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# Puzzling your readers for profit - attracting readers and advertisers through crossword puzzles

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Custom crossword puzzles are a low-cost way to build high reader and advertiser interest in your magazine.

Solving them is America's favorite indoor pastime (hint: 10 letters). Readers spend at least half an hour longer with magazines that have them. Whether as part of editorial or part of a special ad section, their presence in a magazine gives the publication an important competitive advantage. What are they? Crosswords.

If you are like most editors and publishers, however, crosswords aren't something you've given much thought to. That's understandable. Chances are, when you think of crosswords, you think of The New York Times (too hard), TV Guide (too easy) or the puzzle in your local newspaper (too dull).

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During the past 20 years, however, crosswords have been undergoing a tremendous evolution--an evolution that has gone largely unnoticed by magazine management. Solving America's best crosswords is no longer a dictionary-bound activity, but a broad-based, entertaining test of wits that many magazines now use to increase reader interest and their advertising revenue. For example, magazines running editorial crosswords include America West's in-flight title, and Time

Inc.'s People. Magazines running crosswords in special advertising sections include Petersen's Sport and Time Inc. Venture's Health. The SportWord puzzle has been sponsored by one of the Big Three automakers since 1988; the HealthWords Puzzle, started in early 1993, is underwritten by a large drug company.

Crosswords customized for a magazine's readership are as different from ordinary "mass-market" crosswords as filet mignon is from hamburger. If you think crosswords might make sense in your magazine, here are the main points to consider:

**Placement:** Should the puzzle run with your regular editorial, or in a special advertising section? With readership levels as high as 75 percent, custom crosswords are naturals for special ad sections. A crossword dramatically increases interest in and recall of the ad, whether readers do the puzzle or not. That's why offering a crossword as part of a new franchise position is a powerful incentive to a prospective long-term advertiser.

**Editors** who don't want to give up any hard-won editorial space for something as "frivolous" as a puzzle often change their minds once they see that custom crosswords entertain and inform at the same time--and get feature articles read more closely (by including clues tied to them). Editors also like the addictive nature of crosswords, which can turn casual readers into loyal subscribers.

**Size:** To puzzlemakers, "size" is actually "dimension," which ranges from 13 x 13 squares (with 70 clues) to 21 x 21 squares (about 150 clues). A 13 x 13 will take the average puzzler about 30 minutes to complete and needs at least half of an 8-1/2" x 11" page for the clues to be readable and the boxes big enough to write in; a 21 x 21 takes about an hour to solve and needs a full page. You'll also need a few square inches to print the puzzle answer. Unless you're a weekly, or you're running a 900 number or contest (more on that later), it's a good idea to print the answer in the same issue. If you do, print it upside down so that readers won't get an inadvertent look.

**Content:** The main content of a custom crossword will be related to the general theme of your magazine, be it high fashion, home improvement, hiking or hog farming. Puzzle constructors won't be experts in your field starting out, but reading a few back issues and other source materials you'll recommend will take care of that. Be prepared to give a little guidance at first as to content. After a breaking-in period, constructors will be able to work with as much or as little input as you're willing to provide.

**Style and difficulty:** The degree to which a puzzle blends in with the rest of the magazine is the degree to which the puzzle will be successful. The best constructors will be able to discern the right style and skill level by reading a few back issues. And it's a good idea to send the constructor your latest subscriber study, too.

**Production:** After the content has been decided, constructors will need seven to 14 days to complete and deliver a finished crossword. (Allow a few extra days if you'd like to see a draft first.) Standard delivery includes camera-ready art (solving and answer grids) and a typed set of clues with answers at right. Many constructors can also provide everything on disk: the art in PostScript format and the clues in a word processor or ASCII format. The best way to proof a crossword is to test-solve it (in addition to standard proofreading). It's a good idea to have the constructor proof the puzzle as well, once it's gone through your editorial process.

Incentive: Running your crossword in conjunction with a contest is a proven way to increase reader interest in the entire magazine. Surprisingly, the prize value has very little to do with the level of participation. Prizes can range from a year's subscription to something provided by an advertiser in exchange for "promotional consideration."

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- **2**
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