**Connecting with Community Calls for a Creative Spark**

Each year, hundreds of advertising promotions cross my desk. While many are excellent, the most memorable tend to be those that generate a combination of good will and good revenue by taking a time-honored theme and adding a twist. Here are a few of my favorites.

**Options for elders.** Rather than repeat the same old senior section year after year, one Illinois publication launched a section focusing on options for elders in transition. Geared for both seniors and adult children of seniors, the tab offers information about choosing senior communities, selling family homes, financial planning, and dealing with the emotions that arise in the process. With its broad array of topics, the section attracts a cross-section of advertisers.

**Winter wanderlands.** Challenged by the annual drop in yard sale advertising each winter, a group publisher in the Philadelphia area outsmarted the weather by organizing indoor winter flea markets that have continued to attract dozens of vendors, hundreds of shoppers, and thousands of dollars in incremental revenue for the participating publications.

**Parental guidance.** Inspired by her own quest for school information and schedules, a North Carolina advertising director teamed up with two local school districts to produce a pocket-sized guide for parents. The back-to-school booklets contain everything any parent needs to know, including school-year calendars, telephone contact information, bus and sports schedules, a listing of board of education meetings, school closure procedures, and much more. Since the guides are distributed to every student in the two districts at the start of school and are valid for the entire year, advertising spots sell out in a flash.

**Demystifying Social Security.** In a bold move to help readers better understand their Social Security benefits, one Iowa publication produced a 12-page section filled with information about the program, its benefits, and how to access those benefits. Topics ranged from accessing the Social Security Administration (SSA) Web site and using the SSA Retirement Estimator for tax information and changes to specific programs, such as Medicare prescription drug coverage. Since the SSA provided the bulk of the editorial content, the section was both simple and profitable.

**Good news—and only good news.** In southern Pennsylvania, one small-town daily treats its readers to an entire edition filled entirely with good news on Christmas Eve. In addition to inspiring front-page headlines, the good news edition features upbeat and uplifting articles surrounded by colorful holiday greetings from advertisers of every type and size. The edition also includes a special section packed with children’s letters to Santa.

While their topics and target audiences differ, these community-building promotions share two important features in common — creativity and profitability. And from any perspective, that’s a winning combination.

*This article was written by Jo-Ann Johnson of Metro Creative Graphics, Inc.*