

USING CREATIVE PROMOTIONS

By Carl Landau

Most advertising sales promotion pieces look like they were intended for the Internal Revenue Service. Often, promotions are just an afterthought, and the writer goes through the motions as though filling out a 1040 EZ form. The potential advertiser receives this piece of drivel in the mail and tosses it within seconds. The key to good promotion is to get the advertiser's ATTENTION!

The small magazine publisher often shies away from promotion because of the additional cost involved. But good promotions don't have to be expensive to be effective. Sales promotion is an area in which the small publisher can shine. Big publishers often are too scared to develop creative promotions. They fear that some boss's boss will dislike the new, innovative promotion piece and the responsible party will get kicked downstairs to the mail room.

The first step in creating good sales promotion pieces is to put yourself in the place of the audience you're trying to reach: the media buyer. Keep in mind that your potential advertising prospect probably receives two or three magazine sales promotions of some sort every day. If your promotion looks like everyone else's, it's guaranteed to get tossed in the "round file." It's not like Mr. or Mrs. Advertiser is sitting around the office waiting for the mail to come so they

can read about your magazine and order some ad space from you.

Lenny the Weasel

If you just take a little time and develop a creative approach to a sales promotion, the results can be staggering. Even in a highly technical marketplace, off-the-wall promotions can be very successful. I sent the unique promotions I'll describe below to companies like IBM, Digital Equipment Corp., Microsoft, etc -- companies that don't generally run around with Larry, Curly, and Moe. Good clever promotions are effective in any industry.

Here's an example of a promotion that was the key to grossing over \$600,000 for my magazine -- at a cost of about \$150 to me. At the time, I was co-founder and publisher of *Computer Language*, a computer magazine for software designers. We were offering a rate-protection program to all advertisers that guaranteed us a one-half page ad or larger for all 12 issues in 1985. I could have sent out the normal, boring business letter introducing the rate protection program. Instead, I sent out "Lenny the Weasel."

The mailer was a plain, brown, 9x12 envelope. The advertiser's name was handwritten with big, fat magic markers. The writing was erratic and almost illegible, as if a crazed person had written it, (Actually, my assistant and I wrote them all out left-handed.)

The return address was from none other than "Lenny the Weasel." The stamp was placed sideways, by hand (we used the stamp that pictures the dog McGruff saying "Take a bite out of crime").

The envelope contained only one sheet of paper: a color xerox of a ransom note made up of words cut from magazines and newspapers. The copy read, "Advertise-or we'll crash your disk! We don't want to get rough, so just go along with our instructions. Take out your word processor and generate a 12-time insertion order to the best technical computer magazine *Computer Language*. Remember, no funny stuff -- or you'll find your floppy in cement!" The cost to produce the color copies was about 50 cents each.

Within three days of sending out the ransom note, we received 18 calls from advertisers who wanted the rate protection. By the deadline date we had sold over 35 pages of advertising per issue for all 12 issues. All this due to Lenny -- and some hard follow-up sales work. The next year we used a "Weasel Protection" campaign that was equally successful.

Buy an Ad-Get a Cat

Actually, my most successful sales promotion piece started out as a joke -- and turned into big-time sales. I was living in a small apartment at the time and had to get rid of my cats. So I ran an ad in *Computer Language* that read

"Buy an Ad -- Get a Cat." The photo showed the cat dangling from the air with a Federal Express sticker on it. The copy read, "That's right, you can reach 55,000 software developers with your advertising message -- and get a free cat to boot. We're talking genuine felines with shots, spayed, declawed -- the whole nine yards. Just call 800-GET-A-CAT. Let us know how to ship: UPS, Overnight, Bulk Mail, etc. We're standing by ready to punch holes in boxes."

The hoax was written up in *Ad Week*, *Ad Age*, *Business Marketing* and about five newspapers. Besides a call from the animal protective league and a few humorless cat fanatics, the promotion was a phenomenal success. (By the way, I never gave my cat Kazoo away. She ended up making millions for me.) Naturally, we had to follow up the cat ad with "Buy an Ad -- Get a Brother-in-Law" in our April Fools, issue.

Sales Promotion Letters

A basic promotion piece that all advertising sales people should be writing is a monthly advertising letter. The approach I used was to send a copy of the latest issue to each advertiser myself, along with a personalized letter, rather than have the printer send them out. Advertisers are always anxious to see their own advertisements, and this is a good time to reach them.

The key to this letter, like all business letters, is to keep it short and pertinent. Letters should almost always be just one page long. Advertisers don't have time to read pages and pages of your sales prose. Probably the biggest mistake found in sales letters and promotions is that the emphasis is on your magazine and not on the potential advertisers. The letter will continuously say, "My magazine's circulation is," "My magazine's advertising pages have increased to," etc. Shift the emphasis to your client and write about information that is of interest to them.

Your monthly letter should also mention editorial highlights of that month's issue. You could write about circulation increases and the

additional new readers each advertiser can reach. This is also a great opportunity to discuss upcoming issues of special interest. Try using a short, handwritten note to point out editorial items that will be of interest to individual companies.

Again, be unique with your monthly letter. When I was with *Computer Language*, I always included a clever cartoon that was related to advertising or the computer industry. You want to provide some form of entertainment so the advertiser looks forward to receiving your letters. I even ran a football pool in my monthly letter that about half the advertisers were involved in. The key is to get the advertisers to participate. You have to separate yourself from the pack of advertising representatives that are flocking for the same advertising money.

Media Kits

Probably the single most important sales promotion item is your media kit. An entire article could easily be written about media kits alone. Here are just a few suggestions.

Give advertisers the information they need, and no more. The biggest problem with many media kits is that they contain too much information. They are loaded with every detail and fact about the magazine, which can overwhelm potential advertisers and make it difficult to find the information they really need. Remember, advertisers don't have hours to spend looking over every media kit they receive. Plus, you need to save some information to hit a prospect with on the second or third sales call or letter. Of course, don't go the other way and provide too little information. A balance has to be achieved.

I suggest you design one brochure that has all the general information about your circulation, readership, advertising page growth, and editorial coverage. Don't go into any great detail in this piece. This way advertisers can find the general information they need quickly and easily. Also, in this brochure it would be very helpful to include some good

market information about the industry your magazine covers. Advertisers will appreciate this information, and including it will portray you more as a marketing consultant than a money-grabbing advertising sales rep.

Along with the general brochure, you could also include short promotion pieces that give more detailed information about circulation, readership, and editorial coverage for the year. But don't overdo it! Obviously, you also want to include a rate card, an audit statement (if you have one), and a recent copy of the magazine. In addition to what's inside, put some thought and money into the media kit folder itself. This is the first thing potential advertisers see, and you want to create the right image from the very start.

So before you start developing your next sales promotion piece, put yourself in the mind of the potential advertiser you're trying to reach. Wouldn't it be a nice relief to receive an interesting and fun promotion in the mail? Something that made you laugh and enjoy your job a little more? If you can succeed in reaching an advertiser with a clever promotion piece, your chances of them remembering your magazine and wanting to advertise in it are about 10 times greater.

For more information contact:
Carl Landau, Niche Media
Phone: (530) 759-0848
E-mail: carl@nichemania.com
www.nichemania.com

Copyright © 2001 Niche Media: Magazine Advertising Sales Seminar, All rights reserved. No part of this book covered by the copyrights hereon may be reproduced or copied in any manner whatsoever without written permission from Niche Media