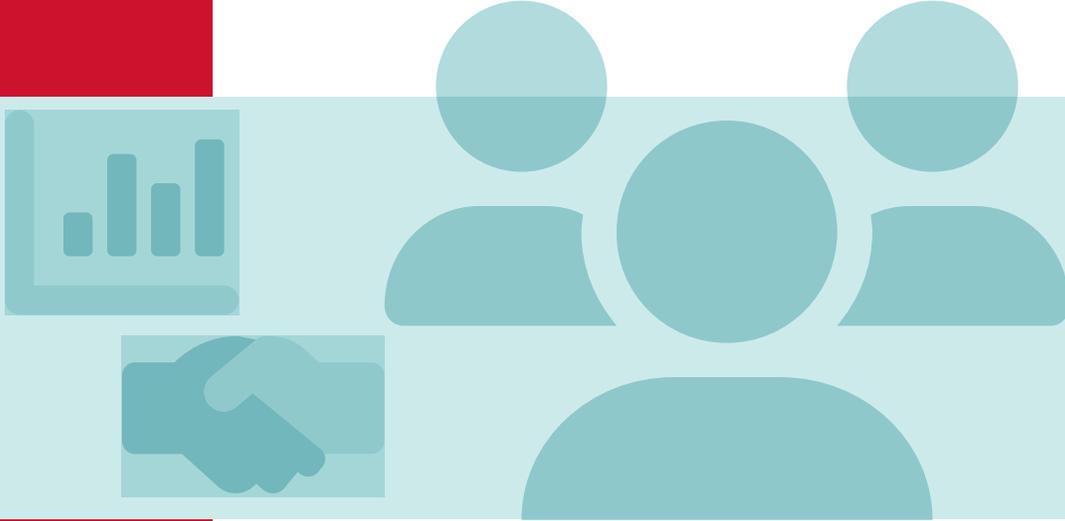


HOTSHEET

# Ad Sales for Small Arts & Literary Magazines

By Joyce Byrne



If you've been tasked with ad sales for your small arts or literary magazine you might have trouble knowing where to start and how to stay organized. There are countless webinars and courses you can take on advertising sales, but most of them are aimed at bigger, commercial brands. What you need right now are a few strategies to help you focus your time and effort, and concentrate on the businesses that are most likely to support you. Here are some approaches to sales, for small, niche and literary publications, with staff models and relationships in mind.

## **Media Kit**

You're going to need a media kit. Success in sales is built on relationships, consistency and process. Setting you up for success is a strong media kit that reflects your brand and prices your offering appropriate to your magazine. Start by collecting as many media kits from similar magazines and websites as you can. While many big brands keep their rates and data very secret, try asking your peer network to exchange media kits. If you are starting from scratch this is going to be immensely helpful, and if you are doing your annual competitive analysis, this will help reassure you that your offering is in the right ballpark. Don't forget to share yours back in return.

Rate card and media kit are two terms that are often used interchangeably, since they are often combined into one document. If you've not sold advertising before, the rate card lays out all the available sizes, prices, and



production information that an advertiser will need to decide on whether they will buy. The media kit uses text and images to give a sense of what your magazine editorial vision is, what topics you cover, and other information that will help create excitement about your magazine.

An effective media kit will include:

- Editorial mandate that tells the reader at a high level what your magazine or website is about. Try to stay away from jargon, think of this as your elevator pitch and a chance to lead with why your title is a great place to reach an audience. Tell us about how long you have been publishing, any recent awards, and the area you serve. Use visuals that represent the brand in your kit and help your contacts imagine the magazine environment.
- Audience demographics.
- Editorial calendar, including any available information about themes and topics.
- Rates, including discounts, listed by ad size.
- Deadlines for booking, artwork/material submission, publication dates, and technical specifications like ad dimensions and formats to submit.
- Your contact information, including a telephone number and email, the business address, and any other information that might be relevant, like a publisher name if it is different from the brand name and the date (year) of the media kit.

If you are creating your first rate card, rather than updating one, it's important to know what similar magazines are charging and to be competitively priced. In this context that means serving the same niche, delivering similar content, and to a similar audience. For example, a literary magazine that carries advertising and serves a general audience published in Victoria, is similar to one publishing in Toronto for the purposes of determining where your pricing sweet spot lies.

It's a good idea to perform a competitive analysis from time to time (annually would be ideal), placing this information into a spreadsheet, for reference and comparison.

Rate cards use formulas to calculate prices as well as discounts. A half page, for instance, is generally 60-65% of the cost of a full page (not half the price). Frequency discounts for buying multiple ads at one time (hurray!) start at 5-10% and increase the more someone buys. Once you have decided with your designer what ad sizes and shapes you will offer, use a formula to determine the ad prices, remembering that the percentage cost of a partial ad will be slightly higher than the percentage of area. Your rate card should also indicate whether other channels carry advertising, such as your website, and what the cost is.



Audience demographics are a crucial part of a successful ad sales strategy. There are a few ways to compile this information. You can use your circulation list to compile the places, by city and/or province, that your audience lives. If you plan a reader survey, capture data from respondents such as age, household income, location and interests. Your website analytics can be a valuable source of reader information, too – look under the audience tab.

Bundling of print and digital ads is another strategy you can steal from bigger titles. Digital advertising like website, e-newsletter and social media has value, and putting them together in a proposal that offers print and digital ads, with a discount for buying both, is a good way to bring advertising revenue in across your brand.

### **Having a Plan, and Working the Plan**

First, you are going to need a spreadsheet because organization is so important, especially if you are prospecting new business or are the only person tracking the ads from conversation to contract, then to the ad material and invoicing.

You can use a notebook or individual file folders, but if you are sharing your information with others, or expanding your prospecting, a spreadsheet will be much easier to sort and share, as well as keep your information consistent. Third party contact management systems are probably not necessary for the amount of information you will be tracking, and they tend to be costly.

A good way to sort your prospect and client information is to track the company name, contact name, telephone number (company and direct if you can get it), email address, and billing address. Additional information to track in your spreadsheet includes company type (eg. local retailer, book publisher, educational institution) and a column or two for notes.

The easiest way to organize your issue sales information is also by spreadsheet. Here, you can track the contact information as well as the ad size booked, price agreed upon, and any other tracking information like the filename of the ad material, whether you have sent out the invoice, etc.

### **Prospecting and Pipelines**

When it comes to a sales process, it doesn't matter how big your business is, the tactics are similar:

- 1.** You should focus your time on organizations that have values that align with your brand, and that can afford to advertise. Unfortunately though, big brands – even those with similar ethos – rarely support micro-business with advertising. Build relationships with businesses that are local enough that you could drop in to support them.

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- 2.** Knowing your audience, and why your prospect would want to advertise their brand to them, is key to a successful sale.
  - 3.** You're going to have to send a lot of emails before you get a call.

Varying your approach when communicating with a sales prospect is a good idea. You should also expect to follow up – a lot. Keep an eye on your own inbox for subject lines that make you want to open an email. Write messages that are professional, but use your brand and your own voice. A first email should be not too long but not too short. Enough to introduce yourself, the brand, your audience, and an understanding of why they should be advertising.

Be a good listener and keep notes to track significant achievements on their end and incorporate them into your communication. For example, "Congratulations on being shortlisted for the Giller Prize! It's been a while since we connected, and I wanted to let you know that our summer reading issue is coming out soon. Our audience are avid readers and an ad in the issue would give them a window into your award-winning catalogue! I'd love to connect with you to discuss your plans for 2022."

Follow up until you get a chance to talk by phone. Be prepared with information about your audience, upcoming issues and rates. If you are ready to ask for the sale and make the sale, follow up promptly with a contract.

After your ad has run, invoice promptly with at least a 30-day payment window. Send a copy of the magazine or a tear sheet so that your client has proof that the ad ran. For digital advertising, you should take screenshots of the ad while it is live, and provide reporting on ad impressions and clicks, if the client asks.

And finally, thank your new client for their business and follow up to renew them.

Though sales is not an easy road for anyone, your efforts are opening up new revenue opportunities for your small magazine, and each win will make you more confident. Remember not to take no (or ghosting) personally, celebrate the wins, and treat your advertiser network with empathy and respect, and you will have success.