

Inside Classified

Money Talks



Sales reps cash in with The Blinder Group's agenda

"Show me the money!" It's not just a cute catch phrase from the movie "Jerry Maguire." According to Mike Blinder, founder and president of The Blinder Group, money is the only true motivator for any sales representative, and that's what his company emphasizes in training programs designed to help newspapers maximize revenues through more effective sales of their multimedia assets. It's a philosophy that has helped The Blinder Group's clientele generate millions of dollars in new revenues, so maybe he's on to something.

"We help make traditional advertising reps believe more strongly in multimedia sales by showing them the money," Blinder said. "They are more likely to believe in the products they are selling once the advertiser buys something. It's that simple."

"What we do isn't brain surgery," he added. "We sell our expertise and our ability to get sales reps to believe in what they are being asked to sell."

Helping newspapers help themselves

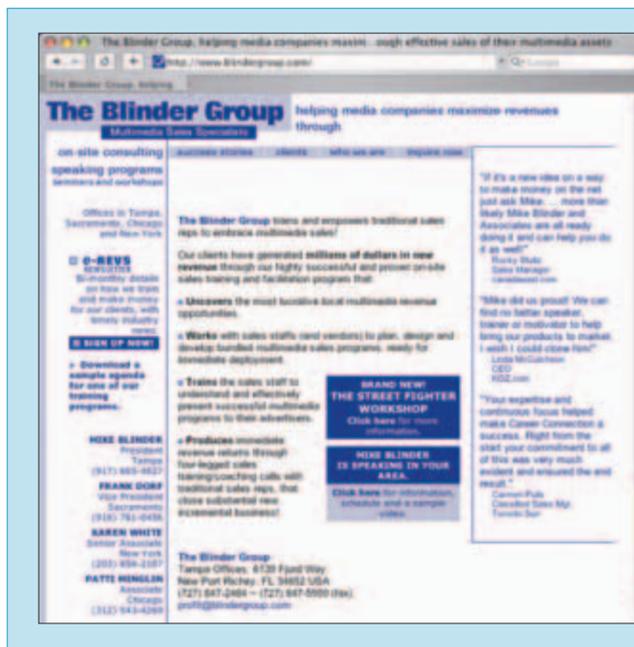
The Blinder Group, which maintains offices in Tampa, Fla., Sacramento, Calif., Chicago and New York City, was first established in 1999 as a consulting firm with the goal of helping businesses develop successful sales and marketing strategies. Currently, The Blinder Group performs training, designs sales programs and conducts seminars for clients all over the world.

The Blinder Group has endeared itself to client newspapers not by selling them on a particular product or service, but by working to obliterate a mindset that plagues far too many of them.

"I like to describe our company as 'culture shifters,'" Blinder said. "Moving from print to multimedia is a culture shift for most sales reps."

"Advertisers will buy the multimedia solutions already available at most newspapers," he added. "The problem is that the reps don't believe in these products. If they don't believe, then it's impossible to convince a customer to invest in the product."

Blinder observed that newspaper sales reps need to understand



Mike Blinder

that they are selling much more than the power of print.

"In today's advertising environment, they are multimedia solutions experts," he said.

Blinder also works to overcome the culture that permeates most newspapers.

"Newspapers were the only game in town for so long that it's hard for them to believe how competitive the advertising environment has become," he explained. "There are a lot of what have been labeled 'ankle-biters' out there, competitors capable of chipping away bit by bit at each of the advertising categories."

Online solutions at work

Blinder reports that his company's agenda is basically the same at every stop, whether its mission involves working with retail or classified sales representatives.

He did note, however, that its approach is more applicable to outside sales reps: "One of our mottoes is 'train in the car, not the classroom,' though we have worked with inside sales reps in the past. You have to be out in the car with the reps in order to convince them that these products can be sold."

Blinder emphasized the importance of positive energy.

"The first thing we do is come in and get the reps fired up, then we get the clients fired up," he said. "This makes the reps believe again in what they are selling."

"And once they're upbeat about what they have to sell, that's when it's time to show them the money," Blinder added. "You can give away prizes and play sales games with reps, but the No. 1 way to motivate them is by putting billing in the books."

"We understand that these people have families to support and that is accomplished with money," he continued. "Our goal is to put them in position to be successful by training them on the beauty of taking online products to market."

The Blinder Group uses the same three basic steps when working with newspapers to cultivate their multimedia assets.

"We begin by visiting the location and doing some initial training and strategic planning," Blinder explained. "Then we put together some sales collateral based on those sessions and return for a four-day market blitz that *always* generates money. In fact, I always guarantee at least four times our fees in new business and I haven't been wrong yet."

Focus on the sales reps

Blinder reiterated that while his initial contact is almost always with senior management, it's the sales reps he seeks to leave brimming with confidence.

"So often, we arrive to find sales reps feeling overwhelmed by the online products they're supposed to be selling," Blinder said. "Online managers have attempted to train them up on the technology involved in each of their products, and we tell them to forget about the technology."

"We train them down about technology and focus on audience because reach and frequency are what it's all about," he added. "I don't care if they go to a customer and admit to knowing absolutely nothing about the Internet. That's not important. What is important is that the customer is made aware of the audience online products have. That's what's most important, not the technology."

"We train the reps that it's OK to say 'I don't know' if asked how the Web works," Blinder continued. "I use an analogy I use in training when I ask the reps how many of them know how to run the press. When I get no show of hands, I then say 'Well, how can you then sell print advertising?' This seems to work, because the reps then begin to understand that they don't have to be experts on the media, simply the audience and message."

"For us, the magic is in showing reps the money and changing the culture at the newspaper," he added. "We see ourselves as a culture-shifting team that comes into town and leaves a trail of money behind us, as well as a bunch of excited sales reps."

"Mike's thoroughly pragmatic approach to the business of making money online was a refreshing change from the usual rhetoric that one hears from people who really don't know."

Bryan Cantley
Executive Director
Canadian Newspaper Association

Contact information

For more information about The Blinder Group, contact Mike Blinder at 727-847-2464 or mike@blindergroup.com.

The Blinder Group can be accessed via the Internet at www.blindergroup.com.

The Blinder Group
6139 Fjord Way
New Port Richey, FL 34652

Valuable Real Estate

Tennessee newspaper finds 90% new business in multimedia product

Imagine the possibilities. What would happen if a user came to a newspaper's Web site and, in addition to searching for a new home, could also research the community? Now, add a print publication that serves as the total resource for living in that community — for newcomers and folks just moving across town — and you have "Living Here," the solution developed by the management team at the Kingsport (Tenn.) Times-News.

Program overview

Content for the print edition included information about the area's various communities, along with lists of schools, churches, recreational facilities, utilities, local government and other useful information. The Times News developed a corresponding Web site that featured the same content as the print publication. In addition, its Web team took the existing online real estate platform and incorporated it into the online "Living Here" edition.

Not only could users search homes from the MLS database of homes, they could also learn per-

manent information about the areas they were investigating.

This entire initiative (print and online) was designed to assist *all* home owners as a way to learn more about the area in which they live (or plan to live). It was able to position itself among the real estate community and other associated businesses as an essential marketing tool in attracting local and global home buyers.

Sales strategy

In order to help facilitate sales and acceptance of this program with advertisers, the Times-News sales management team built an alliance with local organizations and civic and community leaders. The program was promoted as the newspaper's initiative to help strengthen the local economic base by promoting the benefits of the local communities. Letters of endorsement from these groups and leaders were used as part of the sales materials.

The Blinder Group returned to market several weeks prior to the publication date to assist the sales team with intro-

ducing this product to advertisers. Each business that purchased a display ad in the print publication was also listed for one entire year as a "Partner Business" within a business category online. The categories rotated throughout all the pages of the site. In addition to listing the advertiser's information, the listing was linked to a popup version of the display ad online. Senior sponsorship positions were also sold that included additional promotion online and in print for those advertisers.

Results

The new multimedia product brought in 90% new business and totaled more than \$85,000 in sales. The newspaper was able to get more than 33% over the open rates.

See this program live at <http://www.tricityhomes.com>.

For more information on the sales strategy of this program, contact George Coleman, advertising director at the Kingsport Times-News, at 423-392-1393 or gcoleman@timesnews.net.

For technical information, contact David Cate at 423-279-9417 or idav962@timesnews.net.