

24-Hour Moneymaker

LEVERAGING YOUR
WEB SITE TO BOOST
ADVERTISING SALES

While the World Wide Web is a medium of opportunity, those opportunities aren't always so easy to spot.

"Leveraging Your Web Site for Ad Sales," a new NAA report, highlights ways newspapers can make better use of their Web sites to attract and service advertisers.

The report, produced for the Association by The Digital Futurist Consultancy, www.digitalfuturist.com, examines whether newspapers are using their sites to promote print advertising, to share their marketing and pricing data, and to provide customer service to new and existing advertisers. The report's findings include:

- ▶ 55 percent of the sites reviewed have an area for marketing the print edition. That still leaves lots of sites without any marketing information for potential advertisers.
- ▶ 60 percent provide visitors with advertising rates and information about deadlines, terms and ad sizes.
- ▶ Less than 10 percent provide a self-service area for

advertisers. The report defines self-service as the ability to schedule and upload an advertisement.

Navigation and Other Challenges

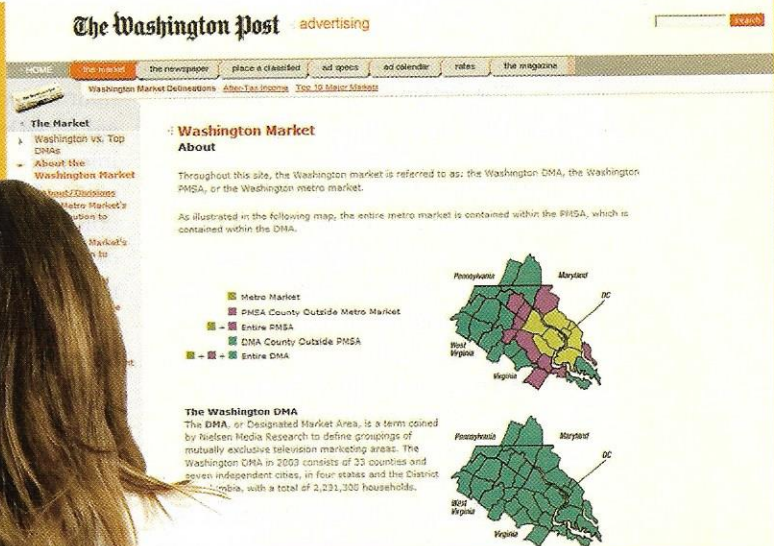
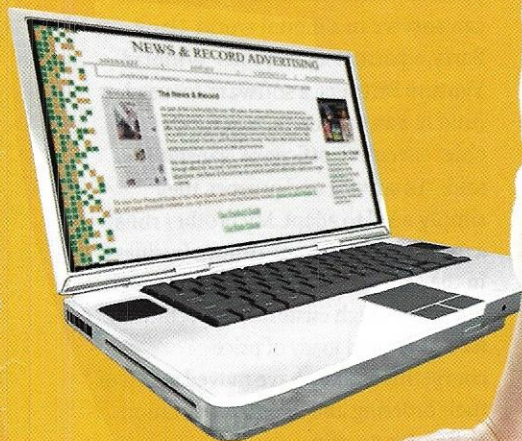
Most newspaper sites suffer from "linkitis," or too many links, buttons and other places for consumers and advertisers to wade through. Some have literally hundreds of links on their home pages.

Recent research on Web page navigation conducted by The Poynter Institute in St. Petersburg showed there is a decline in readership the farther down the page the user has to scroll. This study, called Eyetrack III, compared two different pages with the same or similar content. On the longer page, 40 percent of study participants didn't see many of the elements below the "screen fold."

Having a presence on a newspaper's home page is only the first step. The NAA report, which reviewed 100 sites of all sizes, found many with inconsistent navigation and incomplete or confusing information, including ad rates.

Even if sites had complete information, it often was

by Howard I. Finberg



tucked inside a PDF document. Though great for repurposing printed materials, PDFs often do not translate very well to the Web.

Greensboro's Comprehensive Package

While many newspapers face challenges in creating an advertiser-friendly online environment, many others provide examples of excellent customer service. The News & Record in Greensboro, N.C., for example, actually tells clients how much they should spend on an advertisement.

Planning tools and information are front-and-center on this site (www.news-record.com/advertising/). A budget calculator encourages an advertiser to plug in key figures related to its business to find out how much it should be spending on advertising. The newspaper's ad rates are just a click away.

"It's instant gratification for the advertiser, and it gets them

engaged in the site," says Ginny Olson, who orchestrated creation of this section two years ago and now is a key accounts executive at the paper.

She says a key goal from the start was to publish information that would only have to be changed every quarter (ideally, even less frequently) to avoid the all-too-common problem of having years-old data sit dormant on the site. Several links lead visitors to chambers of commerce sites for in-depth information on the Piedmont Triad area, a smart move to get advertisers the market data they need without the hassle of constant updates.

Planning Pays Off

The Washington Post may have the best-designed online section of print advertising information in the country (<http://advertising.washpost.com>). But that certainly didn't happen by accident.

The section went live in September 2003, the result of a carefully choreographed plan that involved staffers from IT, marketing, advertising and the Post's ad agency, and spanned six months. Client feedback helped set the group's goals, according to Dave Burke, manager of IT Web solutions.

"When we initiated the redesign, we took a more user-centered approach," he says. "We cataloged all the customer feedback about the existing site, analyzed traffic logs to identify common tasks that visitors were trying to complete, and solicited help from customers and service people in the creation of the information architecture."

That's far more thought and analysis than most newspapers—including other major metros—put into their online media kits. But it has paid off with a section that is easy to navigate and lives up to the wording that introduces the section on its main page: "All you need to know about advertising in the Post...rolled into one Web site."

Typical rate and ad spec

information is easy to find and is enhanced by a deep section of market information, including a comparison of how Washington compares to other metropolitan areas, a chart that compares reach of competing local media (not just newspapers), and more.

What all successful sites profiled in the report have in common is simple: a commitment to serve advertisers in creative, engaging and highly functional ways.

These companies see the Web's potential to go beyond repurposing print materials on the Internet. Instead, they have decided to invest today to meet the challenges of tomorrow.

Adapting to the New Digital World

For newspaper advertising executives, adapting to this new world is a balancing act between the current custom solutions that a sales force can provide and the potential of increased value that a "consistent machine interface" can offer an advertiser around the clock.

The report uncovered almost a dozen lessons newspapers can use to market their services to advertisers. Among them:

- ▶ Decide on the audience you want to reach and assemble a small team to help reach it.

- ▶ Get media buyers involved in the creation of any online area aimed at them.

- ▶ Decide who at the newspaper will be responsible for updates.

- ▶ Pay attention to the sales leads your site generates.

- ▶ Invest in ad services, if it makes sense from both a cultural and an economic perspective.

We live and work in a multitasking world, a world full of self-service options. When asked how businesses can survive in a digital world, Hank Barry, a partner at Hummer Winblad Venture Partners, a software-focused fund in San Francisco, and former chief executive officer of Napster Inc., said: "To survive and prosper, they simply need to adapt. My brother runs a propane fixtures and fittings business in the Midwest. It is a simple and tough business—high customer expectations for service and loads of price competition. They have moved much of their ordering and sales configuration online. It's working.

"Perhaps, contrary to expectations, customers prefer a consistent machine interface to an inconsistent human interface."

High customer service expectations and loads of competition. Those issues should sound familiar to any media industry watcher.

To download a free copy of "Leveraging Your Web Site for Ad Sales," go to www.naa.org/leveraging. □

THE REPORT was researched and written for the NAA Display Federation by The Digital Futurist Consultancy, a group that assists media companies with new and emerging technology and business challenges. The authors and researchers for this project were Managing Director Howard I. Finberg, Mike Coleman, Robin Sloan and Kathlyn Oakley. To contact the group, e-mail finberg@digitalfuturist.com.

EXTREME MAKEOVER

DOES YOUR MARKETING Web page need a lift? Does your online rate card lack "wow"? NAA might be able to help.

We want to do a free extreme makeover of your online marketing area. We are looking to help two newspapers use their Web sites to better market their print and online advertising products to improve how they reach new and existing advertisers.

If the accompanying story has compelled you to take another look at how your paper uses its own Web site to market to advertisers, then this is an offer too good to refuse.

Our plan is to consult with your marketing team, providing advice and best practices on how to leverage your Web site to present marketing materials, share rate information, and sell and service ads. The winners will be offered consulting services and a mock-up of an improved media kit/self-service area. NAA will not promise to provide new software or platforms to connect Web sites with legacy advertising systems.

An advisory council of NAA members will offer insight, recommend best practices and participate in conference calls. On-site consulting also may be included.

Those interested in being considered for this initiative should contact Mort Goldstrom, NAA vice president of advertising, at goldm@naa.org. Entrants should explain why their newspaper's site should be selected. NAA will begin selecting the two sites in the next month. Results will be featured in a future article in PRESSTIME.