**Consultative Selling Requires Ready-to-Roll Solutions**

There was a time — and it wasn’t so very long ago — when advertising representatives had to be experts in one thing and one thing only — selling print ads in print publications. Upselling involved convincing customers to run larger print ads, more frequent print ads, color print ads or print ads in special sections. The competition included radio, television and other publications. And overcoming objections typically involved educating advertisers about the improved impact of larger, more frequent, full-color and special sections print ads.

The 21st-century newspaper advertising rep is a different animal altogether. While many of the strategies remain the same — upselling, standing apart from the competition, overcoming objections and closing the deal, to name a few —today’s ad reps are no longer in the business of selling ads.

Here is a sampling of the 21st century resources and strategies that all newspaper ad reps should have in their pockets or, better yet, on their laptops or tablets:

**Spec ads still rule.** In fact, they are more important than ever. Having spec ads — including Web ad presentations — on every sales call is key to making bigger sales and closing them in less time. Having the ability to put together print and online spec ad presentations quickly and easily, then sharing them with the customer during the sales call can make all the difference.

**Get a combination lock.** With the exponential growth of digital advertising, among the quickest routes to getting a lock on the competition and generating increased revenue is through the sale of Web and print combination ad packages. Having multimedia ad combos for the top advertising categories for each month at hand when approaching advertisers and prospects is an essential element of a winning sales strategy. The result? Increased revenue, an uptick in traffic on your publication’s Web site and satisfied advertisers who are eager to come back for more.

**Shape up.** Let’s face it: It’s hard to attract new advertisers or upsell longstanding customers with the same old same old. The first step to breaking free of advertising monotony? Think outside the box. Be prepared to show customers that, these days, print ads come in a variety of shapes, from bookends and goalposts to stairsteps and pyramids. These ads jump off the page, driving greater consumer response to the advertiser’s brand. And the unique positioning of these specialty ads means that they can be sold at a premium.

**Show ready-to-roll solutions.** If you’re selling solutions, you have to be ready to show customers what you’ve got. And that means arriving at sales calls with actual layouts that offer a variety of media, ad positions and sizes, and meet a variety of needs.

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