**In Contests, Action is the Name of the Game**

In last month’s column, I addressed the “why” and “how” of winning contest promotions. This month is all about the “what” — specifically, what kinds of contests are most likely to attract both advertisers and consumers and motivate them to take action. Simply stated, it’s not enough to have a good idea. Effective contests are the results of good ideas paired with compelling incentives that are powerfully communicated. The bottom line? Consider some of the ideas outlined below, then make sure that you give readers good reasons to participate and design ads that convey a sense of excitement and inspire action.

Here are several contest concepts that have broad appeal and will build buzz for your publication and advertisers.

**Pet projects.** According to the Humane Society of the U.S., there are approximately 86.4 million pet cats and 78.2 million pet dogs in homes across the nation whose owners are passionate about their furry friends! Contests that involve pets are some of the easiest and most popular promotions for publications both large and small — especially when they allow pet owners to show off photos of their four-legged family members. Requiring contestants to vote for their favorites online is a great way to drive readers to your Web site and collecting prizes or gift certificates from local pet retailers or services is a no-brainer. Some newspapers have generated buzz by donating a portion of their revenue to local animal shelters.

**“Ugliest” and “worst” contests.** This is one of those ideas that offers endless possibilities. One newspaper ran a super-successful “Ugliest Kitchen” contest sponsored by a local home store and several kitchen contractors. Not only did the contest spur hundreds of entries, readers loved perusing the photos and voting for the “worst of the worst” and local business owners were thrilled at the exposure and being supplied with contact information for prospective clients.

**Holiday-themed contests.** What parent wouldn’t want to be singled out in a Mother or Father of the Year contest — especially when the honor comes along with a prize basket from local retailers? And there’s no reason to limit contests to well known holidays. How about National Anti-Boredom Month in July? Plant a Flower Day on March 12? Or Eat What You Want Day on May 11?

**Seasonal scavenger hunts.** A California newspaper holds an annual “Great Road Trip Scavenger Hunt” that challenges readers to find 20 items during their summer travels and submit a photo of each item — along with one member of the scavenger hunt team — to the newspaper. The contest regularly attracts more than 400 participants and over 6,000 photo submissions!

With so many options, it’s time to spring into action!

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