



## Proud to be a Female Dog

**DEAR VALUED ADVERTISER,** I think it's time we had a little chat. For far too long, I've been barking up the wrong tree. I've snarled at Tanya and snapped at Peter. Nearly chewed the heads off Hubert and Tonia. And it wasn't their fault. They don't want to yank my editorial chain, and they sure as heck don't get a thrill out of my self-righteous tirades. They're just doing their jobs as good account executives, representing their clients to the best of their ability – even when it involves the supreme self-sacrifice of trying to tempt me with what their clients consider irresistible editorial tidbits. (It's a wonder they have any fingers left!) Still they keep coming, knowing in advance what my answer will be but making the obligatory effort so they can at least say they tried.

To be blunt (feel free to substitute four-legged euphemism), the account executives aren't the problem: you are. Don't get me wrong; it's not you personally, but your lack of awareness that makes me twitch. Somewhere, somehow, someone – and I wish I knew who – came up with the “brilliant” idea of requesting favourable editorial content as an advertising added-value. On the surface it

seems like a fair trade exchange. Magazines profile companies and executives all the time. “I'm a loyal advertiser,” you think to yourself. “My company is successful. My company has an interesting story to tell. My company deserves to fill some of those editorial pages!” And so you make your pitch for editorial inclusion, little realizing the depth of the disservice you've done your company and yourself.

The confusion, I think, arises from uncertainty about the product you are buying. An advertisement is much more than a set amount of space in a magazine or newspaper, or even air time on radio or television. It is even more than the complex concatenation of imagery and text that carries your message. Purchasing an advertisement is your ticket to perform before a particular audience. In choosing your advertising venue, you are selecting an audience appropriate to the product you are trying to sell. The more attentive the audience, the more valuable the advertising space. And to be brutally honest, loyal readerships are not built on advertising.

There are magazines which bow to the competitive pressure of the advertising

market and sacrifice editorial integrity to keep clients temporarily happy. They fill their pages with fluffy, feel-good, blatantly promotional material posing as legitimate editorial (properly labeled, it's known as advertorial). It might – for the short term – bring in more money for the publication and give advertisers the temporary satisfaction of thinking they're getting extra bang for their buck. But it's a suicidal strategy.

Not only does it send the wrong message to editorial staff (i.e. “This company isn't really newsworthy because they're trying to use the sales staff to get our attention instead of contacting us directly.”), but it also alienates your advertising audience. It's one thing to promote your company in an appropriate, identified context, another thing entirely to attempt to disguise an ad as something else. For the reader who sees the subliminal message between the lines, it's as though you and your partner magazine have tried to pull a fast one. Trust, once lost, is not easily regained.

Readers don't owe magazines their time, we have to earn it. Our job – “mission” is not too strong a word – is to

challenge accepted ideas, discover unseen perspectives and reveal new information. Reader response to the disrespect of less-than-quality editorial is predictable: they ignore it. Advertising in such a publication is similarly overlooked. Even worse, advertising in a disreputable publication is tainted by association with a similar lack of credibility.

That is why we are so vigilant about guarding the integrity of this publication. Our focus is on making every issue better than the last, on consistently questioning the value of each article, and on selecting writers with superior research and storytelling abilities. Our interview subjects are chosen by the value of their opinion, not the size of their marketing budget. And promotional material is always clearly labeled. Because real added-value advertising comes not in the form of editorial “freebies”, but through a loyal, engaged readership – and that's something I'm more than happy to provide.

**What do you think?** - Letters to the Editor should be no longer than 300 words in length and clearly marked as Letter to the Editor. Send letters to [dchafe@atlanticbusinessmagazine.com](mailto:dchafe@atlanticbusinessmagazine.com).