

# Leveraging *your* Web Site *for* Ad Sales



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This report was researched and written for the Newspaper Association of America's 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 Howard I. Finberg [managing director], Mike Coleman, Robin Sloan and Kathlyn Oakley.

We live and work in a multitasking world. It is a world full of self-service options. Customer service, good and bad, is moving to customer *self*-service.

Listen to the voice of Hank Barry, a partner at the venture capital firm Hummer Winblad, and former CEO of Napster, when he was asked a question about how businesses can survive in a digital world:

*I think all businesses have tremendous opportunity here. 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.

For newspaper-advertising executives, adapting to this new world is a balancing act between the current high touch and custom solutions that a sales force can provide and the potential of increased value that a “consistent machine interface” could provide an advertiser 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. It is a major challenge that's explored in the second chapter of this report: **The New Digital Landscape**.

However, even before dealing with that challenge, there are opportunities newspapers can explore which require little or modest investments in time and resources.

The first is to recognize that newspapers have yet to take full advantage of the Web to communicate with advertisers, and advertising agencies, in a dynamic and assessable manner.

“Come Together III: Making the Advertising Connection” highlights some of the opportunities:

- Slightly more than half – 55 percent– of the sites we reviewed for this report have an area for **marketing** the print publication. This is slightly higher than the results of our survey of advertising executives. In that survey, 44 percent said they had a marketing area online. That still leaves lots of sites without any marketing information for potential advertisers.
- A slightly higher percentage – 60 percent– of the sites reviewed provided their clients or potential customers with **advertising rates** along with information about deadlines,

terms and ad sizes. This again is consistent with our executive survey, with 63 percent of respondents saying they provide this information.

- Less than 10 percent of the sites provide a **self-service** area for advertisers. We define self-service as the ability to schedule and upload an advertisement. In our survey, this number is the same, with 12 percent of the executives saying they offer a way to place a display ad and 10 percent of respondents saying they allow advertisers to schedule or change run dates. Again, there is opportunity in this area.

Having a presence on the home page of the newspaper's Web site is only the first step. Our review of sites showed a lack of visibility within sites; inconsistent navigation and sites with incomplete or confusing information, including data on rates.

Even if the sites had complete information, the data were often tucked inside an Adobe PDF document – a file format originally created for the ease of sharing printed materials. These PDFs are great as a way to “repurpose” already printed materials. However, they often do not translate very well to the Web. These challenges are explored in **Chapter 3: How Are We Doing Today?** and in **Chapter 4: Voices from Newspaper Ad Executives**.

There is good news, however. There are examples of excellent customer service we can learn from. Newspapers are finding creative ways to market their services to advertisers. We uncovered almost a dozen lessons. Here are some of the key ones:

- Decide on the audience you want to reach and assemble a small team to get it done.
- Get the media buyers involved in the creation of any online area aimed at them.
- Create an owner of the information. Decide who 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.

There are more lessons we learned from our explorations in **Chapter 5: Learning From the Best**. We take a closer look at the common elements we found in **Chapter 6: Learning From the Best—The Case Studies**.

The best practices we have found come from newspapers as small as the *News & Record* in Greensboro, N.C, and as large as the *Washington Post*.

The common thread is simple: A commitment to serve advertisers in creative, engaging and highly functional ways. These sites see the potential of the Web to go

# Executive Summary

beyond repurposing print materials on the Internet. Instead, they have decided to invest in the digital future; to invest in today to meet the challenges of tomorrow.

The intention of this report isn't to scold newspaper advertising departments. Rather, its goal is to present a call to "ownership." In much the same way circulation executives have seen the potential of providing customer service to subscribers via the Web, it is now time for advertising departments to come together with their online departments.

Getting started might be as simple as asking a series of questions:

- What do we want to tell our advertisers?
- How can we make it easy to find that section on our Web site?
- Who will be responsible?
- How can we make it easy-to-use?

We provide several checklists at the end of this report—**Chapter 7: Next Steps**—for guidance. There are no rules. There is no "right" or "wrong" way. Each newspaper must find its own way.

The two biggest questions we must ask, however, are:

Are we serving our advertisers? Can we do a better job in this increasingly digital age?

Maybe it was the remote control. Maybe it was the ATM. Whatever it was that kicked it off, at some point in the second half of the 20th Century, customers started taking control. And, in concert, responsibility for service began to shift away from businesses to customers.

The Internet arrived and multiplied the change, speeding it up and deepening its reach.

Now, all businesses have to contend with two linked trends:

1. We want more control over the services we use.
2. We want to exert that control through electronic, not human, intermediaries.

The gold standard for service used to be the human touch: the shopping assistant, the insurance agent. For the elite and the elderly, perhaps, it still is.

But for everyone else—from media to shopping to banking to manufacturing—online tools are the order of the day. Today, businesses don't just need to provide customer service; they need to empower customers to serve themselves.

### Choice and control

The relationships between media businesses and their customers are a harbinger of things to come for other industries. Because media is digitally transferrable—the product itself, as well as the service that surrounds it, can be provided online—it has changed the fastest.

“TiVo is God's machine.”

Thus spoke Michael K. Powell, chairman of the FCC. TiVos and other digital video recorders (DVRs) are only in a small share of American homes, but that share is growing fast. And more importantly, DVR technology is a great converter: Once people try it, they don't go back. (Less than 2 percent of people who bought DVRs have given them up, Forrester Research reports.)

DVRs are engines of choice and control. They spool live TV onto a giant hard drive. Viewers can save shows for later; they can pause live TV; they can fast-forward past commercials; they can rewind and watch again. DVRs transform the static stream of television from a master—“Hurry up, it's about to start!”—to a slave.

DVRs haven't gone mainstream yet, but they will. And if TV is bracing for an increase in digital choice and control, music has already gone through it.

In first few years of the 21st Century, the alchemy of cheap digital storage, pervasive broadband access, and

new sound compression formats turned the recording industry inside out and upside down.

Although the file-swapping heyday of Napster is over, its legal successors are no less corrosive to traditional music-publishing models: Now consumers can buy exactly the tracks they want through online music stores. They're no longer slave to the publishers' packaging—they can mix and match tracks to make their own perfect, personal albums.

iTunes, Apple's online music store, is the market leader. Eleven months after launch, it had sold 50 million songs. It took another four months to reach 100 million, another three to get to 150 million, and two more to hit 200 million.

iTunes charges a dollar a track, so its sales don't approach the total for traditional CDs, which is still about a billion dollars a year in the United States.

But like DVRs, what's important here is the *trend*.

To see an industry where that trend has made its ultimate implications clear, look no further than digital photography, the poster child for choice and control.

With digital cameras, you can preview and filter photos moments after taking them. You can “develop,” process, crop, correct, and print photos all by yourself.

After experiencing that, few folks, if any, go back to film canisters.

Sometime between 2000 and 2003, sales of digital cameras surpassed their film-based counterparts. And in 2003, for the first time, sales of photo film *fell*—by 13 percent. Today, one-third of consumer photo prints are made from digital images, not film. And Kodak has stopped making film cameras altogether.

This is what these trends look like when they mature: Choice and control reign supreme. The old ways wither and disappear.

### Freedom and flexibility

It's not just media that's been transformed. Let's look at retail shopping and its online avatar, Amazon.com.

Here, we discover that the self-service revolution is about more than choice and control. Amazon provides those things, yes; but perhaps more importantly, it provides freedom and flexibility. Here's what we mean:

When you shop on Amazon, it's easy to put things in your shopping cart, take them out, and put them back in. It's easy to compare items. You can fiddle as much as you want.

# The New Digital Landscape

But try shopping Amazon-style in a real store: You'd be skittering back and forth between aisles, loading and unloading your cart, holding four items in your hand at once, all the while calling up other stores on your cell phone to check their prices. In the end, you'd probably leave without buying anything. It would be insane.

But Amazon provides a context for that kind of shopping. And it's fun. There are no salespeople to summon; no store hours to abide by; no other customers to annoy. It's like wandering an empty mall—except the lights are on and the stores are open.

Even businesses that have traditionally been the domain of specialized agents are falling under the spell of electronic self-service. Why use a travel agent when you can access a full matrix of flights on sites like Orbitz and Expedia, fudging your travel dates back and forth to find the best deal?

Again: *Freedom is crucial*. When we deal with human helpers, we often feel constrained; even an uncommonly helpful and gracious travel agent can't provide the perfect patience and slavish devotion of a travel Web site.

Another example of a traditionally mediated business gone self-service is a parts fabrication site called eMachineShop. The site asks: "Why waste time traveling, calling, faxing or emailing to conventional machine shops—and waiting days for quotations?" Why indeed? Here's how they propose you fabricate your parts instead:

First, you download a free CAD program from their site. You use it to design a part on your computer: a gear or a bracket or whatever you need. You can import plans from your own program if you like. Then you can check the cost instantly. If the price is right, you order a quantity—anywhere from 1 to 1 million, eMachineShop.com says.

Why waste time traveling, calling, faxing or emailing to conventional machine shops - and Reduce your total time up to 90%! Open doors to new products and projects, to invent at cost of parts and more. Quantity 1 to 1,000,000.

Injection Molding	Milling	Turning	Laser Cutting	Welding
Tapping	Bending	Blanking	Punching	Plastic Extrusion

Intelligent design software gives instant exact pricing, expert feedback, and unrivaled customer service.

**Download**

1. Download the easy-to-use free CAD software. You'll be designing in minutes and get feedback on your design in seconds.

**Draw**

2. Use the software to draw your design or import from an existing file. See a quick [demo](#).

**Order**

3. At the click of a button, your part is safely shipped and delivered to your door.

Customers: Large companies - Small companies - Labs - Universities - Schools - Individuals

Truly, there is no corner of the economy untouched. For those still in doubt: Even pizza has gone online. Check out the Papa Johns site—complete with interactive topping tool:

Click the toppings below to add toppings to whole, 1st or 2nd half of pizza.

Pizza - Create Your Own

Pizza

Large Original

Add Whole Toppings Here

Add First Half Toppings Add Second Half Toppings

To remove a topping, click it.

Whole Toppings: Pepperoni

First Half Toppings: Green Peppers

Second Half Toppings: Sausage

Main Menu Add Pizza

## Control at the core

Under this new self-service regime, we're taking closer control of—and more responsibility for—the crucial services that underpin our lives.

Banks are pushing people online. Bank of America has a cut-rate checking account that only allows a handful of in-person transactions every month; go over your limit and you'll pay a fee. But you can bank all you want online: Check your balances, transfer money between accounts, order checks, even pay bills.

Bank of America Higher Standards Online Banking

Accounts All Pay & Bills Transfer Funds Customer Service

Accounts Overview Account Activity Account Summary Find a Transaction Open an Account

Check Image - Front

Posting Date: 12/23/2011 Check # 126 Amount: \$47.00

Reference: CHECK Account: 00A-6763 Nickname: Checking

ROBIN J SLOAN  
1201 4TH AVE  
SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94109-2000

12/23/2011

\$47.00

Bank of America

To print this page for reference purposes please use the print button on your browser or click "File" and "Print" if you are unable to view this item and require customer service to describe it to you please

Bank of America offers a feature that obviates the need for boxes of old checkbooks: When people cash your checks, the bank scans them and puts the images online.

You can summon up any check you've ever written and see the check itself displayed on your screen, complete with scribbled signature.

To enumerate the advantages: There are no lines. There's no waiting, and unlimited transactions. Your entire banking history is at your fingertips. It's completely private, available at any time of the day or night.

Banks aren't alone. The insurance industry is getting into online self-service, too: In late 2004, Geico upgraded their Web site with a tool called MyPolicy. On MyPolicy, you can fiddle with your car insurance *ad nauseum* and see instantly how each change will affect your monthly payment. Questions as you're fiddling? Every policy option has an online help section—click on a policy line item and it displays a detailed explanation and coverage recommendation.

Policy Coverages	Limits
The following coverages apply to all of the vehicles on this policy. When you make an adjustment, the change will pertain to all vehicles.	
<a href="#">SOCIAL INJURY LIABILITY</a>	\$30,000/\$60,000
New Coverage Choice:	Please Select
<a href="#">PROPERTY DAMAGE LIABILITY</a>	\$15,000
New Coverage Choice:	Please Select
<a href="#">UNINSURED MOTORIST &amp; UNDERINSURED MOTORIST</a>	\$30,000/\$60,000
New Coverage Choice:	Please Select
<a href="#">MEDICAL PAYMENTS</a>	Not currently carried
New Coverage Choice:	Please Select

Vehicle Specific Coverages	Premium	Limits/Deductibles
Coverages specific to your 2003 TOYOTA MATRIX/XR		
<a href="#">SOCIAL INJURY LIABILITY</a>	\$120.00	\$30,000/\$60,000
<a href="#">PROPERTY DAMAGE LIABILITY</a>	\$150.00	\$15,000
<a href="#">UNINSURED MOTORIST &amp; UNDERINSURED MOTORIST</a>	\$29.00	\$30,000/\$60,000
<a href="#">COLLISION</a>	\$343.00	\$500 DED./WAIVER
		Please Select
<a href="#">EMERGENCY ROAD SERVICE</a>	\$5.70	NON-DEDUCTIBLE
		Please Select

If you like what you see, you can click to make the change—and get your new policy documents in PDF format via e-mail.

Banks and insurance companies, stock brokerages and mutual funds—all industries with a traditional emphasis on high-end personal customer service—have gone online. And it's not a matter of providing low-cost, bare-bones service. Done well, online self-service systems are an all-around improvement on the old model, even when it comes to critical services at the very core of people's lives.

## Implications for newspaper advertising

Hank Barry, a partner at the venture capital firm Hummer Winblad and former CEO of Napster, the online music service, was interviewed online as part of a series called "The Future of Digital Media" in November 2004. Here's a particularly relevant question and answer:

## What businesses are most threatened by the digital future? What can they do to best survive?

*I think all businesses have tremendous opportunity here. 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.*

"Customers prefer a consistent machine interface to an inconsistent human interface."

The boundaries between industries are breaking down. When everything's online—all contained in the same browser frame—expectations bleed from industry to industry, site to site, experience to experience.

When people get used to a certain level of choice, control, freedom and flexibility in a particular domain, they begin to expect it in others—even when the domains are as disparate as music and propane, or car insurance and newspaper advertising.

And if that isn't enough, some expectations are already being set within a domain that's not disparate at all: classified advertising.

Craigslist, the online community site, has taken \$65-million in classified revenue away from San Francisco Bay area newspapers, according to Classified Intelligence. And Craigslist has got self-service down to a science: When you post an ad, the site sends you a 'self-publishing kit' via e-mail with links you use to post, edit, or remove your ad whenever you like. That's it. It's simple, easy, and empowering.

So what should an online self-service system for newspaper advertisers look like?

## Here's a start:

First, it's easy to get detailed information on basic ad rates and schedules. This is a no-brainer; it's online, accessible, and up-to-date. Finding the price of a full-page ad in the Sunday paper is as easy as finding the price of the new Harry Potter book on Amazon.

It's a breeze to create an account on the site.

Once a prospective advertiser has done so, there's a way for her to upload ad copy and images in a variety of standard formats. If the newspaper has certain standards,

# The New Digital Landscape

technical or otherwise, they're spelled out here in an extensive FAQ. All uploaded files go into the prospective advertiser's virtual folder, which she can browse, update and change as much as she wants.

She can design ads and see visual previews of how they'd look in the paper. She can play with the schedule and see how different scenarios would affect her bottom line.

It's entirely possible the advertiser hasn't ever spoken with a representative from the newspaper at this point. She could still just be exploring—deciding for herself if this is something she wants to do.

When she does decide, she submits her order online, specifying which ads to run and when to run them. If there are special promotions or package deals available, the system tells her. Online self-service doesn't imply an abdication of salesmanship; now, the selling just happens in a different way.

Going forward, the advertiser has access to a full dashboard of vital statistics: her account balance; a history of ads placed—with downloadable e-tearsheets; circulation statistics for her ads; and her upcoming ad schedule.

That's just an outline.

## **A different future**

There are lots of different ways it could work, lots of different ways it could look. But such a system would bring the experience of choice, control, freedom and flexibility to newspaper advertisers for the first time. And, like the online self-service systems that are gaining ground all across the economy, it would carry this message to customers: "Hey, you can handle this yourself. Here are the tools you need."



No matter how ideal we might imagine a system that would serve advertisers and media companies, there needs to be a starting point to answer the key question: What are newspaper companies doing today to provide a rich information environment and user-friendly tools?

To answer that question required us to envision what would constitute success. Our measurements are broad but provide a more-accurate view than self-reported surveys of advertising executives [see Chapter 4].

The criteria we used were developed along these key avenues:

- Is it easy for an advertiser [or an agency for the advertiser] to find information about the publication? This would include the key marketing and demographic information about the newspaper and related publications.
- Is it easy for an advertiser [or an agency] to find out what it would cost to place an advertisement? This is a question about whether the paper's rate card is easily found and, as important, whether it is current. Ideally, this would be an interactive feature that would allow an advertiser to adjust different factors – day of the week, size, and position within the publication.
- Can an advertiser schedule an advertisement via the Web? Can the advertiser upload complete materials to the newspaper along with an order – subject to whatever credit or other approvals needed – for the placement of an advertisement?

These were the broad criteria we used to benchmark how effectively newspapers were using the Web as a marketing and sales tool.

We know that the Web has become a powerful way of offering content and information to consumers. Has it become a powerful way to offer information and services to advertisers?

### The 100-Site Review

Our review of 100, media-company Web sites found both good and bad news when it comes to newspapers that provide services for advertisers.

Here's the good news:

Almost all of the sites we surveyed have some kind of "advertise" link on the home page. And, in most cases, this link leads to a Web page that allows customers to place a classified ad.

The rest of the news is either not-so-good or bad, which we'll discuss later in this section.

The goal of our 100-site review was to understand how newspaper companies were using the Web to reach their

business customers – their current or potential print advertisers.

We wanted to see if newspaper companies are taking advantage of the Web beyond the business-to-consumer model. Put another way: Are newspapers harnessing the potential the Web has for business-to-business transactions?

The sites in our sample range represent newspapers across the range of circulation sizes – from very large to very small. There are independent newspapers and newspapers that are part of chains. There are sites from every state in the country. Our review was done in the 3rd and 4th quarters of 2004.

While most of us would agree that the Internet has touched almost all aspects of our daily lives, it is sometimes hard to recognize that many of the changes we see are evolutionary. And that the Internet's evolution is ongoing.

At its start, the Internet provided newspaper companies with the potential of publishing a different kind of news and information product. The Web edition was a way for the newspaper to reach customers with stories and pictures, much like the paper does with its print version.

As the Web evolved, and more Americans went online, newspapers added other services, such as a way for consumers to order a classified advertisement in the newspaper. Newspapers realized – some earlier than others – that they needed to offer online classifieds to meet the expectations of their customers and to avoid surrendering this business to the newcomers such as Monster and eBay.

The forecasts for online classifieds continue to be robust – which is both a challenge and a blessing for newspaper Web sites. The challenge involves the number of new and different competitors; the blessing is the increased opportunities media companies have to provide additional, services to online classified advertisers without additional, traditional expenses such as newsprint and sales support.

Here's what JupiterResearch, an Internet research company, predicts:

*Online classifieds will continue to enjoy strong growth. JupiterResearch forecasts online classifieds spending to grow from \$1.9 billion in 2004 to \$3.7 billion in 2009...*

# How Are We Doing Today?

*More broadly, JupiterResearch expects usage of online-classifieds properties to grow steadily as the overall online population increases and the percentage of the overall online population using broadband grows, too. This will lead advertisers to place a greater value on the online audience, via increased spending per listing, and give them greater confidence to increase the volume of listings they place.*

If newspapers recognize this opportunity, then their online classifieds businesses will continue to evolve and grow as they meet the needs of their customers who are looking to get a job, find a house or buy a car. However, there is an “if” factor: Newspaper companies will need to continue to evolve not only the classifieds-business models but also to restructure their classifieds section to be the “starting point” for consumers.

Newspapers also have realized that the Web is a marketing opportunity. In past five years, media companies have evolved their circulation-marketing efforts to take advantage of potential print-product readers who visit their online news site.

The evolutionary change in using the Web to market print is documented in “Come Together 2,” a project of the NAA Circulation Federation. This 2003 report showed the steady progress among circulation executives to take greater ownership of opportunities to use the Web to promote and drive new subscribers.

We wrote:

*...newspapers as an industry have made huge strides since 2001, enabling Web site secure transaction capabilities for print subscriptions. In 2001, The Digital Futurist Consultancy benchmarked 100 newspaper Web sites on their effectiveness in attracting new print customers, retaining existing customers and providing complete customer service. These sites were revisited for this report.*

- *Almost three-quarters (71 percent) of the sites now offer secure, electronic-transaction capabilities for subscriptions, through either credit card processing or electronic funds transfer. This compares to 41 percent in the original survey of sites.*
- *66 percent of the sites are taking e-mail customer-service complaints, up from 47 percent in 2001.*
- *57 percent now let customers request vacation holds online, up from 28 percent in 2001.*

*The next great hurdle for newspapers to overcome ... is a focus on the full customer experience. Many online customers expect to conduct the same level of business online as they used to do when they phoned the newspaper and were guided to the correct department by the paper's switchboard operator.*

The lessons from circulation departments should not be lost on their colleagues in advertising.

## What's Next? Display Advertising!

Getting classifieds online and using the Web to driving print subscriptions are important activities and these online areas serve important groups of customers.

Today's online-classified services are aimed at individuals on the front end and assist key advertisers – real estate brokers and auto dealers – on the back end, or with processing. Newspaper Web sites do a good job in driving customers to these services.

For circulation departments, the Web has become an effective method of reaching potential customers and, in some cases, a very effective way of reducing service center costs by allowing subscribers to manage their own starts, vacation holds, and although very rarely, stops.

What about the rest of the customers? What about print advertisers – local, regional and national? What methods are newspapers using to serve these clients?

In the 2004 Newspaper Monitor study done for the NAA by The Advantage Group, advertising agencies were asked about their impressions and feelings about newspapers as a place to do business. Among some of the findings:

- “No other medium is so complex to do business with.”
- “No other medium has such a complex pricing model.”
- “No other medium is collectively less sophisticated when it comes to selling their products.”

And all of those issues are evident in the way media companies provide information about advertising in their most important product – the newspaper.

In the 100-site review, we found little evidence that newspapers are providing the services that reduce the complexity of doing business. Here are the results in three key areas:

- Half of the sites – 55 percent – we reviewed have an area for **marketing** the print publication. In defining marketing, we looked for information that would help an advertiser understand the demographics and readership within the paper's circulation area. We also looked at whether there

was information about the various papers' sections or products.

- A slightly higher percentage – 60 percent – of the sites reviewed provided their clients or potential customers with **advertising rates** along with information about deadlines, terms and sizes. Another 15 percent provide information about deadlines and sizes, but do not provide any information about what it costs to place an ad in the paper.
- Less than 10 percent of the sites provide a **self-service** area for advertisers. We define self-service as the ability to schedule and upload an advertisement. While many newspapers provide an easy way for customers to send their classified ad into the newspaper, providing tools for clients to manage their display ads is a different matter.

While each of the three areas – marketing, advertising rates and self-service – is important, we believe it is the combination of all three that will be vital for companies hoping to reverse the trend of criticism that newspapers are hard to deal with or too complex.

To better understand how newspapers might take advantage of the Internet to provide marketing, rating and scheduling services for advertisers, it is important to explore successful examples in each of the areas. It is also important to look at how users navigate a Web page, what various elements are called and where they are placed on the page.

It is our belief that each one of these functions needs to be carefully linked so a potential advertiser would be able to accomplish the following tasks quickly; and with as little friction as possible:

1. Find the link – either a button or clearly labeled text – that would take a potential client to a **marketing** information page that would have data about the publication [print and online editions]. This link should also take existing clients to a **rate card** page or **advertising placement and management** page that would allow uploading and scheduling display, classified and online advertisements.
2. On the **marketing** page, there should be information about circulation, readership, and demographics about the communities served by print and online. This information should be timely, with information clearly labeled as to its creation date. Ideally, a customer should be able to interact with maps and other information to see what products, days of the week and zones or ZIP codes offer the best fit.
3. The marketing page should be linked to the company's **rate card** page. Ideally, this rate card would be interactive and allow for existing and potential customers to adjust size, run date,

frequency and other factors to get the cost of placing an advertisement in any of the company's products. The rate card page would also link an **ad placement and management** page.

4. On the **ad placement and management** page, a customer or potential customer, could schedule and submit (by uploading) print display, classified and/or online advertisements. Among the functionality features would be the ability to change the run date, see previous ads and/or billing and receive an e-tearsheet. Ideally, this page would be accessible by one-time customers (subject to the usual credit-approval process) and contract customers.

While it is unlikely that any newspaper company has the ability to launch all of these services quickly, there are many elements within reach of all companies that want to extend their business-to-business relationships via the Internet.

## Navigation

Let's go back to the good news mentioned at the start of this section. We were pleased to find that almost all sites we looked at have a link on their home page to some kind of advertising services.

However, having a link on the page may not be enough. Most newspaper sites suffer from "linkitis," or too many links, buttons and other places for consumers and advertisers to wade through. Some sites have literally hundreds of links on their home pages.

Recent research on Web page navigation, conducted by the Poynter Institute for Media Studies, showed there is a drop in readership the further down the page the user has to scroll.

This research, called "Eyetrack III" compared two different pages with the same or similar content. On the longer or extended page, 40 percent of the participants of the study didn't read any of the elements below the "screen fold."

While this study was testing how consumers navigated news Web sites, it provides important guidance for newspaper advertising executives: Even the most determined searcher may miss your "Advertise" button on a crowded or busy page.

Of the 100 sites reviewed for this report, slightly more than half – 52 percent – did not have their "Advertise" link above the "screen fold." Even if a site did have their "advertise link" above the fold, it was often lost in the clutter of other links on the page.

# How Are We Doing Today?



Using a subjective measure, we estimated that only a third of that 52 percent had links that were visually distinctive. While other reviewers might quibble about a definition for distinctive, the overall trend is still very clear: Newspaper sites do not make it easy for advertisers [and consumers] to find what they seek.

According to Jupiter Research, a company that gives advice to companies about the impact of the Internet, many consumers – 62 percent – still start on a site's home page. This is where they begin their journey.

If newspaper sites do not make it easier for advertisers (and consumers) to quickly find what they are looking for, there is a large potential for customer dissatisfaction and abandonment.

While the authors of this report were unable to find any specific research about advertisers' habits, we believe it is fair to use consumer behavior as a benchmark. While advertisers might be more single-task oriented, the person seeking the information is still a consumer at heart.

Jupiter makes a strong point when it talks about how sites should manage issues such as navigation:

*“From an organizational standpoint, the sites that operate the most smoothly and efficiently have a clear separation of control, with a relatively light coordination process on top. In other words, editorial and marketing agree upon core site objectives... but then go off to manage their sections independently.”*

Agreement on core site objects should include recognition of the importance of making sure all key customers – readers and advertisers – are given clear navigation guides to the content within a site.

## Marketing

Using the Web as a marketing tool isn't rocket science. In fact, the Web has become an extremely important and easy marketing tool for companies to get their message directly to consumers.

Newspaper companies, however, have been slow to realize the potential of the Web in conveying their marketing message. Of the sites visited, little more than

half – 55 percent – had distinctive marketing sections.

Once we found a marketing section, we looked for the following information:

- Demographics about the community served by the newspaper or other publications.
- Readership statistics.
- Maps and other aids that might help an advertiser make a decision.

Even among those sites that had marketing sections, the content within varied. More than half of those sites with marketing sections provided all three content elements. That means that about a third of the 100 sites had robust marketing sections.

The rest of the sites with marketing sections provide either demographic and/or readership information. A few provided only demographic information or only readership information. One site provided only maps and no information.

It also means that there is a great opportunity for a company to talk to advertisers about the potential of using the newspaper (and other publications) to advertise.

## Rate Cards

Assuming an advertiser finds the demographic and readership information encouraging, the next step might be to find out how much an advertisement would cost. In other words, “what does the rate card say?”

There is good news for those advertisers trying to answer this question: More than three-quarters of the 100 sites reviewed had a rate card section.

Rate cards, we acknowledge, are complicated. Looking at the Web version of many rate cards can be a confusing and overwhelming activity. Among the key elements we looked for:

- Advertising rates or costs.
- Information about the ad sizes accepted.
- Mechanical or technical information.
- Deadlines for advertisers.
- Terms and/or credit information.

However, having a rate card and having a rate card that is easy to read *and interactive* are two different things.

The vast majority of the sites surveyed, more than 95 percent, displayed the newspaper's rate information in “static” form. Often rate information was in Adobe's PDF format. While PDFs are widely used throughout the Web, there are some limitations.

# How Are We Doing Today?

Often, these rate cards were PDFs of the printed documents mailed or distributed to advertisers. In other words, the printed documents were converted to a digital format that maintained the original look and feel. On some sites, there were separate PDFs for different sections of the newspaper.

While there is a labor-saving advantage to taking existing printed materials onto the Web via a PDF, there are other challenges for customers that newspaper advertising executives should consider. One of the major issues involves how easy it is for those seeking the information to find it within the PDF document. PDF rate cards without a table of contents were difficult to navigate for useful information. Others were hard to read because the print-to-Web conversion process resulted in blurry screen text in the online PDF format.

Web usability expert Jakob Nielsen has a very harsh opinion on PDFs and has written about the challenges of displaying information on the Web:

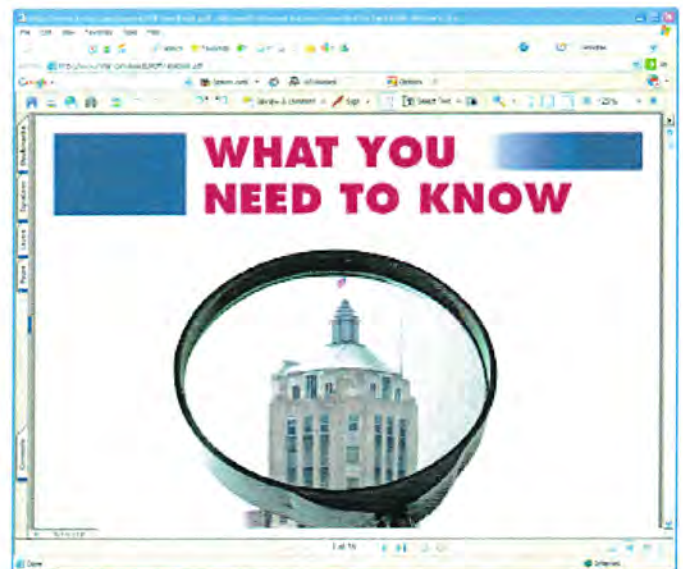
*"PDF was designed to specify printable pages. PDF content is thus optimized for letter-sized sheets of paper, not for display in a browser window. I often see users getting lost in PDF because the print-oriented viewer gives them only a small peephole on a big, complicated layout and they can't scroll it in the simple, linear manner they are accustomed to on the Web. Instead, PDF files often use elaborate graphic layouts and split the content into separate units for each sheet of print. Although this is highly appropriate for printed documents, it causes severe usability problems online.*

*PDF pages lack navigation bars and other apparatus that might help users move within the information space and relate to the rest of the site. Because PDF documents can be very big, the inability to easily navigate them takes a toll on users. PDF documents also typically lack hypertext, again because they are designed with print in mind.*

*Because PDF is not the standard Web page format, it dumps users into a non-standard user interface. Deviating from the norm hurts usability because, for example, scrolling works differently, as do certain commands, such as the one to make text larger (or smaller). Also, after finishing with a PDF document, users sometimes close the window instead of clicking the Back*

*button, thus losing their navigation history. Although this behavior is not common, it is symptomatic of the problems caused when you present users with a non-standard Web page that both looks different and follows different rules."*

An example of what Nielsen describes can be seen in the example below. Following a link from a site's home page, the customer arrives at a PDF document that is 16 pages long and its initial display is part of a full cover picture. While not impossible to navigate, there's not much that's "user friendly"



Although some might argue that printing out the PDF is a solution to the challenge of navigating and reading on the screen, this might be more wishful thinking in an age where users want to quickly get the information they need/want and move to the next step.

While this study does not provide statistics about dated materials, we did find a number of rate cards, again in PDF format, that were out-of-date.

What's the alternative?

For a few newspaper companies, interactive rate or pricing sections on the Web seems to provide a more dynamic approach. The Seattle Times uses the Web effectively in display ROP rates. A user can quickly view rates across sections and products.

Each rate is clearly displayed and can be compared with the cost of multiple insertions or daily vs. Sunday costs. The only missing touch might be a calculator or some other device that would allow an advertiser to play with different sizes and costs as part of a budgeting exercise.

# How Are We Doing Today?

The Seattle Times Company  
representing the Seattle Post-Intelligencer

**ADVERTISING RATES**

Home | Display Ads | Classifieds Ads | Preprinted Inserts | Online Ads

Financial, Insurance and Telecom general display advertising rates

The Seattle Times Company is the Northwest leader in newspaper and online advertising. Our reach includes The Seattle Times and the Seattle Post-Intelligencer newspapers and their websites, plus the Intelligencer (in print and online) and Intelligencer.com. The rates below apply to advertising for financial, insurance and telecommunications businesses. Contracts must be signed in advance of publication to receive discounts. Open rates apply unless a contract is signed.

- A 4% commission is granted to all recognized advertising agencies, except where noted.
- All net advertising charges payable to The Seattle Times Company will apply toward the fulfillment of the advertiser contract except for a logo cost for direct mail advertising, paper and late payment fees and where otherwise noted.
- Weekend circulation rates appear in both The Seattle Times and the Seattle Post-Intelligencer. They may appear in either newspaper. They must run in the opposite newspaper the same or next day and must be ordered in advance of the first publication. Saturday ads may run in the opposite newspaper the following Monday.

	Rate per column inch				Color	Special discount
	Full Month	Seattle Times	Intelligencer	Seattle Times Post-Intelligencer		
Executive and Board	\$450.00	\$375.00	\$311.67	\$193.66	\$217.50	---
High Advertising	\$10.00	281.30	285.00	266.28	124.80	136.25
\$25.00	287.50	292.50	266.28	124.25	132.25	---
\$50.00	244.45	232.50	262.25	143.75	132.00	---
\$75.00	246.95	230.50	260.15	145.25	132.00	---
\$100.00	227.45	232.50	227.15	143.55	129.00	---
\$125.00	228.20	231.45	226.60	142.10	127.20	---
\$150.00	222.00	229.15	222.15	140.55	125.25	5%
\$175.00	220.70	229.88	220.15	139.00	123.25	5%
\$200.00	220.35	229.45	217.85	137.45	121.75	5%
\$250.00	219.50	229.55	215.65	135.60	120.00	7%
\$300.00	208.95	228.65	212.75	134.25	118.10	7%
\$350.00	205.30	227.25	209.45	132.00	115.95	10%
\$400.00	204.85	226.25	207.85	130.00	115.05	10%
\$450.00	204.40	225.55	206.25	128.00	113.95	10%
\$500.00	203.95	224.75	204.75	126.00	112.95	10%
\$550.00	203.50	223.75	203.25	124.00	111.95	10%

The use of a software wizard or calculator would allow an advertiser – especially a small advertiser – to see how to best use the newspaper for marketing.

While such calculators are fairly common in the online-classified sections of newspaper Web sites, they are rare or absent for those wishing to place a display advertisement.

One example, albeit from the college newspaper at Virginia Tech., Collegiate Times, shows the potential of such a guide.

The site walks an advertiser through all of the steps to rate his advertisement. This Collegiate Times site has other helpful guides for advertisers – students and local businesses.

One hidden advantage of displaying rate information in a more-dynamic approach might allow for the adjustment of rates more frequently than with the traditional annual, or semiannual, approach.

## Advertising Services

The final key section we looked at on behalf of a potential print advertiser is scheduling and other types of support.

In this “do-it-myself” world, the ability for an advertiser to have the option to upload and schedule their advertisements will be increasingly important.

Again, the news is both good and bad. Almost all the sites reviewed had the ability for a consumer to upload their classified ads for insertions into the print newspaper. The bad news was that far fewer sites, only 10 percent, appeared to offer this ability to display advertisers. (It needs to be noted that this survey only looked at public sites. Hidden or “extranet” sites were not reviewed.)

Clearly, providing robust scheduling and uploading services for advertisers is a challenge. Not only are there technical challenges on the front end, or at the Web site, but there are also challenges on the back end, with various legacy newspaper advertising systems.

However, as newspapers explore providing further customer service to advertisers, there are some early adopters that provide some hints of what’s possible in future systems.

The Baltimore Sun offers advertisers a “step by step” guide to creating advertisements. And once the ad has been created, it can be uploaded to the newspaper. However, the Sun’s upload system requires that the advertiser have an account representative before sending the ad. However, the site does provide a nice dropdown menu of account reps.

**COLLEGIATE TIMES**

CT Home | Help Desk | FAQ's

**Display Ad Calculator**

1. Select your rate

Enter your advertiser rate (the address to your business)

- Local (190-820-8822) to 201-948-8822 within Montgomery, Giles, Meigs, Allegheny, Hancock, and Clay counties.
- Non-profit, university, religious, or other (make the sender county and zip code the zip code for non-profit rate, non-profit zip code and outside of the local journey are charged the local open rate).
- Senior rate (rate are applied to all addresses outside of those counties. Senior rate is determined by state law payments appropriate levels).

Local rate: University, Non-Profit, Clergy

2. Apply discounts

- Multiple discounts (the number is required) are applied sequentially, not the summed total.
- Two discounts require a system. Contact with a frequency discount.
- The advertiser's non-profit rate is effectively a 20% discount.

Display Discount (10%)

Frequency Discount (make THAT one run of the same ad in one week)

Single run (20%)

1st additional run (10%)

2nd additional run (10%)

3rd additional run (10%)

Volume Discounts (20-99999 to 100000 ad-headers up to 25% off and unlimited non-ads ad-headers up to 15% off - 1000+)

10-99 (2%)

100-999 (2%)

1000-9999 (2%)

10000-99999 (2%)

100000-999999 (2%)

1000000-9999999 (2%)

10000000+ (2%)

**Calculate**

3. Your rates for (selected ad sizes)

Your rate per column inch: 6.40

Full Page Ad: \$12.70

Half Page Ad: 4.20

Quarter Page (Vertical) Ad: 203.19

Quarter Page (Horizontal) Ad: 206.42

Eighth Page Ad: 79.75

Sixteenth Page Ad: 51.82

# CHAPTER 4 Voices From Newspapers' Ad Executives

In addition to looking at 100 Web sites, we asked newspaper-advertising executives about using the Web to provide marketing, rate information and self-service to advertisers. More than 250 executives responded to our request for information.

The results of any self-selected survey can only provide guidance, as these are not the results of a scientific study. However, the results were remarkable for how parallel the responses were to key topics explored in the 100-site review.

- **Marketing:** In the survey of executives, 44 percent said their newspapers have a Web site area for marketing. That is slightly lower than the 55 percent we found in reviewing our 100 newspaper sites.
- **Rate information:** The survey results—63 percent of executives say their newspapers provide rate card information—are almost identical to the 60 percent result we found by reviewing sites.
- **Self-service:** In our survey, 12 percent of respondents say they allow advertisers to place a display ad and 10 percent allow for scheduling or run date changes via the Web. Those figures are similar to the 10 percent we discovered when reviewing sites.

Of the 70 percent who responded that they have an “advertise” link in their home page, only half—51 percent—said the link was “above the fold.” As discussed earlier, visibility is important.

One of the goals of our survey of executives was to discover who is making decisions when it comes to these issues. For advertising executives, the results showed room for improvement. It is our contention that having a sense of ownership—even jointly with the person in charge of online—is essential. Only 20 percent of the advertising executives who responded to the survey said their department manager is responsible for deciding where that all-important “advertise” link goes on the home page. For most, it was the online manager or editor.

Here are the results from that question:

Who is responsible for deciding WHERE on your home page the “advertise” link is placed?

	Percent
The Publisher/General Manager	23.4%
<b>The Online Manager/Editor</b>	<b>56.9</b>
The Newspaper Editor	4.2
The Advertising Department Manager	20.1
Don't Know	3.3
Other (please specify)	13.0

Figures do not add to 100% as multiple choices were allowed.

When we asked a similar question about who was responsible for maintaining marketing information, the results put control in the hands of either the advertising department or the marketing department.

Who is responsible for maintaining marketing information?

	Percent
The Publisher/General Manager	7.9%
The Online Manager/Editor	28.8
The Newspaper Editor	0.7
<b>The Advertising Department Manager</b>	<b>42.4</b>
The Marketing Manager	33.1
Don't Know	0.7
Other (please specify)	7.2

Figures do not add to 100% as multiple choices were allowed.

Another area of importance involves advertising rates—the rate card. While almost two-thirds of respondents say they have their rate information available via the Web, which still leaves almost 40 percent who do not provide this information.

When asked about the type of rate information they provide, the survey respondents report that they don't provide all of their rate information. Roughly 15 percent to 20 percent provide either classified or display-rate information, but not both.

Here are the results of that question:

If you provide rate information for advertisers, what kind of information do you provide?

[Select all that apply.]

	Percent
Display rates	80.8%
<b>Classified rates</b>	<b>84.3</b>
Specialty publication rates	37.8
Online advertising rates	47.1
Other (please specify)	11.0

Finally, we wanted to understand the potential of self-service areas for advertisers. We knew from our review of 100 sites that this would be a subject where there would be few executives reporting that they have such features on their Web sites. We wanted to learn the reasons advertising departments are not offering self-service for advertisers to place and schedule their display advertisements.

The reasons were as varied as one might suspect. However, two major themes emerged: One is technical—

# Voices From Newspapers' Ad Executives

the lack of technical understanding of how this might work or the lack of technology to process orders. The other is a lack of interest in providing this service. For some newspapers, this isn't a high priority. Here are the results on this question, which was asked of those executives who said they do not provide any self-service for advertisers:

Would you please indicate the reasons why you do not offer a customer-service center online:

	Response Percent
Lack of management interest	9.9%
Lack of technical understanding of how to make this work	22.9
Lack of interest by Web site management to service advertisers in this manner	11.5
<b>Lack of technology to process orders in the advertising department</b>	<b>33.6</b>
Do not see any value in self-service for advertisers	5.3
Other reasons (please specify)	48.1

The written responses of those who answered "other reasons" reflect the full range of challenges and opportunities in this area. The answers, as one might predict, were far-ranging and interesting. Here are some of the responses grouped by theme

## Lack of interest in providing this kind of service

- *We prefer to have our customers work with actual account executives.*
- *At this point, we prefer to have personal contact with our advertisers.*
- *We prefer real people in real time.*

## Not a priority, yet

- *I don't think we are at that point in our Web site yet. It will definitely be a topic in the future.*

- *We have not had any interest shown to date but that does not mean we would not consider it if the interest were there and the time involved did not outweigh the benefits.*

## Lack of time/money

- *We see the value but don't see the expense as making it a priority. We don't have many customers ask for the service. E-mail seems to take care of most things like this. As technology increases and costs go down, this will be a more-likely scenario.*
- *Not so much a lack of knowledge or technology, as much as the amount of time to manage the site. I believe we would like to incorporate information for our entire network group in addition to the individual sites.*

## Not yet, but they plan to have one

- *We just haven't gotten there yet. Plan to in future.*
- *Plan to have one soon.*
- *Plan to do this but other investments have been a higher priority.*
- *Our corporate office is creating a customer self-service portal within the next few years.*
- *We just haven't gotten to this. We have many other projects ahead of this. Hopefully we will have our rate card and marketing kit online soon.*
- *This is an area we are now starting to focus on along with the ability to take ads off the Web site. We are also planning on designing a page dedicated to our advertising rates and marketing information.*
- *Demand has not been there but is now growing.*

That last quote—"demand has not been there but is now growing"—is important to keep in mind as we look toward the future. When does it make sense to move forward into new forms of communication and customer service? That's the challenge: When to make a leap from one way of doing business to multiple ways of doing business.



Market size, local trends and even advertisers' technical savvy—or lack thereof—can impact how a newspaper makes print advertising information available on its Web site. Simply put, one size does not fit all. But some of the best practices tend to cover the spectrum of newspaper cities and sizes.

One, which sounds like a given but is often overlooked, is simply recognizing that the Internet gives an excellent opportunity to present information on print advertising. Related to this, the standout newspapers in our study all viewed the building of their online media kits as a special project, typically with a responsible leader and team of supporters. They also built in a plan for ongoing maintenance and updates.

Here are the best practices we identified. They provide a good starting point for newspapers that want to use the power of the Internet to attract and serve advertising customers.

### **1. Figure out who your audience is and how to best serve it**

For a major metro, print advertising information available online might be most valuable for savvy media buyers who just want information on rates and reach. For a small suburban daily, the primary audience is more likely to be small-business owners, for whom rates and reach matter, but for whom a quick tip sheet on common terminology—such as “ROP space” or online “impressions—might also be helpful and appreciated. Serving both audiences is tricky, so if resources are limited, strive to only serve one but do it very well.

### **2. Don't assemble a huge committee to plan your online media kit:**

Three or four people are plenty, whether you're overhauling what you have or starting from scratch. If you're relying on the online department to do the actual building of this section, include someone from that staff from day one. You'll earn immediate buy-in, plus innovative ideas and reality checks throughout the process. Strive only to be required to show the plans and final product to one executive for approval before launch. Incorporating the feedback of every top manager in the organization will be an exercise in frustration and delay the process by weeks, if not months.

### **3. Design your online media kit with sellers in mind:**

Plenty of people will view your online media kit by following links on your site, but it's likely that more

clients will be introduced to it by sales representatives at your newspaper. Make sure the site you develop has buy-in from the sellers—and that they know about it in the first place. Depending on the size of your organization, consider finding a way to list account executives' names somewhere on the site, even if just to introduce contacts for particular client types or territories. It's a great way to make these key players feel included.

### **4. Once built, someone needs to “own” this information**

Ideally, this is the same person who is responsible for production and distribution of printed rate cards, media kits, one-sheets, etc. Whether in marketing, sales, business development or online, this person needs to be held accountable for outdated information, bad links, and other errors. Relying on a team of people to update this section of the site will result in a lack of consistency and quality. Bonus: If possible, give this owner the technical tools to make changes on the site, rather than requiring he or she to go through an online staff member. The more streamlined you can make the process, the less you'll run into conflicting priorities and chances for errors.

### **5. There is no greater sin than outdated information**

It's embarrassing how many newspapers, large and small, offer expired rate cards to potential advertisers and boast about audience reach and quality with data that are several years old. A good rule of thumb: Data from the previous calendar year are okay, but anything older than that needs to be updated or—if new information isn't available—removed. Don't be afraid to point to outside resources—such as a chamber of commerce site—for detailed market information to ensure top-notch, current content for prospective clients. The *News & Record* in Greensboro, N.C., uses this approach.

### **6. Track traffic, watch trends, and adjust accordingly**

Many newspapers don't do any tracking whatsoever of the online media kit pages of their site. This is a mistake, because it typically just involves installing an extra few lines of code on the pages in question so that they show up in overall traffic reports. An occasional look at traffic patterns can tell you what features in your online media kit are useful to prospective clients, which ones aren't, and help make decisions about new tools to add and whether an especially important feature needs more prominence. Some advanced-reporting systems can even track the

# Learning From the Best

number of times a PDF is downloaded, which is especially relevant in this case because many newspapers post rate cards in PDF format.

## **7. Pay particular attention to sales leads your site generates**

Encourage advertisers to contact your sales department using a Web-based form that generates an e-mail, rather than just posting an e-mail address on the site. It will give your newspaper a chance to ask the client a few questions along with their query (Have you ever advertised with us before? How soon are you looking to advertise?) Equally important, you can collect responses in a database as well as have them delivered by e-mail; allowing a sales manager to keep track of leads coming in and ensure that all inquiries are getting a follow-up.

## **8. Cross-link the advertising opportunities in your organization**

It is fine if your print and online rates and audience information, appear separately, but make sure that there are prominent links in both directions. Provide at least some information about how a newspaper advertisement's reach can be extended with an ad on the newspaper's Web site, but respect the fact that not all clients are looking for a "converged" solution.

## **9. Don't hide your online media kit:**

On many newspaper sites, the only link to the newspaper's online media kit is buried in tiny type at the very bottom of

the home page. Even more troublesome is when these miniscule links are labeled "marketplace" or "do business with us," rather than "advertise" or "advertising info" or some other terminology that is dead-on clear. Make links prominent and straightforward. Be especially sure to put a link to your online media kit in relevant areas of your site, such as the searchable databases of print ads available on many online newspapers.

## **10. Use available industry resources**

The NAA and other groups offer excellent materials that explain the power of newspaper advertising to prospective clients. Consider presenting this information in your Web-based media kit, or using it as the basis for tools that help advertisers plan their media spending.

## **11. If you have the resources, invest in ad services**

Encouraging print advertisers to send their materials online makes sense in many ways: It reduces transit time and cost, helps avoid errors, and in some cases cuts down on paperwork. Some advertisers who are familiar with the Associated Press AdSend service, but aren't wild about the fees required to use it, will appreciate a free tool to submit files to your newspaper. Before diving into electronic tearsheets, online proofing and other advanced ad-services features, spend some time looking at vendors in that space. The extra cost could outweigh staff time needed to build, maintain and upgrade a homegrown solution.

While no newspaper site provides a single example of how to use the Web effectively in communicating with and providing services for advertisers, there are examples worth exploring.

This section looks at some of the creative ways newspapers are using the Web to reach their current and potential advertisers.



## Ad-sending technology saving time and money in Atlanta

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution's adWeb tools started off with a modest goal: to give print advertisers a way to send their materials electronically to the newspaper without paying a fee. Almost five years later, the system is credited with speeding up workflow, cutting down on errors and processing around 6,000 ads per month.

"We got ahead of the curve on this technology early," says Charles Porter, advertising systems manager at the AJC. "When we started, it was only us and The New York Times that were doing this."

adWeb is a key feature within the media kit available on the newspaper's Web site, at [www.ajc.com](http://www.ajc.com). Other features of the site area, which is well-organized and easy-to-use, include full rate cards available as PDFs, advertising department contacts, a special sections calendar, and a market overview presented as a PowerPoint slideshow.

It's the company's adWeb features, however, that make it stand out. New users of the site, which sits on a secure server, are greeted by easy-to-follow instructions on how to use the service. The advertiser can access production guidelines and deadlines, then submit their completed PDF file through one of four links, depending on whether

the ad is to appear in the AJC, in the company's shopper publication, in a Spanish-language weekly, or as a free-standing insert. One of adWeb's most-impressive features is that it allows a client to check on the status of the ad after it is submitted, an especially nice touch for first-time users who might be anxious about making sure the materials are received.

Once submitted, the file flows into a Lotus Notes database and a copy of the ad is sent electronically to the sales rep and a sales assistant. They then choose "accept" or "decline" commands, and the ad either continues its electronic journey to the advertising operations group or, in the latter case, the client is alerted of a problem. In almost all cases, Porter says, the process is entirely electronic, reducing errors and time. In fact, adWeb has allowed the newspaper to extend deadlines for some key clients, including a major department store that benefits from a 6 p.m. cutoff for the next day's edition rather than the typical noon deadline.

National and regional advertisers are the most-frequent users of adWeb, but more and more local clients are catching on, Porter says. The system was used to transmit 30,000 ads in its first year, but now handles processing for more than 70,000 ads annually. Porter says the savings have never been quantified, but is certain they're significant. adWeb can integrate into AP Adsend—but in most cases bypasses it entirely, cutting those fees out of the equation.

Once the concept for adWeb was in place, it only took a month to get a very basic submission tool built, with close teamwork between the advertising systems and information technology departments. An outside contractor with expertise in Lotus Notes was hired to integrate the technology to speed the workflow. And plenty of FAQ information has been added, which Porter says was especially critical a few years ago, when many advertisers didn't know what a PDF was, much less how to create one.

The AJC's next big goal? Getting electronic tearsheets to take off. Around 1,400 AJC clients are signed up to access electronic tearsheets, but Porter says that number could go much higher once advertisers get more comfortable with the concept, and the time (and cost) savings become more obvious. And the AJC, which works with MerlinOne for tearsheet technology, may upgrade its system in 2005.

### Resources:

AJC print advertising media kit:

<http://www.ajc.com/services/content/advertising/>

AJC adWeb: <https://www.ajcadweb.com/>

# Learning From the Best—Case Studies



## A comprehensive package in Greensboro

Any newspaper's online media kit can tell a potential advertiser how much an ad costs. *The News & Record* in Greensboro, N.C., actually tells clients how much they should spend.

Planning tools and information are front-and-center on this newspaper's site. A budget calculator encourages an advertiser to plug in key figures related to their business to find out how much they should be spending on advertising—hopefully within their market's daily newspaper, for which 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 the building of this section two years ago and is now a key accounts executive at the newspaper.

The online calculator was simple to build, requiring just a bit of development time from a staff member in the newspaper's online department. Olson involved the online staff early in the planning process for the site, giving them a strong voice in how the information should be presented. She says a key goal from the start was to publish information that would only have to be changed every quarter (or ideally even less frequently) to avoid the all-too-common problem of having years-old data sit dormant on the site. Several links lead site visitors to chamber 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.

The site's AdPost section allows clients to submit ads electronically, plus gives helpful tips that go a bit beyond the mechanical specs and deadlines available in most newspapers' online media kits. Detailed Photoshop setting suggestions are featured, as are noteworthy tips on taking a photo of a home that will be advertised in the *News & Record's* real estate section. (Move the trash cans before you snap the picture, for example). These

tidbits were included at the request of a manager in the company's imaging department in an effort to proactively tackle common questions.

A product guide in PDF format gives intricate information on each section of the newspaper and its readership, plus details on special advertising options such as stand-alone classified publications and polybags. Daily and Sunday circulation maps show penetration in specific areas of town. Information related to budget calculation—including advertising-to-sales ratios in various industries, and peak annual sales periods specific to different business types—comes from the NAA Newspaper Advertising Planbook.

In total, the site took about three months to plan and build, although neither Olson nor her online counterpart were dedicated to the project full-time. She notes that several ideas were borrowed from the (Hampton Roads) *Virginian-Pilot*, where Olson formerly worked, and like the *News & Record*, is owned by Landmark Communications Inc. The newspaper isn't tracking usage statistics for these pages, but leads from the online media kit come in frequently.

Next up for the *News & Record* is adding more information about the market, massaging the look and feel of its ad pages to bring them more in-line with the design of the paper's news site ([www.news-record.com](http://www.news-record.com)), and coming up with a more-effective way to link to the subsections within the online media kit. Beth Compton, the newspaper's advertising development manager, adds that the section might get even better placement on the site's home page. (It's currently linked from a prominent "above the fold" spot on the home page, already far more prominent than on most newspaper sites.)

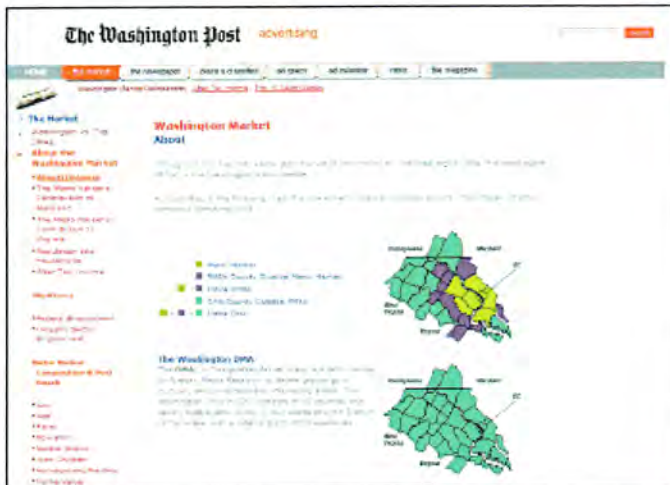
Olson has a few words of advice for newspapers looking to improve the print advertising information available on their site. Get key stakeholders involved early in the planning process, she suggests, and empower them to own particular areas and make updates. Survey the sales reps and make sure they feel that the site being assembled will be a true service to their clients. But, lastly, avoid the urge to assemble a huge group to plan the enhancements. "Everyone has a different opinion," she says. "And those opinions are great, but trying to make everyone happy will make it much harder to get something built fast."

### Resources:

*News & Record* print advertising information and AdPost tools:

<http://www.news-record.com/advertising/>

# Learning From the Best—Case Studies



## Planning, analysis pays off for *The Washington Post*

The Washington Post may have the best-designed online section of print advertising information in the country. But that certainly didn't happen by accident.

The section, at <http://advertising.washpost.com>, 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. Feedback from internal and external clients helped set the group's goals, according to Dave Burke, manager of IT Web solutions at the newspaper.

"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 large metros—put into their online media kits. But it has paid off with a section that is easy to navigate and that lives up to the graphic 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 D.C. compares to other metropolitan areas, a chart comparing reach of competing local media (not just newspapers), and more.

Profiles of each print section include detailed ad deadlines for a client wishing to advertise in that—section, a nice touch. Classified-advertising information is smartly integrated and makes the myriad of classified options fairly easy to understand. (A Flash-based graphic explaining new photo-upload options, powered by iPix AdMission, is especially slick.)

"Before the redesign, our Web site was largely a collection of repurposed print materials, and the site mirrored the way those materials were organized," says Burke. "We found that arrangement left many users unable to find what they were looking for, especially those users who weren't familiar with all the aspects of newspaper advertising—a key audience."

Realizing that the work wouldn't end once this section was launched, The Post built in content-management tools that make it easy for staff members from several departments to make updates to the site. Although this requires more up-front work, it can pay off quickly in terms of saving time and preserving quality. Marketing sets the branding direction, but "the true owners of the content can keep it up to date without needing technical skills or support," Burke says.

Incorporating a content-management system, or adding some of the other features available for Post customers, may not be realistic for smaller newspapers with thinly-stretched staffs. But a few of Burke's pointers can apply to newspapers of any size:

Establish detailed goals and requirements up front before you design or build the first page. "To really understand and document those user requirements, you have to talk to real users. Don't rely solely on salespeople or others inside your organization to speak on behalf of customers, or you won't get the whole picture." An informal focus group of current advertisers could generate some great feedback.

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Put qualified people on the project, and assign roles and responsibilities appropriate to their skills. “Designers should design. Developers should develop. You don’t want the designer indulging his Java hobby on your project, and you don’t want technologists choosing the color for the buttons.”

Realize that the project doesn’t end once the site launches. “In many ways—upkeep, enhancement, troubleshooting, customer service, technical support—it’s the beginning. Plan accordingly.”

Now The Post is beginning the process of incorporating this advertising site and other advertising-related company sites into a single-enterprise portal. “This is requiring everyone, from senior management down, to think about the Web’s role in our business more holistically,” Burke says.

## Resources:

The Washington Post rate cards, online media kit: <http://advertising.washpost.com>



## An interactive, multimedia approach to luring print clients

A subtle text link labeled Advertising Product Rates doesn’t exactly scream for attention on the home page of app.com, the Web site of the Asbury Park Press in New Jersey. And it hardly explains the depth of information that is available for prospective advertisers in the site’s online media kit, which is perhaps one of the most complete among small- to mid-size newspapers.

“Advertising rate cards rank as the most-downloaded files

on the entire site,” Linda Goodgold, the site’s content and production manager, mentions proudly. Goodgold kicked off an effort to get information for advertisers posted onto the site around four years ago. New features have continually been added ever since. The fact that these tools have been added over time is evident by the many different page designs used to present information (the section would benefit from an overall redesign), but that doesn’t change the fact that a client could find more information here than on most newspaper Web sites.

Various rate cards for the Asbury Park Press and three sister newspapers, are available for download in PDF format, as is a calendar of special sections and an overview of the market and readership demographics. A guide to different sections of the newspaper gives a glimpse of content adjacency options. Goodgold notes that it was produced for the site in conjunction with the newsroom.

One of the site’s most-innovative features is video introductions by the newspaper’s advertising managers, explaining to advertisers why the newspaper and site are critical parts of a successful media mix. In his clip, the vice president of advertising emphasizes the fact that the Asbury Park Press reaches 8 out of 10 adults in the market every day. The clips get a fair number of views each month, according to Goodgold. (But the ad manager has been inclined to take a “less is more” approach when executives talk of adding lots more staffer intro clips.)

Another nifty, interactive feature allows an advertiser to see Asbury Park Press circulation figures in different towns and cities in New Jersey, either in large clusters or down to the ZIP code level. The application would likely be useful for customers of all sizes, from a small local retailer looking to see how many of his neighbors take the newspaper, to a media buyer learning the difference between the paper’s two primary zones. app.com also links to advertiser tools on naa.org, including an advertising budget calculator, tips on creating an effective display ad, and pointers on effective coupon promotions.

Online staff members built and continue to manage this area of the site, so it’s no surprise that information about online-advertising options is readily available. A PDF gives an overview of the site’s growing traffic, as well as a snapshot of how the Monmouth-Ocean-Middlesex market uses the Internet. Banner samples and sizes, deadlines and specs are provided. And an index of current advertisers helps prospective advertisers feel confident about a marketing investment, knowing that they’re in good company (and that their competition is already there). Online rate cards were missing from the site while waiting on an update, Goodgold says.

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She adds that the company is considering a real-time, customer-service option, which would allow a prospective advertiser to ask more in-depth questions about rates and deadlines without even having to pick up the phone.

## Resources:

Asbury Park Press online media kit:  
<http://www.app.com/marketing/adrates/>



## Dallas takes a utilitarian approach

When the Dallas Morning News set out to redesign its online media kit, simplicity was the driving theme. “People don’t want it to be too complex, because certainly newspaper rates are complex enough as it is,” says Mark Howard, assistant marketing manager at the Morning News. “You want to make it an easy and positive newspaper experience.”

For one of the section’s primary target audiences—media—that also meant following industry standards rather than taking a more-customized approach. Information about everything an ad buyer could need, from contact names to rates to deadlines, is organized in accordance with guidelines from the Standard Rate and Data Service, a widely used reference for media buyers. Many newspapers configure their printed rate card to these specs, but use a different presentation online, which may create more work for both the newspaper and the ad buyer, according to Howard.

Information is displayed as downloadable PDFs, with separate files for different topics. A rotating image on the media kit index page shuffles through covers from the Morning News’ various section fronts and stand-alone publications, helping drive home the point that the

newspaper can reach various audiences through a variety of products.

The Morning News’ thorough ad services area allows an advertiser to access file preparation instructions, upload files and—a feature not available at many newspapers—do proofing and approval of ads electronically. Clients can also view electronic tearsheets on the site. Registration is required to use these tools, and the site encourages client feedback about the ad services area through an online feedback form.

Howard, who functions as a liaison between the newspaper’s marketing and advertising department, led the development of the online media kit, working closely with a designer from dallasnews.com, the newspaper’s Web site, to design an attractive and intuitive section. He says they learned from problems with a previous site area devoted to print advertising information and were especially respectful of feedback from the newspaper’s sales reps.

Comments about the new section have been quite positive, Howard says. Perhaps more telling is the strong number of leads Howard says come into sales from potential clients and ad buyers who first saw the information online. (The company does not collect actual statistics.)

## Resources

Dallas Morning News ad rates/media kit:  
<http://adrates.dallasnews.com/2004/>

Dallas Morning News ad services tools:  
<http://adservices.dallasnews.com/>



## Ad services making a fast move online in greater Pittsburgh

What’s one way to get print advertising reps—and their print advertisers—to think about computers and the

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Internet? When both are strongly encouraged to use slick, Web-based tools to transmit print ads from client to newspaper.

TribAdDesk has become an integral part of the sales operation at the Tribune-Review Publishing Co., parent of two daily newspapers serving Pittsburgh and nearby Greensburg, Pennsylvania. Since going online 18 months ago, more than 2,000 ads have been submitted through the system, according to Mark Whittaker, director of online and interactive services for the newspapers.

An advertiser fills out various information on a simple Web page—including contact information, publication date(s) and file format—before attaching the ad file and submitting it with a single click. To encourage advertisers to use the system frequently, or better yet, always, TribAdDesk offers users the option of saving their information (by setting a cookie on their machine), which saves a client from having to re-type basic information over and over. Ad agencies, car dealers and movie promoters were among the first eager, early adopters of TribAdDesk.

The ad services directors at both Tribune-Review newspapers like TribAdDesk “because it forces better communication among the client, the ad services department, and the ad salespeople,” says Whittaker. The form requires a user to select an ad rep’s name from a pull-down menu. Once an ad is successfully uploaded, an e-mail is automatically sent to ad services, the ad rep, the ad rep’s assistant and to the client (to confirm that the ad was transferred). It all adds up to an efficient process—far more so than just sending files as e-mail attachments.

Information that surrounds the upload pages also boosts efficiency and cuts down on errors. A big chart listing retail and classified ad sizes and page depths sits prominently on the page, as does a link to extensive information on mechanical and file specs and another page listing deadlines for 15 different print products published by the Tribune-Review. A feedback form asks advertisers if they found TribAdDesk to be a faster way to transmit files and leaves an open-ended question asking what could be done to improve the site. The papers report excellent feedback and strong repeat usage.

Prospective advertisers must register to gain access to downloadable retail and classified rate cards and are encouraged to sign up for an e-mail newsletter which announces new advertising opportunities. Surprisingly, Web-based classified ad placement tools for placing print ads are unsophisticated; an ad entered online will trigger a return call from a customer service rep to complete the order, rather than allowing a user to complete the entire

transaction online. However by filling out a form and supplying a phone number, a user of the site can request a callback from a live representative, anytime day or night. And this system should be tied in with the site’s separate tools to place online-only classified ads.

A splashier treatment is given to information about advertising on pittsburghlive.com and/or triblive.com. Testimonials from online advertisers help make the electronic pitch, as does a top-10 list of reasons to advertise on the sites. A long client list, links to stories about the effectiveness of online advertising, and a prominent logo touting the site’s 2002 award from Editor & Publisher are also available, as are smart tools to help turn a prospect into a customer.

## Resources

TribAdDesk:

<http://www.1800909trib.com/advertising/addesk.php>

Pittsburghlive.com/triblive.com media kit:

<http://www.pittsburghlive.com/x/helpdesk/advrtise.html>

## A good quick-fix spiffs up ad information at small Iowa daily

You’d think that launching a site-wide redesign would be enough of a challenge for Don Farber in his first three months as new media director at the Waterloo-Cedar Falls Courier in northeast Iowa. But Farber also had his sights set on another feature that he felt needed quick attention: the site’s media kit.

His short-term goal was to get enough information about the wfcourier.com, and online advertising in general,



published on the site in an easy-to-understand format. The result is a simple yet effective page of facts and figures that serves as a great quick-fix model, especially for small newspapers.

Facts covered in the online advertising section include: General audience stats for wfcourier.com; an explanation of online's ability to reach young, educated consumers; and a great explanation of why daytime is primetime for the Internet, out-drawing other media during the workday. Short descriptions of sites operated by the Waterloo-Cedar Falls Courier, including the online edition of the newspaper, plus three sites focused on prep and college sports, give potential advertisers a helpful, brief overview of what's available.

It's all part of the "Did you know?" program that Farber has rolled out to raise awareness of the site and its advertising options among newspaper reps and potential clients. Using research from Belden Associates and other sources, the effort started with online sales training for newspaper reps, followed by information sent via e-mail to advertisers, and publication on the site. Clients get information via e-mail roughly once per month to keep them in the loop on advertising options and new features of the site.

Publicizing the information has proven to have its biggest payoff within the newspaper walls. "The reps really like having the information available so easily on the site," Farber says. "We're giving them the tools to make the appointment and talk very knowledgeably. And, internally, it's a great camaraderie-builder."

It helps that the sellers and the company in general have a great story to tell: An advertiser can reach 100 percent of adults in the Waterloo-Cedar Falls market by placing ad in two daily issues of the Courier, one in the Sunday issue of the Courier, and one on wfcourier.com. Adding the Web site to the package extends an ad's reach and pulls in a younger audience, a fact that comes as no surprise to those in the industry, but can't be repeated enough to small advertisers.

Farber has far more plans for the site, and says he looks forward to working with the advertising department to beef up print advertising information available online.

#### Resources:

wfcourier.com media kit:  
<http://www.wfcourier.com/advertise/online.html>

The screenshot shows the SFGate.com website interface. At the top left is the SFGate.com logo. To its right is a blue banner with the text "on sale". Below the logo, there is a navigation menu with "Home" and "About Us" links. The main content area features a large headline: "Drive customers to your retail business with the power of SFGate.com." Below this is a sub-headline: "Your SFGate message will appear next to articles on SFGate.com for 7 days for only \$199." A call to action button says "Show me a sample." Below this, there is a section titled "It's Quick and Easy. You can buy and manage your ad 24 hours a day. Get your ad in front of our readers within minutes!" followed by a "Need more information?" link. At the bottom, there is a "Contact Us" link and a copyright notice for 2004.

## Self-service tools to meet Bay Area small-business owners' needs

SFGate.com, the Web site of The San Francisco Chronicle, is well-known in industry circles for developing "top jobs," a simple program that puts recruitment ads on story pages to target passive job seekers. It's simple and successful, which explains why it has been copied by newspaper sites coast to coast.

Beverly Best, SFGate.com's sales director, hopes to make another winner out of On Sale. The concept is similar to top jobs but designed for retail advertisers, offering them space for a simple text message on story pages to entice Bay Area residents click or walk in. But there's one big difference: On Sale is designed to be self-service.

For \$199, advertisers get at least 1 million impressions for their ad over the course of one week. Advertisers can feature up to 60 characters of information and are encouraged to include specific details, such as prices and sale-end dates. Once submitted, ads either start running immediately or can be scheduled to start at a later date. A mapping feature is even built in, providing a convenience for the user and an impressive tool for advertisers.

The sign-up process is relatively simple and designed to be especially easy for a client to place a subsequent ad buy. Sales reps can be called upon to help if an advertiser is uncomfortable with setting up a campaign online. Modest discounts are available for existing Chronicle or SFGate.com customers, but "the whole idea was to go after the small-business owner that says we're too expensive for them," says Best.

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The self-service setup and simple format of the ads is similar to Google's popular AdSense program, which shocked the online advertising world a few years ago by proving that a few lines of text can get far-better results than screaming graphics. But On Sale isn't a local knockoff of Google's winner; AdSense is cost-per-click and designed for direct response, while OnSale is priced by time and exposure and aimed at passive deal-hunters.

OnSale uses the same back-end architecture as Top Jobs, so retrofitting the ad-placement tools only took a few days of a developer's time. sfgate.com doesn't require site users to register, but Best says that if they eventually do go that route they would use the data to geographically target On Sale listings (to users in Oakland, for example).

On Sale is the latest enhancement in the overall excellent online media kit available on SFGate.com. The section devoted to print advertising is utilitarian, but underneath a sparse design lies a wide range of rate cards, as well as a special section calendar, guidelines and specs, and—strangely absent from many newspaper sites—a form that a prospective advertiser can fill out to have their question routed to the appropriate advertising department based on business type. Electronic tearsheets are available, powered by Massachusetts-based MerlinOne.

SFGate has been a leader when it comes to self-service tool. Best isn't afraid to brag about the tools that have worked and admit some that have been a little more modest in their success. They've determined that print (or print and online) classified ads placed through self-service tools tend to be about 25 percent longer (and thus more expensive) due in part to using full words rather than common abbreviations that classified call center reps insert during a phone order.

A tool intended to help small businesses design, build, and launch their own banner ad on SFGate.com has been less of a raging success, with just a few orders trickling in. The system, powered by AdVariant, probes advertisers about what they want to accomplish (clicks? branding?) and then walks the user through targeting options, scheduling, and eventually payment.

That feature could still find legs, Best says, which could especially be true if Google follows through on plans to introduce graphical ads into AdSense, potentially teaching legions of small-business owners how to craft a banner campaign. In the meantime, the Chronicle is looking at self-service ad building tools for another type of big, graphical ad—the printed kind.

## Resources:

Print advertising media kit:  
<http://www.sfgate.com/chronicle/advertise/>

Online advertising media kit: <http://sfgate.com/mediakit/>  
On Sale:  
<http://sfgate.com/cgi-bin/onsale/step/category/>



## San Jose Mercury News: Focus on Utility

Like many newspapers, the San Jose Mercury News makes its rate cards available online. But unlike most, visitors are required to fill out a registration form to gain access to the information.

It's not about keeping competitors out, or even about building up a huge list of valuable e-mail addresses, says Dan Breeden, marketing manager at the Mercury News. Instead, the newspaper uses it to get a better sense of the type of users who are accessing this information, plus it creates a way to follow up personally with selected prospects. "We thought that if we just opened (the rate cards) up, you'd have people not understanding what they are looking at," says Breeden. "You never know who is going to look at this information, and for some it can seem very complicated. They can become completely lost."

That's true, but the Mercury News has worked hard to make its Web-based media kit easy to navigate. Once registered, users can download rate cards in PDF format for primary display and classified categories. Information on deadlines and specs is thorough, covering slight variations that exist for special sections like the TV book and nontraditional ad vehicles such as Post-It notes and polybags.

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A comprehensive market overview is available for download, heavy on reasons why a potential advertiser is missing a huge and valuable slice of the Bay Area if they were to only advertise in the *San Francisco Chronicle*. A shorter “market snapshot” gives spoonfuls of area demographic information, useful for a media buyer or business owner just looking for a few key facts. One of the site’s strongest feature is individual profiles of all sections of the newspaper, featuring research tidbits that are especially relevant to the section being viewed (example: the Mercury News reaches 55 percent of computer owners in the market, according to a bullet point on the TechMonday section profile). Special ad types get a similar treatment, as does an overview of recruitment products sold by the newspaper and its Web site, [sjmercury.com](http://sjmercury.com).

Other Mercury News publications, including weeklies targeting the area’s Hispanic and Vietnamese residents, are touted on separate pages that include market and reader demographics and content overviews. Like the Mercury News, rate cards for these publications are also behind a registration wall. Bay Area Buy, a converged program that touts the extended reach gained by advertising in both the Mercury News and Bay Area sibling Contra Costa Times, is also explained in depth.

The site avoids fancy tools and gimmicks, instead focusing on core rate and market information—a goal set out when the site was being planned in late 2003. “We wanted it to be rich with information, but not filled with bells and whistles,” Breeden says. He thinks advertisers

increasingly use this information like consumers do for big-ticket items like cars; the Internet gets used for initial research, but the actual business still requires human interaction.

Smartly, the Mercury News works hard to ensure online users who follow an “advertise” link on the home page find the right information. A jump page directs private-party classified advertisers in one direction and “business advertisers” in another. Important phone numbers and e-mail addresses are also available on the jump page, a nice touch for an advertiser who would prefer to get information by phone or contact a staff member by e-mail.

This site was developed by the newspaper’s marketing communications department, and ongoing maintenance is handled by the same group. Like many other newspapers, Breeden says keeping on top of every rate, statistic, and product change takes constant attention. “A lot of printed rate books and media kits are based on surveys and data that are two years out of date, and typically that’s been an accepted practice,” Breeden says. “But the immediacy of online information has changed things. Online consumers and advertisers have an expectation that information will be current, and we need to meet that expectation.”

## Resources

San Jose Mercury News rate cards and market information:  
<http://www.mercurynews.net/advertising/>

There is no magic list of items advertising departments can use to make sure they are providing some level of self-service to advertisers. Here, however, is a list of suggestions that might provide some guidance. It is our contention that the leadership from advertising/marketing, online and technology work together. Any project is best when it is a shared project with shared goals.

Some suggestions

- Ensure the **ADVERTISE** link is “above the fold” on the Web home page (on the top half of the Web page, before the user has to scroll down). It should be repeated on the lower half of the page as well.
- Ensure any **ADVERTISE** and **ADVERTISER SERVICE** links are also part of all regular site navigation.
- Ensure that someone “owns” the advertising/marketing Web area. If dedicated Web staff is not available, consider training someone on your staff to be responsible part-time. Make it part of this person’s job to ensure that advertising pages are always up-to-date and working.
- Collect and analyze customer data and usage patterns.
- Review and discuss advertiser feedback. It should be digested and routed to staff in both advertising and online, and also to appropriate technology staff members, as it relates to programming and functionality.

For those wishing to be bolder and provide self-service for advertisers, here are some suggested steps:

- Ensure that all the basic offline advertising service functions: place, schedule, review, renew, change, cancel, etc., are available online as well.
- Ensure that all online customer service queries get timely responses. If 7 x 24 is not an option, consider either matching your print newspaper advertiser service hours or else expanding into hours currently not served by print customer service. (In order for this to be effective, the response would need to come within that expanded-hour range.)

- Provide and promote advertiser service through the maximum number of routes: telephone, e-mail, fax, Web page menu-driven, connect-to-chat, etc. If you build it and don’t tell anyone, they won’t find it.
- Provide both online and offline rewards for advertisers. Provide more / better rewards for multichannel customers.
- Current and new systems must be integrated to serve both print and Web customer channels; today few systems can even pass data between them.
- Advertising executives should work with their Web and technical counterparts to make information integration needs clear to all system vendors, for both current and future purchases.
- Advertising executives should work with their Web and technical counterparts to establish meaningful return on investment models to convince corporate management that an integrated approach will pay for itself.

### Next steps

Finally, we offer you some immediate next step suggestions. In other words, what you, the advertising executive, should do:

- Share this report with your publisher and your online and technical counterparts.
- Do a triage of your newspaper’s advertising sections online and advertiser service efforts.
- Find out what data are being collected at your newspaper to track the success of various advertiser online efforts.
- Determine benchmarks with your counterparts and your publisher.
- Set goals and a plan to reach them.
- Develop a tracking program to chart your success.
- Join the NAA Marketing/Advertising listserv and share your newspaper’s successes.



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