

Sales Tips for Small Magazines

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Small circulation magazines often know who their readers and their advertisers are. And, if they are regional titles, it's likely that they see these people on a regular basis outside of business. In fact, knowing your advertisers can add another dimension to the business relationship that may impede, rather than help, ad reps make the sale.

To begin with, sales reps must remember that, as the person approaching an advertiser, they are in charge of managing the process of selling—presenting the magazine, answering objections, closing, etc.—and they need to keep moving this process along.

One of the key ways to sell advertising in a small circulation magazine is to be friendly when doing business, but don't work at being friends while trying to sell. Getting to know clients too well can lead to traps. If a sales rep looks at a client list and says "I won't call him about our upcoming issue because I know he doesn't have the money," or "They are going through a rough time, no use calling them," then knowing too much about that client has stopped them from selling and has derailed the sales process. Sales reps who assume advertisers don't have the money to advertise have done the advertiser's thinking for them—and done themselves out of a potential sale.

Similarly, when a sales rep goes through his or her prospect list and makes comments like "I know they won't buy an ad because it's not a good time for them right now," the rep has bought the client's excuse instead of selling the client an ad. This excuse has stopped the sales rep from approaching the client and selling advertising.

Another trap that can derail the sales process is getting caught up in other problems with the magazine. For example, if the client mentions that they don't like the person who answers the phone at the magazine, this should not lead to a conversation about how hard it is to find good people or that she's a really nice person once you get to know her. The meeting has turned into a discussion that does not further the process of selling. Sales reps need to acknowledge such remarks—"If you have an issue with the receptionist, I'll make note of it and let the publisher know"—and then bring the conversation back to what advertising in the magazine can do for the client.

Objections are challenging for all sales reps, but can be especially so for small circulation magazines since one of the main objections to the sale is often that their circulation is too small. The key to handling all objections is to see them not as a "No," but as an opportunity to sell. Often they are requests for information. For example, when a client says

that a magazine's circulation is too small, that tells the sales rep that he or she hasn't shown the client that the magazine has the right audience for them, and needs to further explain the benefits of reaching those readers. Or, if the client says that a magazine doesn't reach their target market, the sales rep is invited to show the client how it does. Seen in this way, objections aren't door closers: they are door openers that allow a sales rep to recognize where they failed in the selling process, and shift the process back to what their magazine can do for the advertiser.

In all communication with clients, sales reps should always watch their language. Use clear, direct language in explaining the magazine to the client, because wishy-washy questions yield wishy-washy answers. For example, closing with "Do you think you might be interested in advertising with us?" will get a response like, "Perhaps that might be worth thinking about in the future." It's better to close strong with a statement like "Let's begin your advertising campaign in the next issue." Doing so will flush out any objections and tell the sales rep what the client needs to know before they will commit to buying advertising.

Finally, with a better sense of some of the sales traps facing small circulation magazines, reps can turn their focus to selling more efficiently: which means selling advertising campaigns as opposed to one-offs. Contacting the same advertiser issue after issue to sell one ad each time is time-consuming and inefficient. It prevents sales reps from drilling down deeper into the client list and developing new business.

It's much more efficient to sell clients, especially repeat ones, on the benefits of buying an ad in more than one issue of the magazine—in other words, a campaign. Once they are signed up on a year-long contract, sales reps can then focus on bringing new business into the magazine.

In order to be effective at selling advertising, sales reps must remember that they are offering advertisers the opportunity to increase their business by advertising in the magazine. This is a position of strength. Instead of feeling shy about the magazine they represent, a sales rep who goes in with this position in mind will find it easier to avoid the traps and pitfalls of selling advertising for a small circulation magazine.