

Alternative Weekly Generates More Than \$125k with 'Share of Voice' Online Banner Sales Program

The Challenge

The *Arkansas Times* (<http://www.arktimes.com/>), the premier alternative newsweekly in the Little Rock area, needed to find a way to increase their digital sales dollars, without increasing the local traditional sales force. Just as many other markets have discovered, the management of the *Arkansas Times* knew their best bet for revenue growth would be from local small to medium-sized businesses (SMBs), which is a philosophy backed by many recent research studies.

With lots of new and exciting products in the digital space available for purchase, like search engine optimization (SEO), online search directories, mobile marketing, video solutions and more, The Blinder Group still believes that online banner sales is still a viable revenue opportunity for "quick to market" revenue.

"The banner ad isn't going away, it's going to evolve," says Mike Blinder, President of the Blinder Group, a multimedia sales training and consulting firm hired by the team of the *Arkansas Times* to assist them in developing an online sales program they could offer to local SMBs. Many pundits are predicting that banner ads will decline as a revenue source as online video increases. But, keep in mind that online video ads, as I define it, is nothing more than a flash file. What will simply happen over time, is more and more static online banner ads will incorporate motion in order to evolve. However, whether the ad is static or flash, an online banner can still be a "lions share" of the revenue for a local media company. And, we need to take them seriously, today!"

The Solution

The *Arkansas Times* Web site is currently garnering 200,000 unique visitors a month with 800,000 monthly page views—giving them 800,000 "medium rectangle" online ad spaces available each month for sale. Instead of pricing ads at 10 to 20 CPM, The Blinder Group suggested the newspaper utilize a very successful, proven sales model known as "Share of Voice," meaning that instead of having the advertiser purchase online inventory based on a cost per thousand (CPM), they use the desired CPM as a pricing guide to establish a rate needed for a specific online ad position. "This 'Share of Voice' sales model is easier for the advertiser to understand what he/she is buying, as well as easier for the sales person to explain," says Mike during his many worldwide training sessions. "Rather than having the salesperson say to the advertiser: 'I can give you 30,000 monthly advertising impressions at a \$10 cost per thousand.' The salesperson should say to the advertiser: 'Your ad is guaranteed to be seen no less than 30,000 times a month within this ad position, shared by you and a select number of other advertisers, for a price of \$300 a month. "

For the *Arkansas Times*, a select group of 25 advertisers were given the opportunity to share the total number of monthly impressions with a guarantee to be seen no less than 25,000 times a month within the ad position at a price point of \$99/per week. Using this model, the *Arkansas Times* achieves a \$17.16 Cost Per Thousand (CPM) for the inventory, which is much higher than the current industry average. Blinder adds, "With this 'Share of Voice' pricing model, the sales call process is much easier 'on the street,' making the length of the sale call much shorter and the 'closing ratios' much higher. Also, limiting advertiser availability, increases the urgency to close. In short, you can say to an advertiser: 'You can give me a no or a yes. And, a no is okay, since we will sell that slot to someone else.'"

The online ads offered within this program were available to be linked to the advertiser's website or to a customized online "splash page" which can feature their latest deal, offer, special or current newspaper ad. "Having this link option is essential," says Blinder. "Many advertisers we meet with will complain that they do not want any form of online advertising because they are not happy with their current Web site. We need to be able to provide a 'total marketing solution' so all advertisers can see value from such a program. Having a choice for the online ad to link to the Web site or an online page we can manage for them, helps the deals get done, quickly!"

Sales Support Materials

Utilizing, detailed local market research provided from Media Audit (<http://www.themediiaudit.com>) , the Blinder Group assisted in the production of the associated sales support collaterals necessary for this program's deployment. A simple, easy-to-follow, multiple page flier was developed so the local business owners (and the sales team) could easily grasp the features and benefits of this sales program. The Blinder Group has vast experience in creating such sales presentations. "Too often media companies do not graphically explain the online portions of sales programs in an easy-to-follow manner," says Mike. "This creates confusion during the sales process."

Sales Team Training

The Blinder Group conducted a "Multimedia Master Class" (<http://www.blindergroup.com/training/multimedia.shtml>) for the local sales force of the *Arkansas Times*, to instruct on:

- Prospecting new multimedia business
- The basics of multimedia marketing and how the medium works
- Best practices in selling online solutions
- The benefits of bringing interactive products to market
- Methods for using the Web to garner more market share
- How to attack the competition with online offerings

The training also included content informing the sales staff of the Blinder Group's return visit. During these return visits, "4-legged" sales training/closing calls would be performed with the reps to assist in the launching of this initiative.

Guaranteed Revenue Generation

During sales training for the team of the *Arkansas Times*, the salespeople were urged to set up a large amount of appointments with qualified "decision-makers" of area businesses that would be visited during the Blinder Group's return visit. The sales staff was supplied with proven support documents that reinforced the training as well as an appointment-setting script to assist them in setting up the calls.

Two key elements to ensure sales success of new initiatives like this is getting the advertisers full attendance at the meeting and their acceptance of validity of the concept in general. Some of these advertisers are new to marketing their business online and feel wary of trying new ideas. One of the most effective means of accomplishing attendance and acceptance is to introduce the advertiser to an industry respected "outside" consultant who has had success with similar programs, with similar businesses, in similar markets all across North America. That is why many media companies contract with the Blinder Group to perform "4-legged" sales training/closing calls with traditional ad reps assisting in the launch of programs like the one defined in this document.

Also, during these assisted, sales training/closing calls provided by the Blinder Group, the accompanying salesperson learns new, valuable techniques on how to sell innovative programs in a more effective manner. The Blinder Group has a proven track record of generating high "closing" ratios, resulting in significant revenue for client media companies that have deployed this form of advertising sales initiative.

The Results

With the Blinder Group Associate/ Trainer in the market for one full week, conducting 4-legged," sales training/closing calls with the reps, a 99% "closing ratio" was achieved during an initial visit with a local business owner. The total program generated over \$125,000 of new online revenue for this alternative weekly newspaper.

"By bringing in the Blinder Group, we were able to put the focus of our reps on digital sales," said Alan Leveritt, Publisher of the *Arkansas Times*. "Digital makes up 15%-18% of our print sales revenue—it's almost like adding a week of revenue to our income stream. It's very important to us. Plus, it's a lot of fun...it's sort of like we're in the daily newspaper business again. We certainly

don't ignore our weekly print product, but with the type of editorial we are doing online right now, we are posting 20 items a day of news items on our Web site."

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