

LOCAL MAGAZINES:

Leveraging a Community Connection

Luminosity Perspectives

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Overview

Local Magazines can play an important role in local advertising efforts. They can extend the reach of a broadcast or newspaper plan and can be used to connect with hard-to-reach audiences such as upscale consumers or business professionals. The format of magazines also allows for a depth of communication not achievable in many other locally-based media, such as broadcast or outdoor. And for national advertisers, local magazines can provide community credibility and ground-level access not available from national publications.

When planning a local magazine effort, advertisers must consider all their alternatives, as the most obvious publications are not always their best option. The full breadth of local publications should be considered and evaluated based four key factors: Circulation, Involvement, Environment, and Pricing.

Local Magazine Types

There are many local magazines types although they typically fall into the following categories: Travel, Upscale, Shopper Guides, Entertainment, Business, Parenting/Specialty and Regional Editions of National Magazines. Each of these magazines types has their own strengths and weaknesses. Depending on the objectives and target audiences of the product or service being advertised, they may or may not be appropriate.

Circulation

When buying advertising space, a marketer is first and foremost purchasing the opportunity to communicate with a magazine's readers. Therefore, as part of the evaluation process, it is imperative to have a thorough understanding of each publication's circulation/audience.

Magazines are typically forthcoming in providing in-depth information on their circulation. Ideally, this information should be verified through an independent audit service such the Audit Bureau of Circulation, known as ABC (www.accessabc.com), or the business publication audit service, BPA Worldwide (www.bpaww.com). Some local magazines are audited the by less known audit companies, Verified Audit and Circulation Verification Council. Audited magazines will almost always include copies of their audited circulation statement in their media kit.

If a publication is not independently audited, advertisers should ask for other proof of circulation/ distribution. Often, un-audited publishers can provide mailing verification from the U.S Postal Service or verification of the printed quantity/shipments from their printer. Advertisers have the right to know what they are buying.

There are several different types of circulation. An understanding of the types helps determine reader involvement.

Type	Description	Examples
Travel	Targeted at vacationers/visitors. Good vehicles to reach visitors but rarely effective in reaching local audiences. Typically distributed free at local hotels and tourist attractions.	TravelHost (largest/franchised publisher), Where, MPV Publications Some larger resort destinations also publish their own magazines for distribution around their resorts
Upscale City	Targeted to local society scene. Contain news about charity events and local personalities. Target upscale homes and are strong vehicles for luxury brands.	Ocean Drive, Palm Beacher, Palm Beach Illustrated, Greenwich Magazine, Philadelphia Magazine, Points North, Modern Luxury, Niche Publications (Aspen Peak, Gotham, Hamptons, Los Angeles Confidential, etc.)
Shopper Guides	Shopper guides for real estate, cars, weekends, etc. Reach a locals and can be ideal vehicles for local retailers. Print quality can often be a concern.	Auto Shopper, City Shopper
Entertainment	Report on the local entertainment scene and are often similar to alternative weekly newspapers. They provide information on entertainment options as well as other community news and information. Many gay/lesbian magazines fit this category.	Time Out, Atlanta Life, Skinnie Entertainment (Orange County), What's Up Annapolis
Business	Often published in Journal format, they seek to reach the local business community by reporting on local business news. Usually limited to larger markets with robust business environments. Nearly every large city has their own local business journal and there are many state wide publications.	Crain's Chicago, Cleveland, Detroit and New York American City Business Journals operates in 41 markets Vermont Business, Greater Charlotte Biz, Virginia Business
Parenting and Other Specialty	Connects specific audiences (such as local parents) to each other. Provides calendars of local events and (kids) activities.	Boston Parents' Paper, Atlanta Parent, New Jersey Parent, LA Parent, Chicago Parent
Regional Editions of National Pubs	Some larger national magazines publish a regional or state edition. Contains the same editorial and advertising as the national edition, with a few extra pages of local ads.	Metro Networks Inc (MNI) and MediaMax

Standard circulation classifications:

- **Qualified** - Qualified circulation refers to circulation where the recipient is known and qualified. Qualification is typically by job title or job function. To receive the publication, the reader is required to provide certain information, such as name, address, job title, job function, purchasing power, salary, company size, etc. Qualified circulation is usually reconfirmed every 1-2 years. This type of circulation is most often associated with trade publications and with non-paid circulation.
- **Non-Qualified** - With non-qualified, readers are not required to disclose any personal information in order to receive the publication, but only needs to request and/or purchase a subscription. Most consumer publication fall under this classification.
- **Paid** - Refers to circulation where the recipient pays to get the publication. Payment may be through a subscription or individual newsstand sales.
- **Non-Paid** - Publications that are free. These may be distributed via subscription or frequently via newspaper boxes and high traffic distribution points around a city such as stores, restaurants, hotels and/or public buildings.

Initially, you might conclude that Qualified/Paid circulation to be the best since the reader has to provide information as well as pay money to receive the publication. Conversely, you might also conclude that Non-Qualified/Non-Paid circulation to be the least desirable since the publication is free with no information required. While this may appear to be the case, circulation type does not always relate to reader involvement.

Involvement

Reader involvement is a term used to describe how actively, attentively and passionately a person interacts with a publication. These qualitative factors will help you understand how to value the audience. Advertising agencies often use the term “engagement” to describe consumer interaction with advertising messages. However, it’s very difficult to generate consumer engagement without first selecting publications with high reader involvement.

National magazines use syndicated research studies that attempt to measure reader involvement through factors such as “time spent” with a magazine and the “number of issues read.” These measures are great comparison tools if you are working with publications that are measured by these studies. However, most local magazines are not measured by syndicated services. Some cross-market local magazine research is available from the City and Regional Magazine Association, known as the CRMA (www.citymag.org).

When syndicated research is not available, an independent readership study is often commissioned (paid for) by a publication. While these studies can contain valuable information, it is important to consider the source of the information. Since these studies are very expensive to conduct, the publication controls what data it shows and is likely to only show information favorable to the publication. Also, attempts to compare information across

independent studies can be misleading since methodology is often significantly different.

To really understand a local magazine’s readership, it is more useful to have an in-depth intuitive understanding of the publication. In this regard, actually spending time reading the publication provides the best background. This provides an understanding of how the publication relates to its local community and competition. This “touch and feel” element is probably the most important aspect of effective local magazine planning.

Environment

The content of a publication will put it’s readers in a specific frame of mind that may or may not be appropriate for a particular marketer. Many factors, including editorial style, advertising content, and paper and printing quality contribute to the environment a publication offers.

To successfully evaluate editorial environment, it is critical to have a clear understanding of advertising objectives. For example, an upscale city publication might not be the best environment for a retail message with an immediate call to action, such as a sale or limited time offer. The audience for upscale publications tends to cumulate over a long period of time. In addition, readers may be reluctant to clip a coupon, fold down a page or tear a phone number out of an upscale publication that they display on their coffee table.

A better match for a retail effort might be the local shopper’s guide, where readers are in a shopping mode and are expecting to clip coupons and circle offers. Shopper publications are also published more frequently and cumulate their audience more quickly.

Conversely, a local shopper’s guide might not be the best environment for a brand message. In fact, many would argue that the wrong editorial environment can even detract from a brand’s message and that an inappropriate environment can not only be less effective, but actually cause harm to a brand.

Understanding editorial content also makes it possible to negotiate for positioning that will best match advertising objectives. An effective media buyer will request specific positioning placements to maximize effectiveness and will also make it clear to publishers which editorial adjacencies are not acceptable.

Factors indicating Reader Involvement

- Robust “Letters to the Editor” section
- High response rates to reader surveys
- Presence of direct response
- advertisers/ Business Reply Cards
- Well-attended Signature Events
- Website traffic
- Large percentage of readers opting-in to email lists and e-newsletters
- Frequent postings to bulletin boards
- High response rates to other advertisers’ promotions

Price

It’s important for advertisers using local publications to consider cost-per-thousand (CPM) and not just overall page cost. Often the vehicles with the largest out-of-pocket cost are the most cost effective. Sometimes an advertiser can generate the most awareness by affording just a few insertions in the largest and most expensive publication versus many insertions in smaller less efficient publications.

CPM can be a difficult measure to determine locally due to the lack of consistent local audience research. We recommend using circulation CPM as the primary basis to compare efficiencies and using estimated audience CPMs derived with judgment from subscriber studies as a secondary point of comparison.

Negotiating an Effective Package

In addition to on-page advertising opportunities, local publishers can often provide other communication channels that can prove to be just as valuable as advertising. Since strong circulation and readership are so important to magazine's success, many publishers cultivate valuable relationships with their readers through other channels that can be utilized by advertisers to generate more direct contact.

Many local publications have events and sponsorships that allow advertisers an opportunity to communicate and sell directly to magazines readers. Additionally, signage and sponsorship opportunities allow advertisers to be part of the local community.

Advertisers should not be shy about asking for list rentals, names of event attendees or introductions to local community leaders.

Opportunities to extend the advertising message to online, email, and e-newsletters are abundant. Often, subscribers opt-in to these lists and request information from the publication. These can be ideal and responsive vehicles to extend your advertising message.

Online opportunities are sometimes undervalued by print publishers and can often be obtained via added value or at reduced pricing.

Online elements of local magazine packages should be evaluated and tracked using the same tools as independent online media purchases. However, advertisers should be prepared to accept fixed or shared placements without the impressions guarantees they are accustomed to receiving from newspapers and larger national sites.

In addition, local magazines often have less access to editorial content than major national publications. They are sometimes willing to feature advertisers in editorial - especially if the advertiser can provide an appropriate local angle or provide access to celebrity.

Providing the publications with clear objectives results in communication programs that go beyond advertising and that benefit both the advertisers and magazine. Local magazines are often experts on their city audiences and have widespread community contacts. These publishers can be valuable partners for advertisers targeting local markets.

About Luminosity Marketing

Luminosity Marketing provides media consulting and marketing communications research services. We specialize in connection planning, including target development, competitive intelligence, touchpoint mapping, content strategy, media planning and media buying. Analysis for this edition of Luminosity Perspectives by Ted Grussing, Media Director.

To learn more about how to advertise in local magazines, call us at 646-213-4860.

Visit us online at www.LuminosityMarketing.com