

## Participation in Community Events: 'Essential to Success'

By Sean Ireland

Health-care professionals can tell you about the general health of a patient by checking a few key indicators: weight, blood pressure, heart rate, and cholesterol and blood sugar levels.

Newspaper pros similarly can tell you about the general health of a newspaper by looking at some of its vital signs: paid circulation, classified ad lineage, retail advertising totals, and the size and economic condition of the newspaper's community.



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And just as a doctor will advise a patient on ways to stay healthy – exercise, healthy diet, sufficient sleep – an expert in the newspaper industry can offer sound advice for keeping a publication healthy. Vital content, engaging design and a hard-charging sales staff are part of the prescription for a hearty newspaper.

Newspapers also need regular doses of public relations, especially when they can be combined with an injection of new revenue. The [Gwinnett Daily Post](#) of Lawrenceville, Ga., has discovered a way that the two go hand-in-hand: a quarterly health fair backed up by a special health-care section.

“We feel that community public relations is one of the keys to our success as a profitable daily newspaper,” said Janie Roling, major account representative for the Daily Post. “The Gwinnett Daily Post prides itself on having the support of Gwinnett County, as well as the surrounding counties that we reach. In a time when many newspapers are losing circulation and advertisers, we are happy to report that our circulation is still strong and our clients are very happy and successful. We take the role as the ‘community’ newspaper very, very seriously and feel that any outside and out-of-the-ordinary participation in community events is essential to our success and their success.”

Gwinnett County is located about 25 miles northeast of Atlanta. In just 40 years, the county has grown from mostly rural farmland to bustling suburb of the big city, and, now, is evolving into its own metropolitan area. The Daily Post has been growing right along with it, with weekday circulation now topping 62,788.

Efforts such as the Daily Post's quarterly health fairs are fueling that growth.

The newspaper produces the one-day fairs in conjunction with a special editorial section called HealthSource. Combined, they bring in more than \$100,000 in annual revenue.

Each fair is held at the Mall of Georgia. The mall, the largest in Georgia, receives about 250,000 visitors per weekend, and thousands of them visit booths in the Daily Post's health fairs, usually held on Saturdays from 10 a.m. to 7 p.m.

It's a good audience for health-care advertisers to reach. Mall statistics indicate that 80 percent of the shoppers live in metro Atlanta or within 50 miles of the mall, and their average household income is \$84,362. Good news for the newspaper as well: 63 percent of Daily Post readers are frequent Mall of Georgia shoppers.

When visiting one of the newspaper's health fairs, those shoppers have access to a variety of health-related services. "In the past we've offered such things as flu shots, blood pressure screenings, samples of health-food ideas and drinks, eye exams, chiropractic exams and chair massages," Roling said.

The services are provided by about 20 or so vendors who pay for booths at each fair. Vendors also are able to provide information about their businesses, promotional items and free samples.

Many also buy advertising in HealthSource. Special packages are available for businesses that commit to being in the section and the fair four times. "The content (HealthSource) is advertorial and public interest specific to the theme of the section," Roling said. "We have about a 50/50 split of clients who advertise regularly and those who only do these fairs. Overall everyone who participates always has good things to say."

HealthSource is produced in about a week by the Daily Post staff. "It's distributed in our Sunday newspaper (circulation of 104,640) the week prior to each fair and at the service desk at the Mall of Georgia and also the Gwinnett Daily Post booth," Roling said.

Roling said organization and set-up for the fair is labor intensive. The newspaper and the mall have a partnership, but the Daily Post pays rent for the space. "Our assistant organizes the contracts, the revenue, certificates of insurance, ordering of the furniture, etc., and probably spends about 20-25 hours overall on this task," Roling said.

House ads in the newspaper and on its Web site, [www.gwinnettdaily.com](http://www.gwinnettdaily.com), start about three weeks before a fair is scheduled. The mall marketing staff produces signs and window clings for promotion on site.

It's a big undertaking, but the results in PR and revenue are well worth it. "You have to have organization, teamwork and a very strong sales force," Roling said. "You need to make sure the event is hosted at a high-traffic venue, and first-timers need to give themselves plenty of time."

*For more information, contact Janie Roling at (770) 963-9205.*

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