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Media kits: Changing with the times

Advertisers still want media kits, but they want it now, and the only way to do that is to provide it for them electronically. Plus, how to make your media kit more accessible.

By EILEEN KESSLER | 10/13/2011

Media kits have long been valuable marketing tools for associations that rely on advertising and sponsorships for a significant portion of their annual income.

Taking the lead from commercial magazines, many associations spare no cost to produce beautifully designed kits that contain vital information about circulation, attendance, demographics and the spending patterns of their memberships.

But as organizations increasingly shift their primary communications from print to online, they are finding that advertisers also prefer to have access to information about marketing opportunities 24/7.

"Advertisers still want media kits, but they want it now, and the only way to do that is to provide it for them electronically," American Public Health Association advertising director Asbell Alston said.

Five years ago, APHA, which has 50,000 members worldwide, saw a significant drop in requests for printed media kits (*top right*). The organization drastically scaled back printing, from about 5,000 a year to 300. APHA now provides a PDF of its publication media kit, which is downloaded hundreds of times each year.

American Veterinary Medical Association, with more than 75,000 members, took a phased approach to moving its media kit online (*below, right*). AVMA publications assistant director Nick DeLuca said the first year the kit went online, the association reduced its printing by about half. Then, after surveying its advertisers, AVMA eliminated the print version the following year.

In addition to the convenience factor, online media kits are advantageous as marketing opportunities become more complex and associations expand venues for reaching their constituents to include social media sites, e-newsletters, job boards, webinars, podcasts, blogs, digital magazines and even mobile apps.

American Speech-Language-Hearing Association decided to take a more revolutionary approach to presenting the breadth of the organization's reach by creating a web site devoted exclusively to marketing opportunities for advertisers and sponsors.

ASHA recently launched a "Marketing Solutions" site (*right*). The site provides an interactive and searchable media kit that is designed to steer advertisers to ASHA's primary and distinct audiences, while reinforcing the association's overall brand identity. Before launching the new site, ASHA promoted its more than 50 advertising, recruiting and exhibiting opportunities in a PDF document.

"We have a lot of marketing opportunities available, and it occurred to me that it might be a little confusing for marketing folks to go through and find what they needed in a PDF," ASHA advertising sales director Pam Leppin said. "The site pulls everything together in one location so companies have an easier time of knowing all the marketing opportunities available to them."

After pushing the marketing solutions site out to some of its marketing clients, Leppin said the association has received positive feedback, especially when it comes to the navigation of the site and its ease of use. The site is broken out by advertising channel or medium, and the audience advertisers want to reach. The design is simple but visually pleasing, and makes it easy for users to search for something specific, or navigate the pages to find what they're looking for – features that set this kind of site apart from a PDF.



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"One [client] said that it's an effective site and that it makes them want to dive deep into it," Leppin said. "The feedback we've gotten has been overall very positive and it's an easy tool to use, they like the look and feel of it, and they were able to find the information they were looking for, and that was the most critical thing for us."

The switch from printed kits to electronic versions also can be a cost saver for associations during these tough economic times. Once in place, online kits can be updated immediately and inexpensively to accommodate changing prices, data and new venues.

"In the past, our media kit was our biggest annual promotional expense. A lot of resources went into design and printing our kit," American Psychological Association advertising and exhibit sales director Jodi Ashcroft said. "Today we print smaller, less elaborate rate cards to mail, with a more robust online presence."

Despite the ease and accessibility of online media kits, some type of physical "leave-behind" is still important, experts say.

Pamela Strother, principal at Sponsorship Specialists, said a printed piece can help to make a personal connection with a prospect, but that it's less important once the relationship with an advertiser is established.

"Most corporate decision makers will tell you it still matters to receive a printed solicitation that reflects the individual relationship with the association, and to see a brochure that excites them about your conference or event," Strother said.

National Business Aviation Association sales VP Katrina Bradshaw added that the printed kit allows the sales representatives to engage more with potential advertisers, and allows them to capture prospects and leads more easily than if prospects were to view the same information online.

Bradshaw suggests offering both, "not one versus the other. The bottom line is to make sure the information is accessible."

Making your media kit more accessible

Advertising and sponsorships can be a substantial part of an association's revenue, so make sure you're not creating any unnecessary barriers between advertisers and your media kit. Here are a few tips for making your media kit as accessible as possible.

Don't require advertisers to provide their email addresses to access the media kit. True, this might not allow you to track who is looking at your media kit and follow up with them, but having this extra step might be all it takes to turn an interested prospect away.

Keep your PDF as small as possible so prospects can download it quickly. If a download is taking too long, prospects might give up and move on. Also keep in mind that people are doing more and more on their mobile phones, and speeds can vary on these devices – make it work for your on-the-go prospects.

Make your PDF easy to find. Don't bury the link to your PDF on an internal sub-page on your website. If it's difficult to find, it won't be seen. Make sure it doesn't take more than two clicks to get to your media kit, whether it is a downloadable PDF, a dedicated website or an advertising-specific page on your main site. Keep the path to your advertising opportunities as clear as possible.

Get the word out! Put links to your media kit in everything you publish, from emails to blogs. You have the connections to a select audience that advertisers want to reach. Don't be shy about broadcasting this.

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