

Chapter 1

How To Sell Bigger Chunks Of Business

In these difficult financial times, publications must find more creative ways to sell bigger chunks of business. Instead of struggling to sell just small mom and pop operations, the answer is to sell large merchant groups either as an area promotion or a subject promotion.

These area merchant groups are looking for someone who can work with them to not only develop their image but greatly improve their sales volume every month not just at heavy promotional times a year like Mother's Day, Back to School, and Christmas. Let's talk about a procedure that is applicable to area promotions which could be a shopping center, small town, or business community.

The first step is to diagram each target area as much as possible.

The diagram will show the key merchants and as many of the other merchants as possible. Code each merchant in the diagram as follows:

O = Objections

I = Interested

FA = Friendly Advocate

RA = Regular Advertiser

Understand how the coding works: O-Objections are for merchants who still have objections to your publication. These people have to be converted to I-Interested. Once a merchant is interested, the next step is to convert them to FA-Friendly Advocate, who though not a regular advertiser, believes in your publication and will go to bat for you. The FA will hopefully be converted to a RA—Regular Advertiser. Under this plan, the ideal situation is to convert most of the merchants to an FA or RA.

Now get a 3-ring binder and set up a sheet for each target area that is assigned to each salesperson. Discuss the status of each target area at weekly sales meetings.

Build rapport and fact find the target area merchants

The next step is to build rapport with the merchants in each target area.. Whoever is assigned to a target area should try to shop in the area frequently, attend their promotional events, and above all, get to know the merchants. Next fact find—ask questions. Build a file of data for each merchant. At this point you need to approach a designated chairperson, president, or key leading merchant and ask to meet with a committee or group of key merchants. It is important that you stress the reason for a meeting is to make a presentation regarding a marketing plan with your publication which would include a yearly (12x) advertising schedule and various other promotional services which will be explained at the meeting. The ideal procedure is to have a breakfast meeting at least 2 hours before the majority of stores are open. An invitation is sent to the merchants, their home offices, and their regional or district managers. Registrations are needed for the food count.

Preparation For The Meeting

The publication staff must prepare for the meeting with the following planning:

1. Know the mix of the merchants in advance of the meeting. Talk to the friendly advocates and regular advertisers who will help get others to the meeting.
2. Customize your talk. Know the surrounding competitive market environment.
3. Have members of your staff—layout artist, sales management, and if possible the publisher, share in the presentation. Have a TEAM presentation.
4. Use ample visuals including a Power Point presentation and a dummy layout with a sample heading, suggested ad sizes, and spot color examples. Show ad costs based on a 12x rate (which is a 13x time rate) for new promotion advertisers. Regular advertisers could run in the promotions at their regular rate.

The Meeting Agenda

The team leader opens the meeting by explaining what the publication wants to

accomplish with this group of merchants. The promotions are all in-paper promotions and no tabloids. Here is a suggested agenda:

1. A 12 x schedule is presented which shows a promotional theme for each month. These themes can be a mixture of traditional events like Mother's Day, Back to School, Christmas, etc., and events which are customized to the target area like Sidewalk Sale, Anniversary Sale, Harvest Of Values, etc. The dates for each promotion are shown which are based on research of the merchants, when their best sale dates are, and copy deadlines. This schedule, once approved, will be sent to each merchant, their home offices, and their district managers. This will be done at NO CHARGE.

2. A sample announcement flyer is presented. This flyer will be sent prior to each promotion to participating merchants. The flyers not only remind people of the promotion date, but the copy deadline and extra point of sale services which will be summarized later. This flyer will be done at NO CHARGE

3. Tearsheets for each promotion will be brought to the participating merchants to post on their windows. Their ads can be circled in red. Also extra papers can be brought to go on their front counters. This service is at NO CHARGE.

4. Other point of sale support:

A. Window banners AT COST

B. Shelf Talkers accomplish with this group of merchants. The promotions are all in-paper promotions and no tabloids. Here is a suggested agenda:

C. Coupon Boxes—delivered with tearsheets and shelf talkers AT COST
The merchants are impressed with the plan

At this point most merchants will be impressed with the plan. However the question may be asked, "How can your publication do all these things at no charge or at cost?" The answer is, "Only if your group or association will run this promotion

schedule as a collective group and at least 50% of your merchants sign a 12x contract." Your regular advertisers can be counted in the 50%. The percentage of required participation can vary. A strip center of 20 merchants may be 50% while a business community or small town of 50 merchants may be 60%.

The closing procedure starts with a dummy layout

The layout will be configured to the size of the promotional page spread and will have a heading for the first promotion on the yearly schedule, and ad sizes showing the 12x cost of each ad size. Regular advertisers will have their ad selection at their rate. In some cases a regular advertiser will run a separate ad in the promotion besides their ROP ad in the publication—or at least run a more dominant ad in the promotion. The closing procedure now is to get commitments for ad spots and have 12x agreements ready to sign. If your presentation is effective, most of the merchants present will sign a 12x contract.

Follow up to the meeting

Although there may be a good turn out for the breakfast meeting, there are always merchants who are absent or home offices to be contacted.. These contacts should be seen as soon as possible and shown the dummy layout where many of the spots were sold at the meeting. The services at no charge and at cost are to be explained as well as the 12x rate. In many cases if the group is organized, there will have been a notice telling absent merchants what was done at the meeting. After all the merchants have been seen, the percentage of participation is reviewed. If it is close, you may want to proceed. If it is off quite a bit, the leadership of the group may need to help you solidify the commitments. At this point, it is a judgment call for the publication. It is my experience selling 20 shopping centers, small towns, and business communities, that the breakfast meeting will determine the success of the promotion.

Summary

Once a target area merchant group is sold, it becomes a domino effect. The more groups that are sold, the more easier it will be to sell new groups. Although the procedures outlined in this article require a lot of effort and hard work, the results can generate huge increases in advertising revenue.