

Tap county records for new subscribers

Voter registration lists, assessors' records are resources at your disposal

Happy holidays and end of the year to all of you! As you prepare for 2015 and begin making plans for the coming year, let me offer you a couple of thoughts relating to your business.

We all know the importance of marketing to growth. While many of you work hard with internal advertising to convert single-copy sales to subscriptions, one possible avenue you might consider is mailing to county residents who are not subscribers in an effort to convince them to subscribe. The question is where you acquire a list to do such a mailing?

There are probably many places. However, one simple one is local county records! One of the most frequently requested county resident lists is the voter registration list that your county has. Politicians are frequent requesters of that list and I believe, in many cases, the cost to acquire it is fairly minimal.

Plus, since it is a frequently-requested list (meaning the county is used to providing it in many formats, including electronically), you are unlikely to get caught up in bureaucratic red tape by finding a sunshine request for that list in an electronic format denied.

Another list of county residents is found in the assessor's office. There you can find lists of both personal property owners and real property owners and their addresses. In the interest of full disclosure, I'll admit that I've been involved with a client who is seeking copies of the real property lists around the state, so I am highly aware that some counties find it easy to generate this list, while others seem baffled with how to do this at a reasonable price and because of their unfamiliarity with this request, are not as prepared as the voter registration folks to generate this list.

But, the lists of these owners are



public records and are in all cases electronically available, or should be. And if you can't get it for a reasonable price, know that I'm working in the hopes that, someday soon, you'll be able to do this.

Besides, this list would allow newspapers in the state to create an important database online for their readers to be able to compare property tax assessments for local residents. Some counties have this database online but others do not.

Furthermore, there may be limitations to what information collected by the assessor is put online, despite the fact that this data is all a public record. Some of the newspapers in the state are heavily into providing certain public data materials online as resources for their readers.

As you begin the new year, think about the records held by various public bodies and how you might find those useful and informative, both for you as a business in the community and for your readers, who can find your website a fantastic resource for information. After all, that's what newspapers are all about!

SYLLABI CASE UPDATE

Speaking of information, I must tell you that our Missouri Supreme Court acted a few weeks ago in a manner that I think we'll find shuts a door to information which has previously been open to you.

The Court declined to accept for review a case on appeal from the Western District of Missouri Court

of Appeals where the court held that a record "retained" by a public body (in this case the University of Missouri) could be accessed (ie: inspected) but not copied. The reason the university gave in denying the production of the copy was that the record was copyrighted material owned by a third party and therefore it had no right to "copy" the record.

In considering whether to accept the appeal, the Supreme Court had before it not just the request for transfer from the party seeking the copy, but also support from various media and journalistic groups, including the Missouri Press Association, urging that it accept and reconsider this decision because of all the potential impact it could have to access copies of records. There are many instances where a record being held by a public governmental body may actually be copyrighted by a third-party which created it.

Never before has a body been able to claim it couldn't copy such a record. Now that possibility exists. While it's too early to say what the outcome will be, I am concerned.

Best wishes to all for 2015!

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