

## Online Ad Design Progresses on Multiple Fronts

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Online Ad Design continues to make progress with its Ad Wizard. Its most prominent customer to date, the Denver Newspaper Agency (DNA), reports modest growth in support among its advertisers, and other notable customers have recently been added: the Newspaper Association of America (NAA), CareerBuilder.com (which runs a Web site and also places employment ads in newspapers), Wisconsin Community Papers, the *Orlando Sentinel* and the *Rockford Register Star*.

DNA, publisher of the *Rocky Mountain News* and *Denver Post*, began publishing Ad Wizard ads in February as part of a special campaign involving standard-format ads. Each ad was one column by four inches, with coupon borders, logos and text, ideally suited to this technology. As of this writing, 89 of these ads produced by 46 different advertisers have been published using Ad Wizard, according to Bob Kinney, director of prepress operations at DNA.

Kinney said he is generally pleased with the results, although he acknowledges that getting advertisers to sign on has been hard work. To be successful, newspapers will have to persuade advertisers that the system works well. A good selling point, Kinney said, is the idea of "one-stop shopping", that an advertiser can book an ad, pay for it and build it on the Internet. Another benefit to advertisers is the ability to build and submit ads much closer to a publication's deadline.

Kinney wondered whether ad rates will have to come down for this kind of ad. Since the newspaper is saving on the cost of production, perhaps some of the savings should be passed on to the advertiser. Another issue we haven't encountered yet is resistance by unions. Although Kinney didn't complain about union difficulties, he said he has had to deal with some contractual issues.

money than if they had hired an agency or other design service. Advertisers might appreciate the added value of increasing the size or adding or enlarging graphics and color because they can see the improvement as they work.

### Looking Beyond

With any new technology, early implementations target the most obvious applications; in this case, those with straightforward layouts that don't require design skills. Plugging new photos and text into structured templates presents little challenge to advertisers without design skills. So far, real estate ads have been the most popular application attempted with this technology because of their highly structured design. But vendors are moving into other types of ads as the early programs gain wider acceptance, and Pica9 counts 15 different business categories for its next product.

The other cautionary note from Kinney is that Ad Wizard isn't a design tool and isn't intended to be used for the design type of ad. The ads run so far in the Denver papers haven't required much creative work, so as DNA moves forward, Kinney is looking for other types of ads that he can try, including mortgage and small real estate ads and, eventually perhaps, furniture, liquor, auto and employment ads.

**New customers.** Both CareerBuilder.com and the NAA have contracted for custom versions of Ad Wizard, which is part of Online Ad Design's progression to a new phase in its development following the implementation of a basic version for general use. Aimed at producing more sophisticated ads than were possible initially, custom versions are available for newspaper associations, franchises, etc. CareerBuilder.com has placed Ad Wizard ads in 138 daily newspapers, Online Ad Design said.

The NAA has signed a contract to use Ad Wizard for creating process-color ads for its *Presstime* and *Newspaper Marketing* publications, and its trade show guides, among other applications.

Wisconsin Community Papers has signed a contract with Online Ad Design for an ad-building and distribution system for the association's 101 free-distribution newspapers. Three of the members have already acquired Ad Wizard services for their publications. The project is notable in that WCN papers have different formats, but will require building each ad only once. Ad Wizard will automatically scale an ad, with certain restrictions, to achieve dimensions required for each title.

The *Orlando Sentinel* will use Ad Wizard for a new real estate book about to be launched. Ad Wizard will support scheduling, pricing and online payments.

The *Rockford Register Star* will use Ad Wizard to

Automotive listings, where layouts tend to be consistent, particularly in the used-car market, present another possibility. New car ads, Groome points out, might require more elaborate designs that feature particular models. Brian Anderson of Lizard Research has shied away from the automotive department so far, but hasn't ruled it out for the future.

### The Present Course—and the Future?

At the beginning of this article, we suggested that the Internet hasn't lived up to its potential in the newspaper industry, but that the time is at hand for that to change. As CNI's Mike Gold said, "The last great return on investment for newspaper operations in their current form" is now taking shape. This will require significant changes in the advertising operations department, long a "cost center" but now due for some cost cutting.

build display ads for its seven daily editions and a weekly. The focus will be on small ads for restaurants, travel and so on.

**How it works.** Online Ad Design continues to upgrade Ad Wizard (from version 4 a year ago to version 8.5 at America East this year) and add templates to its library. (There are now 12 million templates, according to David Ball, company founder.) Templates are based on a three-part design, with a header, a middle and a footer that are selected independently, based on the advertiser's needs. After making the appropriate template selections, the advertiser can edit the data, adjust the size, select colors, add borders, etc., and send the ad off to get a JPEG version back. Clicking on "edit" enables further editing. Hovering over the ad with the cursor displays the ad's dimensions.

Graphics can be added from five online image banks. Image editing features are minimal, but it is possible to scale and crop elements. Ad Wizard informs the operator of the maximum size at which an image can be reproduced, based on the resolution available. Another useful function allows the advertiser to create an ad once and use it for multiple publications that might require ads of different dimensions. In this situation, the ad's dimensions are scaled anamorphically to precisely meet each paper's needs, but the graphics are handled independently. If the ad is enlarged, the graphic is maintained at exactly the same size as specified in the original version. If the ad is reduced, the graphic is reduced proportionally to fit the new dimensions.

The automated creation of display ads is one potential area for savings. Over the past five years many of the larger daily newspapers have seen a large percentage of ads migrate from being built in-house to being supplied electronically in "completed" form. As advertising customers now supply the majority of their display ads digitally, some metro newspapers have reduced their ad-composition staffs drastically, in some cases from 200 or 300 people to a few dozen. This trend is now moving down to the 100,000- to 200,000-circulation papers, and with online ad production tools, this tendency is spreading to even smaller advertisers and smaller newspapers.

Newspapers have been able to reduce staffing because it takes less time to process a customer-supplied ad than to build one from scratch. This new process requires training advertisers to build ads to a newspaper's specifications, and the newspaper likely

Scheduling and pricing with Ad Wizard. One of Online Ad Design's newest customers is the NAA, which uses Ad Wizard to handle ads for publications and show guides. This screen shows the price and ad information for an ad scheduled to run on April 1. The user chooses payment method at lower left and generate a printed proof of the ad at lower right.

Ad Wizard's management functions are substantial. Finished ads can be scheduled and priced, based on ad rates input by an administrator, with discounts supported. The administrator can add templates and images to the database. A new tool enables a newspaper to create its own templates. Spec ads can be created and letters automatically e-mailed to customers with live links to the ads.

Although Ad Wizard functions like an integral part of the newspaper's Web site and is branded with the newspaper's identity, it actually runs on Online Ad Design's servers, saving the newspaper from worrying about hosting, maintenance and security.

### Morcor to Integrate Ad Wizard with Xpance

Morcor Solutions said it will integrate Ad Wizard with its Xpance workflow and tracking software, though no details were disclosed.

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will need a preflight server such as OneVision Asura or Enfocus PitStop to repair and prepare PDF files to work in its pagination system. But it takes far less time and resources to train the customer and process ads through these systems than to build ads.

Ad building is just one area where greater efficiencies can reduce costs. Another is the integration of the ad-building process into the production workflow to coordinate booking, proofing, status checking and other stages of the operation. Integrating online ad-building tools with workflow systems is an obvious next step, and a variety of workflow options are starting to appear, ranging from traditional, full-function ad-tracking systems integrated with online ad-building tools, to lower-functionality, lower-cost systems like CNI's AdDesk, which is being developed in conjunction with MultiAd to handle internal ad-production workflow.

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