

# Finding profitable ideas

By JERRY BELLUNE

I've just returned from two thought-provoking sessions that produced many ideas for revenue building, cost cutting, selling online and in niches and other bottom line strategies. The first was the Nuz-Biz.com annual summit in Tampa, Fla.

As a group of newspaper consultants, we come together once a year to discuss what our clients are doing to cope with the recession that we can pass along to other clients to keep them profitable.

For more than seven hours, Bob Bobber, Ken Blum, Ed Henninger, John Peterson, Kevin Slimp and I discussed strategies. I drove home with four pages of notes. The second was an SCPA Publishers Roundtable in Columbia. It was sponsored by the S.C. Press Association and SNPA. For more than four hours, 14 of us discussed what we are doing to control costs, increase revenues and attract readers to our print and online editions. I drove home with another four pages of single-spaced notes.

This week, we came together with our staff for a half-day 2010 planning meeting. We discussed the strategies from these two sessions and put priorities on the best of them.

If you're not participating in Publishers Roundtables and holding annual planning sessions with your staff, it's high time you started. I'm going to share with you the best ideas discussed. So pull up a chair and take a seat. Take notes and share them with your team.

1. Publisher Patricia Larson of the Fort Mill Times offers her advertisers a package of advertising opportunities that include: Her newspaper and its special promotions and sections; niche publications such as her "Newcomers" and "Seniors" magazines; and direct mail campaigns targeted by ZIP code and demographics.

Advertising agreements cover 12 months. The total investment is divided by 12 and billed monthly – just like the power company. This helps advertisers anticipate their monthly billing, whether they do a lot of advertising or a little in any particular month. For a look at Patricia's Web site and to contact her, go to <http://www.fortmilltimes.com>. Fort Mill works with a printer who buys direct mail lists that fit the advertisers' needs. The newspaper writes and designs the copy; the printer takes it from there. The average direct mail campaign costs less than \$500, Larson said.

2. Publisher Eric Hancock of Free Times, a Columbia alternative weekly newspaper, reported he did something similar for the Time Warner cable company. He sold them a 12-month package in print, online, in special sections and their home, college and restaurant niche publications with even monthly billing.

3. Several newspaper publishers said they offer to post PDF files of advertisers inserts on their sites for a small additional fee. That's another way you can provide additional advertising exposure at an affordable rate.

4. Publisher Susan Rowell of The Lancaster News publishes a twice-yearly print and online "Medical Guide" that's all ads. Her advertisers are physicians, dentists, pharmacists and other health care providers. You can see her 2009 Medical Guide at: <http://bit.ly/16gnmL>.

5. Publisher Steve Robertson of the Horry Independent in Conway, sells an advertising coupon book with 40 coupons worth \$4,000 for \$295. The first coupon is worth \$295 so advertisers get their investment back the first month. You can visit Steve's site and contact him by going to <http://www.horryindependent.com>.

6. Publisher Cody Sossaman of the Gaffney Ledger has made his school news pages pay. Cody sells local professionals and business owners sponsorship ads for \$30 a week. That may not sound like much per ad but sell 10 of them on a long-term agreement and you've just added \$300 a week to your advertising revenues.

7. Publisher Ellen Priest of the Summerville Journal Scene sells a special "Destination Downtown" shopping guide for local merchants with a map. To view her Web page and contact her, go to <http://www.journalscene.com>.

8. General Manager Bob Bobber of the Lake Wales (Fla.) News generates \$1,300 a month selling online banners for \$250 a month, skyscrapers for \$200, buttons for \$100.

Is this a strategy you could use to boost your Web site's advertising rates?