

# Statewide classifieds can be a revenue source

**B**e they large or small, paid circulation or free distribution, it's no exaggeration to say that community newspapers in America are searching for new streams of revenue.

Sometimes the stream is hidden deep in the potential client hinterlands.

And sometimes it's right under your nose.

Here's an example of the latter. Statewide classified (or display) ads. Most newspapers run them. Not

enough sell them. And what a sweet deal it is when your paper is the giver, not just the taker, to a classified or display ad network run by a state press association.

Let's say a 25-word classified ad is charged at \$350 and the newspaper share is half, \$175. Let's say the goal is to sell an average

of only four ads per week. That's \$1,400 total, \$700 to the newspaper, \$36,400 in plus revenue for the newspaper per year, all for only four tiny but mighty ads per week. And the potential is much higher than four per week in many markets.

Many press associations create a kitty/pool to offer further financial rewards for all the papers that participate in the networks.

So is your newspaper a getter that donates space, or a giver/getter that rakes in the dough? If you need to be more of the latter, here are some thoughts and tips to get the sales momentum going.

## SALES MOMENTUM

- Keep in mind what a tremendous deal a CAN ad is for the client who needs to reach customers statewide, or a region of the state. (I'll refer to the classified word ads in this column, but most if not all states offer 2 column by 2 inch, and sometimes larger, display ad networks. And some offer a newspaper website network option.)

The ad costs at least 70 percent less than if the client were to place it separately in each of the network's newspaper.

- Most newspaper people know about the option to sell into the networks,

but they don't sell into them. They run the weekly group of ads from other newspapers, and they'll run an occasional promotion ad for the network provided by the press association.

Then, if a client shows interest on his own, the reps scramble around figuring out how to charge and submit the ad.

Remember, the ad almost never sells itself; appropriate prospects don't realize what the ads do until someone explains it to them, personally.

- Therefore, the sale of statewide classified ads needs to be part of someone's job description. Not just someone who knows how to submit the ad if a client walks through the front door, but someone who contacts prospects regularly just as he or she would contact Main Street merchants.

For a newspaper with a larger ad staff, selling statewide classifieds can be part of a selected ad rep's account assignments. For smaller newspapers, an employee in the front office can sell. (Perhaps the publisher can offer a 10 percent commission on the newspaper's share of revenue from each ad.)

Again, the important factor is consistent effort.

- Many newspapers promote and explain the network in a section of the rate card. But, beyond that, it helps to have a customized sales kit that includes promo materials provided by the press association, specific information about how the ad works and where it is placed, and who to contact to place an ad. Testimonials are also helpful.

The salesperson should visit the client in person to go over this material. After the visit, the client's ads can be taken over the phone or by email. Many newspapers require prepayment by credit card.

- Periodically, a suspicious ad will be submitted, say from a company promoting a miracle diet pill to take off 100 pounds in 100 days. In this case, use the same common sense you would use for an ad in your own newspaper.

As a guideline for caution, here's a list of ads prohibited by the Missouri Press Service:

- No work-at-home advertisements, unless reviewed and accepted by Missouri Press Service.
- Business opportunity and investment ads that do not disclose the type of

business to be invested in, and/or the amount of investment required.

- Ads promising large salaries or commissions.
- Any advertising that could be misinterpreted by the readers.
- No 1-800 or 1-900 ads for dating services or talk to guys/girls ads.
- In poor taste, offensive, false, misleading, deceptive or otherwise unacceptable.
- Advertising not in compliance with state and federal regulations.
- Advertising that requests money be sent through the mail.
- Advertising that offers employment and equipment offers through listing publications.
- Advertising claiming bad credit repair/fix credit or similar programs.
- Overseas employment.
- 1-900 telephone numbers.
- No government job ads, unless reviewed and approved by Missouri Press Service.
- No diet pills, drug or diet ads.
- No cruise ads.
- No scholarship/grant ads.
- Acceptance of advertising may be subjected to business and/or Better Business reference checks.

## BEST PROSPECTS

Who are the best prospects for the network?

The general guideline: if the client's product, event or service is capable of attracting customers from across the state, or a region of the state, a statewide classified or display ad is the best investment he or she can make.

For sales leads, check out the account suggestions from your state press association, or search for suggestions on other state press association websites.

In the meantime, here are six categories I highly recommend.

1. **Help Wanted.** Contrary to popular and politicized opinion these days, many industries are desperately seeking skilled labor; the type of good

paying jobs people will be willing to pack up and relocate to land. If there are industries in your market, they probably need these highly-skilled workers. Hospitals and nursing homes need professionals for various specialties. There is a nationwide shortage of truck drivers, so a trucking firm is a good target.

2. **Is there a unique festival or other event scheduled in your town—**one that a weekend warrior would like to experience? A statewide classified or display ad is ideal. One tip: include a website address for more information.

3. **Any major auction** can attract customers from across the state. A suggestion: briefly describe the auction in the statewide classified ad, and include a link to view the display ad that ran in your newspaper; or a link to the auctioneer's website.

4. **Unique real estate** for sale—say a 130-acre horse ranch—or a golf course, or a warehouse.

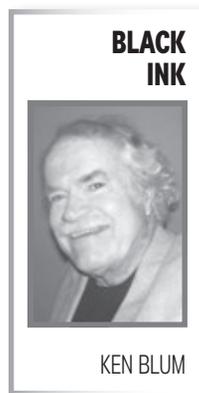
5. **Legitimate business opportunities**, such as reputable franchises.

6. **Computer training specialists** for specific programs, such as Quickbooks.

And don't forget the possibility of running an appropriate ad in a number of states, or even nationally. Your state press association can provide rate information and place the ad in additional statewide networks. Note that many of these ads will require more than 25 words.

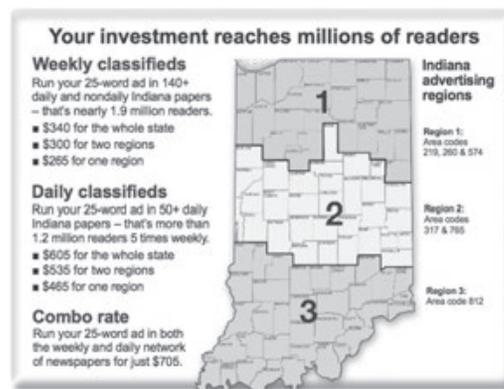
The more the merrier for your newspaper. © Ken Blum 2017

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