

Ethical Considerations for Journal Advertising

Chair:

Annette Flanagin
JAMA Programs
and International Activities
Chicago, Illinois

Panelists:

Peter Murphy
American Medical Association
Parsippany, New Jersey

Phyllis Stone
Merck & Co Inc
Whitehouse Station, New Jersey

Deborah Whippen
Journal of Clinical Oncology
Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts

Alma Wills
Baltimore, Maryland

Reporter:

Sameh Fahmy
Texas A&M University
College Station, Texas

Annette Flanagin, director of JAMA Programs and International Activities, gave the four panelists ethical dilemmas in journal advertising. The panelists discussed ways to increase or maintain revenue from advertisements without decreasing reader satisfaction with the journal or harming the integrity of the journal.

The panelists offered ways to increase revenue without decreasing editorial content. Peter Murphy, publisher of the JAMA and American Medical News, said that decreasing the amount of editorial content to increase advertising content is a los-

e-lose situation for the advertiser and the reader; too many advertisements clutter the journal, and readership decreases with decreased reader enjoyment. Deborah Whippen, managing editor of the Journal of Clinical Oncology, said that an increase in advertisements might jeopardize readers' perception of the journal; she suggested increasing advertising rates. Alma Wills, former executive vice president of Lippincott Williams & Wilkins, pointed out that changing the advertising-to-text ratio could jeopardize the nonprofit status of some journals; she suggested increasing the total number of pages or the frequency of publication to allow for more advertising. She also suggested creating more premium positions by expanding the table of contents or moving the letters section to the front of the journal.

Some of the panelists thought that interspersing advertisements in articles harms readers' perception of the journal and decreases readership. But Wills said that it might not have any negative consequences for readership. "I've always felt that editors and editorial boards are a little too cautious", she said. "Interspersing advertisements in features might not be popular with readers but would not be so unpopular that it would cause readers to cancel their subscriptions."

Another point of difference between panelists was whether to distribute editorial calendars, including advance copies of tables of contents used in planning by the editorial and production staff. Some panelists said that the distribution of editorial calendars presents no problems, but Murphy thought that advertisements could be too closely associated with the

editorial content of the journal and possibly create reader mistrust of the journal. "You can get yourself into trouble by giving the sales staff editorial content that is too specific", he said. Murphy added that distributing editorial calendars can also cause a problem from a business standpoint by encouraging advertisers to place advertisements only when there is an article related to their product and lessening the opportunity to sell advertisements in other issues. Phyllis Stone, director of promotion and planning, marketing, and medical communications for Merck & Company Inc, said that from an advertiser's perspective editorial calendars are helpful in deciding what type of purchase to make and what products to place.

The panelists agreed that there is no set way to charge for online advertising in that no workable business model exists. "We won't be able to sell [online] advertising until we get the information we need to communicate the value of online ads", Murphy said. In the meantime, Wills suggested offering online space to current advertisers at a slight premium. Murphy suggested offering online space as an incentive for regular advertisers in the print journal.

The panelists also discussed linking to advertisers' Web sites. Whippen noted that a disclaimer or buffer page would be needed to ensure that readers know they are leaving the journal's Web site. Murphy pointed out that hot-linked advertisements can change and that he would want to ensure total control of the product that is being advertised. 