

New Technologies Ignite Direct Mail Response

BY SHAWN R. SALTA



Direct mail is alive and well in today's electronic world, in spite of what the marketing pundits seem to proclaim. Companies attuned

to changing consumer response trends and poised to exploit them already understand that marketing is not an either/or proposition. Rather, the greatest success belongs to those organizations that effectively integrate traditional direct mail approaches with new electronic media.

Trends emerging over the past five years support the notion of integrating these two disciplines in a cohesive overall marketing strategy. In particular, my firm, DirectMail.com, has seen:

- Lead-generation mailings where 70 percent of responses and conversions once accomplished via business reply card (BRC) or phone evolve into 70 percent being transacted online or by phone.

- Membership renewals increasingly triggered by a mailing that provides respondents an online enrollment option.
- Marketers who had allocated large percentages of their acquisition budgets to electronic media return to traditional direct mail to meet their projections.

Perhaps the most notable trend is that today's consumers are taking control when it comes to receiving marketing messages electronically. They know they can tune in or out to online contacts and emails at will; and Generation Y is all but tuned out, eschewing email and instead communicating exclusively through protected social media sites.

Given that direct mail remains a vital component of any successful direct marketing strategy in this new electronic world, what has changed? The response channels offered to direct mail recipients. These channels confer advantages such as cost savings, higher response rates, total response capture, and immediacy. Cost savings stream from lower production and postage costs. Most respondents like the ease of online response, while marketers revel in 100 percent response-capture rates and access to immediate, actionable marketing information.

Ideally, more marketers will incorporate personalized URLs (p-URLs) and micro sites into future direct mail campaigns rather than direct consumers to generic websites. Micro

sites not only allow marketers to serve up information targeted to a recipient's unique demographic and lifestyle data, but also collect new data. For example, if an individual accesses a site but logs off without responding, it is captured. Marketers can follow up immediately, either through another direct mail campaign or ideally through a faster, pre-programmed email campaign initiated by log-offs without responses. Such immediacy allows the customer engagement process to proceed uninterrupted, thereby increasing the likelihood of creating/sustaining profitable, long-term relationships with potential/existing customers.

Prospects and customers will always choose to respond in a variety of ways. Truly integrated solutions can track all communications and responses through multiple channels. Today's solutions allow marketers to create and manage integrated direct mail, email, p-URL, micro site, search and SMS text campaigns. So, amid all the clamor surrounding e-marketing, direct mail is alive and well—and a prominent part of integrated marketing solutions.

Shawn R. Salta is vice president of DirectMail.com and a certified direct marketer. He oversees multiple aspects of DirectMail.com's business operations, but specializes in new technology identification with the goal of offering clients advanced multi-channel marketing tools, streamlining direct mail operations and increasing overall enterprise efficiency. Shawn serves as Industry Chairman, Washington Metropolitan Postal Consumer Council, and was instrumental in developing Enhanced Postal Optimization, a program that generates cost savings and faster delivery options for DirectMail.com's clients throughout the country.