



The 5 Laws of Attraction: Increasing the Advertiser Appeal of Your Association's Print Publication



As an association executive, you have a unique understanding about what it means to be pressed for time. Between keeping your current members engaged, recruiting new members, lobbying for your organization's interests and planning your annual meetings, trade shows and educational conferences, focusing on the advertiser appeal of your print publication may go overlooked, costing you revenue, allied member support and reputation.

This paper is designed to shed light on some simple ways that you can effectively increase the appeal of your current publication for advertisers, leaving you with a stronger advertiser base, a more robust publication and one less thing to worry about in your busy schedule. We'll do this by focusing on the major areas related to this topic: editorial considerations, design decisions and advertising sales techniques.

The Pitfalls of Not Focusing on Advertiser Appeal

According to a 2007 article, the top 100 advertisers in print B2B magazines spent an estimated \$1.12 billion in 2006 (*BtoB Media Business*, 2007). Though most associations certainly understand the value of a dollar, engaging your advertisers pays off in more than just cash.

Diminishing Your Advertising Base

Without a solid base of advertising revenue, your publication can suffer and fall down the slippery slope of becoming less and less desirable to the advertisers and members whom you do have. As you miss out on advertisers, your publication shrinks, and suddenly the top-quality member benefit and image piece that you dreamed of has become little more than a glorified newsletter.

A Future of Advertising Uncertainty

Another danger of coming up short of your true advertising potential is that you are actually creating more work for yourself and your staff in the future. It's common knowledge that it's far easier to keep an existing advertiser than to cultivate a new one. By not locking in an advertiser today, it will likely be even harder to convince that same advertiser the next time you contact him. Establishing a base of regular advertisers sets the standard for the rest of your sales efforts. Don't let your publication suffer the negative effects of having poor advertiser appeal. The following tips are intended to entice advertisers to view your publication as an attractive outlet for their advertising dollars, which in turn will create a more robust publication and preserve your publication as a source of potential non-dues revenue for your association.



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The Laws of Advertiser Attraction

Luckily, there are some basic methods that successful associations use to maximize their publication's advertising potential. We call these *The Laws of Advertiser Attraction*. These laws are intended to help you pinpoint where your association's advertising efforts currently excel, and where you need some help.

Law #1: A Theme is Worth a Thousand Words

OK, this one is a biggie. It's why we put it first and if you take nothing else from this paper, take this: communicating your content is key. While creating urgency is one of the most basic rules of advertising, and something we'll touch on in Law #3, one major way you can convince your advertisers that the time is right to advertise is by planning your editorial calendar, which also encourages your advertisers to plan ahead. Having a theme on hand is worth much more to a potential advertiser than a long speech about your publication and who you "think" may be reading it.

Commit to an Editorial Calendar

The best approach is to map out your editorial calendar for the entire year before you pick up the phone to sell on the first issue. If you know that your first quarter publication will focus on "Insurance Matters," your second quarter issue will focus on "Going Green" and your third quarter issue will highlight "Our Fabulous Annual Conference," you can sell around these themes in a far more effective manner than simply pitching your publication as a whole. Perhaps Joe's Widget Company isn't interested in "Insurance Matters," but "Going Green" is a hot-button topic for them.

You've just made a sale by giving Joe insight into the future content of your publication. Additionally, your media kit – and yes, you need to have a media kit – should present your year's editorial themes to your potential advertisers in a clear and concise manner. Help your advertisers plan their ad spending for the year by showing them exactly what your plans are and how they can fit into them.

Focus Your Content

Sometimes you simply can't commit to an editorial calendar. While not ideal, there are ways that you can still build in themes to encourage your advertisers to participate in supporting your publication. If you know the content of a single article that will be in your upcoming publication, sell around that. If you aren't sure what articles will appear, create a themed section of your own. You could decide that your first quarter publication will include a special advertising section devoted to office supplies and sell spots within that section. The bottom line is that there is a place for Joe's Widgets to advertise with your association, but it's up to you to help him find it.

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Law #2: Design Decisions

There are two major areas related to design that you need to consider when evaluating the appeal of your publication. The first is the design of your publication; the second is the design of your potential advertiser's ad.

Design Like the Consumer Publication Pros

The design of your print piece needs to be up-to-date and attractive. There is no reason for association publications not to be as attractive as consumer publications. A full-color, glossy, engaging publication stuffed with fascinating editorial will always outperform a newsletter peppered with clip art when it comes to attracting advertisers. Remember, your publication should build image for your association and your advertisers should be proud to be within its pages. Find inspiration from consumer magazines and apply those basic principles to your print piece. Work with your design and editorial teams to ensure that your publication stacks up to the pubs that are competing for your ad dollars. You should also be sure that your publication has consistent, predictable sections that your advertisers can rely on, such as "A Letter from the President," "Legislative Affairs" and so on.

Assess your publication's overall layout and design and don't be afraid to mirror it after a consumer publication.



Provide Design Solutions for Your Advertisers

Next, we'll briefly touch on the design of your advertiser's submission. It should first be pointed out that it's far easier to convince an advertiser who already has a campaign and ad dollars out there to switch from a different publication to your publication than to convince a company with no existing campaign to create one for your publication. With that said, there are times when you may approach a potential advertiser, especially at a more local level, that does not have an existing print ad program.

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If your potential advertisers do not have an ad on hand to send over to you, or if an objection you are facing in landing the sale is that they do not have the time or resources to create an ad, you can nip this in the bud by having plans in place to help advertisers overcome this hurdle. Having a fair-priced designer on hand to refer potential advertisers to if they need their ad designed or working with a publisher that can handle this request when this situation arises are two possible solutions.

Law #3: Urgency and the Competitive Edge

Though this is not a sales tutorial, one of the sales basics that we can't overlook is creating urgency to sell advertising. Part of your job in ensuring the success of your print publication is to give your advertisers a reason to place their ad *today*, not tomorrow, not next Thursday – but *now*.

Sell Premium Positioning to Lock in Advertisers

One way to increase the urgency of advertising in your publication is to sell premium positions within your book. Advertising on the inside front cover, outside back cover or within the pages of a hot topic article has real value for potential advertisers. There is true urgency in this tactic because there is only one inside front cover, and once it's gone, it's gone.

You can further this tactic by selling premium position packages, such as selling all the back covers for a year or the inside front cover spot for every other issue. This method both

encourages advertisers to commit today and paves a future of advertising revenue for your future issues.

This ad is positioned directly across from the Table of Contents - an attractive placement for potential advertisers.

Premium positioning is a sales tactic that can increase urgency and encourage advertisers to commit to your publication.



Fire up Your Advertiser's Competitive Spirit

Besides supporting your industry and getting their own name out there, your advertisers are also interested in what their competitors are doing. You can entice potential advertisers by limiting the number of ad spots that a specific industry may have in a single publication. This creates value for your advertiser by letting him know in advance that your publication will not be chock-full of his competitors, but that there will be enough competitors that he should be represented. It will also give your advertiser peace of mind knowing that he will be highlighted within his product category of one of only two or three same-category advertisers.



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Building further on this, positioning your advertisers around each other is important. Encourage your advertisers to be included in your publication by letting them know who they'll be joining when they sign on. If two of your limited spots are sold, you may want to share with Joe's Widgets that his competitor XYZ Widgets will be holding one of those positions. Letting Joe know that XYZ has already taken you up on your offer may be just the push he needs to sign on as well.

Conduct a Competitive Market Analysis

You can take the idea of using the competitive edge selling point one step further by conducting a competitive market analysis to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of your publication compared to others in the field. Conducting both a competitive market assessment and an advertiser feedback study will best evaluate where your publication stands in relation to the others vying for the same advertising dollars.

Law #4: Leverage the Power of the Association

We're hoping that this one is a reminder, but just in case, let's take a moment to focus on the unique advantage you have as an association approaching advertisers. Your pitch to advertisers is distinctive, and it's one that many other publications or media outlets that are vying for those same ad dollars would love to have – *you don't just count the people you reach, you reach the people who count.*

Capitalize on Your Unique Position

Your association's publication is unique and appealing for a number of reasons. First, there's the fact that your publication is a member benefit, so the people receiving your publication have paid to be part of your organization and are far more likely to open and read your magazine than a direct mail or free publication. Additionally, your members have a lot in common with each other. They're either all interior designers, human resource professionals, dentists or whatever your association caters to – and that tells advertisers a lot about what sort of consumers they'll be. An article from *Executive Update* reminds advertising salespeople to tell their potential advertisers that "our magazine is the best buy for our niche market" (*Executive Update*, 2000).

Pointing out that your publication represents a pool of qualified targets may be just the thing to bring ad dollars from other publications to your own.

Top 4 Reasons to Advertise in Your Association's Publication

1. Your publication is a member benefit
2. Your audience is highly specialized
3. Advertising with you expresses support for your industry
4. Your publication represents millions in industry buying power



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Advertisers search for niches that hit their exact target audiences, and your association's publication may be just the ticket. After all, 28 percent of B2B advertisers invest marketing dollars in industry-specific communications – just like your publication (Forrester Consulting, 2007).

Michael Moss, former vice chairman of Naylor and a 40-year veteran to the association publishing industry, points out that when an advertiser places an ad in your magazine, he is expressing his support for your industry and should feel that he has done much more than purchase an ad, but has joined your industry's "inner circle."

Your publication is a smart buy because, as an association, you most likely represent millions of dollars in industry buying power, and your publication is a direct route for your advertisers to the fingertips of industry decision makers.

Discover the Best Pricing Practices

Another consideration is how you price your advertising space. This one may seem like a no-brainer, but you'd be surprised how many associations sell themselves short, or price themselves out of a sale. As associations, you may have a tendency to undervalue your publication and not be aggressive enough with your pricing structure. Pricing the advertising real estate in your publication appropriately means something different to every association. What should you do to remedy this? Again, leverage your status as an association and network.

As an association, you understand the value of networking; after all, your members network with each other every day. Now it's your turn to network to learn about what your best price might be. It's important to make sure you are getting the biggest return you can from advertisers, without pricing yourself out of their budget.

If you're a state association, contact your association's chapters in other states and ask them exactly what their advertising rates are. Find out how successful they've been with these rates, and request a copy of their publication to review. Do they have plenty of advertiser support? Or are they on the slim side? Saddle up next to an association that you want to mirror and ask for its help. Odds are it will be more than happy to point you in the right direction, further strengthening the name and brand of your shared affiliation.

Law #5: Select the Right Salespeople

Finally, select the right people to sell your publication. We realize that the way associations work and who sells their publication's advertising depends on the structure of the particular organization. However, there are really two basic scenarios:

1. The association conducts advertising sales in-house.



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2. The association outsources advertising sales.

Selling In-house

The first scenario is the most challenging for obvious reasons. If you do not have a staff dedicated to sales, you are relying on your other officers to make sales in their “spare” time, which we know probably doesn’t exist. We wish there were a way to put more hours in the day, but since there’s not, we suggest exploring alternatives to this scenario. You can often outsource to a sales staff that focuses exclusively on your industry at little to no cost. This alleviates the pressure to find the time to fit selling into an already full schedule, and also increases the potential for the sales team to dig deeper to uncover advertising opportunities that may not have occurred to a non-sales staff member who is pressed for time and rushing to sell on your book.

If you must operate as an in-house sales team until you are able to outsource, there are some things you can do to make this process more efficient:

- Plan your sales strategy proactively, not just reacting to your advertisers’ requests.
- Organize some formal training for those who will be making sales calls – this includes researching the potential objections of those who you will be soliciting and thoroughly understanding the current trends within your industry.
- Set daily, weekly and monthly goals.
- Organize your databases and get all of your sales tools in one place before making calls.
- Establish realistic financial and time management goals for yourself in order to balance your potential dual roles within the association (*Marketing Insights*, 2005).
- Be as up on the industry as you can to talk to potential advertisers about these topics.
- Relay your sales accomplishments, as well as the concerns or objections you are hearing from your advertisers, to your senior management on a regular basis.

Outsourcing for Sales Success

The second option we will discuss is to outsource your sales efforts. This can extend your internal resources immensely by removing the sales task from your plate, but there are some major things to look for if you do consider outsourcing.

A very important point to touch on is that just because you’ve outsourced the sales of your publication, this doesn’t mean you’ve given up all your rights. You should look for a partner who makes you these offers:

- Your partner should specialize in working with associations and, even better, working with your industry. That way, when the salesperson picks up the phone and starts talking about all the reasons Joe’s Widgets should be in your pages, he understands what a widget is and why



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your association's members might want to buy one.

- Your partner should have proven success in driving more revenue for associations than you could drive on your own. This means that whomever you partner with should be willing to have an open conversation with you about how you may be able to drive non-dues revenue by extending your resources with the addition of a large, knowledgeable staff of association publishing experts.
- Your partner should allow your association to maintain full product control. Your association should have as much or as little control over your final product as you choose and you should maintain the final word on the editorial, advertising, layout and design of your publication.
- Your partner should offer its services to you with little to no financial risk. If a publishing or sales partner is a solid one, it should be able to partner with you without requesting that you incur several up-front costs or fees.

Whatever company you choose to sell the ads within your publication, make sure that it is armed with an arsenal of industry knowledge and experience, sales skills and that your publication has taken the steps above to be the most appealing advertising value that it can be.

What's Next?

Now that you've been schooled on *The Laws of Advertiser Attraction*, put them to work! Start drafting that editorial calendar, choosing themes for your issues, creating urgency and selecting the right salespeople to speak on behalf of your association's valued asset. While these laws are not all-inclusive, they hit on some major points that associations should consider when addressing their advertising sales efforts. Even if you can't follow all the laws at once, try picking just one and taking steps to follow it today.

A Final Note

This article offered the basics of increasing your advertiser appeal. These laws are intended to help you assess your current advertising efforts and reveal some new tactics for increasing your publication's appeal.

Whether you employ the laws in-house, or partner with an outside entity to sell on behalf of your publication, a little attention to the advertising appeal of your print publication can go a long way, and give you results that you're bound to see in your publication's bottom line.



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