

FREE Advertising

BY BOB REISS

Per Inquiry Ads

Assume that you have no advertising budget. How do you get out the word on your product to your potential consumers at no cost to you?

One answer is per inquiry (P.I.) ads. How does this work? In most cases, media outlets (newspapers, magazines, radio, TV, etc.) fail to sell all of their advertising space. Think of ad space as the equivalent of hotel rooms. If a hotel room sits empty, its potential revenue is gone forever. The same holds true for ad space. When that show's broadcast ends or that newspaper or magazine hits the streets, the opportunity to sell space is over for that specific show or edition.

How do you take advantage of this? Easy. You prepare an ad with a coupon for direct response and give it to (for example) a magazine. They run the ad at no advertising cost to you. In return, you give them a percentage of the sale. This is a P.I. deal, and in my experience, it's a true win-win. The magazine gets a chance to generate some income where they otherwise would have generated nothing. The supplier generates some immediate sales and also gets a "free" ad that can help create name recognition.



Long-time friend of MANA Bob Reiss has graciously allowed *Agency Sales* magazine to serialize his book *Bootstrapping 101: Tips to Build Your Business with Limited Cash and Free Outside Help*, available now on Amazon.com. The book looks at surprisingly effective low-cost and no-cost ways to acquire the resources you need to run your company. Whether your company is an existing enterprise or a start up, a manufacturers' representative company or a manufacturer, this book will introduce you to innovative ways to cut your costs and drive more of your income into bottom line profits.

Be aware that the P.I. approach requires you, as the supplier, to have the capability of shipping individual customer orders. The magazine's only involvement is to run the ad. After that, all inventory and fulfillment responsibilities belong to you.


I used a magazine for my example because that's by far the most common medium for P.I. ads although newspapers, TV, and radio outlets also accept them. In the case of electronic media, you will need to supply the completed ad in whatever format that station or network requests. Again, fulfillment is entirely your responsibility.

Many people think that P.I. ads are only run in third-tier media. That is not true. We have run P.I. ads in major magazines like *Time*, *Golf*, *Field & Stream*, and *Modern Bride*. Some of our customers have run 1-800 TV response ads on our products, using the same TV stations from which they purchase commercials.

One word of advice: in many cases, you're better off not including your company name in the coupon. Some retailers with whom you're already working may feel — if they see your name in that coupon — that you're competing with them by drawing off some of their potential sales. I know that this kind of ad exposure can only help

them, but it's not always an argument that they buy. In this case, be careful about a high company profile.

P.I. ads should be easier to obtain in poor economic times. One of the first budget cuts of corporations in a downturn is advertising. The media may not be able to sell all their advertising and thus will be more susceptible to P.I. ads.

Although it is not free, *pay per click* advertising (explained in the Internet chapter) is extremely inexpensive and an excellent tool for a small business. 

Bob Reiss was a national manufacturers' representative for 14 years before changing his business model and becoming a manufacturer who sold through manufacturers' reps. He has been involved in 16 start-ups and one of his companies was named to the *Inc.* 500 list of America's fastest-growing companies for three years in a row. A native of Brooklyn, New York, he is a graduate of Columbia University and Harvard Business School. An army veteran, he is the author of *Bootstrapping 101 — Tips to Build Your Business With Limited Cash and Free Outside Help* and *Sales Reps*, both available now on Amazon.com.

