



# APA Media AWARDS

Print | Digital | Magazine



## 2026 APA Media Awards

### Advertising Rules

**ENTRY DEADLINE:** Monday, March 16, 2026

# 2026 AMA Advertising Contest Essentials

## Contest Deadline: Monday, March 16, 2026.

Deadline for receipt of entries is 11:59 PM, Monday, March 16, 2026. All entries must be entered online at [www.newspapercontest.com/Alabama/](http://www.newspapercontest.com/Alabama/) on this date. Categories that require mail-in entries must be postmarked no later than Monday, March 16, 2026.

## Contest Period:

January 1, 2025, to December 31, 2025

## Number of Entries:

Only one entry may be submitted by each newspaper in categories 1, 2, and 18. **No more than four (4) entries may be submitted for the other categories.**

## Entry Fee/Payment:

Newspapers in Divisions A, B, C and D will pay \$8.50 per entry. Division E papers \$11.50 per entry.

## Divisions:

- A: Daily newspapers (publishing 2+ days/week) with a total paid circulation of 10,000 and above.
- B: Daily newspapers (publishing 2+ days/week) with a total paid circulation of 9,999 and below.
- C: Non-daily newspapers (publishing less than 2 days/week) with a total paid circulation of 3,001 and above.
- D: Non-daily newspapers (publishing less than 2 days/week) with a total paid circulation of 3,000 and below.
- E: Associate Member Newspapers and Active Member affiliate free circulation products (TMC's).

**NOTE:** Your newspaper division will remain unchanged going forward. For example, if you entered the 2024 contest in Division A, you will remain in Division A. APA staff will review the USPS Publisher's Statement of Ownership each year to evaluate any significant changes in paid circulation. *Newspapers wishing to compete in a different division must seek the approval of the AMA Committee.* Newspapers entering the contest for the first time will be assigned a division based on circulation.

## Eligibility:

The contest is open to active newspaper members, active member affiliate free circulation products (TMC's), and publication associate members of the Alabama Press Association. Active member affiliate free circulation products may enter the contest in Division E.

All ads must be original from your newspaper or newspaper website. **They must be conceived, written, and sold by the newspaper staff members.** The concept must be unique to the advertiser and to the newspaper.

Entries in all categories may be submitted from newspaper print products, newspaper websites, or newspaper niche publications.

Papers entering the contest must provide at least one (1) judge per paper.

A signed Publisher's Statement of Validity is required.

# 2026 AMA Advertising Contest Essentials

## Group Publications:

In instances in which more than one newspaper under one ownership cooperates in its news and advertising, a single piece of work can be entered by only one newspaper in the largest category. Entries for affiliates of active member papers that enter in Division E should only enter work unique to their product. For example if a story, photo, or ad is entered under the active member paper, it is not eligible to be entered in Division E under the affiliate member paper.

## Entry Prep:

All entries should be submitted as a cropped PDF, JPG or URLs, and a lower quality PDF of the whole page to include the date of publication and paper. Check the rules for more details. Some categories require hard copies to be mailed as well as entered online. Note: Entries for Advertising Sweepstakes are required to be from specific date ranges. Check the rules for details. PDF's should be print quality resolution, but please try to optimize the file to the smallest size. Ads for entry should be clearly marked so it is obvious what to judge.

## Web Categories:

If linking to a part of your website that is behind your paywall or password-protected area, make sure to include a user name and password for the judges that will work in the months of March - May. Judges may disqualify your entry if work samples are inaccessible. Simply enter your paywall info into the Title/Cutline box or create a PDF with the access info and upload when you submit your entry.

## Judging information:

Judging will be handled by newspaper professionals from another state. When possible, panelists from dailies will judge daily entries and those from weeklies will judge weekly entries. Judges reserve the right to disqualify entries submitted in an inappropriate category or that do not otherwise follow the criteria described herein. Decisions of the judges are final, however the APA Media Awards Contest Committee reserves the right to revoke any award found to be in violation of the contest rules. Judges will be asked to include brief, useful and constructive comments for each first place award. Comments will be published in a contest publication and distributed to all member newspapers.

## Awards:

Newspapers will receive awards at the APA Summer Convention. Not all winners will be announced prior to the banquet. Newspapers will be notified if they are among the winners in the unannounced categories.

## Special Notes:



Indicates that category has specific date requirements.



Indicates that category is a mail-in category.

Packages should be shipped to : Alabama Press Association  
AMA Advertising Entry  
2180 Parkway Lake Drive  
Hoover, AL 35244

Packages must be post marked by **March 16, 2026.**

## PDF Instructions

- Each entry must be less than 100 MB, but smaller files are better.
- Eliminate extra pages. Upload only the page(s) on which the entry is located.
- For multiple-page entries, combine all pages, into one PDF.
- If you don't have Adobe Acrobat or can't figure out what to do, call APA for help.

### **Extract pages from multi-page PDFs:**

- If your entry is part of a multi-page PDF, open the PDF with Adobe Acrobat and save it with a new name.
- Open the new PDF, go to "Document" menu, select "Extract Pages" and follow the directions.
- Eliminate all pages that are NOT part of your entry. In the "Pages" panel, you can rearrange the PDFs in the order you want the judges to see them.
- Save the new PDF.

### **Combine multiple PDFs into one:**

- Each entry should consist of one single PDF file whenever possible.
- If a category calls for more than one piece, combine the pieces into a single file for uploading to the contest platform. Using Adobe Acrobat, open the first PDF that you want in your entry and save it with a new name.
- Open the new PDF, go to the "Document" menu and choose "Insert Pages." Navigate to the next PDF that you want in the entry and select it.
- Continue until you have inserted all of your pages. In the "Pages" panel, you can rearrange the PDFs in the order you want the judges to see them. Save the new PDF.

### **Marking an entry on a full-page PDF:**

- Within Acrobat, be sure to mark your entry with an arrow or box so judges will know what to judge.
- This is especially important if you have more than one ad per page.

### **Make PDF files smaller:**

- For printing, most newspaper PDFs include high-resolution images. However, contest entries will be viewed and judged on computer screens at low resolution and in RGB color.
- Changing the resolution and changing the CMYK color mode to RGB are the two most effective ways to reduce file size without sacrificing the screen viewing quality.
- Winning entries will be displayed in a printed tab, so do not reduce below average print quality.

## BASIC ENTRY INSTRUCTIONS

<http://www.newspapercontest.com/Alabama>

**The Association Code is: AlabamaPress**

Step 1 — Login to <http://www.newspapercontest.com/Alabama> . Complete rules for both advertising and editorial contests are available online. Some browsers, such as Safari, will open the rules in a new window; others will require you to download the PDF file to your computer.

Step 2 — Click on the “Register” tab.

Step 3 — Register on the contest website using your email address. **The Association Code is: AlabamaPress.** You will receive a confirmation email, which you will need to complete your registration. **Note: You will need separate email addresses for the Editorial, Advertising and Magazine contests.**

Step 4 — On this page, select your newspaper name. A lot of information will auto-fill. If you do not see your paper listed or if the information is incorrect, please call APA at (205) 871-7737. Your division will be selected for you based on your circulation. Fill in the preparer’s name.

Step 5 — Select “Editorial” or “Advertising” to begin submitting entries. As you create entries, this field will not change unless you select to change it. All required fields are marked with a red asterisk.

Step 6 — Select the contest category. These are drop-down menus for your convenience. This field will clear each time you save an entry, so you must select a class for each new entry. When you select the class, special instructions will appear below it.

Step 7 — If necessary, provide an explanation of your entry. The explanation/cutline box is limited to 3,000 characters. It’s a good idea to write your explanation in another program, such as Word, and copy/paste into the explanation box. If a URL is required, fill in the URL box; there is no need to type “http://.”

**Step 8 —Please name/save your entry (the uploaded file) as the title of your story, ad or photograph. i.e. “APA Wins Contest” or “Sunset on the bay”** If you wish, also include the name/number of the category you are entering.

**Step 9 — Include the name of the person or people who should be credited for any award.** This is generally the writer, reporter, photographer, graphic artist, cartoonist, etc. It is not necessarily the name of the person submitting the entry nor the person picking up the award at the convention.

Step 10 — Add your file or files. You can drag and drop files or use the “Add files” button to navigate your files. Generally, files should be in PDF format except photos, which should be in high-resolution JPG format. Other files and URLs may be acceptable as noted in the special instructions. Upload as many files as are necessary to complete your entry but refer to the special instructions for any limitations. Mail-in categories **MUST** also be entered into the online system. Follow the instructions for each category listed in the Contest Rules and Regulations.

Step 11 — When you have completed your submission, click the “Save” button. If you click the “Back to list” button, you will lose the entry you just completed. After clicking “Save,” you will be directed back to the list of your entries. You may not change an entry, but you may delete an entry and resubmit it.

Step 12 — To submit another entry, click “Add New Entry.” As long as you have not logged out of the system, your newspaper name will still be in place and you can simply start at Step 6 again. You may log out and log back in later to continue adding entries. You will need to select your newspaper name each time you log in.

Step 13 — If you are finished submitting entries, please review the list. When you are finished uploading all your entries, click the “Billing” button on the list page. This will take you to a page where the entry fee is automatically generated. You will have the option of paying online with a credit card via PayPal (you do not have to have a PayPal account to use this feature), phoning in a credit card payment or mailing in payment. Once payment is made, we will disable your access to the page. If you find out later that you need access, you would need to call the APA office at (205) 871-7737 or register using a different email address.



## Category 1 Advertising Sweepstakes Award ONE ENTRY PER PAPER



This is the top award given in each division. Winners in the Advertising Sweepstakes Award category can be said to be consistently outstanding issue to issue.

Papers **MUST** enter the Advertising Sweepstakes category to be eligible to place in the overall Advertising Sweepstakes Award. Also, Papers who don't enter Advertising Sweepstakes will not be able to gain enough points to win General Excellence in the Editorial Contest.

The judge's points awarded for the Advertising Sweepstakes Awards are based on the following criteria:

General layout and appearance, organization and promotion of advertising.	Up to 20 points
Overall creativity/originality.	Up to 20 points
Use of photos, graphics and typography.	Up to 20 points
Quality and technique of copywriting.	Up to 15 points
Overall website advertising.	Up to 15 points
Handling of classified or reader ads.	Up to 10 points

*To Enter: Select the category name from the online entry tab, name the entry: "Ad Sweepstakes" and submit (no other fields should be filled out). **Submit a total of four (4) complete newspapers**, one from **March 9-15, 2025** and **November 2-8, 2025**, and **two issues of your choice**. Only **ONE** of the four issues can be from a **SUNDAY** paper.*

**Additional Notes on Advertising Sweepstakes** Awarding of the Advertising Sweepstakes prizes will be based on a point system, with the judge's total points awarded for your Advertising Sweepstakes entries added to points you earn by winning awards in other advertising categories (5 points for first, 3 points for second and 2 points for third) .

## Category 2 Best Classified Page or Section ONE ENTRY PER PAPER

Emphasis will be given to layout, organization, promotion and general appearance. Judges will not consider volume of advertising.

*To Enter: Select the category name from the online entry tab. Submit URL's or upload full-page PDF(s) from three different issues. If possible combine pages from each issue into one optimized pdf file.*

## Category 3 Best Single Ad 1/2 page and under – black and white

Judging will be based on design, copy, visual impact and creativity.

*To Enter: Select the category name from the online entry tab. Entry name should be the caption of the ad or the advertiser name. Submit URL's or upload a full page PDF, jpg, or screen shot of the entire page that the ad is on which includes the paper name and date.*

## Category 4 Best Single Ad 1/2 page and under – color

Judging will be based on design, copy, visual impact and creativity.

*To Enter: Select the category name from the online entry tab. Entry name should be the caption of the ad or the advertiser name. Submit URL's or upload a full page PDF, jpg, or screen shot of the entire page that the ad is on which includes the paper name and date.*

## Category 5 Best Single Ad over 1/2 page – black and white

Judging will be based on design, copy, visual impact and creativity.

*To Enter: Select the category name from the online entry tab. Entry name should be the caption of the ad or the advertiser name. Submit URL's or upload a full page PDF, jpg, or screen shot of the entire page that the ad is on which includes the paper name and date.*

## Category 6 Best Single Ad over 1/2 page – color

Judging will be based on design, copy, visual impact and creativity.

*To Enter: Select the category name from the online entry tab. Entry name should be the caption of the ad or the advertiser name. Submit URL's or upload a full page PDF, jpg, or screen shot of the entire page that the ad is on which includes the paper name and date.*

## Category 7 Best Regularly Scheduled Special Section – Newsprint or Glossy

Section must be published annually or more frequently. The entry must be an entity unto itself, separate and distinct from the regular edition of the newspaper, yet inserted in the newspaper. Judging will be based on the concept of the section, creativity, effective use of line art and half tones, effective use of typefaces and presswork.

*To Enter: Select the category name from the online entry tab, name the entry the name of the special section. Use the explanation box to offer any additional information about your entry, and upload a pdf or jpg of the cover of the special section. Mail one copy per entry to be considered. Must be a section or supplement distinct from the regular edition of the newspaper.*

## Category 8 Best One-Time Special Section – Newsprint or Glossy

Includes all sections that are not routinely published. Vendor-funded sections may be submitted in this category. The entry must be an entity unto itself, separate and distinct from the regular edition of the newspaper, yet inserted in the newspaper. Judging will be based on the concept of the section, creativity, effective use of line art and half-tones, effective use of typefaces and press work. Editorial content will not be considered.

*To Enter: Select the category name from the online entry tab. Name the entry the name of the special section. Use the explanation box to offer any additional information about your entry, and upload a pdf or jpg of the cover of the special section. Mail one entire copy per entry of the sectional supplement to be considered. Must be a section or supplement distinct from the regular edition of the newspaper.*

## Category 9 Best In-Paper Promotion of Newspaper HOUSE ADS ALLOWED

The entry may be a single house ad, a series, a campaign or a special page to promote the newspaper. Consideration will be given to specially prepared campaigns or series of advertisements with an original theme. Materials must be entirely the work of the newspaper's staff. Points to be considered in judging are originality; layout and design; headlines and copy; and photography and other art.

*To Enter: Select the category name from the online entry tab. Entry name should be the caption or campaign theme. Use the explanation box to offer any additional information about your entry. Submit URL's or upload a high-res cropped PDF or jpg of the ad(s) being entered **AND** a PDF, jpg, or screen shot of the full page the ad is on that includes the paper name and date.*

## Category 10 Best Advertising Campaign

Campaign must consist of a minimum of (3) three ads for a single advertiser with a continuing, common theme. Judging will be based on design, copy, visual impact and creativity of the total campaign.

*To Enter: Select the category name from the online entry tab. Entry name should be the campaign or advertisers name. Use the explanation box to present a statement on the effectiveness of the campaign or offer any additional information about your entry. Submit URL's or a PDF, jpg, or screen shot of the full page the ad is on that includes the paper name and date. If possible please combine each campaign into one pdf.*

## Category 11 Best Original/Creative Idea HOUSE ADS ALLOWED

This category includes both black and white as well as color ads. It includes not only ads that are particularly unique, fresh, creative and original, but also all those that do not fit any other category. House ads may be submitted in this category including a single house ad, a campaign or a special page to promote the newspaper.

*To Enter: Select the category name from the online entry tab. Entry name should be the name of the ad or advertiser. Submit URL's or upload a full page PDF, jpg, or screen shot of the entire page that the ad is on which includes the paper name and date.*

## Category 12 Best Classified Display Ad

May include but is not limited to auto, real estate, employment and directories. Judging will be based on creativity and originality of the promotion, design and reader appeal of the ads.

*To Enter: Select the category name from the online entry tab. Entry name should be "Classified Ad". Submit URL's or upload a full page PDF, jpg, or screen shot of the entire page that the ad is on which includes the paper name and date.*

## Category 13 Best Signature Page

Judging will be based on creativity, unifying theme, use of typeface, artwork and overall composition.

*To Enter: Select the category name from the online entry tab. Entry name should be "Sig Page". Submit URL's or upload a full page PDF, jpg, or screen shot of the entire page that the ad is on which includes the paper name and date.*

## Category 14 Best Niche Publication

For the purpose of this contest, a 'niche publication' will be defined as a special publication, distributed independently of the newspaper, **published less than 4 times a year**. A publication is not excluded if it is also distributed with the parent newspaper. This also includes any printed product that is sold as a stand-alone product for a specific targeted market. **Examples:** Football Preview Sections, Bridal Magazines, Cutest Kids Calendar, Community Calendar, Directories, Dining, Election, Visitors and Gift Guides, and Cookbooks. Judging criteria will be based on: creativity, design and reader appeal of the publication.

*To Enter: Select the category name from the online entry tab, name the entry the name of the publication. Use the explanation box to explain how the publication was distributed and offer any additional information about your entry, and upload a pdf or jpg of the cover of the publication. **Mail one copy per entry of the entire niche publication to be considered. Must be a section or supplement distinct from the regular edition of the newspaper, which the majority of its circulation is not inserted into the newspaper.***

## Category 15 Best Use of Humor

Ad may be any size, black and white or color. Judges will consider all aspects of the ad (basic idea, layout, copy, headline, typography and originality) plus special emphasis on how humor is used.

*To Enter: Select the category name from the online entry tab. Entry name should be the caption of the ad or advertiser name. Submit URL's or upload a high-res cropped PDF or jpg of just the ad being entered **AND** a full page PDF, jpg, or screen shot of the entire page that the ad is on which includes the paper name and date.*

## Category 16 Best Presentation of Online Advertising ONE ENTRY PER PAPER

Judges will evaluate general layout, appearance and organization of advertising throughout the website. Judges will not consider volume of advertising. Judges will randomly visit each website anytime March-May.

*To Enter: Select the category name from the online entry tab. Entry name should be the website address. Submit the URL. If your site requires a subscription, please include a user name and password in the explanation box.*

## Category 17 Best Innovative Online Advertising – Single Ad

Recognizes visual appeal, creativity in design, originality and content of a single ad appearing on the newspaper's website. Ads may be static or animated. Ad must be conceived, written and designed by the newspaper staff members.

*To Enter: Select the category name from the online entry tab. Entry name should be the caption name of the ad or advertiser name. Submit entries via URL (full link) if the site remains live, upload JPEG, or PDF if not. If your site requires a subscription please include a user name and password in the explanation box.*

## Category 18 Online Revenue Builder

Entries should be house ads, and should spotlight efforts to drive traffic to the publication's site, increase use of the publication's site and increase revenue with online advertising and marketing.

*To Enter: Select the category name from the online entry tab. Entry name should be named the caption of the ad. Submit entries via URL (full link) if the site remains live, upload JPEG, or PDF if not. If your site requires a subscription please include a user name and password in the explanation box.*

## Category 19 Best Use of Video Advertising

Recognizes visual appeal, creativity in production, originality and content of a single video format ad appearing on the publication's or advertiser's website. Ads may be static or animated. Ad must be conceived, written and produced by the newspaper staff members. **This does not include still ads that appear in video content.**

*To Enter: Select the category name from the online entry tab. Entry name should be named the caption of the ad. To submit entries upload screenshots as JPEG, PDF or video files.*

## Category 20 Best Use of Social Media Advertising

Recognizes visual appeal, creativity in design, originality and content of a single ad appearing on the publication or advertiser's social media feed. Ads may be static or animated. You may share campaign metrics but the judge will only consider creativity of ad, not it's performance. Ad must be conceived, written and produced by the newspaper staff members.

*To Enter: Select the category name from the online entry tab. Entry name should be named the caption of the ad. To submit entries upload screenshots as JPEG, PDF or video files.*

## Ad of the Year

Judges will select one ad from all first place winners in categories 3-6, 10, 11, and 14-16.





## Publisher's Statement of Validity

I hereby certify that all entries submitted by this newspaper in the 2026 APA Media Awards Contest meet the prescribed requirements and qualifications as related to circulation figures, membership, publication dates and all other aspects spelled out and implied by the rules of the 2026 AMA Advertising Division.

I understand that any violation brought to the attention of the APA Media Awards Contest Committee is subject to review. Any award found to be in violation of the contest rules can and will be revoked.

***All entries must be original from your newspaper. They must be conceived and written by the newspaper staff members.*** A staff member is defined as a regularly employed, full-or-part-time person who works for your newspaper. Freelance work is allowed only if it appears exclusively in your newspaper or on your website.

Signature of Publisher: \_\_\_\_\_

Newspaper: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

You can email this form to [jaclyn@alabamapress.org](mailto:jaclyn@alabamapress.org) or fax to (205) 871-7740.  
You may also include it with any hard copy entries you are mailing to APA.

### PLEASE NOTE:

- \*Entries must be uploaded no later than 11:59 PM, Monday March 16, 2026.
- \* Entries requiring hard copies should be postmarked no later than Monday March 16, 2026, and mailed to: APA Media Awards Contest, 2180 Parkway Lake Drive, Hoover, AL 35244

# 2026 APA Media Awards Contest Advertising Hard Copy Entry Form

Name of Newspaper: \_\_\_\_\_

AMA Division (check one):    A \_\_\_\_\_    B \_\_\_\_\_    C \_\_\_\_\_    D \_\_\_\_\_    E \_\_\_\_\_

**Check categories entered & list publication date(s) for each entry:**

☐ **Category 1 Advertising Sweepstakes Award**

Only ONE can be from a Sunday paper (one entry per paper made up of four issues \*see rules)

Dates (4):    ☐ From March 9-15, 2025    ☐ From November 2-8, 2025  
                  ☐ \_\_\_\_\_    ☐ \_\_\_\_\_  
                                    Your choice                                      Your choice

**List publication date(s) of your choice for each entry: (4 entries maximum per category)**

☐ **Category 7 Best Regularly Scheduled Special Section – Newsprint or Glossy**

**Date(s):** \_\_\_\_\_

☐ **Category 8 Best One-Time Special Section – Newsprint or Glossy**

**Date(s):** \_\_\_\_\_

☐ **Category 14 Niche Publication**

**Date(s):** \_\_\_\_\_

## Labels for Required Hard Copy Entries

**STAPLE** label to the upper left-hand corner of each individual entry. Each individual entry should have its own label.  
Do not use paper clips or tape to affix entry labels or multiple pages. Make copies if you need more.

2026 APA ADVERTISING CONTEST	2026 APA ADVERTISING CONTEST
Contest Category (name & number):	Contest Category (name & number):
_____	_____
Division: A B C D E (circle one)	Division: A B C D E (circle one)
Newspaper:	Newspaper:
_____	_____
Name(s) to be recognized:	Name(s) to be recognized:
_____	_____
2026 APA ADVERTISING CONTEST	2026 APA ADVERTISING CONTEST
Contest Category (name & number):	Contest Category (name & number):
_____	_____
Division: A B C D E (circle one)	Division: A B C D E (circle one)
Newspaper:	Newspaper:
_____	_____
Name(s) to be recognized:	Name(s) to be recognized:
_____	_____
2026 APA ADVERTISING CONTEST	2026 APA ADVERTISING CONTEST
Contest Category (name & number):	Contest Category (name & number):
_____	_____
Division: A B C D E (circle one)	Division: A B C D E (circle one)
Newspaper:	Newspaper:
_____	_____
Name(s) to be recognized:	Name(s) to be recognized:
_____	_____