

# publish.

Issue 10. November 2005

## How to catch and hold onto subscribers

Successful  
online  
marketing  
strategies

Avoiding  
sales  
burnout



**AUSTRALIAN BUSINESS & SPECIALIST PUBLISHER**

...the association representing the interests of print and electronic media



# How to build and retain

**Malcolm Auld\* offers some tried and true ways to drive up subscriptions.**

**T**he publishing business offers interesting insights into how advertising works.

As we all know, magazine publishers hate spending money – everything is done on a shoestring to get each issue produced on time and profitably.

When you talk to publishers about their subscription strategy, more often than not you get a blank stare in return.

Many publishers run their subscription strategy on the basis of available distressed space in their own magazine. If they have a vacant page that can't be sold, they run a subscription ad.

Or they simply stitch in a card and hope the responses cover the cost.

Those in the know, test their subscription advertising to learn the most cost-effective way to generate subscribers. And of those who do know what works, they'll usually tell you that stitched insert cards always get the best results.

There are a number of reasons for this. A stitched insert acts like a cover so that the magazine opens at the insert when the reader attempts to flick the pages.

If designed properly, an insert is an easy-to-use reply device. Simply complete your details and stick the card in the post or an envelope and then in the post.

An insert is unique in that it invokes a motor action – you have to remove it or move it to read the content underneath, so you get involved with it.

## **Direct response advertisers can reveal a lot about readers**

Traditional direct marketers, such as Dell – those people whose businesses live and die by their advertisements – will tell you that, in their view, inserts nearly always out-perform on-the-page advertising to get a direct response, such as to a special offer or promotion. They know this because they are constantly testing what works and what doesn't.

These marketers understand that



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when you conduct research, what people say and what people do, can often be quite different. So they don't just look at the usage research supplied by the media owners, rather they test to see what gets them the most cost-effective responses.

And once they find a medium that works for them, they increase their investment in that medium, to maximise their return.

Dell, for example, has been known to place a combination of over a dozen inserts, gatefolds and ads in one issue of a computer users magazine with the result that each ad paid for itself.

They know exactly what works because each execution has unique response devices – phone numbers and web codes. They keep advertising until the law of diminishing marginal returns applies and the ads (in whatever format) no longer pay for themselves.

Tipped-on inserts inside publications also work well to generate response.

In the late 80's while I was running Ogilvy & Mather Direct, we had to force publishers to produce the first tipped-on insert within a magazine in Australia.

We had found the technology in Europe, but no publisher wanted to

# subscription revenues

invest in it here. So we held a meeting with competing publishers in a room and told them what our client (American Express) was prepared to spend if they could deliver a tip-on technology within the magazine.

Surprising what a bit of financial motivation can do.

The first ad we did was in *The Good Weekend*. The tip-on was the size of an American Express card and it opened out to a self-mailing application form. Not only did the insert become the second most profitable way (behind take-one brochures) to generate new card members for American Express, but it also researched as their most successful brand advertisement.

## Partner with advertisers to test what works best

Despite the fact that inserts and tip-ons work so well, publishers continue to sell on-the-page advertising to advertisers, which is not often the best solution for the advertiser.

Why not collaborate with advertisers to deliver a creative stitched insert solution or a gatefold? You can add value, such as a sample, or some sort of value-add offer for readers and generate better results for advertisers. And you don't have to do it in all copies. Part-fund a test, say in one region and see what happens.

An alternative to add value to advertisers and readers (also known as customers) is email. Email newsletters and special bulletins are an excellent and cost-effective way to provide extra information or news to magazine subscribers, as well as offering additional advertising opportunities for advertisers.

A regular e-mail newsletter also allows you to provide more timely information in between magazine issues, if your publication is monthly, for example.

And if you use video email messages, you can deliver vision and audio from a journalist/columnist/advertiser to really bring your publication to life.

You can also help increase sales or readers of a magazine by using an e-mail message to drive readers to purchase, subscribe or read a publication.

But there are some traps to using email. After all, never before has a medium been so enthusiastically accepted and used by consumers, yet so appallingly abused by marketers, that laws were created to prevent its use.

The first thing to consider when using e-mail is selecting an outsourced supplier to send your messages. With spam filters now existing at ISPs and at corporate gateways, not to mention Microsoft's default restrictions, every email that is sent gets filtered at least three times along

## Email tips for beginners

1. Always get permission via an opt-in subscription system. It's common-sense, polite and the law.
2. Always run your content through a spam filter such as spam assassin or spam cop to confirm whether or not it will get through spam filters to your audience. Most reputable email distributors now provide spam checking as part of their service.
3. What works in direct mail will only work in email if you get through the filter system. Don't use CAPITALS in the subject line, words such as; free, money, love, sex, happy, win, lots of exclamation marks!!!!!!, \$\$\$ and others.



The first tip-on in an Australian magazine.

the way. Marketers often have no idea how many emails reach their intended recipients, unless they use a specialist e-mail distribution company.

Most distributors provide web-based solutions so you can still send your messages yourself, but you do so via the e-mail distributor's system. This ensures you get a higher penetration of messages, because the distributor is constantly developing their systems to cope with the daily changes in computer technology – something you cannot do yourself by typing an e-mail in Outlook and hitting the 'send' button.

4. Use low res images in your messages to avoid delays on your recipient's system.
5. Over 65 per cent of emails are opened Tuesday to Thursday, so test day-of-week and time-of-day for the best response. Friday afternoon may be the right time to send a message if what you publish has to do with weekend entertainment for example.
6. People ask two questions before opening their emails – who is sending it to me? (the From line) and what do they want? (the Subject line). If they know who you are,

