Subscription Sources That Really Work
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As a smaller circulation magazine, you want to continually grow your subscriber base (think of it as your community). But, before we talk about subscription sources, we have to talk about three things that will maximize your sub sources.

1. Renewals
Achieving great response rates on new subscription campaigns is just not enough. You must also plan your renewal strategy when you first sell subscriptions. If you don’t plan for renewals right at the get-go, you could end up losing 70-80% of those subscribers in the next 12 months. Then what? Well, you start all over again...spending more money on new subscribers than it would have cost to renew the ones you had. But if you plan your renewal strategy ahead of time, you are going to minimize the churn. Because there will always be churn!

2. Fulfillment
Fulfillment is customer service. You have to provide great customer service to maximize the response to your marketing efforts.

3. Your target market
No, not everyone is your target market. Think long and hard about out who your target market is: Do they live in a certain region? Do they have a special interest? Are they male or female? How old are they? Everyone on your publishing team needs to understand who you are publishing this magazine for.

Form a mental picture of your best subscriber. Give them a name. When you are designing your offers, when you are writing your marketing copy, talk to this person.

OK! Now, let’s talk about subscription sources. Where do you invest your precious resources? How can you minimize costs and continually build your subscriber base?

Here are some suggestions:

Subscribers and Readers
The first place you go are to your subscribers. There is a good chance that they know people who would love to subscribe to your magazine. Give your subscribers opportunities to introduce your magazine to friends and family. If you polybag your magazine, include an outsert with every issue. Offer to send a free sample issue to a friend on their behalf. Ask them if they would like to give a gift subscription.

Always have bind-ins or blow-ins in every issue. Your magazine will sell itself. When someone is enjoying your magazine it is the best time to sell them a subscription. They can feel the benefit, and they can show the benefit to their friends and family. Remember, your magazine is shared with other people. People who are not subscribers — yet.

Insert buckslips with all renewals and invoices that you mail out. Suggest a gift subscription, talk about a contest, remind your readers about Mother’s Day, direct them to your website, offer them a digital edition, etc.

Trade Shows
This is a tricky one. Some magazines do very well at trade shows. Special interest magazines in particular are effective at shows and events geared toward their target market. If you do take part in a trade show, make sure you have trained, enthusiastic people working there.

School Fundraising Programs
Both Quality Service Programs (http://www.qsp.com/us/products.aspx) and Canadian Community Reading Plan (https://www.ccrp.ca/) offer great exposure. Each are definitely worth a test to see if they work for your publication. The remit is only about 10%, but there is no cost and awareness of your magazine would increase.

Websites
You have a website — make it work for you! Make sure you have a prominently displayed subscription offer. Anyone that has taken the time and effort to find your website should be asked to subscribe (and you should make it easy for them).

Direct Mail
Yes, direct mail still works. The trick is to do small, targeted mailings. Mail to your expired subscribers and supplement with one tried-and-true list once a year. You can still achieve a 4-6% response rate. Honest!

The Target Market
You have to get into the heart and mind of your target market. Partner with other businesses that sell to your target market but are not competitive. Again, you have to know exactly who your target market is. Not only will this increase response to your initial marketing efforts but it will also ensure profitable renewal rates.

Your magazine is creating and growing a community of like-minded people — your subscriber base. Get to know them. Understand why they subscribe to your magazine. Then, go out and find more of them.

Small, steady growth with great renewal rates is the recipe for a healthy, profitable subscriber base.