**Digital Advertising Success Requires New Best Practices**

By now, it’s an old story: More and more readers are getting their news and consumer information digitally. But this now-timeworn tale begs publications to ask a new question: What are our digital goals and how do we get there? For newspapers large and small, paid and free, answering this question is the first step toward developing a winning digital marketing strategy.

First, consider these facts: According to the Census Bureau, 76 percent of U.S. households had Internet access in 2010 — up from 18 percent in 1995. Now there is news of another big shift. A report released in early May of this year by the Local Search Association notes that local search via non-PC devices — smartphones and tablets — more than quadrupled in 2012 and “…signals an opportunity for local businesses to evaluate where they devote their online ad spending.”

No one understands this better than Daniel Perez, VP of New Media for Metro Creative Graphics, who urges publishers to take a long, hard look at their audiences and goals with respect to both print and digital advertising. Perez notes that while publications have fine-tuned formulas for success with print advertising, new media require a new set of best practices.

“The bottom line,” he says, “is that what works for print doesn’t necessarily work for digital. In both environments, viewers want information that is appealing and easily accessible. But digital consumers are looking for interactive experiences that allow them to customize their viewing through links to Web sites, offers and special landing pages.”

For example, says Perez, when publishers place PDF versions of special sections online, the benefits — both to publications and advertisers — are limited. PDFs are not only difficult to optimize, meaning that the content will be hard to locate, they are not mobile-friendly and do not enrich viewers’ experience of the product.

“The question then becomes ‘Why are we putting a static PDF section online and what results are we expecting?’,” he notes.

If the goal is to gain an online presence, consider this: Simply being online is not necessarily a benefit for advertisers. Online products need to be designed specifically for that environment. They need to engage users visually and functionally, and then enable them to move quickly and easily to a point where they can know more or make a purchase.

Concludes Perez, “Sections designed for the online environment can be extended and enhanced — by adding or changing content and advertisers, for example — and there are multiple ways to boost their impact, such as including links to photo galleries, videos and special offers. The goal is to create a unique digital experience that’s not just a replication of print.”

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