

How to Effectively Market your Newspaper

By John Lloyd



*"It is better to aim too high and miss the target,
than to aim too low and achieve it."*

- Michelangelo

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Introduction

The major objective of this *AIP Quick Guide* is to provide newspaper publishers with a strategic insight into marketing. Newspapers trade and operate in challenging times. Too many newspapers are focused on every aspect of what they do (from publishing to technology to cost cutting) apart from the one discipline which could make such a huge difference to their fortunes: **their marketing**.

This Guide provides you with what you really need to know about the essentials of newspaper marketing. It also provides you with a suggested action plan and strategies which applied correctly will solve all your marketing problems.

I also remind you about the absolute, number one, most important principle of marketing – **SATISFYING THE NEEDS OF YOUR CUSTOMERS!**

Marketing your newspaper

Marketing newspapers or newspaper marketing? Somehow, these words don't seem to go together. Newspapers definitely practice selling, they sell to advertisers, they sell to readers, and they even sell themselves to the community. But, do they practice marketing? Seldom! Why? Because most newspapers think that they don't need to, others think that what they are doing is marketing, and others simply don't know how.

The newspaper as a product or service

From a marketing perspective, a newspaper is many things. To a **reader**, the newspaper fills a want for news, information, entertainment and opinion. Whatever the need or want that the newspaper fills, there are a significant number of people who believe that newspapers provide real value.

Then there are the needs and wants of **advertisers**. Advertisers need access to newspaper audiences to sell their own products and services. Newspapers create value by opening this consumer-advertiser exchange. Newspapers therefore have the dual role of marketing *for* advertisers and marketing *to* advertisers.

Newspapers are a complex product to market as they have more stakeholders than readers and advertisers alone. The other stakeholders would be shareholders, community, society, government and so on. The newspaper is a complex combination of public servant and privately owned business with profit goals. It is unique as it serves many diverse customers on many different levels.

Do newspaper publishers, editors and managers understand marketing?

The opportunities and threats facing newspaper titles today defy easy solutions. How can we attract new and young readers? How do we reverse circulation declines? How do we reduce subscriber churn? How do we increase market share in a competitive advertising environment? How do we safeguard and retain some of our key classified franchises? How do we retain a highly qualified and diverse workforce?

The goal of this *AIP Quick Guide* is to work out strategies and actions that respond to the challenging sticking points that face our industry.

As in any business, the traditional tasks of effective marketing is to guide, plan and implement the **product** concept, plus the **pricing**, **promotion** and **distribution** of this product and service. The key element in a successful marketing program depends on how the newspapers leadership organizes, relates and combines these four elements (**Product, Price, Distribution, and Promotion**) to create tangible value to fill the wants and needs.

So far, given the above definition and description, it might seem that everyone at your newspaper has been practicing marketing all along. They just haven't called it marketing. Instead they have called it editorial and product development, or circulation management, or promotions, or selling, or the "commercial side" of the operation. On the whole, newspaper editors, publishers, sales people and circulation managers haven't really accepted the very principles of marketing.

The true basis of marketing is to determine customer wants and needs and then find ways to better serve those wants and needs than competitors. It's called "customer focus" or being "market driven". Many newspaper managers are only now beginning to understand and embrace this vital concept. But, too many still consider marketing as simply a more complex system of selling, or a fancy name for the promotion function, or just another way of building circulation or advertising revenue.

That's a serious problem as marketing is much more than just selling. It is the re-orientation of most of the newspaper functions and structures towards its ultimate customer. It's moving from an internal view to an external view of the product and the market. It's moving to producing and distributing a product that truly serves the readers' wants and needs. Marketing and the resulting market orientation moves newspaper planning and management direction from "what we can do effectively and efficiently" to "what customers (readers and advertisers) really want and need from us."

What does it mean to be market-driven? It means **thinking of the business and newspaper through the eyes of the reader and advertiser.**

What is strategic marketing?

Strategic marketing is all about **educating** the marketplace. It's the process of **informing** your potential clients (readers and advertisers) that your newspaper can **solve problems, fill voids, and achieve opportunities and goals** in a way that no other newspaper can. All effective newspaper marketing is about **EDUCATING** your readers and advertisers.

Trends in newspaper marketing

The advertising downturn cuts both ways. Advertisers are spending less on newspapers and newspapers are spending less on advertising. In this challenging financial climate, newspaper marketing budgets are being reduced or spent in different ways.

The past few years have seen an unprecedented change in the finances of large traditional newspapers. The sharp downturn in advertising revenue against a background of decline in circulation numbers has led to a change in the way that newspaper publishers look at their business and in how they allocate marketing budgets and staff resources.

Initially, given the speed of the downturn, most companies put a freeze on marketing plans. It was inevitable because the marketing budget is the largest uncommitted spend that any senior management has at its disposal. Most other cost reductions such as cutting staff or production overheads take time to implement. Unfortunately, with less marketing and brand promotion for these newspapers, the spiral of advertising and circulation decline is intensified and will continue.

Smaller community-focused newspapers need to grasp the opportunity that now exists to gain market share. They have been particularly 'passive' marketers in the past. Now is the time to up your marketing game to educate and prove to advertisers and readers that your title provides cost-effective solutions to the changing needs of the marketplace.

When times get tough one of the first budget items newspaper publishers cut is marketing

This is not short-term thinking, this is naive thinking. It probably happens because newspaper publishers don't see any direct results from their marketing; it almost seems like a wasted expense. It may be because they're doing ineffective, unquantifiable and unmeasured marketing. I believe that this short-sighted approach is a lack of understanding and appreciation of what drives a newspaper's growth and success.

Without effective, quantifiable and measurable marketing, all newspapers suffer with substantially less than optimum, much less than desired revenue, income and profits. These newspapers would have a radically better chance of success if they were to refocus their primary efforts and energy on marketing their business. Marketing is the lifeblood of any newspaper. Give it up and you may as well slit your business' jugular vein.

Stretching your marketing budget – making every cent count

Marketing, like any management discipline requires time, effort and some degree of financial commitment. The fact is that many newspapers simply cannot afford the things they would most like to have. But marketing does not necessarily need to cost a fortune. The key to effective and successful marketing is to test and measure all the marketing that you do. You can maintain a lean marketing budget by doing the following:

- **Target accurately.** Keep your marketing focused on the best reader and advertiser opportunities. This will help you achieve optimum results with minimum wasted effort.
- **Nurture a good reputation.** Cultivate a natural reason for readers and advertisers to select you. Create something that clearly distinguishes your newspaper from its competitors.
- **Be more creative.** If your newspaper is to be noticed it must attract attention. Generate free PR, seek referrals from your advertisers and generate strong word of mouth through testimonial marketing.
- **Make use of the web.** The internet offers great opportunities to reach targeted audiences for comparatively little outlay.
- **Look after your good customers.** It costs ten times more to attract a new customer than retain an old one. Create a strategy that looks after the interests of your most profitable customers. Make sure you stay in touch with them and give their needs your fullest personal priority.

The strengths of newspapers

As a consultant, media negotiator, trainer and speaker within the newspaper industry I am frequently surprised at how newspaper people have so quickly forgotten the strengths of this powerful media type. There is tremendous power in print, yet I unfortunately meet too many newspaper people who are pessimistic about the prospects of their titles.

I seldom see these marketing strengths demonstrated on newspaper websites, advertising campaigns, brochures, presentations and sales kits.

Newspapers are:

- **Mass Media** – With other media heavily fragmented, newspapers remain the only mass media.
- **Far Reaching** – Newspapers are capable of reaching large numbers of readers with a single advert.
- **Brand Building** – Newspapers offer the greatest opportunity of being seen by the most consumers.
- **Frequent** – Frequency of exposure builds awareness of brands.
- **Targeted** – Newspapers can pinpoint a specific consumer group through special interest pages.
- **Local** – Newspapers target the local community with relevant local content.
- **Retained** – Newspapers adverts can be kept for future reference by prospective customers.
- **Believable and Credible** – Newspapers have a high standard of believability.

- **Active Focus** – Readers of newspapers give their full attention when reading, unlike other media where attention is passive. Think of radio and TV.
- **In Demand** – Readers buy and read newspapers for the advertising. Think motors, property and jobs etc.
- **Shopping Media** – Newspapers offer shopping consumers a catalogue of advertising with competitive prices, deals and product information. Newspapers are retail media.

The aim of marketing is to get customers to know, like and trust you

Creating your Marketing Plan

A marketing plan is your guide to exactly how you are going to action your newspaper marketing. It is the definitive outcome of your thinking and decision making. It is your blueprint to success.

Creating a highly effective marketing plan is vital for your newspapers success. Too many newspaper owners, publishers and managers spend too much time *doing* operational tasks as opposed to *planning* strategic objectives. The key is to not only work *in* your business, but to work *on* your business. This means you need to think strategically about the future. Your marketing plan is your team's commitment on paper to a secure business future.

Here are the 10 steps to your successful marketing plan

1. Understanding your market and your competition

Your marketplace

- What is the marketplace within which your newspaper operates?
- What is happening within that marketplace?
- How is the market moving?
- What are the hot issues?

Your competition

- Who do you consider a competitor?
- How do they position themselves?
- What is their USP (unique selling proposition)?
- What is their competitive edge?
- How much do they charge for advertising?
- How much do they charge if they are a paid-for title?
- What marketing literature do they use – is it impressive and effective?
- Where are their weaknesses?
- What is their website like?

2. Understanding your customers (readers and advertisers)

Your target reader and advertiser

- Who is your target reader?
- Who is your target advertiser?
- What are the key problems and challenges that your target readers and advertisers face?
- Are there any gaps in the market that you currently serve?
- What do you most want to find out about your target readers and advertisers?
- Which questions could you ask them to enable you to uncover their problems and desires?

3. Positioning your newspaper

- What are the strengths of your newspaper and team?
- Your newspaper has a personality – what is yours?
- Describe a number of potential niche reader and advertiser groups to target.
- What are the needs of these niche groups?
- What could you do for them (readers) and sell to them (advertisers) that would fulfil their needs?
- How exactly will you position your newspaper to satisfy the needs of your target markets?

4. Clearly list and understand the sticking points that may be hindering your success

- List every possible sticking point in your business?
- Brainstorm and list every possible solution to every sticking point.
- Take action and solve!

5. Developing your marketing message

- What is your brand?
- What is your USP (unique selling proposition)?
- What is your newspaper's strap-line?
- What are your marketing slogans (they could differ for readers and advertisers)?
- What is the "one big thing" that you want to promote? This is your core story. Part of creating a highly effective marketing plan is the ability to sum up, in less than ten seconds, in a magnetic way, what exactly you do or are going to do.

6. Setting your marketing goals

- What is your vision for your newspaper and business?
- What specifically do you want to achieve with your marketing?
- What are your measurable goals for each type of marketing action that you plan?
- Your goals must be **SMART** – Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time bound.
- Prioritise your goals.
- What are the timelines for the achievement of your marketing goals?

7. Determining your marketing methods

- What has worked for you in the past? What has been your return on investment (ROI)?
- What has previously not worked? Why?
- What marketing methods do your successful media competitors use? List them.
- What can you do to raise the profile of your newspaper in the marketplace?
- Which methods can you use to attract new readers and advertisers?
- Carefully choose the most relevant and cost effective marketing methods available to you.

8. Developing your budget

- Which marketing methods have you chosen to implement?
- What is it going to cost to utilise your chosen marketing methods?
- Always have a marketing budget. I recommend a marketing investment that sets a specific goal and question - '*what does it cost to acquire each customer?*' This adds great focus to your marketing efforts.
- Set the budget in advance and expect to spend it.
- Share your budget with key people. Don't play games.
- What return do you expect? How will you measure your return on investment (ROI)?

9. Planning your strategy

- How are you going to ensure that you make progress on each element of your plan?
- What are the priorities?
- What specific actions need to be taken? By whom and by when?
- What are the milestones and deadlines?

10. Measuring your marketing plan

- If you can't measure it, you can't manage it.
- Measure your return on marketing by identifying up front the things to measure.

Implement your Marketing Plan

Once you have a goal and a set plan of attack, the next, and often most difficult part, is to expedite your plan. Some newspaper people are fine up to this point, but others tend to go through all the planning steps and then they hesitate.

If you've clearly thought out your plan of action, DO IT! And if you don't act now your competitors will. Concentrate on your plan to reach your goals. Anticipate, plan and execute. These are the steps to success.

You need to ask yourself: Why should the customer do business with you and your newspaper over everybody else?

Twelve inspiring ways to market your newspaper

1. Creating a powerful USP (Unique Selling Proposition)

A **USP** is something that distinguishes your newspaper from all of the media competitors in your marketplace. It is what makes you so unique that it motivates people to choose you over anyone else.

You must be able to describe in a sentence or two what makes your business tick, what makes it unique, how your employees can fully understand what their best efforts produce and why, and what makes your newspaper special. This is also known as your 'elevator speech'.

Ensure that your USP meets the following criteria:

- It is a **unique and appealing idea that sets you and your newspaper apart** from the competition.
- It must say **“read this newspaper and you will get this specific benefit”**.
- It must be **something that the competition does not or cannot offer**.
- It must have a **promise that is strong enough to pull readers and advertisers to you**.
- You must be **able to deliver on it**.

***A powerful USP sets you apart from all of the other
“me too” competitors in your field***

2. Developing a strap-line slogan for your newspaper

A strap-line slogan is a one line statement about your newspaper that captures the essence of your USP. This slogan should be a short phrase that evokes the spirit and personality of your brand to your readers and advertisers.

People are more likely to remember your name and strap-line slogan than anything else.

8 Examples of effective newspaper strap-lines:

It's got the Coast written all over it - Sunshine Coast Daily, Australia

Bringing the Community to Your Door - Leavenworth Echo, United States

The Newspaper Iowa Depends On - The Des Moines Register, United States

Houston's Leading Information Source - Houston Chronicle, United States

Get in Touch With Every Issue - The Post and Courier, United States

Discover What's In It for You - Antelope Valley Press, United States

We're Telling Your Stories - The Brownsville Herald, United States

Your Community Connection - Yukon News, Canada

Use your strap-line along with your logo on everything you use to communicate with your readers and advertisers. It must be on all your marketing and business literature.

3. Produce marketing materials that educate

Most newspapers don't create printed brochures, PDF brochures, fact sheets and sales kits and that effectively articulate why advertisers should buy from them. The key is to create a tool kit of marketing materials that are flexible, affordable, personal, practical, and most importantly, educational.

The marketing kit is vital for your newspapers success. This kit is a collection of carefully crafted and individual pages of information that helps you present the best possible case for why an advertiser should buy from your sales reps. Too many newspaper sales reps visit customers armed only with a rate card, calculator and good intentions. This is not good enough!

Create a marketing brochure about the newspaper to leave with potential advertisers. This brochure becomes your 24-hour salesperson. The potential advertiser will refer to it at their convenience and will become better informed about your newspaper and its opportunities.

You can develop an eye-catching brochure easily and inexpensively by creating a newspaper about your newspaper. Include information about distribution, statistics, research about your readers and a map of the area you cover as well as a list of your advertising rates and policies.

4. Creating a newsletter

An email newsletter is a useful communication tool to produce and distribute to your advertisers at regular intervals.

Newsletters are one of the most cost effective and powerful tools for generating customer traffic and encouraging sales from existing advertisers and building relationships. An effective email newsletter must provide information that benefits or educates your subscribers. It must add value to their lives or businesses, not only be a vehicle to sell. Get this balance right and your newsletters become a powerful and cost effective marketing tool.

5. Make the most of e-mail marketing – 'your 1 000 person sales team'

Imagine if fifteen years ago, I told you that in the future you would be able to communicate directly with your customers or potential customers, sending them any message you chose and that it was absolutely free. No paper needed, no printing, no envelopes, no brochures and no stamps. In addition to this, the message could be sent to anyone anywhere in the world. As an added bonus, instead of having to wait 48 hours or longer, they would receive it within seconds. It would have sounded too good to be true, right? Welcome to the world of email and E-marketing.

Too many newspaper publishers and managers still don't appreciate the power of email and the internet. The irritation that many people choose to feel about the emails they receive fails to take into account that email has the most powerful communication channel of all time.

Build E-marketing into your marketing mix and you will see an immediate return in both profits and enhanced customer relationships. The key is not to think of Email as a selling tool, but as a powerful communication tool. Use it to add real value to your customers' lives and to keep them informed on your newspapers activities and unique opportunities.

Here are some of the fundamental basics of E-marketing:

- **Capture everyone's Email address** (customers, prospects, contacts – everyone!)
- **Once you have Email Addresses – use them!**
- **Personalise your Emails - You want to make sure that your emails stand out from the mass of messages that people find in their inbox.**

6. Maximising the impact of your website

What do you want your website to achieve?

- Create a professional and credible image.
- Present your newspaper's 'shop window'.
- To provide information for readers.
- To attract new potential advertisers to contact you for information.

How to drive traffic to your site?

- Tell your customers about your website.
- Publish your website address on everything that you use to promote your business. In your newspaper, business cards, brochures, sales letters, invoices, advertising, compliment slips, vehicles, signage etc.
- Your website name must be easy to remember.

Give your customers a good reason to visit your website

- Good clean design with effective copy.
- Offer your visitors something of value. Educate them. Provide rates and packages. Free interesting articles.

7. Designing promotional adverts to attract readers and advertisers

Advertising is the biggest revenue source of any successful newspaper. Yet I'm always amazed how publishers don't use sufficient advertising to promote their brand to readers and advertisers.

Marketing means selling your dream to others. So you can't be shy when it comes to talking about your newspaper. That's where advertising comes in. For a start-up, struggling or even thriving newspaper, your own title is an obvious place to run your own advertising campaigns. Advertising yourself in the pages of your own newspaper does two things: (1) It gets your message to lots of people (2) It demonstrates that you have confidence in your own product. It's also affordable.

Evaluate the advertising that you are currently creating and ask yourself these questions: (1) Does it deliver a message that promotes the sale of advertising? (2) Does it effectively demonstrate and

articulate the newspapers value to readers? (3) Are you placing these adverts consistently and frequently enough to grow your brand?

Testimonials (which follow next) are for me the most impactful reader and advertiser promotions that a newspaper can do. A third party endorsement of your newspaper is powerful. I would never publish an issue of my own newspaper without a reader and advertiser testimonial endorsement.

8. Testimonials from readers and advertisers – ‘let your customers and readers shout it out loud!’

What others say about your newspaper and your service is infinitely more credible than anything you can say on your own behalf. When you make a statement it's a claim, when your satisfied readers and advertisers make positive statements about you, that's a *fact*. I am here to tell that you cannot overuse testimonials.

The absence or underuse of testimonials remains the number one marketing error I see most repeated by newspapers. Run a reader and an advertiser testimonial promoting your newspaper in every issue.

9. Mobile marketing opportunities for newspapers

Mobile is the fastest growing media of all time. Mobile Internet users on smart phones and tablets have just surpassed desktop internet users in early 2013. A growing number of South Africans receive at least some of their local news and information on their mobile phone or tablet computer.

Newspapers big and small must explore the new distribution opportunities provided by mobile platforms. Ignore this market change and opportunity at your peril.

The next phase of the mobile revolution will be for newspapers to leverage advertising support. Print style ads will not be effective on mobile. Start preparing for technology where newspapers will sell and create short deadline 'mobile friendly' advertising. I'm thinking of vouchers, coupons, competitions, restaurants, entertainment, travel, motors and travel. This opportunity will give newspapers the ability to compete for revenue with the discount group buying companies.

Research in America indicates that coupons generated from a mobile device offer a greater return on investment for advertisers with redemption rates up to 10 times that of coupons distributed in print.

There are strong benefits when a local advertiser adds a mobile component to a traditional newspaper campaign. The advertiser's message has the added value of an on-screen presence in a highly personal media channel. Advertisers are also able to reach a younger demographic audience (the bulk of mobile internet use comes from 25 to 44 year olds).

10. Newspaper Kiosks (open on distribution or busy days)

Newspaper businesses can establish low-cost branded kiosks (this could be a barter agreement to save hard costs) in high traffic areas like shopping malls as a marketing strategy. Kiosks can give away free or sell current copies (if you are a paid-for title) of the newspaper, but also provide customer services, such as subscription renewals, address changes, competition entries and

classified ad sales. Marketing tactics can include selling branded goods including tog bags, mugs, tee shirts or caps. This is an effective way to engage your community and make back-end profits on promotional clothing sales.

11. Social Networking

Newspapers can use social networking to market the energy of the newsroom by creating accounts for individual reporters, photographers and editors to post story developments before the story appears in the newspaper. This must not be seen as cannibalizing the printed product, but adding value to its relevance to its readers. The better the relationship of the journalists is built with its targeted community, the better for the newspaper.

Readers may become interested in not only the story and news content, but also their newfound ability to peek into the mysterious world of newspaper newsrooms. Allowing readers to post comments and questions for your newsroom staff to respond to, boosting interactivity and creating relationships between the public and your newspaper.

Newspapers must have a Blog linked to their website. A Blog is a strong marketing tool and is another low-cost vehicle to connect with your readers and advertisers. Newspapers are content-rich, so leverage this valuable content to attract readers. Occasionally post something controversial, but relevant. Invite reader participation on your message board. A blog is also a free research mechanism to get reader opinions and feedback.

Create a marketing calendar

Strategic marketing is about working *on* your newspaper business and not just *in* your business. I recommend that create a large visible marketing planning calendar is visible to everyone in your newspaper. Map out every strategy and action that you intend to do and which steps it will take to achieve that, then schedule them.

Even if it takes you six months of scheduling, in six months from now you'll have it completed. In other words, make marketing appointments with yourself and your team.

Carve out a portion of every day, if that's what it takes, and make an appointment to do marketing. Just take it piece by piece. It is such an essential aspect or element of the long-term success of your business.

Other recommended marketing methods to grow your newspaper

- **Get free PR** (newspapers are in the news game yet don't leverage enough PR themselves)
- **Create Referral Marketing plan** (every satisfied advertiser is a possible source of new business leads)
- **Using Joint Ventures** (grow income by partnering other companies – don't just sell ads)
- **Using events and talks to promote your newspaper**
- **Networking to build relationships**
- **Telemarketing**
- **Consider using targeted Direct Mail. Old-school, but still a powerful marketing weapon.**
- **Developing special offers and incentives**

- **Using Banners, Posters and Signs**
- **Sponsoring for maximum return**
- **Exhibiting at conferences**

Excellence! Be the best.
It's the only market that's not crowded

Conclusion

If times get tough, don't make the mistake of jumping on the bandwagon and cutting back on marketing. As I have said before, marketing is the first budget that newspapers cut back during challenging times. How do they expect times to get better if they stop communicating with readers, customers and prospective advertisers?

Your success or failure depends on marketing. I cannot emphasise it enough! Marketing should be the last budget cut back. Remember that setting goals, developing a game plan and then implementing that game plan are all vital keys to your business success.

Aggressively incorporate the marketing strategies and mindset that I have recommended in this *Quick Guide* into your own newspaper business situation, always testing to see if your implementation is the most effective it can possibly be.

About the author

John Lloyd of Brandstorm is a business growth strategist, media and marketing consultant, media negotiator, trainer, speaker, columnist and author. He has a strong commercial background in newspapers, radio and TV management.

While serving as Commercial and Marketing Director of Independent Newspapers Cape (1998 to 2004) they won 28 International Newspaper Marketing Association (INMA) Awards between 1999 and 2003. It included the 2001 *Best of Show* in San Francisco. This was the most won by a single publisher over this period. He was appointed to the INMA board of directors between 2001 and 2004. Independent Newspapers Cape was named the *Marketing Organisation of the Year* in 2002 by the Institute of Marketing Management.

He is a recipient of the Institute of Marketing Management Western Cape *Communicator of the Year Award*. He is a frequent speaker and MC at local and international conferences.

He wrote and published the book *Smart Thinking for Crazy Times* in 2012.

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