

Mastering the Advetorial

The first few attempts of most any new *Midnight Engineer* or other small scale startup into using high circulation slick magazine advertising are virtually certain to turn out extremely disappointing at best. And an outright disaster at worst.

The typical reasons for ad failure include unrealistic expectations, inexperience, a lack of targeting, ongoing exposure factors, overpayment, and the many tiny insider details which can gang up to cause you serious grief.

I personally *never* seem to have been able to get it right. Not once have I ever run anything major in the way of print advertising that I'd care to brag about. Instead, I have found two very useful alternate tools which sometimes can supplement or outright replace conventional ads. At the least, these two should be able to extend your ad budget and make it go a lot further.

The tools are the *Advetorial* and the *Editorial Exchange*.

Using RCF scams

Before going into some advetorial secrets, let us look at an even more fundamental underlying tool that I've found to be *extremely* useful in an amazing number of ways. Just what determines which direction your cash flows in any transaction? In lots of cases, the "obvious" answer that "they" think is good for you is not necessarily the only one possible. If you get creative enough, I'll define a *Reversed Cash Flow*, or *RCF Scam* as any method you could conjure up to cause the nickels to head on out exactly in the opposite of the "usual" direction. And preferably into your own pockets. Knowing and using relevant and workable RCF scams can be the key secrets to a successful *Midnight Engineering* venture or other small scale tech startup.

For instance, how much would a furnished vacation cottage in the deep woods set you back? Be in the right place at the right time, and your US Forest Service or a similar state agency might pay you to stay in one as a fire lookout. They'll even throw in some free helicopter rides, front row center seating for slurry bomber shows, and a few interesting people as well.

Want a few hundred extra bucks (or similar perks) a year in exchange for drinking beer an hour or two each week? Become a volunteer fireman.

Would you like discounts on all sorts of software and hardware plus lots of freebie technical information? Form a user group or club with a few friends and let others know about it. Casting as wide a net as you can.

Tired of staggering BBS telephone bills? Have one of the

large information utilities hire you to be a sysop or an information provider. Besides free access to many goods and services, they will also pay you a percentage royalty everytime someone else calls up to use your part of the board. The monthly checks can be big ones on a popular enough service. Given enough personal value added.

Don't care for the full cost of laser printer toner and cartridges? Become a toner tester for several leading refill supply houses, and they will pay you to use their toner. You can now have negative toner costs.

Better yet, all those scrap pages you have printed while testing their toner: Instead of paying your town for trash pickup or hiring someone to carry them to the dump, arrange the pages in groups of one hundred, bind them, and then charge unsuspecting *Blatant Opportunist* readers \$24.50 to haul them off one volume at a time.

Scams? Yes. And, no, they don't apply to everybody. And any specific RCF scam certainly will only work for a scant few midnight engineers and then only for some of the time. So, you'll have to find some of your own.

And your selected scams do have to fit into the big picture of who you are and where you are heading. But, if you do tune yourself into the RCF ploy, and always ask yourself how the cash flow for any transaction could be reversed, you'll be amazed at how many ways this virtually unknown tool can be put to work for you.

One of the greatest and most general of RCF Scams involves...

Applying the Advetorial

All those words and pictures on a magazine page. Who pays for them, and which way does the cash flow?

Well, if it is an *ad*, the cash flows into the magazine. The ads are often largely ignored by most readers and are felt to be both a nuisance and outright hype.

If it is *editorial material*, the cash often can flow out of the magazine. Editorial material is often considered by the reader to be both useful and informative, and orders of magnitude more "true" than what they usually perceive in most commercial ads.

The four major purposes of editorial material in a magazine are...

- (A) to provide useful information to the end reader that is hard to find elsewhere;
- (B) to provide bunches of wannabe wish fulfillment for the end reader;

(C) to provide escape or fantasy or some other reader reality avoidance of one kind or another;

Or, rather sadly...

(D) space-wasting abject trash used to keep their ads from crashing into one another and guaranteeing a special lower postal rate.

We will focus mostly on (A) here, since this most closely meets my own needs as author and advertiser.

I'll call an *advertorial* any editorial material that purportedly can provide highly useful and apparently complete end reader information not easily to be found elsewhere. While also leaving a very strong perception in the reader's mind of who you are and what you have for sale. Along with a very strong urge to whip out their VISA card.

Oversimplified, by printing your advertorial, the magazine will pay you to advertise in it. A RCF scam for sure.

Better yet, the reader response to an advertorial is usually far better than for an ad. Thus, one single properly done advertorial can easily do the work of several ads.

The only little trick in repeatedly pulling advertorials off lies in how you handle...

The Blatancy Factor

Just how much can you get away with in an advertorial? This depends entirely upon the magazine, its slant, its editor, and its readers. Needless to say, if you go too far, you'll end up in deep trouble. All is lost if the editor throws you out of the magazine; if the people paying for the real ads complain too loud; or if an incensed reader suddenly discovers "This puffery is nothing but self-serving ad hype."

At one end of the spectrum are all those "get rich quick" magazines in which virtually anything might be acceptable as editorial copy. With most of those controlled circulation industry trade journals, your stories can often be obviously self-serving, so long as you have an overall "technical" rather than a "sales" focus.

With most newsstand magazines, a tastefully done self-serving paragraph plus a personal product mention or two is usually reasonable and acceptable. On more scholarly publications, you can get away with very little in the way of advertorials.

You can further reduce any potential objectionability of your own product mentions by including those of your competitors and by revealing lots of additional sources for whatever the subject matter of your story is.

Other times, humor can be used to purposely point out your hype. "By one of those astounding coincidences that seem to infest this column..."

As to the reader side, by far the key consideration to your successfully done advertorial is *fair value received*. The reader should walk away from the story with lots of welcome and useful information that would be difficult for them to find elsewhere. Stand-alone information which *clearly* requires zero further involvement or input from you as author or advertiser.

At the same time, you want them to end up feeling that it would be very foolish indeed for them to not get some more from where what they already got came from.

The two classic sales rules of "give them something extra" and "leave them wanting more" certainly apply here. If possible, offer some free something like an insider secrets brochure or a software listing or a reference card. Or a voice helpline or an electronic BBS. Something that clearly "won't fit" in the magazine that they

gotta have. In the absolute worst sort of way.

Ideally, your advertorial should also be strong enough on its own to make your readers either save their magazine forever, or else tear out your part of it.

Another useful ploy is to try and seamlessly work in unrelated product references that clearly have nothing to do with the story topic. Of course, no *Midnight Engineering* reader would fall for such a vile and despicable ploy.

For our contest this month, just add in some useful manner to our ongoing RCF scam dialog. There will be all of those usual *Incredible Secret Money Machine* book prizes, with one all expense covered (FOB Thatcher, AZ) *tinaja* quest for two going to the very best of all.

Let's hear from you.

Editorial Exchanges

Another useful ad tool is the *editorial exchange*. In an editorial exchange, you might accept ad space as partial payment for editorial materials you submit as an author.

Just about any magazine is always in a cash crunch, and paying top author rates is often near the neglected bottom of a very long list of priorities. To the editor, your editorial exchange prevents hard cash from flowing out of the magazine. To the author, the editorial exchange can very dramatically reduce their ad costs.

This happens because the perceived out-of-pocket loss value of ad space to an editor is usually far lower than the going list price for the same ad space. Especially if your ad space would go unsold anyway or might solve some layout or no-show problem.

To an author, your ad costs are far lower than normal using an editorial exchange. Which often can turn what could have been a marginal return into a positive one.

Certain magazine editors welcome and seek out these editorial exchanges. Others refuse to consider them at any time for any reason. In general, the smaller, the newer, and the more hungry the magazine, the more likely they are to favor an exchange.

One crucial rule: *Never use editorial exchanges for total payment*. Always be sure to insist on at least a partial cash payment, as consistent with the value of the material to the magazine's readers and your own involvement.

To do otherwise is working on spec and you could end up giving your time and effort away for nothing. It is exceptionally easy for an author to get ripped off. If you are not being treated fairly, go elsewhere. There's over 65,000 magazines and journals in print these days.

Lots of extra details on all of this can be found in my *Incredible Secret Money Machine* and in the additional resources mentioned below.

There's quite a few possibilities here. ♦

Microcomputer pioneer and guru Don Lancaster is the author of 35 books and countless articles. Don maintains a US technical helpline you'll find at (520) 428-4073, besides offering all his own books, reprints and consulting services.

Don has a free new catalog crammed full of his latest insider secrets waiting for you. Your best calling times are 8-5 weekdays, Mountain Standard Time.

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