

idea exchange

Relationship Leads to Exclusive Opportunities with Chamber of Commerce



Sean Ireland

By Sean Ireland

In an economy like this one, no stone should go unturned, especially one right in your own back yard.

Virtually every newspaper has some sort of relationship with its local chamber of commerce, even if it's just an arrangement to publish photos of ribbon cuttings at new businesses and from other chamber events. Leaving it at that level, however, could mean leaving a lot on the table, for both organizations.

The [Anniston \(Ala.\) Star](#) has developed a strong bond with the local Calhoun County Chamber of Commerce that has paid off with revenue and promotional opportunities for both of them. For other newspapers, the partnership can be a model for what they could build, if they're willing to put in the legwork. "It takes a lot of work and effort to not only develop, but maintain a good relationship with a local chamber," said Robert Jackson, vice president for sales at The Star. "It takes both parties being willing to engage in the type of effort to make it prosperous."

The Star has long made that effort. Both Jackson and other officials at The Star have served on the chamber's board of directors, and "there's a longtime connection between this paper and the chamber and civic involvement," Jackson said. The Calhoun County chamber returns that effort with its own strong commitment to doing business with local companies whenever possible.

For The Star, that means it has the exclusive opportunity to produce – and sell advertising in – a variety of chamber products. Among them: an annual directory of chamber members, a monthly newsletter, a county map, event-related promotional pieces, such as the guide for the chamber's annual business expo, and, starting last year, a quality-of-life magazine highlighting Calhoun County. "This product is distributed in the newcomers packet that is sent out to people and companies that may move here," Jackson said. "It's a primer for our area."

The magazine is a chief example of the success that can come from close cooperation. The chamber's staff works with the newspaper to gather photos and information for editorial content. The newspaper's niche products manager, an editorial position that works exclusively in the advertising department, helps in that effort and then puts it all together with the advertising sold by The Star's staff.

Special Report on Social Media

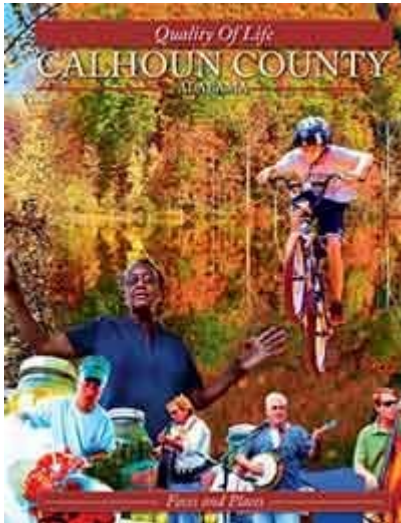
While many newspapers are trying to embrace social media (Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, etc.) as a tool to garner more eyeballs to their products, these very tools are becoming more of an issue in the workplace.

The SNPA eBulletin would like to examine this in an upcoming issue.

We'd like your help:

- Please e-mail cindy@snpa.org with information about how social media is affecting your workplace.
- And, if you have a policy for dealing with the issue, please e-mail a copy of your policy to cindy@snpa.org or fax to (404) 252-9135.

Thank you!



The first chamber magazine The Star produced last January was 86 pages, printed on glossy paper and had factual information about elected officials, government and utility contact information and demographic breakdowns of the area as well as profiles of local people and businesses and features about attractions, recreation and arts and culture.

The magazine was so successful that the chamber has decided it wants it done annually rather than on the 18-to-24 month schedule it had been on when produced by another company. "We spend approximately six months collecting the necessary amount of photographic and editorial content that's needed for the layout," Jackson said. "We sell it for a four-week period in May, and, to take the burden off the customer financially, we do split payments in June and November. It's a big project but revenue numbers are high and so are the profit margins.

"One of the benefits to the chamber working with us is that we have a revenue-sharing agreement that gives the chamber 10 percent of the gross sales," Jackson said. "That gives us the advantage over competitors, besides

our distribution and position as being the leaders in reaching our market."

The arrangement gives The Star an entrée with local businesses that don't typically buy display advertising, such as heavy industrial companies that usually only run employment classifieds. "For the newspaper," Jackson said, "you have a new revenue stream from nontraditional advertisers that are chamber members that want to advertise in these products."

The commitment from both organizations is ultimately what makes it successful. "You have to work together to create an environment where it's win-win for both parties," Jackson emphasized. "The chamber gets a lot of promotion at no cost and a percentage of the gross advertising they allow you to sell. For the newspaper, it's new revenue streams. Our sales staff just loves the opportunity to participate because it allows them to go out and reach new customers, and they're selling the newspaper and support of the chamber in the process."

For more information, contact Robert Jackson at (256) 235-9206.

SNPA eBulletin 4-16-09