



Yellow Pages Advertising

How to get the same deals as the big guys

By Sue Weinman

When you're a large Yellow Pages (YP) advertiser with a big budget, everything is negotiable, whether the advertising is handled locally or serviced regionally/nationally by an agency. But since "large" accounts are defined by YP publishers as those advertising in at least three states and a minimum of 20 directories, how do you get a good deal when you're a smaller operator with only one or two facilities?

YP advertising is still one of the top lead generators for storage facilities, often responsible for bringing in as many as 80 percent of new customers. The ad sales representative knows this, but he also knows "storage" is a competitive heading. So his main goal is to entice you to buy an ad that puts you as close to first position as possible. That could mean big bucks, and you might not see much of a return investment with only one or two locations to split the cost. Here are some helpful hints to help you maximize your YP budget.

It's About Competition

What you understand—and the sales rep may not—is self-storage is a location-specific business. In most cases, your customer will only be willing to travel 3 to 5 miles to get to you. So buying the "double truck" ad (two full pages that face each other) that puts you in first position under the storage heading could be a huge over-buy. If ABC Storage is your direct competitor, its ad is the only one you need to worry about, regardless of where it falls in the section or its size.

Get Statistics

All local YP reps are going to tell you their directory is the one used most, so make them put their money where their mouth is. Most publishers track usage statistics for their directories and conduct research for the top 150 headings, one of which is storage. So ask to see the results. The data can range from heading use in a specific directory to measured call counts for one or more display ads under a particular category.

If available, request a copy of the study itself. You want to know it was performed by an independent third-party research firm. Also ask for a coverage map to be sure the directory does a good job covering your 3- to 5-mile, customer-base radius.

Cut to the Rates

Most YP publishers offer pricing incentives for new and upgraded business. A local rep probably won't tell you that immediately; but remember, he works for the publisher. National agencies, on the other hand, work for *you*.

Ask for rates on all the sizes you would like to consider, but don't settle for the first price offered. Play hardball—you know what you can afford, and you need to know you're buying the most competitive ad size within your budget.

For example, tell the rep you may want a half page, but it's just outside your price range. Since most discounts will phase out to the full rate over a period of time anyway (typically two to three years), it's still in the rep's best interests to give you a discounted rate. Chances are you won't want to shrink and lose your position, even once you have to pay full price. Before you make your final decision, always ask if you're getting the best rate possible.

A Word About Positioning

Priority placement goes first to advertisers buying large ads, such as double trucks. Within that ad family, the advertiser who was first to buy a double truck and continues to renew it will always get first position within the heading. Anytime he declines to renew that exact ad size, he will lose his priority positioning.

For example, let's say Ed's Storage has the second-position, full-page ad in the heading. If the company doesn't renew for a full page this year but wants it *next* year, it will fall to last position because it will have lost seniority.

Independent or Utility?

Every area has a "utility" directory, which is published by the local phone carrier and generally the most widely used. However, most areas are also covered by one or more "secondary" directories, published by independents. While the utility directory is pre-dominant, the secondaries do get used, and their rates are much lower. The independent reps also have

more flexibility to discount prices, so don't be afraid to go for it. You may be able to get good positioning at good rates.

Color and White Knockout

When you have to go with a smaller ad, more potential competitors will fall on the same page as you. Getting your ad to stand out with color or white knockout could be your best bet. If you decide to go with a full-page ad, you only face one competitor, so color is not necessary.

Artwork

The YP publisher offers to provide free design for your ad, but remember he works for your competitor as well. This results in a cookie-cutter look for everyone. It may be worth the investment to have a third-party professional design your ad. If your artwork isn't eye-catching or copy doesn't speak to customers' needs within two to three seconds, it could cost a lot more in lost business.

Don't Ask, Don't Get

There are some freebies that may be available from the publisher—if you're savvy enough to ask. YP studies have shown that a second, smaller display ad could increase call volume considerably in crowded headings. If you're buying a display ad near the front of the heading, ask for a second ad no charge. It could be anything from a small display to an in-column ad.

Call-Tracking Numbers

Ask your local rep for a call-tracking number. This is a special phone number you use only in your YP ad. It ties in to your regular phone line, but all calls on the number are tracked, and you get a monthly report. Most publishers offer call-tracking numbers, and it's a great tool to measure the effectiveness of your YP advertising. It's especially recommended to new advertisers.

When it comes to YP, get the best bang for your buck in the right directories with a stand-out ad that falls in the most competitive position you can afford. Follow these tips, and you can become your own Yellow Pages expert. **ISS**

Sue Weinman, senior account executive, represents the Yellow Pages Division of The Michaels/Wilder Group, an advertising agency that specializes in Yellow Pages, Internet and recruitment advertising. Based in Phoenix, the award-winning firm is celebrating its 16th year of business thanks to a loyal client base that includes hundreds of self-storage owners and managers. For more information, call 800.423.6468; visit www.michaelswilder.com.