

Inside

# Classified

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CLASSIFIED



## Letter-Writing Campaign Targets Classified Gun Ads

■ Newspapers create policies to accept ads only from licensed dealers

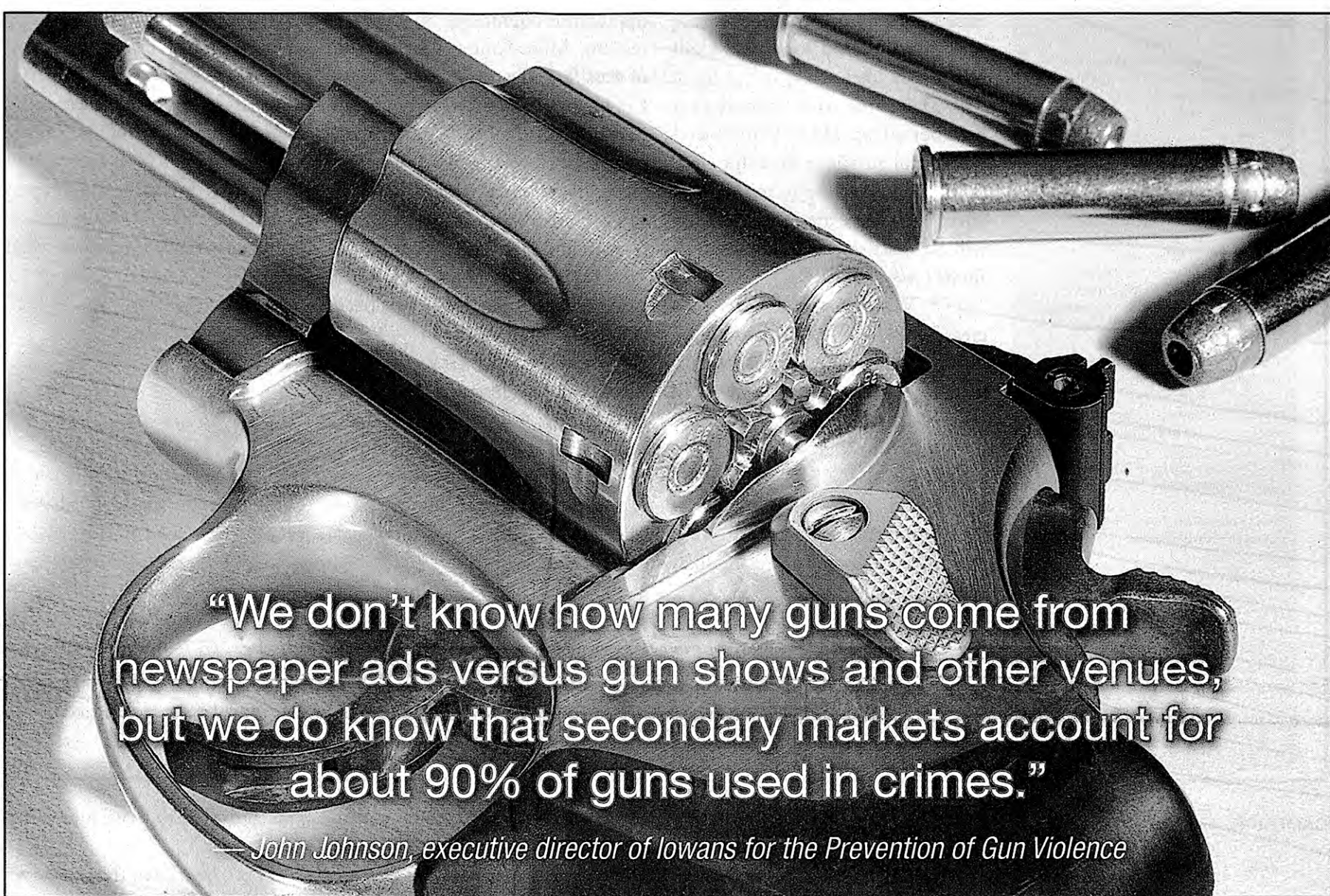
By Jennifer Streisand

A campaign to halt secondary gun sales in classifieds has a new strategy: The group organizing the effort is conducting a campaign to write letters to publishers of all daily newspapers throughout the country.

The grass-roots movement, which began in 2001, has made steady progress in persuading newspapers to accept classified advertising for firearms only from licensed gun dealers, said John Johnson, executive director of Iowans for the Prevention of Gun Violence.

### Modified objective

The initial objective of the Campaign to Close the Newspaper Loophole — a project of Iowans for the Prevention of Gun Violence — was to persuade newspapers to refuse classified ads from all gun vendors. More than a year into the campaign, however, the objective was modified to persuade newspapers to accept classified ads from licensed gun dealers only.



"We don't know how many guns come from newspaper ads versus gun shows and other venues, but we do know that secondary markets account for about 90% of guns used in crimes."

— John Johnson, executive director of Iowans for the Prevention of Gun Violence

See CAMPAIGN, A2

## Something to Chew Or

■ STLtoday.com reaches out with innovative item

Online Marketing Manager Marie Ethen wanted to promote the fact that the St. Louis (Mo.) Post-Dispatch's Web site, *STLtoday.com*, is the Web site of choice for St. Louis residents. To do so, she and her team created a promotional piece that was both fun and easy to carry.

"Finding a creative item with a relevant concept was the hardest part," said Ethen. "Once we knew we wanted to do a spoof on gum packs, the rest was easy."

The marketing team worked with a premium item company that brought the gum pack idea to its attention. "We were able to create our own package design, giving us a lot more room for our message than is normally available with premium items," Ethen said.

To create the copy, the team threw out various quips during a brainstorming session. Key statistics about the Web site were worked into a nutrition information box and contact information was featured under the heading "Product Questions."

"The sales staff loves the gum packs and reports they are highly popular among our customers who receive them," Ethen noted. "The sales reps often use the packs to break the ice and introduce their clients to *STLtoday.com*. One rep told me that many of his clients plan to pass the gum packs along to their marketing people as an idea for promoting their own product or service."

"We've already had to reorder our initial stock of this premium item. We're definitely getting our money's worth."

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**STLtoday.com** #1 ST. LOUIS WEB SITE

Nutrition Facts		% DV*	
Market Reach	35%	Local News	100%
Page Views	25 mil. +/mo.	Entertainment Guide	100%
		Sports Updates	100%

\* Percent Daily Values based on St. Louisans' basic needs for news and amusement.  
Net Wt.: 443,000 unique visitors in St. Louis metro.

**INGREDIENTS:** 11 CHANNELS FILLED WITH NEWS AND FEATURES, INCLUDING HOME, NEWS, BUSINESS, SPORTS, ENTERTAINMENT, LIFE & STYLE, JOBS, AUTOS, REAL ESTATE, AD ZONE AND NEIGHBORHOODS.  
Sources: The Media Audit, Jan-Feb 2004; STLtoday.com traffic report, July-Dec. 2003.

**STLtoday.com** #1 ST. LOUIS WEB SITE

**STLtoday.com**

#1 ST. LOUIS WEB SITE

Long-lasting local flavor!

**STLtoday.com** #1 ST. LOUIS WEB SITE

CALL CENTER



**B** Inside Call Center suggests how to improve call centers by focusing on six distinct areas.

RECRUITMENT



**C** Inside Recruitment provides an overview of SHRM's 57th annual conference in San Diego.

REAL ESTATE



**D** Inside Real Estate describes how to analyze market share and develop revenue.

AUTOMOTIVE



**E** Inside Automotive profiles the Amarillo (Texas) Globe-News' drive auto book.

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## Editor's Note

### All eyes on call centers

Circulation and classified call center executives convened in Chicago on July 20-22, 2005. The Newspaper Association of America-sponsored conference drew 186 executives from newspapers all over North America.

The program featured several joint sessions with speakers addressing a myriad of issues of mutual concern to executives handling classified advertisers and newspaper subscribers. The preeminent question raised throughout the conference was: What should tomorrow's call center look like?

Delegates were treated to a number of speakers who raised thoughtful questions about the challenges of connecting to readers and advertisers. Here are just a few that will be discussed in next month's *Inside Call Center*.

- With Web order entry increasing and call volume declining, how will call center executives be redeployed?

- To what extent should inbound private party calls be outsourced?

- What role will the call center of tomorrow play in protecting against revenue erosion to the likes of eBay, Craigslist and Google?

- What role will vendors play in helping newspapers with photo

and e-commerce solutions?

- What types of transactions will continue to migrate to the Web?

- How will this affect hiring, training and planning for the call center of tomorrow?

- How can newspaper call centers use technology to efficiently drive new revenue through better contact management?

I left the meeting with more questions than answers. On the last day of the conference in the last session, Mike Kment — director of classified advertising for Gannett Co. Inc. — asked the most poignant question of all: "Will newspaper publishers be willing to invest in the necessary resources to enable classified executives to grow classified content and revenue?"

It should be noted that Mike truly believes that the newspaper's "localness" and ability to out-promote the likes of Craigslist are sustaining advantages if leveraged intelligently.

I could not agree more, but I would add that newspapers must race to improve their Web interface for both private party and commercial advertisers.

Stacey Stedbrook, director of online product development for the Houston (Texas) Chronicle, put it

best in the context of a discussion about 'clunky' newspaper Web sites. "Strategically, it will not be enough for us to sit here and strive to be best of breed in the newspaper industry; we need to strive to be best of breed in the online industry."

Be sure to check out the conference calendar on page seven so you can make plans to attend upcoming events.

This month's issue of *Inside Classified* includes a discussion about newspapers and firearms advertising, a report about Newstravel, a company that works with newspapers to build advertising revenue through travel incentives, John Foust's always insightful Ad-Libs® column and a profile of a great classified advertising manager whom I have had the pleasure of knowing for many years, Ron Beach.

Until next month,

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### CAMPAIGN, continued from A1

"We ran across a couple of newspapers that already had policies to accept gun ads only from licensed dealers," Johnson noted. "After thinking about that type of policy, we thought it was a better place to draw the line."

Purchasing from licensed dealers means that buyers must go through a background check, which is the central issue, according to Johnson.

"Unlicensed sellers don't have the ability to do background checks and aren't required to, so newspapers should stay away from them," he said.

Johnson plans to complete the letter-writing campaign within the year. He believes newspapers are the best vehicle to educate the public, even though it's possible for consumers to purchase guns without a background check from other venues such as the Internet, gun shows, flea markets and estate sales.

"We don't know how many guns come from newspaper ads versus gun shows and other venues, but we do know that secondary markets account for about 90% of guns used in crimes."

### A tragedy in Florida

Without a background check, buyers with violent criminal histories can purchase firearms. Such purchases could result in devastating acts of gun violence, as was the case with an ad that appeared in the Sarasota (Fla.) Herald-Tribune.

According to the newspaper, Mark Williams, a convicted felon, purchased a semiautomatic handgun from a private party that advertised

in its classifieds on April 27. On the same day, he used the handgun to murder his estranged wife in front of her nine-year-old daughter.

After learning about the homicide, the campaign wrote a letter to the newspaper, requesting that it change its policy.

Because of his record in the criminal justice system, Williams would not have passed a background check if he had tried to purchase the gun from a licensed dealer.

The newspaper acknowledged the event, and effective Oct. 1, 2003, the Sarasota Herald-Tribune no longer accepts classified ads for firearms.

### Ohio newspapers change policies

The campaign is targeting newspapers more aggressively than it did a year ago. If a state has a gun violence prevention organization, the campaign plans to include the organization in the letter-writing campaign, as it did in Ohio.

In December 2004, the Campaign to Close the Newspaper Loophole and the Ohio Coalition Against Gun Violence wrote letters to approximately 80 newspapers, requesting management to change their policies.

This year four newspapers in Ohio have changed their guidelines related to classified advertising and firearms, with some of the changes a direct result of the campaign.

"Newspapers are fiercely independent," Johnson said. "They can't be threatened or coerced. They will only change if they are convinced it's the right thing to do. We don't try to take credit where we can't."

The Ironton (Ohio) Tribune

changed its policy to accept classified ads from licensed dealers only, even though the newspaper does not receive significant business for firearms advertising, said Kevin Cooper, the newspaper's publisher. The change in policy came after the Campaign to Close the Newspaper Loophole and the Ohio Coalition Against Gun Violence contacted it.

"From our perspective, it is not as big an issue as some of the gun proponents and opponents have made it," Cooper explained. "However, I can't just walk into a gun shop and buy a handgun without having a background check, so why should somebody be allowed to do it through our newspaper?"

The Delphos Daily Herald, another Ohio newspaper, also changed its policy after being contacted, said Doug Nutter, advertising director.

"It just seemed to me like the right thing to do," he said. "Certainly, from a revenue standpoint, it wasn't going to affect us in a significant way because it's not something we get every week."

Earlier this year, The Cincinnati (Ohio) Enquirer and The Cincinnati (Ohio) Post changed their policies and now accept classified ads only from licensed dealers, said Mary Lark, classified project manager at The Cincinnati Enquirer. The two newspapers are run under a joint-operating agreement, which calls for The Cincinnati Enquirer to handle the business components of both newspapers, including classified advertising.

The Cincinnati Enquirer changed its guidelines after an informal study revealed that changing the policy would not likely have a significant impact on classified business, Lark explained.

"We notified our sales team that we would not accept guns from anyone except a registered dealer," she said. "The policy goes into our rule

book and everybody we hire will be trained on it."

Lark noted that the change was not a direct result of the campaign's intervention.

Johnson stressed that it doesn't matter why newspapers change their policy, as long as they do so.

"When newspapers change their policy to accept classified ads from only licensed dealers, they are making it easier for other newspapers to make the change," he noted. "Therefore, we give those newspapers a lot of credit for setting an example."

### The efforts in Iowa and Nebraska

Following the letter-writing campaign in Ohio, the Campaign to Close the Newspaper Loophole mailed letters to publishers of daily newspapers in Iowa in April 2005. The campaign in Iowa is represented by Iowans for the Prevention of Gun Violence. As a result of their efforts, three Iowa newspapers have changed their policies to accept classified advertising from only licensed dealers.

The Daily Iowegian in Centerville, Iowa, changed its policy after being contacted, said Becky Maxwell, the newspaper's publisher.

Maxwell acknowledged that changing the policy was a prudent step, considering school shootings and other acts of gun violence around the country.

The campaign also conducted a letter-writing campaign in Nebraska. The Nebraska City (Neb.) News-Press changed its policy in May 2005. Advertising Director Kathy Kaufman said that the newspaper will now accept classified ads only from licensed gun dealers.

### Business decision, not legislation

While the Campaign to Close the Newspaper Loophole has modified its strategy since 2001, at least 26 newspapers in the United States have altered their policies to restrict secondary sales of firearms in the classifieds, according to its Web site [www.gunloophole.com](http://www.gunloophole.com). Some newspapers changed after being contacted by the campaign, while others made the change independently, Johnson said.

The Houston (Texas) Chronicle instituted a policy in May 2003 to accept classified handgun ads only from licensed dealers, according to Cindy Mitchell, contact center and general classified director at the newspaper. Some customers were disgruntled when the policy was changed, according to Mitchell. But, she said, "The policy is working very well for us now."

Some states have regulated secondary sales at gun shows, but Johnson believes such efforts are a small part of a more lethal picture.

"Essentially, they have closed the gun show loophole," he said. "I think that was a positive step, but people put so much emphasis on closing that loophole, they have completely ignored these other areas."

The campaign is focusing its efforts on newspapers because the current environment in Congress and in many state legislatures makes it difficult to pass gun control legislation, Johnson explained.

"We've decided that it is a better use of our time to work on what we call non-legislative issues, which is why we are aggressively targeting newspapers," he said. "It doesn't take an act of Congress. All it takes is a management decision."