

Online Tactics for Publishers

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Imagine for a moment that you are a magazine publisher in 2003. Your job is to make sure your sales, editorial and circulation managers are working hard to get you through one of the toughest downturns in media history. Consider yourself lucky if any of your hotshot staffers recommend harnessing the web in order to decrease costs and improve customer experiences. Indeed, they are on to something. Many of the traditional direct response tactics used by publishers can be developed and made exponentially more powerful on the web. And many marketing companies offer both the online and database expertise to quickly and inexpensively put these strategies into action.

Online Reader Service and Online Subscriber Services, for example, are relatively inexpensive and easy to put in place. These tactics have applications for both consumer and trade magazines. And to a publisher's delight, these efforts can create synergy across advertising sales, editorial and circulation departments.

Online Reader Service

Many magazines have a "Reader Service" reply card or a "Where To Buy" page. These cards or pages provide timely information to readers on how to contact advertisers or find retailers. Publishers can sell this space to advertisers separately or include the service as a value-added for purchasing an ad. Assuming printed reader service cards or pages are driving revenue, publishers should consider taking this lead-generating effort online. By providing increased interactivity and enhanced user experiences, publishers should realize improved response rates and happier advertisers.

How It Works

A week after a magazine is mailed, subscribers receive an email from the publisher highlighting cover stories and featured advertisers. Timing of the email should be adjusted as needed. In a "Featured Advertiser" section, the email contains links to special landing pages designed for response. A reader, who clicks on an advertiser's link, would have their contact information sent to that advertiser, perhaps on a daily basis. Prior to the email going out, the advertiser would have signed a contract with the publisher regarding leads generated by the email. The written contract would contain a statement granting the advertiser permission to follow-up the lead with a sales pitch by a predetermined channel within a predetermined time frame. Following CMA's Code of Ethics, the publisher must already have gained permissions from the reader to provide his/her contact information to the advertiser, who could then proceed to communicate with the reader or use the information for analytic purposes.

Developing this channel so that it is even more immediate might be appropriate for some marketers. A "hotline" alert could be emailed from the publisher directly to the advertiser. This email could say something like; "A subscriber to XYZ trade

magazine is currently reviewing web information regarding your ABC product. This might be a terrific time to give (prospects name) a call at (phone number)".

Benefits for the Reader

Loyal readers of a magazine would likely enjoy hearing from their favorite editors by email. This email supports the brand and also let's subscribers know that the magazine is on its way with some great content. Many readers are interested in special offers, especially from brands they are familiar with.

Benefits for the Publisher

For a publisher worried that the competition may be stealing readers, the email highlights the editorial content that the Publisher is most proud of. Secondly, the publisher has an integrated sales (display advertising and direct response) environment to offer advertisers.

Benefits for the Advertiser

Of course advertisers want qualified leads. And this sales tactic can deliver. Advertisers might be cautious about printing promotional pricing in a magazine with pass-along readership and long shelf lives. So a landing page on the web might be just the right place to offer qualified prospects a limited time offer to encourage immediate sales.

Online Subscriber Service for B2B Publishers

One of biggest challenges a B2B publisher has is a mobile readership. Senior Management and staff move to new companies, different departments, new cities and new job functions. Workers also get laid off and retire. In fact, the better qualified the subscriber, the more likely that subscriber is to make a career move. Advertiser's best prospects (and therefore Publisher's best readers) are constantly on the move.

It is essential then that magazine subscribers who move are encouraged to request that their trade magazines follow them to their new office. House ads in the magazine itself must continually promote easy change of address options for subscribers.

Subscribers need quick access to their subscription records so that they will make an effort to change necessary address and contact information. This is where the web comes in.

A good Online Subscriber Service site has these attributes:

It is Comprehensive

Subscribers should be able to view and change all the information that they have supplied to the publisher including company name, address, phone number, fax number and email address. Plus subscribers should be able to view a list of all the magazines that they receive from a publisher with subscription numbers, start dates, subscription expiry dates and current status.

It is somewhat secure

2 pieces of personal information should be required from subscribers at the login stage. For example, postal code and email address could be required. This helps prevent a non-subscriber from accessing subscription records by chance. High-level

security measures are not warranted since the majority of trade magazines are free to qualified individuals. Liability is low.

It links all records together for an individual

The change of address function should be built so that a subscriber can modify all or modify separately each piece of contact information. Secondly, for those publishers with more than one magazine "Modify All," means modify the contact information across all the magazine subscriptions an individual may receive.

It is timely

Subscriber change requests must be acted upon in a timely fashion. For a monthly magazine, that could mean output and uploads once per month but for a biweekly, once a week is a better frequency.

It cross-promotes

Online Subscriber Service pages are perfect places to cross-promote other relevant magazines, newsletters or surveys using a button or banner.

The pages can be printed

The availability of a printer-friendly version to view and print will instill trust and add to customer satisfaction.

It gathers statistics for the Auditor and Publisher

Since Circulation auditors need to track changes to subscription records, it is smart to make the site ABC or CCAB compatible. To do this, get your ABC or CCAB representative to approve your site design before you build. In addition, publishers need metrics to determine subscriber usage of the site. After all, some analysis regarding the cost/benefit of online subscriber service should be completed annually.