**Contests Create Wins for All Involved**

When it comes to creating both buzz and bucks, there’s nothing better than a contest. Perhaps that’s why it’s hard to find a newspaper that hasn’t tried this popular promotional vehicle at least once. But even publications with long track records of great success with contests can benefit from revisiting and revamping the strategies that go into planning and delivering these tried-and-true revenue, circulation and readership builders. Here are some thoughts and ideas to consider the next time you’re contemplating a contest.

***Start from the finish line.*** Effective contests begin with clear goals that are appropriate and achievable. If your goal is to build circulation, for example, consider a contest that runs over a longer period of time and requires readers to check the newspaper on multiple days. But if your aim is to highlight a particular section of your publication — classifieds, for instance, the timing of the promotion becomes less important than its location.

***Multitask***. I recently heard about a newspaper contest that is a perfect example of achieving multiple goals. During the build up to key holidays, classified advertisers have the option of paying a nominal fee to insert a themed icon, such as a Christmas tree, jack-o-lantern or shamrock, in their ad. The contest challenges readers to count the icons during a particular period of time and a winner is selected from among the correct entries. Not only does one lucky winner receive a prize, but the newspaper generates extra classified revenue and advertisers have a festive opportunity to call attention to their ads.

***Promote online viewership***. Whenever possible, build in online components to your contests. Whether it’s simply to showcase prizes or an easy way to enter the contest, coordinating print and Web is always advantageous.

***Go social*.** Even if the contest is “print-only,” social media can keep the buzz alive — before, during and after the promotion — and spotlight contest sponsors. It’s also a perfect way to count down the days until the prize drawing, highlight contest participants, and drive readers to your Web site for additional information.

***Avoid booby prizes.*** Withoutappealing prizes, even the most intriguing contest can fizzle. Prizes don’t have to be expensive, but they do need to stir reader interest and motivate readers to take action. Many popular newspaper contests involve prizes donated by advertisers, but offer winners the option of cashing in their “winnings” at any one of the sponsoring businesses. With a variety of prize options, there’s a good chance that there will be something for everyone.

***Get creative*.** Contests call out for imagination and innovation. Next month, I’ll highlight ideas for a range of contests that generate great revenue and winning results.

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