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THE S.I.P ON THE NEWSSTAND

THE COVER FOR the new special issue looks great, but have you cleared a path to get your little beauty to the stores? And have you done everything possible to ensure your Special Interest Publication (SIP) stays on the newsstand and has every chance to thrive there? More and more publishers are getting involved with these spinoffs and they can be a great boom for sales, exposure and brand development. But, they also come with their own set of challenges and headaches on the newsstand.

DISPLAY UNTIL DATE

This is the simplest way to let retailers know your special issue is special: ask them to display it longer by printing a realistic “display until” date on the cover. Not all retailers will pay attention to a “display until” date, but the sharp ones usually do. It’s unrealistic to hope retailers will keep a magazine on display for a year, or even six months, but an issue like this needs a chance to stay on the newsstand awhile and succeed. A “display until date” will probably help.

CHOOSE THE RIGHT BIPAD

This is a tricky one. Ideally, a completely new bipad that is reusable each year for your SIP would work best. The bipad is part of a magazine barcode—it is the second group of five digits in the barcode and is unique to each title. I liken it to a licence plate. It is how the magazine is known in the computers of most of the stores selling the magazine and the distributors distributing it. The problem with using the same bipad for your SIP as for your core magazine is that when your next issue comes out it will show the previous and now returnable issue is the SIP. This may cause retailers to return unsold SIP copies too soon. A bipad is a bipad and retailers don’t want to take a chance by waiting too long and have their returns rejected. This is why a separate bipad for your SIP is preferable.

HOWEVER, (here comes the tricky part) if your magazine is being distributed a wholesaler, or to large chains such as Chapters/Indigo, London Drugs, Shoppers Drug Mart, Wal-Mart, Canadian Tire, etc., you will have to set up distribution for a new bipad as if it’s a brand new magazine and get permissions from these stores in advance. Not only will this take time but most of the larger chains might demand that you spend some money at their stores promoting it in order to be granted this permission. Of course, being a SIP, it might well be worth spending the promo dollars for this, but all of this must be taken into consideration in advance.

TIMING

Many SIPs are seasonal (*Cottage Life’s* Summer Grilling issue) or event-timed (*Hello! Canada’s* Royal Wedding series) and it is vital to clear the path to the stores as carefully and precisely as with any timed promotion. In a sense, your subject has a window of retail opportunity and it’s your job to be sure copies are in the stores and promotions are in place to take full advantage.

PRICING

SIPs are special. They should have a heavier cover stock and look sumptuous. The content should be specially chosen to fit the subject and new content should be written to fill in the holes. They should look like something your readers will want to keep, rather than recycle. In many cases, they show off your brand. For all these reasons your SIP should have a higher cover price than your core title.

A RETAIL BULLETIN might be in order, especially if you are not using a unique bipad for your SIP. Magazines Canada sends these out regularly for many of our magazines, but an SIP is practically begging for one. Essentially, it is a letter from the publisher to an ally at the store: the staffer who opens up the box from the distributor, checks the contents against the invoice, puts the magazines on the shelves and is known at the store as the magazine expert.

The bulletin would be a one-page letter with a scan of the cover, a description of what the issue is, how valuable and fantastic it is, and who it is from (if the core title is not obvious). It should also include the distributor and distributor’s rep information or customer service phone number, a reaffirmation of the “display until” date, and, if you think it necessary, a recommendation of where on the store’s rack it would best be shelved (“beside *Saveur*, *Cooking Light* and *Jamie Magazine*” is much better than “with the food magazines”). I tell our publishers to email me a copy of their bulletin beforehand, so I can offer my thoughts.

Once the publisher is happy with the bulletin, Magazines Canada prints the bulletins in-house (if they’re in black and white) and makes sure there’s one sent to each store receiving the magazine. Consult your distributor about this option if you think it might help.

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