

Upickem Helps Statesboro Paper Generate Monthly Contest Revenue



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Newspapers have long offered special print sections featuring adorable photos of the babies and grandbabies of readers.

More recently, pet sections have become popular, with people sending in their favorite photos of their beloved Fido and Fluffy.

These sections often bring in modest amounts of revenue collected from entry fees and limited advertising – mostly small ads from businesses that regularly appear in the newspaper.

The Statesboro (Ga.) Herald has taken this basic idea and expanded it into an online effort that produces revenue on a monthly basis by targeting very specific audiences and providing advertisers with a dynamic multimedia platform to reach them.

The Herald is using Upickem, an application designed by Second Street Media Solutions, to develop, promote and administer online contests through its Web site, www.statesboroherald.com. Through the contests, the Herald has earned new revenue that in some months has helped it make its revenue goals, and has registered thousands of people for its Web site. “It really has been a home run for our media company,” said Julie Foley, regional online marketing director for Morris Multimedia, owner of the Herald.

It all began simply enough in 2007 when Foley was contacted by Second Street about using Upickem for a weekly online football contest. Statesboro is home to Georgia Southern University, and Foley, a big fan of the six-time national champion Eagles, decided to give it a try.

“We were able to get a sponsor every week,” she said. “It was a no-brainer, it was so easy. We generated online revenue all three months.”

That opened eyes at the newspaper, and armed with research indicating that online advertisers are shifting their focus from brand advertising to promotions and contests, the Herald decided to try some other applications. By August of 2008, the paper had run 10 contests, including Cutest Kids, Cutest Couples, Pet Idol, a bikini contest and others. “All of these ideas sort of stemmed from doing one thing that was a no-brainer in our community,” Foley said. “If we have people that are interested in photos and blogs, wouldn’t they be interested in a contest? It evolved from sports and it sort of steamrolled from there.”

To varying degrees each of the contests has worked. The Cutest Kids online contest, held in spring, was the Herald’s most popular in ‘08. It drew 500 photo submissions, 10 advertising sponsors and thousands of votes from moms, dads and grandparents. It also generated about 2,000 new e-mail addresses from people who had to register at the newspaper’s site to be able to submit a photo for the contest or vote in it.

The newspaper pitched the contest to pediatricians, dentists, ladies workout gyms and other advertisers interested in reaching parents of young children, most of them businesses that had done little to no advertising in the paper before.

Those that signed on as sponsors received multimedia advertising campaigns that were targeted directly at their

most likely customers. In print, promotional pieces about the contest featured their logos. Online, sponsors got a flash ad on the contest page that linked to their own Web sites or, if they had no Web site, a page created by the Herald about their businesses.

Everything the Herald does to promote the contests – from print ads and stories to Web features such as video promotion, includes sponsor information.

“Our revenue model is to have multiple sponsors and multiple levels of sponsorship,” Foley said. “Going to them with a specific target audience in mind makes it so hard for them to say no to you.”

Each contest has prizes, usually donated by the sponsors as part of their advertising contracts. Foley said the prizes must be significant enough to get people to participate. For its Pet Idol contest, which required the submission of photos to the Web site, the Herald offered a top prize of a \$100 gift card from one of its sponsors. Winners in eight other categories got lesser prizes.

Once people have registered on the Herald’s Web site, the paper has a list of accurate e-mail addresses to which it can promote other contests, newspaper offers or sponsor advertising.

Foley said Upickem can be used for any number of different contests. It can be customized to require payment to submit an entry to a contest or vote, though the Herald has not done this. She also said that newspapers of virtually any size can produce the contests, such as Cutest Kids or Pet Idol, with few problems.

She suggested having a point person for each contest to coordinate with editorial and advertising departments on the details, sales and promotion of the contests. “It’s so easy and so fun. It’s fun for reps to sell, fun for advertisers because it’s interactive, and it’s fun for the community. Why not give it a try?” Foley said. “It’s not expensive. It’s almost like it’s risk free. If you do the things I outlined, you will have success. People love contests.”

For more information, contact Julie Foley at (912) 489-9457.

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