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Name of the game is news

United Press International
The name of the game in the newspaper business is sales. It doesn't matter how good the news coverage or how lively the features if no one buys the paper.
As a result, newspapers — specifically their promotion departments — always are on the lookout for ways to entice new readers and keep subscribers in the fold.

Easy money has universal appeal — especially when the economy is rocky. This year the big payoff games are everywhere: grocery stores, fast food restaurants and the daily hometown newspaper.

"Everyone is looking for the end of the rainbow," said Dick Kane, president of MardenKane, an agency that handles games for the New York Post.

Most promotions directors who work with newspaper games say the simpler the challenge the greater the response it will draw.

Among the more popular newspaper games are variations on bingo — The New York Daily News runs "Zingo," the New York Post "Wingo" and the Chicago Tribune "Zingo Bingo" — and listings of birthdays, license plates and social security numbers.

"The thing to look for (in a successful game) is a balance between simplicity and involvement," said Jerry Meyeroff, promotions supervisor for the Chicago Tribune. "These two are vital."

"A simple game is going to get much more involvement," Earl Truax, director of promotion and public affairs for the San Antonio Light, put it this way:

"The primary goal of any newspaper game or contest is reader participation."

"The theory behind all contests or games is the more you can get your readers participating with you, the more important the newspaper becomes in their lives and so, therefore, they wouldn't want to be without it."

"When we promote the contests on radio and television, it does attract some new subscribers, but it also keeps the current readers involved in the newspaper."

One method of increasing sales is to block off a specific length of time to sponsor a game. Readers become bored with a game that lasts too long and the newspaper's promotion department can spend too much money.

Two Hearst-owned newspapers, the San Antonio Light and the Los Angeles Herald Examiner, limit their contests to 12 weeks.

The Chicago Tribune sells T-

shirts, bumper stickers and buttons through its public service office promoting its "Zingo Bingo" game.

"Most of the contests are a visibility effort by promotions that usually coincide with a price increase or other factor to try and diffuse the effect," said Ralph Otwell, executive vice president and editor of the Chicago Sun-Times.

The Sun-Times began a "Lucky Numbers" game at the same time the price of the newspaper was increased to 25 cents

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daily and \$1 on Sunday, Otwell said. The game was phased out about two months ago.

"Games are usually triggered by the amount of competition and pressure in a newspaper market," Otwell said. "Maintaining circulation is an ongoing battle."

The highest jackpots generally are found in markets where competition is intense and the stakes are high.

New York City fosters the most competitive atmosphere in the nation. Although the state has legalized some forms of gambling, use of the word "bingo" is illegal.

The New York Daily News and the New York Post each sponsor games with big jackpots. Both papers also run the other's daily numbers.

The Daily News, the nation's largest general-circulation daily owned by the Tribune Company of Chicago, sponsors a game called "Zingo." The rival Post, owned by Australian press magnate

Rupert Murdoch, comes up with "Wingo." Both are bingo games.

The Zingo game was introduced in November, 1980. John Daily News promotions manager said: "It is a good way of attracting them (the other sections of the paper) that they may start to buy regularly."

The game, which has a top prize of \$50,000, was introduced through computer "instincts," Parker said last Sept. 6, the game had more than \$3 million in prizes.

The paper gets about 100,000 entries per week and has refused about 400 prizes per week, Parker said.

Even though it is a losing proposition, Kane said, "We have to stand back off a ticking watch. This year the rival Post's Wingo began nearly a year ago and is in its second phase, Wingo II. It also has a \$50,000 each week for the other winners."

"This kind of game is a losing proposition for both the newspaper and non-readers," Kane said.

Last year, The San Antonio Light sponsored a contest called the Name Game — a game using letters in women's names. It had a \$25,000 prize plus a \$500 bonus on a winner was a subscriber to the newspaper. The Los Angeles Herald Examiner's game had several names, but the theme is the most prominent.

A promotions spokesman for the Examiner said the game draws about 50,000 entries during its 12-week run — sparking a rise in circulation at the outset which tapered toward the end of the game.

Top weekly prizes are \$1,000. The grand prize of \$50,000 is awarded at the end of the game in October. The Chicago Tribune Agg since January. The newspaper has paid out more than \$450,000. Meyeroff said a game draws thousands of entries each week.

Zingo Bingo boasts a weekly jackpot of \$100,000 split between 100 winners. "The whole idea is to appear (the players) to buy the paper," Meyeroff said. "It's not about the prize, it's about the paper."

Otwell said, "Newspapers were running contests before anyone was even aware of the word 'bingo'."

"It cannot be considered an antidote to the influence of television. In the wake of television and now cable, the gains are going to come from restructuring the content of the paper more than using promotional games to keep readers. Promotions don't alter only on sales."

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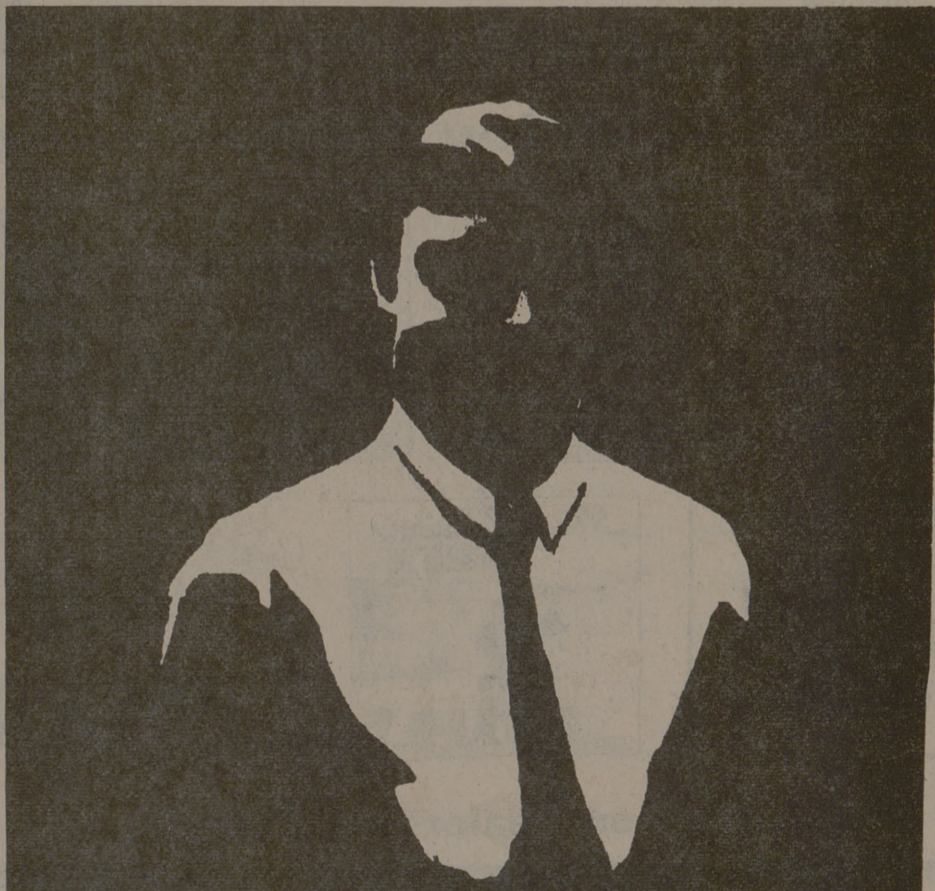
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