**“Native Advertising” a Natural for Homegrown Businesses**

Native advertising is the talk of the town these days, and for good reason. Done well and done right, native advertising — which encompasses a range of techniques for embedding sponsored content into an editorial piece — can be a powerful branding tool for advertisers of every stripe and a winning sales tool for publications of every type.

While not a novel concept, the strategy of inserting sponsored content into editorial has become increasingly popular in Web advertising. Examples are everywhere on Facebook, Twitter and Tumblr. But what has not received as much notice are the significant ways that native advertising can benefit print publications, particularly smaller and community publications, and the local businesses that are their core advertisers.

First, however, a word about what native advertising is and is not. It is not advertorial, which is 100% promotional copy written in an editorial style. And while it is always transparent, meaning that it is labeled as sponsored content, it is also understated and non-intrusive — particularly in contrast to traditional ads, which are designed to “call out” to consumers. But understated does not mean lackluster. In fact, the key to successful native advertising is first-rate editorial content that is both engaging and enlightening — and as attractive to readers as it is to advertisers.

Some of the most effective native advertising techniques are also among the simplest. For example, a local business can sponsor a print or online feature whose subject matter corresponds with its expertise or industry. Another technique is to quote local business owners in features or attribute tips or advice to them, both of which establish the advertisers as experts in their fields. Some newspapers have helped members of the business community launch ongoing blogs, while others designate space for advertisers to present their views on compelling topics. An added benefit is that all of these techniques work well in both print and digital formats, and are extremely effective tools for cross-promotion.

The bottom line? If it is clear that the content is sponsored and if that content is newsworthy and noteworthy, readers will engage and advertisers’ will be “rebranded” — as experts, leaders and vital community “voices.” Why? Because despite today’s challenging media landscape, community publications — particularly newspapers —remain highly regarded and trusted sources of information, opinion and opportunity. They have tremendous value in the community and lend credibility to advertisers’ assertions.

Another major advantage to native advertising? Since its form and function are so different from other types of advertising, there is little risk of cannibalization. In fact, native advertising is a great add-on to any advertising program.

So if you’re in the market for something new and different, consider “going native.”

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