

Friday, January 11, 2008

Job Journal founder says specializing led to revenue and reader gains

Sacramento Business Journal - by [Melanie Turner](#) Staff writer



Dennis McCoy | Sacramento Business Journal

Kathy Masera founded the Job Journal in 1983.

For 25 years, the **California Job Journal** has worked to connect employers and job seekers throughout Northern California.

Although the business model changed several times, the goal to improve those connections has remained the same.

In recent years, major newspapers have experienced double-digit declines in classified ad revenues. While the Job Journal is not immune those pressures, revenue at the free, weekly newspaper increased more than 9 percent from 2005 to 2006.

And while final numbers have not been calculated for 2007, founder and publisher Kathy Masera said she expects revenue to be up slightly or, at worst, flat.

"I think a great deal of that has to do with the fact that we're specialists," Masera said. "I think that's contributed to why we have not seen the downfall that traditional papers have seen."

Job Journal revenue has reached seven figures annually since the mid-1990s. Masera declined to be more specific. The journal employs about 20 people.

What sets the Sacramento-based paper apart from its competitors, including online giant Craigslist and **The Sacramento Bee**, Masera said, is that its rate structure encourages longer, more informative ads that steer job seekers to positions that better fit their skills. The journal also provides a variety of job-search resources, including job fairs, assistance in résumé writing and its award-winning Web site.

Masera said the paper has been somewhat insulated from Craigslist's impact, in part because it tries to be an employment resource for people, carrying some Craigslist listings on the site and informing readers of competing job fairs.

The Job Journal put on its first job fair in 1992 and now about 20 jobs fairs annually.

In recent years, the journal has beefed up its Web site with more editorial content. And this month, in addition to banner ads, the Job Journal began selling online display ads. The site has won several awards from the **National Association of Free Community Newspapers**.

"In a small-company environment you have to be doing things differently," Masera said. "That and customer service have kept us evolving over the years."

One thing the Job Journal has done differently is to charge one price for a recruitment ad, instead of charging by the line like most daily newspapers. That way, even small employers can afford to give a detailed description of jobs and ideal candidates.

Masera founded the Job Journal with a background in job placement rather than journalism. But the concept was the same -- the more information job seekers have, the better it is for them and employers alike.

The Internet made the space issue irrelevant.

"It was a revolutionary concept" back in the 1980s, said California Job Journal executive editor Clayton Babcock, Masera's husband. "Now it's the standard."

Chuck Gourley, formerly a sales manager at **Univision Channel 19**, which partners with the Job Journal to host job fairs for Hispanics, said the Job Journal fulfills "a big need in the community."

"They not only help recruit people and place people, but help educate people about how to get jobs and keep jobs," he said, citing articles on handling rejection and career advancement dos and don'ts.

Masera started the Job Journal in her Orangevale home. Today, more than 280,000 job seekers a month read the publication, she said. She said the key to the paper's longevity has been its ability to adapt to market and economic changes.

When the journal debuted, job seekers paid \$8.95 a copy and the ads were free to employers. The paper was so unusual that Masera estimates she did 200 interviews the first year, including with national publications such as BusinessWeek.

While the publication garnered lots of attention, the business model wouldn't last. A huge marketing budget would be needed to continuously attract new readers.

So Masera made deals with 20 Northern California newspapers. The Job Journal was distributed as a free insert, building a weekly circulation of 375,000. But the cost became too high during the early '90s. Masera chose not to renew her contracts.

She reinvented the business model again as a stand-alone product. By then, all the papers were free and ad-based.

Over the years, Masera raised about \$5 million, including about \$2 million in venture capital, to support the company.

Janie Williams, an administrator at the Sacramento office of **AFLAC**, said she rarely uses The Sacramento Bee to advertise job openings and relies on the Job Journal.

"I think the Job Journal is more of a captive market when it comes to people looking for positions in the Sacramento area," she said.

Pricella Retuta, a human resources associate for Sacramento Coca-Cola, agreed, saying her representative knows what she wants and is personable and not pushy.

"She makes sure that I get the best rates," she said.

Masera's employees are trained to help employers come up with information for the ad, and the employees write the ad.

"Twenty-five years ago it was like, 'You've got to be kidding? You write the ad for people?'" Masera said. "At newspapers you dictate the ad to them. They don't care what's in the space. They're just selling space."

melanieturner@bizjournals.com | 916-558-7859

All contents of this site © American City Business Journals Inc. All rights reserved.