

MAXIMIZING

By Jake Dumensil



Like most chambers, yours probably employs a variety of communications vehicles to reach the members, potential members and larger community. Time and staff are often in short supply, so you may rely on several vendors to help meet the multitude of deadlines.

One firm might work on your membership directory, while another maintains your website, and yet a third prints your letterhead, business cards and brochures. But in today's competitive business climate, more and more companies are branching out from the specialized niches they once offered, and are now providing a broader spectrum of products and services. If you've been using the same old firms to do the same projects for many years, it might be time to reevaluate what your publisher can do for you.

Gerrie Cook, IOM, national sales and marketing manager for Lawton Publications, a leading publisher of chamber directories, maps and guides, recommends that chambers "capitalize on a publisher's experience and knowledge of current trends and what works in a chamber of your size. You can depend on them to provide you with new ideas to make you look good."

IT STARTS WITH A SOLID RELATIONSHIP

Chamber executives have long known the value of building strong relationships. Solid, long-term relationships are often

critical to ensuring the success of a program or a project, and publishing is no different.

Juli Schatz, vice president of VillageProfile.com, Inc., the largest multi-media chamber publisher in the U.S., knows first-hand that relationship-building is what it's all about. "By developing long-term relationships with our customers, we get to know one another and what to expect, and that makes working together easier," she says. Her colleague, Mark Waligorski, the company's California manager, agrees. "Our entire industry is built on relationships. We look at it as a partnership with the chambers."

Schatz feels that the best way for a chamber to maximize the effectiveness of a relationship with an existing publisher is through multi-edition contracts. In these situations, the publisher already has many of the materials necessary for the project in hand, so the project moves along more smoothly, she explains.

YOUR PUBLISHER AS A TRUSTED TEAM PLAYER

The advantages of using one publisher for all projects are many. In addition to chamber and publisher staff becoming well-versed on each other's capabilities and talents, the continuity of working with the same sales staff is a benefit to chamber members, too. Cook states: "Advertisers can rely on the publisher (who produces multiple publications for a chamber) to have their ad copy available from previous publications, which makes it easier for them to participate."

Also, a publisher's sales person who is handling multiple projects for a chamber can often offer discounts to members

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PUBLISHING RELATIONSHIPS

for advertising in more than one publication. “The publisher can schedule the advertising campaigns strategically to accomplish the maximum return,” she says.

According to Schatz, “sometimes bringing in a sales person from outside the Chamber helps because they are not seen as the same Chamber staff member knocking on their door again” asking for funds to support a Chamber project or program.

“There is a real advantage to bringing the same sales person back into the community (to sell ads in multiple publications),” she continues. “He or she becomes a trusted member of the Chamber and often even brings new members into the Chamber by approaching those who may want to advertise but are not current members.” Some of the VillageProfile.com sales staff have helped add up to a dozen new members to a chamber’s membership roster, she says.

JUSTIFYING USING JUST ONE FIRM

Using an all-inclusive publisher can yield enormous time savings for chamber staffs because the firm will not only sell and invoice for advertising, but can also research and write copy, acquire photos or hire a local photographer to take appropriate shots, create the design and layout, proofread final drafts and coordinate production with the printer (which can be a local company and chamber member if the pricing is competitive).

What do you say to a Chamber member who might question the need, or the wisdom, of hiring a large, national firm, rather than parceling out projects to local companies?

First of all, publishers like Lawton and VillageProfile.com always become members of the chambers with which they work.

Also, “in some smaller communities, there is simply no one available to do these kinds of publications,” says Schatz. “The best quality and the best prices might not be local.” With technology advancing at such a rapid pace, geography is no longer the barrier it once was. The best publisher for your members’ needs might be located across the country, but will be readily available through telephone, fax, Internet and courier/mailing services.

Cook concurs. “Very few communities have a company that can provide the turn-key process that handles every facet of the project in-house and is willing to pay a royalty to the Chamber for this opportunity,” she says.

The royalties she refers to come from ad sales. Large-scale publishers pay a royalty to the chambers—typically 10 to 15 percent—on gross sales. At VillageProfile.com, a program called RSVP (for Rewards Scholarships from VillageProfile.com) provides an additional one percent for scholarships to chamber members to help them attend educational programs, conferences, and even college classes on management and other business courses that benefit chamber executives or their staffs.

When considering your Chamber’s investment of time and resources and your objective to produce the highest quality publications that meet your members’ needs, choosing to work with a publisher that offers comprehensive services may be a wise decision. You may find yourself better able to manage your publishing projects and generate more revenue to support your other programs and services at the same time. ☐

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