



TAMING THE DIGITAL HERD

Merging your print and mail communications with the multi-channel world | *By John Foley*

Communication today is nothing like it was 10 years ago — or even two years ago. We now receive messages from vendors, family, friends and even our dentist in a variety of ways. It might still be through a traditional phone call or a letter, but more often than not, it is via email, a text message, a post on our Facebook page or a tweet on Twitter. Today, there are so many vehicles for communicating, and most are driven by our ability to use the Internet and cell phones, technologies that allow us to communicate with one another no matter where we are in the world.

Without a doubt, the emergence of web-based and mobile technologies has had an impact on traditional communication and marketing channels — particularly mail, print and even fulfillment. Access to different channels of communication has made it easier for us to find information, pay bills and buy just about anything.

In spite of all this electronic activity, print and mail is still a very effective method of communication. Designed and produced with the recipient in mind, it can attract attention — creating awareness and demand. It can deliver a relevant, compelling message when you incorporate personalization or the use of TransPromo. However, in order for mailers to grow their businesses, it is becoming increasingly important to understand and seek out ways to connect traditional print and mail with other popular channels because your customers are looking at all forms of communication when it comes to reaching their own customers.

So what do you need to know to be a total solutions provider and answer these demands for your customers? The following are certain basic capabilities that are important to have in place today or very soon:

- **The ability to effectively manage customer databases.** The reality is that the one who holds the data wins. The ability to house your customers' data effectively, create multiple

distribution lists and manage future entries by automatically updating names, addresses, phone and fax numbers, job titles and other critical fields is paramount. It is important to integrate software into your processes that has the features and the scalability to support both simple and complex database requirements, giving you the ability to deliver the right message to a target audience across different channels.

- **Offering personalized URLs as part of your mailings.** Personalized URLs (PURLs) are an effective way to increase the response rates of marketing efforts. PURLs are mostly being used to enhance printed direct mailpieces; however, they can also be effective with email blasts and other media targeted to a specific individual. There are software solutions today that allow you to easily build, execute and measure PURL efforts, adding value to each mailpiece. A Direct Marketing Association survey reports that nearly 33% of consumers prefer to respond to direct mail by going online rather than using a reply card, which makes PURLs the method of choice for gathering leads.
- **Supporting traditional mail with email campaigns.** One of the most effective (yet inexpensive) methods to quickly reach people is through email. Email campaigns can support the mailpiece by reaching out to the recipient through one more channel with the same message, or they can stand alone. Once again, the ability to be able to build, execute and measure is important. Email marketing can also be used to close the sales loop. After someone responds to a PURL by visiting the landing page, your system should be able to automatically send an HTML or text email to their address. This email can be nothing more than a simple "thank you," but it can also contain links to other information that the prospect might find interesting, further encouraging engagement.

- **Getting on board with the use of QR codes.** Quick response (QR) codes are an innovative way of connecting stagnate print with an interactive response — a practice known as interactive print. They are part of an ongoing development of marketing solutions that also build, manage, execute and measure all aspects of a company's marketing efforts. QR codes are two-dimensional barcodes featuring URLs that drive users from printed material to the web and are increasingly being used on business cards, direct mailpieces, billboards, postcards, fliers and more to enhance marketing initiatives. While it may sound difficult, there is software on the market that makes it extremely easy to generate QR codes independently or as an integrated part of the company's end-to-end, personalized marketing solutions.

understand its value, letting it resonate with customers and then looking to grow from there. For example, create a personalized direct mailer and combine it with a PURL. In doing so, you can integrate the marketing message from the direct mailpiece to the web, where you can track and measure response, providing the most valuable part of any marketing campaign: feedback.

Today's technologies certainly can support all of the new channels of communication. While many solutions are available to implement each application and support each channel, it is important to avoid amassing a disparate conglomeration of technologies and applications. Rather, seek out a comprehensive, integrated marketing solution that is flexible enough to accommodate a wide range of requirements and scalable enough to grow alongside your business.

As companies investigate using other channels to communicate with their clients, mailers must find ways to present the benefits of being a one-stop solution, whether you are an in-house department or a service provider. The days of "spray and pray," mass-marketing approaches are fading away. While this may end the amount of mail volumes that have been seen in the past, it may be that these new ways of communicating more closely with customers will open up opportunities to be more effective in our communication efforts. We now have the ability to create and measure what messages matter to each recipient, which is sure to result in greater loyalty and a higher success rate in the end.

In this business, it is definitely a time of transition. What we are seeing today is often labeled as a transformation from mailer to marketing services provider. Whatever it's called, if mailers take advantage of technologies that enable the management, execution and measurement of multi-channel communications, they will grow their business. ■

Taking the first step to offering these new services can be as simple as employing one communication channel first, taking time to

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