



Green or Governance?

Paul Turner, CEO of Acxiom Australia and New Zealand, discusses how best practice direct marketing may influence the future direction of the industry.

As consumers we care more today for our environment and the plight of our planet. We diligently recycle and remain vigilant about water consumption. We switch off lights in empty rooms, no longer leave the television on standby and participate in Earth Hour. But can we translate this same concern into action in our working lives? Beyond printing double-sided and recycling office paper, can marketers make genuine contributions?

Though marketing material in general, and direct mail (DM) in particular, forms a comparatively low percentage of total of household waste it maintains a high profile. This may be due to its largely unsolicited nature, and to the duplications or inappropriate offers of poorly managed customer data. A growing and inevitable swing towards digital and email marketing may improve DM's perceived environmental impact, but as long as direct mail remains the channel of choice for many consumers it will continue to feature prominently in multi-channel strategies.

We know that maintaining an up-to-date and accurate customer database both improves receipt and response rates and lessens waste. Sophisticated de-duplication and screening processes remove duplicates, industry suppressions, deceased and home movers from campaign files. However, accurate matching of your customer data that helps you to decide who to target, and when, is no less important.

In B2B mailing the complexities of accurate targeting, data management, de-duplicating and matching are multiplied by additional company information, generating more waste. Business marketing, however, represents a considerable untapped area of growth for many firms, and well-targeted, relevant campaigns offer numerous opportunities.

This supports greater focus on and investment in analytics; building trigger-based and predictive models for both B2B and B2C marketing remains a growth area within Australia. Employing effective techniques to target likely respondents outdoes any blanket approach, and thorough, repeated testing of campaigns prior to rollout prevents the expensive and wasteful exercise of discovering flawed targeting too late.

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Companies that collect home and business address information, often fail to give the same attention to collecting, verifying and maintaining accurate phone numbers and email addresses. Basic safeguards including double entry of data fields, and prompting customers through other communications such as online statements or incoming calls to update their contact data helps to improve and maintain data quality.

Now common US business practice, designation of a corporate 'data steward' confers responsibility for the development and enforcement of rules for collecting and sharing customer data across all business lines and departments to help maintain accuracy and consistency.

Any corporate green strategy must be sustainable and practical, and realistically benefit the environment. It must also make sound economic business sense without impeding your competitive advantage or inflating your marketing budget. Fortunately, promoting best practice DM achieves this, while enabling us as environmentally aware

citizens to positively impact both our workplace and our planet. Some will always regard DM as junk mail, and while the industry maintains a reputation as a contributor to the global environmental waste issue, it will remain under scrutiny. Businesses electing not to deploy eco-friendly strategies of their own may soon find such decisions imposed upon them as governments issue edicts.

Jodie Sangster, Acxiom's Chief Privacy and Compliance Officer, notes the likely introduction of mandatory Do Not Mail (DNM) Registers in an effort to encourage more responsible marketing activity. "In the US, there are currently several DNM bills before State Senates, while the UK has introduced an environmental policy in response to the imminent threat of mandatory DNM. Conversely, recent attempts to introduce a similar policy in Australia are considered by some to be premature. It may, however, be wise to modify marketing strategies and codes of conduct before the foreseeable threat of legislation forces marketers to conform."

If green is in our corporate future some simple, best practice steps can improve the overall profile of direct mail, and direct marketing as a whole. By exercising more responsible disciplines and self-regulation marketers may influence the degree to which legislation eventually dictates the future direction of their industry.

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