

Are you tracking your Direct Mail?

It's so easy to set up and assemble direct mail pieces and campaigns without considering tracking the response by piece or medium. Often times we get caught up in creative, printing and just getting the mail out that we forget about knowing which piece, campaign or message generated the most response.

Tracking mail pieces can be as simple or complex as you want to make it. The more complex, the more back-end analysis and time will go into organizing, sifting and analyzing raw data into a format that provides accurate statistics.

Here are some simple methods that you can use not only for direct mail pieces, but also many other types of marketing channels.

Bounce Back Cards & Envelopes

Credit card companies use these every time they send out a preapproved offer. The envelope that you use to mail back the form is coded, along with the form itself. They know exactly which offer you received, and based on response can tell which offer out pulls others. Place the codes on the letter/form being filled out, envelope or the card, if you are using a double postcard. Double postcards are often used in mailings to spark interest in a particular product or service through small amounts of copy. The other attached card may be a survey or asks for more information. This card is filled out, torn free, and mailed back. These cards should have codes on them indicating the campaign, offer, or market segment that you used for your mailing.

Toll Free Numbers

Depending on who your business phone provider is, you can typically obtain multiple toll free numbers at little or no cost. Most providers charge based on how many calls come in, and some provide online tracking management services that you can access from the Internet. For example, say you have three or four campaigns going on at the same time, each overlapping the other in response dates. If your call to action is one of using the phone for your prospect/client to inquire or purchase, you can use different phone numbers on each campaign or mailing piece target. We place inserts in a local business paper and use different toll free numbers on each insert. We want to track response based on the service being advertised that month. During this same period, we are mailing out campaign pieces for various service segments and use different toll free numbers on each campaign segment to track response. It makes more work to manage the numbers, but you know exactly who called about which piece. You can deactivate numbers or reuse them as time passes between campaigns. Numbers are relatively cheap to acquire and usage prices are often negotiable based on volume.

Website or e-mail

Several companies only have one Website and push it in every marketing channel, message, and campaign they deploy. The problem is that if you are driving traffic to your site through multiple channels, campaigns and messages, you have no way of knowing which message or offer is more effective at generating this traffic. As in the above example of toll free numbers the same applies to Websites or email addresses. If you are marketing a specific product or service and pushing response through an email address, use a unique address for each campaign or offer. Set up unique Websites for each campaign or offer. They don't have to be an extension of your current site, but can link to your home page. For example, if your main page is www.trackyourmail.com and you have an offer for product "XYZ," some marketers will use www.trackyourmail.com/xyz as the site. Still others will set up a new Website called www.xyz.com, which I prefer. It's shorter and more directly related to the product or service. Also, choose name variations of your company or product. For example we use www.immediaDelivers.com, www.immediainc.net, www.Deliverimmedia.com. Each time we deploy a new campaign, we obtain new URLs for that campaign or recycle old ones that haven't been used in awhile. Website URLs are fairly inexpensive to obtain, and relatively fast to set up hit tracking. Any web developer should be able to do this for you. Try using a unique URL for each campaign and see if you are able to track responses better. You might be surprised to learn that campaigns you thought were more effective are not and vice versa.

Login Name & Password

Many Internet service providers and other companies have capitalized on this concept. Depending on your business model, market segment and message, you may be driving people to a Website where they need to login. For example, you may be offering free white papers for a limited time and you want people to get a "taste" of the value of this information. Send out mailers that contain unique passwords and login user names for each recipient. When they sign in, you can track who responded, when and to what offer.

Offer Codes and Types

Many times in business-to-consumer marketing, marketers will make use of various types of offers in testing. For example, "Buy one get one FREE" or "Buy one, get 50% off your next purchase," and many others. Offer types are limitless and can be used in tracking. If you choose to test one offer versus another in direct mail, try two offers the first time. Send one offer to half your list and the other offer to the rest. It's important to know up front who got what offer so when they respond, you will know which offer out pulled the other. When doing this type of testing and tracking, it's a good idea not to use any other variable in the copy or design elements so that the test will stay fixed within the offer itself.

Telephone Inquiry

This is probably the most widely used, inexpensive and least objective of all methods. The problem with asking people over the phone how they heard about the offer, sale or promotion, is that they may not remember exactly which marketing channel provided the buzz for them to respond. For example, if you are using a multi-channel campaign

through radio, television, direct mail and billboards – all with the same message, offer or promotion – how can you be absolutely certain that the person remembers exactly which medium caused their response. They may say, “I read your mail piece,” but actually a television ad that morning – after hearing about it on the radio two days prior – caused the trigger. Another issue is those responsible for asking the question within your organization may not remember to inquire or document the source of response from the caller. The good thing about a telephone inquiry is that it’s inexpensive and requires little setup and data tracking systems before deployment. It can also be done after the fact if you forget to use other tracking devices.

Coupons

CW Post first introduced coupons in 1895 to promote its new health cereal Grape Nuts. Since then, marketers have used coupons in every possible way, medium and method. The key is to code each coupon with an indicator of when, where and in what target market it’s being used. This will help you determine which coupons are more effective. Don’t just code all your coupons with a month or promotion code, but really analyze what it is you want to track within the coupon itself. For example, if you have identical coupons going into a newspaper and a magazine, use one code for the newspaper and another for the magazine. Use different codes for each magazine if more than one, or each paper, mail piece or other channel if more than one is being deployed simultaneously.

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