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E Pluribus Unum – out of many, one
Using promotional pages to hit your target

Whatever you call them (sig pages, promo pages, gang pages, theme pages) group ad pages are a great way to build your customer list and increase your sales volume. These ads, which are shared by multiple advertisers, offer many benefits for advertisers and sales reps. Group pages can also be a double-edged sword creating a unique set of challenges for the sales person. Here are some thoughts on how to use these pages effectively to build your territory.

Advantages of promo pages

Price – Group pages often allow you to offer a low-end price point to small advertisers. By taking a large ad and dividing it into smaller sections you can offer prospects a chance to get into your publication with a minimal investment. This gives you the chance to build a relationship with the advertiser, which if handled right may lead to them purchasing a larger program.

Value – For a customer with a limited budget, a group page can help them get noticed. For the price of a small ad they can be part of a larger more colorful ad. This can put them on an even footing with larger firms.

Positive association – Group page advertisers get to associate their business with the theme of the page ("Early Summer Savings", "Shop Downtown Where-ever"). Their ad space can be used to make a specific offer or for other sales copy. Community pages show their support for the local community. This makes the ads easier to sell because many businesses will want to show their support for the community, organization or event that the page promotes.

Expanded Advertiser Base – Group pages attract many types of businesses that might not normally advertise. Using these pages adds to the variety of your publication. Consumers like to have as many options as possible. Thus diversity through these pages drives readership.

Challenges presented by promo pages

ROE – "Return on Effort" Because of the low price-point and the number of ads on a page, group pages require the rep to do a lot of work for a relatively small amount of revenue.

Limited Response – Because the individual spaces in a group ad are small and they leave little room for copy or offers, group ad response may be hard to measure. This may lead the advertiser to doubt the effectiveness of your publication.

Cat Herding – Sometimes getting a group of businesses to agree on a page is like "herding cats". It is hard to get everyone to agree on a design or a run date. Coordinating these pages can be time consuming.

Getting Paid – Collecting on group ads can be as time consuming as selling the ads. Generating the invoices requires a great deal of paperwork.

The Right way to sell a group ad
The key to profiting from group pages is to sell them as a series. For example, sell a weekly page that is serviced monthly. Customers purchase their ads and pay for them once a month. By selling in this way you eliminate many of the challenges that are associated with group ads. Securing a long-term commitment allows the rep to make one layout, which will run multiple times. The frequency also enhances the advertiser's response.

Selling Group pages step by step
- **Start with an idea** – The sales rep's knowledge of his or her territory is crucial to selling a group page. Develop an idea that reflects the local market. Create a theme that ties into a local identity or organization.

- **Do a layout** – Create a spec ad of your idea. This will help you describe the product and close sales.

- **Develop selling points** – Write out a list of the benefits of your program. Use this in conjunction with your spec art to sell the program.

- **Identify the "Bell-cows"** – A bell-cow is a cow trained to walk to the barn at milking time. They have a bell hung around their neck so that the rest of the cattle know when it heads toward the stalls. The herd instinct kicks in and soon all the cows fall in line. Local business people also have a strong herd instinct. In any area there are a few people who are the unofficial leaders of the community. They are often the head of the local C of C, or Rotary etc. They may be a professional or the owner of the largest business. Get their buy in to your proposal and a commitment to advertise. Ask them if you may use their name when approaching the other business owners. This will help you to overcome resistance and to close sales.

- **Nothing succeeds like success** – As you build your list you will find business people will not want to be left out. If your production department can build the ad and give you proofs as you sell the page, you can show what the other people are doing. Depending on your design, you may be able to close on "I only have a few spots left."

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- **Think holistically** – Be conscious of the page design. Set rules for the content of the page. Try to create a clean, consistent appearance for the page. A standard format will give you the best results, a page that is cluttered or uses too many colors will be hard to read.

- **Manage expectations** – Position the group ad as a promotion. Remind the advertiser that group ads are designed to identify them as part of a community and keep their name in front of local consumers. Tell them if they want to see an immediate response they need to invest in a larger program. Don't hesitate to sell a group page space as part of a larger program.

- **Collect upfront** – Getting advance payment for group ads eliminates the time to chase advertisers down to collect small amounts. Because the investment for a space on a group page is low this does not place an undue burden on the advertiser.

- **Keep reselling the program** – Each month refresh the theme and constantly be reselling the program. If you have a design that only allows a limited number of advertisers, maintain a waiting list, which will keep the product running without an interruption.

Some Ideas for group pages

- **Organization pages** – Sell pages that promote local organizations like Chambers of Commerce or local business associations. You might want to allow space for informative copy from the sponsoring organization

- **Community support pages** – Contact local non-profit organizations and offer to partner with them. You can either make a donation for each space sold (which is built into the price) or use the ad to communicate their information to your readers. One of the reps in my company has run a monthly flyer for the animal shelter in her territory for over 5 years. One side of the flyer features photos of the pets available for adoption and a list of items they would like donated to the shelter. At the bottom of the page is a line stating "This information brought to you through the support of local businesses on the opposite side of this flyer." The back side of the flyer is headlined "These businesses support the local animal shelter" above 6 ads for local businesses.

- **Business feature pages** – You can layout a page with one space significantly larger than the others. This position is dedicated to a "Business Profile" which is an advertorial highlighting one local

business. Each business rotates into this position. This is a great way to secure long-term commitments, as the customers are unlikely to cancel when their "Turn" is coming.

- **Shopping Center pages** – Businesses in shopping centers often pay into an advertising fund used to promote the center. This money is often managed by the center manager with the approval of the tenants. This is ideal for a group page, the money is already set aside, you just need to prove that your product is the best place to invest it. If you can get one or two major tenants to support you, this revenue will go into your pockets. Once the center decides to go with you, you just need to contact the residents for copy. This is often true of local business associations as well.

- **Community event pages** – Events like fireman's fairs, founder's day etc. can be a great source of revenue. Usually the volunteers who run these events have very limited promotional budgets. You can help them to get their information and schedules to the public. Contact the committee and offer to publish their schedule or announcements for free if they will line up "sponsors" for the page. You contact the sponsors to get their copy and collect their payment. This is a great way to streamline the process for doing a one-time page.

Group pages are an effective way to grow page counts, build your advertiser base and generate revenue. If done properly they can help your advertisers, increase commissions and help local readers find the information they need. Group pages are an opportunity to initiate a relationship with new clients and demonstrate the level of service you are willing to provide. In the current economic downturn, they are a way to maintain your client list and to take business away from the competition. Like anything worth doing, group pages require a little extra work, and require some creative thinking, but in the long run they are well worth the effort.

This article was written by Jim Busch of the Pittsburgh Pennysaver.