

Publishers: mark your turf

A couple of outsiders show us what real promotion looks like

BY SCOTT BULLOCK

I remember a joke my minister shared that has stayed with me for 40 years now. A parishioner, named Shamus, was complaining to the preacher that God certainly could not exist because he had been praying every night for 10 years begging God to let him win the lottery. The minister probed, "Every night?"

"Yes, Father."

"Ten years?"

"Yes, Father."

"If you win, do you plan to tithe?"

"Yes, Father."

The minister looked a bit perplexed. "Shamus, have you bought a lottery ticket?"

"No, Father, I have not."

The joke may not be that funny, but the point was made: Faith alone is sometimes not enough. Even my minister was acknowledging that simply praying for things to miraculously improve was probably not a winning strategy. God helps those who help themselves.

Fast forward to the streets of Toronto, summer of 2005. There, on the TTC transit shelter is a remarkable advertisement for *OK!* magazine, which made its Canadian debut on Aug. 8. But that's not all; TV ads for *OK!* bombard me every night. According to CEO Christian Toksvig, *OK!* will spend \$2 million on consumer marketing in Canada this year. Dave German, director of sales at Comag (*OK!*'s newsstand distributor in Canada), claims over 6,000 checkout pockets have already been installed, with an additional 4,000 planned by year's end. Plus, aggressive point-of-purchase promotions with key Canadian magazine retailers like Shoppers Drug Mart, Gateway, Loblaws, Wal-Mart, and HDS Retail have been booked.

Not to be outdone, Torstar launched the *Weekly Scoop* on Oct. 3. According to publisher Kathryn Swan, newsstand distributor DSI has already secured over 13,000 premium checkout positions at major Canadian grocery and drug store chains. "We're spending close to \$2.5 million over the next 12 months on advertising and newsstand promotions. We totally get how important it is."

When was the last time you saw a Canadian magazine aggressively marketing itself on TTC shelters or using outdoor advertising? A few notable campaigns come to mind, such as the launch of *Wish*, or the fabulous cross-section of the beaver by *Maclean's* a few years ago. However, the examples are few and far between. Prologix, the delivery agent for magazine

wholesalers here in the Toronto market, offers poster advertising, or complete truck wraps, on 130 magazine delivery trucks. According to Larry Payne, vice-president of operations, the last Canadian magazine that purchased space was *Chatelaine*, nearly a year ago. So who advertises on our magazine delivery trucks? Gretzky's Restaurant, that's who. Maybe another Read Canadian Magazines campaign might do us all some good.

The question is: does advertising work? As publishers, we certainly proclaim to General Motors, Procter & Gamble and Absolut Vodka that it works

to" or, "Prove to me it will work." Thank God the advertisers who sustain us all believe that good ad campaigns are good business.

Many years ago, when *Toronto Life* launched the "red books" (the digest-sized, expanded-service component to the award-winning city magazine), a deal was struck with Pattison Outdoor. It was a proud day for the *TL* team to see its trademark red on billboards in strategic locations around town, where readers and advertisers lived, worked and played. Posters were also plastered on construction boardings all over town. *Marketing Magazine* gushed about "guerrilla marketing" but the publisher simply called it "marking our territory". It may be a bit crude, but even dogs understand that it's important to stake a claim to some turf.

Perhaps we are on the cusp of a new golden era in magazine marketing here in Canada. The bold launch of *OK!* and the aggressive launch plans of Torstar's *Weekly Scoop* may show us the way. Consumer magazine marketers in Canada are quietly celebrating that a British interloper and a Toronto newspaper publisher are making a powerful statement about the importance of marketing magazines to generate paid circulation. And, the *Weekly Scoop*'s incredibly sexy launch party in Toronto in late September reminded us all that publishing magazines is fun and exciting, and that if you're going to do something, do it right.

In a recent press release, St. Joseph Communications chairman Tony Gagliano spoke tellingly about "funding and supporting the growth of paid circulation." And why not? As we all know, educated, affluent, trend-setting and curious Canadians love to read magazines. It seems that aggressive circulation marketing to capture those eyeballs is suddenly fashionable again. Glory be to God—my prayers have been answered. **M**



extremely well. I think we can all agree that our advertisers are intelligent—that magazines do in fact help move product, and that our advertisers' brands benefit enormously from the wise investments they make by marketing themselves aggressively.

So why is it that Canadian circulators have such a hard time getting the resources to advertise our products aggressively, beyond the obligatory insert card source and the occasional direct-mail effort? If advertising works for the goose, it certainly follows logically that it will work for the gander. Ask any circulator what publishers typically say when asked about expanding the marketing budget for non-traditional advertising, and the answer is usually the same: "We can't afford



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