

# Ad Policies That Protect



Can you clearly articulate your magazine's advertising policies?

by Kim Pettit

**T**hough advertising sales generate 70-80 percent of an average magazine's revenue, magazines cannot accept every ad. A good policy for a magazine's use of advertisements is essential.

If you already have a policy, review its effectiveness. If not, develop a policy regarding which advertisements to accept or decline. Keep these concerns in mind:

**Your mission.** A publication with an evangelistic purpose will only publish ads for products that popularize or promote a Christian world view. At times it might even publish free ads that support its cause.

**The organization's statement of faith and its theology.** Suppose a popular pastor, who denies a key doctrine, wants to buy an ad. What basis will you give your staff for accepting or rejecting his ad? You may require advertisers to adhere to a statement of faith, but adherence to a specific creed is not always sufficient to ensure advertisements will be acceptable.

For instance, editor J. Lee Grady says *Charisma* magazine prohibits ads "that appear to 'sell' a spiritual benefit. If an ad says, 'Buy this book and you will be healed' or 'Come to this event and you will receive a new anointing,' we ask the advertiser to revise the text." [Advertisers] "cannot promise such a benefit," he says.

**The organization's values.** A magazine will carry ads that affirm specific values. Its policy might state advertisements will demonstrate sensitivity in depicting or referring to people, regardless of gender, age, race, handicaps, class or religion.

A policy should state that the magazine will prohibit ads that contradict its values. For example, most Christian publications refuse to carry ads for alcohol or tobacco products or ads with inappropriate sexual content.

**The magazine's intended audience.** One magazine for health professionals in Asia, published by Christians for a secular audience, aims to inform readers and assist them in gaining expertise in their field.

That magazine accepts ads for books on health issues by non-Christians.

A consistent message is critical in establishing an ongoing relationship with your audience. Ads must have value for readers. Note that some magazines must also appeal to a secondary audience, such as parents.

**Reader sensibilities.** Magazines must avoid publishing ads that might prove offensive and cause circulation to drop. However, Grady cautions that this can be "more difficult than you might expect." For instance, he says, "We cannot say, 'We prohibit ads that promote the ego of preachers or musicians,' since what looks egotistical to one Christian may not seem that way to Christians in another denomination or cultural group. Does having a glossy photo of the person make it egotistical? Or is it the flashy colors or the hype in the copy?" An editor's judgement is key.

**Competing products and organizations.** In some cases, ownership by a larger organization may mean that advertising space will not be sold, or will be severely curtailed, for competitors. One Latin American magazine does not feature ads for products that compete with the main source of revenue for the publishing house, but does allow ads for related Christian materials.

**Ethical considerations.** You might limit the types of ads allowed from organizations that could be deemed to have a conflict of interest with the publication, its owners, or board members. You may decide not to publish advertisements that attack others.

**Legal issues.** Ads should comply with the law. For instance, some regulations govern the wording of medical or health benefits of specific products. You could be penalized for publishing advertisements with spurious or unsubstantiated claims.

Ads are a significant source of revenue. However, they can also raise theological, ethical and legal problems, offend readers, lead to a drop in circulation and in turn sales. Prevent problems. Develop policies to protect your magazine. ♦