

## Change Your Mind about B-to-B Direct Marketing to Change Results

Direct marketing has always played a role in business-to-business marketing programs. But new technologies and audience dynamics are inspiring fresh ways to use strategic, actively-managed and highly-agile database marketing to bring new results. Being successful simply requires a different way of thinking.

### Think Like a Publisher

Trade magazine publishers once owned the franchise as aggregators of information. They also owned their audience, or community of interest. Many publishers are not leveraging the power of the Internet but rather protecting their traditional print business. This creates an opportunity for marketers to own their own communities. But to do it right, you have to think like a publisher.

It starts with your list. You might be amazed to learn how much money good publishers invest in their circulation lists—building, cleansing, qualifying, nurturing and maintaining. As you work to build your own audience for direct communications, you have to be prepared to invest in building and maintaining your list. In the short term, you can purchase or rent lists. But the objective is to break your reliance on renting lists, to *own your list* and continually nurture and maintain it. Think of your list as your community of interest; it should become one of your most valuable marketing assets.

An integrated program of advertising, public relations, online marketing, search and direct communications can bring prospects to your company web site, where you can use information capture techniques to build a database. Telemarketing can be used to build or qualify a list, or your sales organization can do it. Many B-to-B marketers are improving the overall ROI of the old favorite, trade shows, by using them as a key component in the list-building process.

### Think Like an Editor

Again, think about trade publications. Editors stay in contact with their readers to make sure they are covering valued topics. They create an editorial calendar and work ahead to stay on track. They keep a disciplined production schedule so they always hit their publication dates. As you make the move to regular direct marketing, incorporate these practices into your process and you will be more successful. Instead of being a marketer sending out an occasional direct mail piece or email, you are seeking to become a trusted source of information that is of interest to your community.

### Think Like a Sales Pro

Strategic direct marketing isn't about single direct mail projects where you send out 20,000 mailers with the same message to a rented list and hope for a 2% return. It's about creating a program and system of messages, offers, information capture, measurement and refinement. The key is to build a direct communications *roadmap* of continuous cultivation that provides more targeted information and leads prospects to the point where the sales channel can take over.

Using direct or database marketing to move a prospect closer to a sale emulates good selling techniques. Primarily, that means thinking about how to move a prospect toward an action or decision, based on what they need or want. It requires a step-by-step strategy that maps out how to respond to their actions. If the prospect says yes to this question, you send this message or offer. If the prospect says no, you send this one instead. It's really a refinery process, and it can get very granular depending on the audience and selling situation.

### **Think Like a Web Strategist**

Your web site should be the centerpiece of an effective direct marketing program. It is already the center of your B-to-B marketing program and the online representation of your company to prospects and customers alike. In reality, a direct communications program is a kind of outreach, extending the web site's presence to the audience and bringing interested parties to the site to continue their experience.

The direct strategy and the web site should function as a unit to generate lead activity. This means that direct communications need to have specific, targeted offers. The web site must pay off those offers with lots of good content that is of value to the audience. Plus, it must include techniques for information capture, qualification, cultivation and action-generation. If your web site is still primarily a static environment or brochure online, it won't serve this purpose as effectively.

### **Think Like a Marketer**

An effective direct marketing program must be tightly integrated with the other parts of the marketing communications program, not just the web site. New technologies and techniques crop up every day. Frequently, they overlap the traditional boundaries or definitions of media, direct, Internet and even advertising and PR.

Keeping the direct program separate from the rest of the marketing program undercuts its potential for success. It can certainly make sense to use specialized vendors for execution or database management, but it's important to integrate the program creatively and strategically with everything else to ensure that the audience has a consistent, coherent experience with your brand and messaging.

### **Think Like a Manager**

Results matter to management. Direct as a channel is well-suited to the gathering of metrics, response and feedback. By setting up a system of messages, offers, information capture and measurement, you can see and report where prospects are in the direct marketing pipeline. You can assess how they are moving toward an action that will engage the sales process. You can determine how many leads are being generated. With additional information from your sales force, SFA or CRM system, you can determine how many are closing and at what dollar volume.

Ultimately, it is possible to learn what it takes to generate a specific volume of demand for your sales organization. You can use this knowledge to predict how to reach sales goals, and then *dial in* the programs and tactics for the proper level of demand generation. If you can track through to sales results, you can align your program even more closely with sales goals and report program ROI more confidently.

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