



## Inside Classified

July 2006

# African-American Newspapers View Classifieds as Key Way to Serve Communities

Newspapers use various media to target customers

*By Jennifer Streisand*

African-American newspapers in the U.S. have a long and distinguished history of providing information on issues of social justice. While this mission has remained constant throughout the years, the publications are finding new ways to serve their audiences through advertising.

### Reaching more advertisers in Chicago

Celebrating its 101st year in May 2006, the Chicago (Ill.) Defender has consistently been the voice of the African-American community in the market and across the U.S., said Karen Weddington, general sales manager. On its Web site, a person can read that the Chicago Defender “led the charge to integrate the United States Armed Services, and promoted the careers of Poet Laureate Gwendolyn Brooks and renowned author Langston Hughes” as part of its distinguished history.

In April 2006, the newspaper appeared with an entirely new look and new sections. To market the redesign, the newspaper is being promoted as the “new” Chicago Defender, Weddington noted.

In addition to a new look and additional editorial features, the newspaper has a much more comprehensive classified advertising section than ever before, Weddington said.

Management at the Chicago Defender wants to make the publication the third newspaper of choice in the market, after the Chicago Tribune and the Chicago Sun-Times. Such a goal requires an enhanced classified section, she explained.

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**CHICAGO DEFENDER**  
Honest. Balanced. Truthful. Unapologetically Black.

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Before Weddington joined the newspaper in November 2005, the Chicago Defender had scattered classifieds, ranging from two to three pages. Now there is an average of 10 to 12 pages, she noted.

The newspaper is a daily publication, running every day except Tuesday. Its weekend edition is published on Friday. The newspaper can be as long as 44 pages on a given day, depending on its ad count.

Weddington said the key to getting more classified advertising is to position the newspaper as an untapped market for both readers and advertisers. While readers may have seen some of the businesses advertised in other newspapers, they have never seen them in the Chicago Defender.

“They have other options of publications to read and to advertise in, but quite frankly, you are going to go to the newspaper that you read, that is about your community, that is really targeting the editorial to what your concerns are for your family, for your neighborhood, etc.,” Weddington explained. “You want to go to the newspaper of choice in the African-American community, which is the Chicago Defender.”

Even if readers have seen the ads in other newspapers, seeing them in the context of the Chicago Defender will make readers more likely to pay attention to the advertising, she explained.

While the newspaper’s Web site is important, the newspaper is focused first on developing the classifieds in the print product.

“Readers are still looking to pull the ad out, circle it, tear it out and find the jobs, the apartments, the homes and the automobiles.”

One reason the Chicago Defender enhanced its classified section was to respond to the requests of readers and advertisers.

“Readers have asked, ‘Why don’t you have real estate sections?’ Some African-American real estate businesses have said that they would love to see a real estate section where they could advertise in the Chicago Defender,” Weddington said.

The newspaper added two salespeople to go after new business in classified. The response from both advertisers and readers has been excellent.

In addition to the traditional classified categories of real estate, automotive, recruitment and private party, the newspaper is also pursuing healthcare organizations for advertising.

The newspaper looks to continue to grow its readership and advertiser base under the

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leadership of Executive Editor Roland Martin, said Weddington. The newspaper will also continue to address its audience directly, covering issues so that citizens can make choices to demand a more fair and equitable society.

### Afro American Newspapers

The black press across the U.S. shares the tradition of educating audiences on issues, and the mission has not changed, said John J. Oliver Jr. (Jake), chairman of the board and publisher of the Afro American Newspapers in Baltimore and Washington, D.C.

“We try to live up to the legacy of our predecessors,” he said. “We always try to examine the current social community, challenges and issues for the purposes of helping the community and our readership understand clearly what they are confronted with in the quest to become a greater participant in American society and in the American dream.”

Classified advertising plays a critical role in the Afro American Newspapers because it makes up about 40% of the overall advertising business, said Susan Warshaw, advertising manager.

“It is important to us that people recognize that the African-American worker and our readers comprise a huge part of the workforce,” Warshaw explained.

Management and salespeople at the Afro American Newspapers develop new business by networking with organizations in the area to help them recognize a need or problem that could be solved through advertising.

“It is as reasonable and rational as being able to determine where there is a need in some business to disseminate a message that may basically fit into the demographics of our particular readership,” Oliver noted.

Such a strategy provides opportunities to generate new customers and to create different kinds of advertising with existing customers, he added.

The Afro American Newspapers has had a visually appealing Web site since 1994, becoming the first African-American newspaper on the Web, Oliver said. The current challenge is to promote classified advertising on the newspapers’ Web site. Because technology changes fast, the management is studying ways to take what is intended for the print product and put it online. The presence on the Web, however, is critically important, he said, especially considering the dominance of Internet competitors.

In this regard, the Afro American Newspapers face the same difficulties as large and small newspapers nationwide.

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**THE INDIANAPOLIS**  
**Recorder**  
INDIANA'S GREATEST  
WEEKLY NEWSPAPER

**The Charlotte Post**



“Newspapers have to figure out smarter ways to incorporate the Internet into their overall product offering for purposes of making sure there isn’t a net loss at the end of the day,” Oliver explained.

### Using TV in Indianapolis

The Indianapolis (Ind.) Recorder Newspaper — the fourth oldest African-American newspaper in the U.S. — is using television to promote its classified section, said Sharon Maxey, senior sales consultant. The opportunity to place classified advertising in the newspaper is often highlighted during a weekly hour-long program on cable television entitled Recorder On Air Report (ROAR). The program is a joint effort between the newspaper and communications company Radio One.

“Throughout the program, we constantly reinforce the fact that viewers are able to advertise their classifieds with us in our newspaper,” Maxey said.

The program, which examines community issues and events, reaches at least 200,000 viewers on a weekly basis, she added.

The newspaper also uses house ads to promote classifieds.

“We have a strong listing of legal bids, companies that are looking for contractors or different products, so our classified is a strong section of the newspaper that includes the legals as well as employment advertising,” she said.

### Charlotte and Detroit

The Charlotte (N.C.) Post has increased its classified business by about 15% since it enabled readers and advertisers to place their own ads on the Web, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, said Publisher and CEO Gerald Johnson.

“Advertisers can go on the Web, and they can literally type it, and we quote it online,” Johnson said.

Manpower at the newspaper is required to verify credit-card information on the ads, he noted.

The Post also uses fax and e-mail blasts to solicit advertising from potential and existing customers, said Classified Manager Jeri Thompson.

While Thompson acknowledges there is a lot of competition in the market to lure advertisers, The Post has a niche audience, and for some products and services, it just makes more sense to advertise in The Post, she said.

“For instance, legal bids,” said Thompson. “They might be more likely to advertise

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with us because they are looking for minority contractors.”

Bids from municipalities also make up a large portion of the classified business at the Michigan Chronicle in Detroit, said Publisher Sam Logan.

The presence on the Web has helped classified revenue, but Logan would like to see more real estate advertising in the paper.

“We have a market in which African Americans are probably buying more homes than any area in this country,” he said.

### Remaining vital

As Weddington of the Chicago Defender noted, a key to developing business at African-American newspapers is tapping into untapped markets.

Community newspapers are a great place to reach a target audience, Maxey added, and classified advertising is a staple.

“It is important to keep the newspaper vital. Don’t forget the small newspapers and the papers in the community that have been there for years. Support them in their efforts to keep information strong in the community,” she concluded.

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VOICE OF THE COMMUNITY SINCE 1936  
**MICHIGAN CHRONICLE**

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