to test the subscription sales waters. Positive remit programs like those offered by Quality

School Plan (QSP), Genesis, DialAmerica, Synapse, and others should definitely be considered.

There are also a number of agents like SWETS, Ebsco, and Magazine Yellow Pages that market publications to libraries worldwide. You can typically charge a higher price for library subscriptions, because the copies are read by multiple individuals.

Selling subscriptions on your website should also be evaluated. Again, you do not want to cannibalize your member acquisition and retention activities, so be careful how and where you do this. One good place to test would be the publication page, where people are already being exposed to the content of your magazine.

Before you start selling subscriptions, please talk to your fulfillment company. More than likely this will require some programming on their part to make everything work properly. You want to have everything in order before you implement a subscription sales strategy.

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