

How Research Sells Issues

LEFLEIN: Tell me a little bit about your responsibilities at NJ Monthly magazine and some of your challenges.

SCHLAGER: I have been here as editor for 2 ½ years and all of the editorial content of the magazine is under my purview. We start from scratch every month, we have no wire services or any other sources for content, everything is either staff written or written by freelancers.

LEFLEIN: Do you offer a unique advertising environment in NJ Monthly?

SCHLAGER: We try to edit the magazine for a very broad audience but our readers tend to comprise an upper demo older audience, which is a choice target for marketers. It's kind of sold that way by our sales department. The editorial package works for them.

LEFLEIN: What need do you fill for NJ residents?

SCHLAGER: There are a lot of other magazines and websites that cover regions of New Jersey and certainly newspapers that cover specific towns and cities, but we are really the only one that covers the whole state. We aim to be a general interest magazine covering lots of different subjects. We'll cover serious subject matter like healthcare, education, politics, issues like the environment but we also provide a lot of service type stories telling people about all New Jersey has to offer. We love publishing stories about what we call getaways, giving people ideas of where to go and what to do in different seasons. The summer is a big thing for us, every June we do our Shore issue and try to tell people what's new and exciting at the Shore. Restaurants are another big component for us, NJ people love to eat and there's a lot of good restaurants here. I think we're the definitive statewide source for restaurant reviews and listings in the magazine and online.

LEFLEIN: Are your subscriptions hurt by subscribers shifting to your website?

SCHLAGER: Amazingly it hasn't been a problem for us at all, the unique visitors to our website have now surpassed our 90,000 circulation base and yet it doesn't seem to erode the readership of the magazine. The principal reasons people go online to NJ Monthly is to search our resources, such as our restaurant database. They look at our listings like our top doctors and top dentists, top towns, top schools. Those surveys are published every year but are online 24/7.

LEFLEIN: Let's talk a little bit about how NJ Monthly uses research from an editorial standpoint.

SCHLAGER: There are really three or four principal perennial issues that we do, that require research surveys. The big one is the top doctors which comes around every November. Top dentists is every July. We do a top towns issue every other year and alternate it with top high schools.

LEFLEIN: What are some of the requirements that you have for the research in order for you to feature the results of a survey in the editorial in the magazine.

SCHLAGER: It needs to be statewide. It needs to be as comprehensive as possible. It needs to be done in a way that readers can pretty much understand the methodology and certainly understand the results. It is very important that we maintain our standards and believability for our lists.

LEFLEIN: What steps have you taken to maintain quality research standards?

SCHLAGER: Let's focus first on the top doctors survey that you conducted for us for the November issue, because that's the biggest one.



First of all, traditional things, you want to get the highest response rate possible. We go to The Medical Society of New Jersey which sends out reminders for doctors to vote although the society can't officially endorse the survey. Secondly we try to keep the ballot to one page although the greater majority of doctors now are voting online so the physical size of the printed ballot is not as significant anymore. But we do try to keep the survey short despite the many medical specialties listed. In our latest survey, we also added a blue-ribbon panel of doctors to review the results.

LEFLEIN: I know that you use a hybrid approach in the balloting where a sizeable proportion of doctors will go online and fill it out, rather than pencil and paper.

SCHLAGER: It would be great if we could get it all online but we do see among the doctors some resistance to doing things electronically. Online responses where doctors key in their medical license numbers makes it easier to eliminate any duplication of ballots.

LEFLEIN: What is your validation process?

SCHLAGER: The research team fact checks everything. That's kind of a moving target too because offices move, some doctors add offices, hospital affiliations change so we try to finalize the information as close to the publishing date and have everything as accurate as possible as of that date.

LEFLEIN: What's the vetting process like?

SCHLAGER: Part of the information gathering is looking at whether there are any official actions that have been taken by the state board against the doctors and also looking at the results of malpractice suits. While there is really only a handful every year, some doctors are eliminated.

SCHLAGER: Finally what's the relationship between advertising and editorial as far as the top doctors and dentists issues?

SCHLAGER: We definitely have a separation between editorial and advertising. Advertising does not dictate the editorial coverage in any way. Specifically with the doctors and dentists surveys, once we have finalized the lists we do provide the names to our marketing department to sell against. They do quite well with that but we make it clear in the magazine that doctors and dentists are never on the list because they buy ads. They are also never kept off the list because they don't buy ads. One thing just has nothing to do with the other. It's determined before the marketing department starts to try to sell those ads.

An Interview with:



Ken Schlager
Editor
New Jersey Monthly

Ken Schlager is Editor of New Jersey Monthly, the leading regional publication in the Garden State. In this position, he is responsible for planning, assigning and editing all articles in the magazine each month. Ken also oversees the magazine's website (njmonthly.com) and serves as Editorial Director of two sister publications, Park Place and New Jersey Bride.

Prior to joining New Jersey Monthly, Ken was Executive Editor of Billboard, the newsweekly of the international music business. Ken spent 20 years at Billboard, also serving as Managing Editor and Vice President of Business Development. His accomplishments include the successful launch of billboard.com, which today reaches more than 5 million unique visitors around the world.

Ken previously served as Associate Features Editor of the New York Post and also held reporting and editing positions at Gannett Westchester Newspapers and the Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) News. He has a master's degree in journalism from the University of Missouri-Columbia.

Ken lives in Montclair, N.J., with his wife and their two teenage children.

Barbara Leflein



Corporate Philosophy: At a time when corporate America is seeking greater value from its consultants and research suppliers, Leflein Associates, Inc is delivering results with efficiency. Clients benefit from a philosophy that integrates sound strategic thinking with creative implementation. Research empowering creativity.



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