



Vegas paper's job-ad strategy finds riches in niches

BY DAN LINDLEY

As at most U.S. newspapers, print-classifieds sales have sagged at the Las Vegas Review-Journal, hurt by the gambling mecca's collapsing housing market and its effects on real estate and recruitment ads.

But there is still viva in Las Vegas, according to Chelle Bizé, recruitment advertising manager for Nevada's biggest newspaper (the Review-Journal's print circulation exceeds 200,000).

Twenty stand-alone niche job sites that the paper has set up with the help of online vendor Adicio form the core of a project that paid for itself in a month, she said. "It's been phenomenal," said Bizé, who has worked at 13 newspapers across the country, from New Jersey to Oregon, in her more than 30 years in the business.

Bizé and Shane Kelly, recruitment supervisor, came up with the idea of riches through niches last year. It was a way to better serve the popular but increasingly competitive local recruitment-ad market. Industry-specific niche job sites on the newspaper's LVJOBNetwork would benefit job-seekers and advertisers, they decided. They'd be easier to target and navigate for everyone. So they picked the 20 most-popular classifications from the newspaper's 43 career categories, and made each into a niche, standalone site, with names like LVCasinoJobs.com and LVEntertainmentJobs.com, and with links on the newspaper's online recruitment landing, JobsTodayOnline.com.

The process was straightforward using Adicio's "child site" technology, in which existing sites can leverage their job and resume databases with different templates at a fraction of the cost of building a new job board.

Launched in mid-October, the sites have far exceeded revenue projections from banners and upsold print ads, Bizé said, by about \$10,000, or nearly 40 percent, a month.

"We probably have about \$30,000 in liner and display ads that go up every month. Tiles are generating another 10 grand a month," she said. "Not bad for a start-up. That's an additional \$40,000 a month. They paid for themselves in the first month."

Though many look at Las Vegas as a place to play, others also regard it as a place to work. It's a national job magnet that draws about a half-million visitors to the Review-Journal's niche sites each month. That number is in part supported by the niche sites' links on the newspaper's strong online jobs home page, JobsTodayOnline.com, which receives 400,000 unique visitors a month.

Making money off the niche sites wasn't as easy as hitting the jackpot on a slot machine, however. It took six months to get the sites off the ground, Bizé said. Getting the necessary people and departments to work together seamlessly was "unbelievably difficult," she said. But all the gears eventually meshed.

"Anybody who works at a newspaper understands when you're coordinating print with online and your IT department and your vendor, it's a huge process," she said. "There were a lot of glitches. We really underestimated the time it would take to test the feeds and sites."

Another big task: securing the names of the niche sites. The newspaper started buying the URLs about a year ago. At Adicio's suggestion, Bizé used the domain-name registrar GoDaddy.com to find and buy most of the sites' URLs for \$75 each or less (though she had to fork over \$1,500 to acquire the URL LVMedicalJobs.com from a woman in San Diego). Besides the 20 URLs for the niche sites, she also bought another 20 or so nearby URLs for future expansion "just to protect the franchise," she said.

Bizé used other strategies to gain eyeballs. Forty-eight percent of her traffic comes from Google searches, and she spends \$1,000 a month to buy keywords from Google. Phrases such as "Las Vegas jobs" and "casino jobs," and branding names of some of the newspaper's more prominent advertisers, such as MGM jobs, were among the keywords she used most successfully. iPod giveaways at career fairs, which required contestants to register at the niche sites, have brought in 2,000 résumés a month, she said.

Besides an immediate bump of nearly \$40,000 a month in revenue – at a time when ad sales at the paper have been down by 50 percent, she said – the niche sites may have longer-term benefits as job-seekers move from print to the Web. And they extend the Review-Journal's reach.

"It creates an opportunity for us to see job-board only customers," she said. That's important in a local market where 140 online job boards compete for customers (up from 40 when Bizé began working at the Review-Journal four years ago). The newspaper still leads in paid job postings she said, with about 25 percent of the local market. Monster, Yahoo HotJobs and CareerBuilder have never had a strong presence in town, she said, although the Review-Journal recently started upselling to Monster, which has an alliance with Adicio. Craigslist leads the free segment of the market, she added, with about a 25- to 30-percent share.

First Las Vegas, then cyberspace, then the world: Besides upselling liners and banners, and selling tiles on the niche sites, Bizé wants to push more purely e-commerce sales. She's positioned a sales rep to specialize in online ads to recruiters and "job-board people." She plans to offer video on the niche sites within a couple of months (the newspaper already features employer videos on its home page). She's eyeing advertising on mobile phones. Future efforts may leave Las Vegas entirely, really broadening the Review-Journal's market.

"We want to do a couple of national job boards," she said. "I want to do global gaming. We're thinking of Macau and cruise ships and things like that, Asia and the Middle East."

