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# Advertising Sales Agents

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## Significant Points

- Overall earnings are higher than average but vary considerably because they usually are based on a salary plus performance-based commissions and bonuses.
- Pressure to meet monthly sales quotas can be stressful.

## Nature of the Work

Advertising sales agents—often referred to as *account executives* or *advertising sales representatives*—sell or solicit advertising primarily for newspapers and periodicals, television and radio, websites, telephone directories, and direct mail and outdoor advertisers. Because such a large share of revenue for many of these media outlets is generated from advertising, advertising sales agents play an important role in their success.

More than half of all advertising sales agents work in the information sector, mostly for media firms including television and radio broadcasters, print and Internet publishers, and cable program distributors. Firms that are regionally based often need the help of two types of advertising sales agents, one to handle local clients and one to solicit advertising from national advertisers. Print publications and radio and television stations employ local sales agents who are responsible for sales in an immediate territory, while separate companies known as media representative firms sell advertising space or time for media owners at the national level with their own teams of advertising sales agents. Sales agents employed in media representation work exclusively through executives at advertising agencies, called media buyers, who purchase advertising space for their clients that want to initiate national advertising campaigns.



Many advertising sales agents work long and irregular hours to meet sales goals.

When a local television broadcaster, radio station, print, or online publisher is working with a media representative firm, the media company normally employs a national sales manager to coordinate efforts with the media representative.

Local sales agents are often referred to as *outside sales agents* or *inside sales agents*. Outside sales agents call on clients and prospects at their places of business. They may have an appointment, or they may practice cold calling—arriving without an appointment. For these sales agents, obtaining new accounts is an important part of the job, and they may spend much of their time traveling to and visiting prospective advertisers and current clients. Inside sales agents work on their employer's premises and handle sales for customers who walk in or telephone the firm to inquire about advertising. Some may also make telephone sales calls—calling prospects, attempting to sell the media firm's advertising space or time, and arranging follow-up appointments between interested prospects and outside sales agents.

A critical part of building a relationship with a client is to find out as much as possible about the client. Before the first meeting with a client, sales agents gather background information on the client's products, current customers, prospective customers, and the geographic area of the target market. They then meet with the clients to explain how specific types of advertising will help promote the client's products or services most effectively. If a client wishes to proceed, the advertising sales agent prepares an advertising proposal to present to the client. This entails determining the advertising medium to be used, preparing sample advertisements, and providing clients with cost estimates for the proposal. Because consolidation among media industries has brought the sales of different types of advertising under one roof, advertising sales are increasingly in the form of integrated packages. This means that advertising sales agents may sell packages that include print and online ad space and time slots with a broadcast subsidiary.

After a contract has been established, advertising sales agents serve as the main contact between the advertiser or ad agency and the media firm. They handle communication between the parties and assist in developing sample artwork or radio and television spots, if needed. For radio and television advertisements, they may also arrange for commercial taping sessions and accompany clients to these sessions.

In addition to maintaining sales and overseeing clients' accounts, advertising sales agents' other duties include analyzing sales statistics and audience demographics, preparing reports on client's accounts, and scheduling and keeping their appointments and work hours. They read about new and existing products and monitor the sales, prices, and products of their competitors. In many firms, the advertising sales agent handles the drafting of contracts specifying the advertising work to be performed and its cost, and may undertake customer service responsibilities such as answering questions or addressing any problems the client may have with the proposal. Sales agents are also responsible for developing sales tools, promotional plans, and media kits, which they use to help make the sale.

**Work environment.** Selling can be stressful work because income and job security depend directly on the agent's ability to maintain and expand clientele. Companies generally set monthly sales quotas and place considerable pressure on advertising sales agents to meet those quotas. The added stress of rejection places more pressure on the agent.

Although agents work long and often irregular hours, most have the freedom to determine their own schedule. The Internet and other electronic tools allow agents to do more work from home or while on the road, enabling them to send messages and documents to clients and coworkers, keep up with industry news, and access databases that help them target potential customers. Advertising sales agents use e-mail to conduct much of the business with their clients.

Many advertising sales agents work more than 40 hours per week. This frequently involves irregular hours and may also include working on weekends and holidays. However, most advertising sales agents are able to set their own schedule. Eleven percent of advertising sales agents were employed part time in 2006.

### Training, Other Qualifications, and Advancement

For sales positions that require meeting with clients, large employers prefer applicants with a college degree. Smaller companies generally are more willing to hire individuals with a high school degree. Successful sales experience and the ability to communicate effectively become more important than educational attainment once hired. Most training for advertising sales agents takes place informally on the job.

**Education and training.** Some employers, large companies in particular, prefer applicants with a college degree, particularly for sales positions that require meeting with clients. Courses in marketing, leadership, communication, business, and advertising are helpful. For those who sell over the telephone or who have a proven record of successfully selling other products, a high school degree may be sufficient. In 2006, the highest level of educational attainment for advertising sales agents was as follows.

	Percent
High school graduate or less .....	20
Some college, no degree .....	19
Associate's degree.....	10
Bachelor's degree or higher .....	52

Most training, however, takes place on the job, and can be formal or informal in nature. In most cases, an experienced sales manager instructs a newly hired advertising sales agent who lacks sales experience. In this one-on-one environment, supervisors typically coach new hires and observe as they make sales calls and contact clients. Supervisors then advise new hires on ways to improve their interaction with clients. Employers may bring in consultants to lead formal training sessions when agents sell to a specialized market segment. This practice is common when advertising sales agents sell space to automotive dealers and real estate professionals.

**Other qualifications.** Employers look for applicants who are honest and possess a pleasant personality and neat professional appearance. After gaining entry into the occupation, successful sales experience and the ability to communicate effectively become more important than educational attainment. In fact, when selling or soliciting ad space, personality traits are equally, if not more, important than academic background. In

general, smaller companies are more willing to hire unproven individuals.

Because they represent their employers to the executives of client organizations, advertising sales agents must have excellent interpersonal and written communication skills. Being multi-lingual, particularly in English and Spanish, is another trait that will benefit prospective advertising agents as media increasingly seek to market to Hispanics and other foreign-born persons. Self-motivation, organization, persistence, independence, and the ability to multitask are required because advertising sales agents set their own schedules and perform their duties without much supervision.

**Advancement.** Advancement in the occupation means taking on bigger, more important clients. Agents with proven leadership ability and a strong sales record may advance to supervisory and managerial positions such as sales supervisor, sales manager, or vice president of sales. Frequent contact with managers of other departments and people in other firms provides sales agents with leads about job openings, enhancing advancement opportunities. In small firms, where the number of supervisory and management positions is limited, advancement may come slowly. Promotion may occur more quickly in larger media firms and in media representative firms.

### Employment

Advertising sales agents held over 170,000 jobs in 2006. Workers were concentrated in three industries: More than 3 in 10 jobs were in newspaper, periodical, book, and directory publishers; 3 in 10 in advertising and related services; and nearly 2 in 10 in radio and television broadcasting. Media representative firms are in the advertising and related services industry. A relatively small number of jobs were found in specialized design services, including industrial and graphic designers; printing and related support activities; computer systems design and related services; business support services; and cable and other program distribution.

Employment is spread around the country, but jobs in radio and television stations and large, well-known publications are concentrated in big metropolitan areas. Media representative firms are also concentrated in large cities with many advertising agencies, such as New York City.

### Job Outlook

Employment growth of advertising sales agents is expected to grow faster than average for all occupations for the 2006-2016 period. Because of growth in new media outlets, such as the Internet, advertising agents with an ability to sell, should see good job opportunities.

**Employment change.** Employment of advertising sales agents is expected to increase by 20 percent from 2006 to 2016, which is faster than the average for all occupations. Fast growth in the number of cable channels, online advertisers, and other advertising mediums will create many new opportunities for advertisers. These opportunities, along with increased efforts by media outlets to market to the growing Hispanic population, will lead to the growth of advertising sales agents.

The industries employing advertising sales agents, particularly the newspaper, periodical, radio, and television industries, have experienced considerable consolidation in recent years,

## Projections data from the National Employment Matrix

Occupational Title	SOC Code	Employment, 2006	Projected employment, 2016	Change, 2006-16	
				Number	Percent
Advertising sales agents.....	41-3011	170,000	205,000	35,000	20

NOTE: Data in this table are rounded. See the discussion of the employment projections table in the *Handbook* introductory chapter on *Occupational Information Included in the Handbook*.

which created efficiencies in the sale of advertising and reduced the need for more sales agents. While this trend is expected to continue over the next decade, it should do so at a slower pace and not affect employment of advertising sales agents significantly.

While advances in technology have made advertising sales agents more productive, allowing agents to take on additional duties and improve the quality of the services they provide, technological advances have not substantially decreased overall demand for these workers. Productivity gains have had the largest effect on miscellaneous services that workers provide, such as accounting, proposal creation, and customer service responsibilities, allowing them to provide faster, improved services to their clients. For example, the use of e-mail has considerably shortened the time it takes to negotiate a sale and place an ad. Sales agents may accomplish more in less time, but many work more hours than in the past, spending additional time on follow-up and service calls. Thus, while productivity gains will temper the growth of advertising sales agents, who can now manage more accounts, the increasing growth in advertising across all industries will ensure that new advertising sales agents will continue to be needed in the future.

**Job prospects.** Those interested in ad sales positions can expect good job opportunities. This is particularly true for sales people with experience and those with a college degree. For those with a proven sales record in advertising sales, opportunities should be excellent. In addition to the job openings generated by employment growth, openings will occur each year because of the need to replace sales representatives who transfer to other occupations or leave the labor force. Each year, many advertising sales agents discover they are unable to earn enough money and leave the occupation.

Advertising revenues are sensitive to economic downturns, which cause the industries and companies that advertise to reduce both the frequency of campaigns and the overall level of spending on advertising. Advertising sales agents must work hard to get the most out of every dollar spent on advertising under these conditions. Therefore, the number of opportunities for advertising sales agents fluctuates with the business cycle. So while advertising sales candidates can expect good opportunities, applicants can expect keen competition for job openings during downturns in advertising spending.

### Earnings

Including commissions, median annual earnings for all advertising sales agents were \$42,750 in May 2006. The middle 50 percent earned between \$29,450 and \$63,120 a year. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$21,460, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$91,280 a year. Median annual earnings for sales agents in the industries in which they were concentrated were:

Motion picture and video industries .....	\$55,340
Cable and other subscription programming.....	50,260
Advertising and related services .....	47,640
Radio and television broadcasting .....	41,110
Newspaper, periodical, book, and directory publishers .....	36,880

Performance-based pay, including bonuses and commissions, can make up a large portion of advertising sales agents' earnings. Most employers pay some combination of salaries, commissions, and bonuses. Commissions are usually based on individual sales numbers, whereas bonuses may depend on individual performance, on the performance of all sales workers in a group or district, or on the performance of the entire company. For agents covering multiple areas or regions, commissions also may be based on the difficulty in making a sale in that particular area. Sales revenue is affected by the economic conditions and business expectations facing the industries that tend to advertise. Earnings from commissions are likely to be high when these industries are doing well and low when companies decide not to advertise as frequently.

In addition to their earnings, advertising sales agents are usually reimbursed for entertaining clients and for other business expenses such as transportation costs, meals, and hotel stays. They often receive benefits such as health and life insurance, pension plans, vacation and sick leave, personal use of a company car, and frequent flier mileage. Some companies offer incentives such as free vacation trips or gifts for outstanding sales workers.

### Related Occupations

Advertising sales agents must have sales ability and knowledge of their clients' business and personal needs. Workers in other occupations requiring these skills include telemarketers; advertising, marketing, promotions, public relations, and sales managers; insurance sales agents; purchasing managers, buyers, and purchasing agents; real estate brokers and sales agents; sales engineers; sales representatives, wholesale and manufacturing; and securities, commodities, and financial services sales agents.

### Sources of Additional Information

To learn about opportunities for employment as an advertising sales agent, contact local broadcasters, radio stations, and publishers for advertising sales representative positions, or look for media representative firms in your area.

For information about advertising sales careers in newspaper publishing, contact:

► The Newspaper Association of America, 1921 Gallows Rd., Suite 600, Vienna, VA 22182. Internet: <http://www.naa.org>