**Blending the Personal and Professional**

Successful advertising creates awareness and desire. But it’s equally true that effective ads also generate familiarity. And familiarity is the key to building trust — the essential ingredient in producing long-term consumer loyalty. Even in today’s multifaceted, multiplatform media environment, there’s no better way to enhance visibility and create familiarity than to turn a spotlight on the people behind the ads.

I’ve seen dozens of great examples of promotions that feature business owners, everything from a single spotlight ad and ad campaign to informational/advertorial features, and full-blown special sections. And though their formats are very different, when skillfully executed, all of these promotions encourage readers to forge personal connections with businesses — and business people — in their communities.

The best prospects for these “up-close-and-personal” promotions tend to be small- to medium-sized independent businesses owned by one individual, a small group of partners, or members of the same family that were either established very recently or have been in business for a long time. Business owners who are active in the community, have noteworthy personal or family histories, or pursue unusual hobbies also make great subjects.

When considering what type of ad or promotion would most effectively showcase both the business owner and his/her business, it often pays to think outside the box. When writing or customizing editorial or advertorial content, consider quoting local business people on matters in which they are experts in their personal, rather than professional lives. For example, members of the business community with longstanding family ties to the area can add interesting tidbits to items focusing on local history.

Another tried-and-true strategy is a series of ads featuring a question-and-answer format that aims to familiarize readers with local business owners. A particularly memorable series featured the responses of two members of the business community to a list of common personal-choice questions, such as coffee or tea? beer or wine? one area football team or the other? The ads not only offered insights into the business owners’ personal preferences, but encouraged readers to connect with them based on their own answers to the questions.

Special sections offer a wide range of options for spotlighting business owners’ stories. A publication in New England regularly produces special sections featuring one local business that is celebrating a landmark anniversary. Another memorable section featured a variety of companies and organized them based on the length of time they had been in business. In addition to ads, the tab included short features based on interviews with the owners, who described how they got started in business and shared some information about their lives and families.

Whatever the format, the key to blending the personal and professional is encouraging connection and familiarity.

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