



# classic

tactics keep on working

by Mary Wynn Ryan

## *Is print advertising dead?*



Not if you ask the retailers who bank on ad help from Banker and Brisbois. Celebrating its 100th anniversary in 2012, this company has been devoted to one powerfully simple idea: As their classic house ad vowed, "You'll never have to run another lousy ad."

"Retailers are still running newspaper ads. We help make it worthwhile," asserts B&B's Lee Gilmore, who, with his father Harry, has run the company for more than 30 years.



"In small, closely knit communities, especially in rural areas, people still read the local newspapers for the obituaries, wedding announcements, sports scores and other local news," Gilmore observes. "Even some big-city papers have resurrected local sections and filled them with press releases from local community groups and clubs. Ads in these papers from local retailers get noticed."

"People in small rural communities also like to get mail – the old-fashioned kind that comes to your door. They feel appreciated and special when they receive direct mail invitations from their local furniture retailer, so we do creative direct mail pieces and packages to preferred customer list

mailings. We help make sure each communication expresses the store's message in a way that gets results."

While Banker and Brisbois take classic communication skills seriously, they are at home translating those skills in modern media.

"Some retailers are comfortable sticking with space ads and direct mail pieces, but for others we also create websites, e-blasts and other marketing tools. We provide fully integrated marketing programs that include a coordinated look and message for all elements so there's a reinforcing, synergistic effect. Repetition is important in advertising, and that doesn't just mean running more ads. It means repetition of a theme, look and copy platform that has







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proved successful for you."

In addition to custom ads and direct mail pieces for clients, Banker and Brisbois also provides an Ad Service offering a large library of syndicated ad and direct mail templates, including almost 3,000 ads from which retailers can choose. The Ad Service gives retailers the benefit of professional design, layout and copywriting at a low cost, and selected ads are provided camera-ready and exclusively to the retailer in his or her trading area.

"You can just download our ad, email it to the newspaper, and have the newspaper drop in product photos you choose from your vendors' shots, or have us drop the photos in before the ad goes to the newspaper.

"The retailer has exclusive use of that design and message for space ads, direct mail, website, onsite signage, email blasts and more," Gilmore explains. "In the electronic PDF format it's easy to reapply the basic art to different media and uses. We encourage retailers to use Adobe's InDesign software to adapt our art; it's very easy

software, not like the old QuarkXpress that was difficult and scared some retailers off."

For circulars, Banker and Brisbois does the design and drops the photos in that the retailer chooses, as there is little template design to be done in pieces that are largely made up of vendor photos.

Since the mid-'90s, the firm has also offered gift and traffic items to spur retail sale results. "Customers respond to promotions that offer past customers a little gift – usually housewares of some kind – just for coming back in," Gilmore observes. "They also respond well to getting a premium with a purchase and to getting a useful item for a token price, like \$5 for a stadium blanket.

"It's probably old-fashioned but people still like to get a deal and a free gift," Gilmore says, and indeed, gifts for the home have traditionally worked for every business from banks to movie theaters, especially during tough economic times.

Gilmore says that even in a challenging economy like ours today, there's a role for ads that don't scream "Sale!"

"Retailers think they can't afford "institutional" or "image" ads, and if you think of it in those terms, they're probably right," Gilmore says.

"We prefer to call image ads "positioning" ads because that's a more accurate term for what they do. Positioning ads are essential because they're the way you differentiate your store from other stores that offer the same merchandise at similar prices.

"Positioning ads let you tell the rest of your story in a way that makes people pick you when there's a tie between your pricing and





somebody else's. In fact, if you're positioned powerfully enough, you can get the customer even if the other store offers the item at a slightly lower price. And you'll be likelier to get the add-on sale and the repeat sale if what you offer is a trustworthy, enjoyable experience and not just a cheap price 'today only.'

"Of course, you still need sales ads to create urgency; a reason to come in right now. Just make sure your positioning and sales ads share a family resemblance. You don't want to confuse your target customers. You need to portray a consistent image, which means your positioning and sales ads must be coordinated.

"We make sure that every ad we do for a retailer gives a store sell, not just a merchandise sell. You can always be undersold so it's essential to have something meaningful besides cheap prices that customers value. That's the store's own unique selling point and it's worth repeating in every medium.

"It's essential to have a good sense of who you are and what it means to your market," Gilmore says. "The typical independent retail store will not be able to be known as the one with the lowest price or the biggest selection, so you have to find

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"Maybe you can be the store that offers the best fit with the local preference in styles, as many successful stores in resort communities have done? Maybe you can be the store that does more fine-tuning, more custom choices and more customer care? The one with the friendliest service, known for taking infinite patience with customers' feelings and fears about big-ticket purchases? Or the best VIP service, including coming into the home to help customers make truly custom decisions and make them comfortable?

"Do what is true to your store. Don't go off in some direction because you heard somebody else was doing well with it. Find out what your target market wants and how your store can most easily deliver on those wants, and then talk it up in a way that makes the customer feel you are speaking her language.

"If a retailer thinks all he has to do is build an ad with a bunch of pix, prices and his name at the bottom, that's not the case. Cover up the store name and it could be anyone's ad. You need a clear and compelling reason for the ad - from the customer's perspective. That is the reason for the customer to come in.

"I know what reps tell retailers, but let's face it; furniture doesn't sell itself. You have to sell it, and the selling job starts way before your salesperson gets involved. "Good design and copy are not nice-to's in today's hyper-competitive marketplace. They're the essential tools you need to catch the consumer's eye, appeal to her heart, and get her walking into your store." 