**Spec Ads Streamline Holiday Ad Sales**

With the holiday season around the corner, retailers are gearing up for the big rush and advertising departments are gearing up for the big push. For many merchants, the holiday season can generate anywhere from 20 to 40 percent of yearly sales, so business owners are understandably eager to captivate shoppers and capitalize on the opportunity to boost their bottom lines. Similarly, publications of every size in every market greet the oncoming holiday bustle with a flurry of advertising activity — prepping seasonal special sections, gearing up for gift guides, generating holiday greetings and — hopefully — turning out a multitude of magnificent spec ads.

While spec ads are always among an ad rep’s most trusted companions, during the holiday season, they are elevated to the status of BFF. Not only do artfully prepared ad layouts grab advertisers’ attention and cultivate their interest in your publication, but also they encourage business owners to imagine a range of advertising options they had not previously considered. When presented with a finished layout that links their goods and/or services to the holiday shopping season via elegant images and imaginative copy, advertisers are primed to say, “Yes!” And once they are engaged with the spec ad, they are far more open to hearing about other opportunities, such as print or multi-platform campaigns, themed pages and sponsorships.

For non-retail businesses, holiday greeting ads continue to be in demand and spec ads can slash the time it takes to close these end-of-year deals. Presenting advertisers with completed layouts not only provides them with visual validation of what they are purchasing, but it offers an effective strategy for avoiding duplication.

Spec ads are also a powerful way to introduce advertisers to new holiday season products. For example, a Pennsylvania publication recently developed a multiple-advertiser page that served as a wrap for its many Black Friday inserts. Since the vast majority of Thanksgiving Day inserts promote national retail chains, the wrap features local, independent businesses and provides them with the perfect vehicle for bolstering their visibility in advance of the biggest shopping day of the year. In the cases of a multiple-advertiser layout such as the Black Friday wrap, advertisers are far more likely to buy when they can see both the overall layout and their own piece of “real estate” on the page.

The key to both creating appealing spec ads and raising the odds that they will sell is in the preparation. Successful spec ads are not only visually engaging, but are consistent with an advertiser’s industry, image and objectives. With a little investment up front and a lot of creativity in the middle, spec ads are sure to win in the end.

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