



Can regional media sell more local advertising?

Advertising revenues are the core income stream for local newspapers, whether those ads appear in the print or online version of the newspaper.

But times are tough.

Hardly a week goes by without a newspaper group or company reporting significant declines in advertising revenues, especially in print.

And it's a competitive world. There seems no end to those keen to secure advertising spend from local businesses whether it be highly targeted magazines, leaflets, sponsorship, digital screens, commercial and community radio, poster sites, cinema, transport, and of course the ad platforms run by the digital giants : Google ad words, Facebook ads, Instagram and Twitter ads etc...

For the local business who doesn't have an advertising expert it can be a daunting experience being bombarded with calls and emails from would be ad sellers, many of whom have a 'fantastic offer' that is 'just right for their business'.

So how can 'traditional' regional media companies differentiate themselves from all other players and re-establish themselves as the turn to place for local advertisers?

Here's six ideas:

1. Be the local advertising experts

Most local businesses don't have any in-house advertising expertise. They often buy advertising on the back of five criteria:

- 1 History - they've always used a particular advertising vehicle.
- 2 Awareness - are they familiar with the advertising medium being offered?
- 3 Personality - do they like the sales person?

- 4 Price - does it sound like a good deal?
- 5 Ease of Purchase - how easy is it to buy the ad?

Being seen as the local advertising experts and sharing that expertise with potential and current customers could be hugely beneficial. There is work to be done though.

How many regional media advertising sales people understand all of their competitor offerings, are comfortable talking about advertising generally, and sketching out ideas for current and potential advertising customers?

2. Focus on relationships not transactions

In the business to business sector relationships play a really important part in the decision-making and long-term purchasing process.

If people like you, and then trust you, you've got a very good chance that they will buy from you.

What tends to happen though in my experience of being sold advertising is that the person trying to sell me the advertising is more often than not focused entirely on achieving a sale there and then of a single ad rather than trying to build some sort of ongoing relationship.

Most of the calls I get go like this:

- This is who I am
- This is my publication
- I saw your ad in a different publication
- We got lots of readers who would be interested in seeing your ad
- We've got a great offer on a space the same size as your ad in our publication next week
- Do you want to take it? - we could lift the ad - I need to know today

As sales coach Brian Burns would say what is happening here is that the salesperson is 'racing to a no rather than going slowly to a yes'

Advertising sales people need to ask high-value questions, they need to be good listeners rather than non-stop talkers and they need to develop relationships.

3. Make it easy to buy advertising

The businesses regional media are targeting are often put off by the thought of the time it's going to take to organise the advertising.

It's easier for them not to advertise than to advertise, even if the advertising that they are being offered is likely to be of real benefit to them.

The most straightforward way of making it easy for people to buy advertising is visuals.

Three ideas presented or emailed with some personalisation will attract the interest of the potential advertiser. Few people won't look at ideas.

Why three ideas? It means the business can make their own decision as to which one would be best for their business. If you only offer one idea it's much easier for the customer to say no.

How many local regional media websites carry advice and tips on how to make the most of your advertising spend or send out personalised mail-shots to customers offering advertising ideas or organise advertising seminars?

I've yet to find one.

4. Change the offering

I think most local newspapers have far too complicated advertising price and size structures.

As a potential advertiser how do I decide whether I need a 10x3, 7x4, 6x2, 10x1, 5x3, etc... How about running with no more than nine ad sizes - three small ones, three medium-sized and three large ones - it's back to the three alternatives - 'You just want a small ad - that's great - we have three for you to choose from' - and then after a few small ads use a couple of new ideas to seek an upset to a medium sized ad.

The same applies to prices. Why do local newspapers still charge more for certain sections of the paper? All that says to me as a buyer is either some sections aren't worth advertising in or some are vastly overpriced.

Here's a thought - what would happen to the job ad sections if the job rate was the **lowest** in the paper?

5. Think 'Customer' not 'Advertiser'

If I buy furniture I'm a customer not a sofa buyer, if I stay in a hotel I'm a guest not a room occupier, if I hire a lawyer I'm a client not a hirer, so why if I buy an ad am I still called an advertiser not a customer?

And my point is?

Everyone who hands over money for advertising needs to be treated as someone special not someone who has just bought some space. Customers need to be cherished and feel valued and not just by the ad sales team but by everyone in the regional media organisation.

6. Don't employ ad sales people

Instead employ highly skilled marketers and creatives who between them will provide highly targeted communication to existing and potential customers, create inbound leads and provide stunning advertising ideas that local businesses will love.

A touch radical? Maybe but something needs to happen if regional newspapers are to start selling more ads.