



Mind Your Business....Data

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Mind Your Business Data

Turn Marketing data into a business knowledge centre

In business data, nothing is more important than accuracy. And in B-to-B marketing, data represents a company's most important asset- its customers. The more specific and current information companies have about their customers, the more effectively they can target their market and deliver their message to those customers. And, because a "customer" includes both the business and the contracts within the business, it is essential to keep both types of information up-to-date. With complete and accurate customer data, a marketing database truly can become a knowledge centre for business.

They keys to finding and maintaining quality B-to-B data are:

- Keep data accurate during force change;
- Find the most valuable data
- Trust the data – and its source
- Target the right contacts
- Make sure the information is relevant; and
- Maintain data with frequent updates

Keep Pace with Change

The pace of business change makes the frequency of data updates even more important. In fact, according to the US department of Labour, nearly 50 million hires and 50 million separations occur in any 12-month period. It also reports that the median length of time workers had been with their current employer was four years as of January 2004, up only slightly from 3.5 years in 1983. Among those who started a job between the ages of 33 and 38, 39 percent had ended it in less than a year, and 70 percent had moved on in less than five years. Many companies struggle to keep up with internal changes, let alone keep up with such a high volume of transition in the work force of their target market. Therefore, having access to an external source that maintains current business and individual contact information is vital for marketing success.

Find the Value

So, how do marketers find valuable business data? Since this is the information safe, it should be easy. However, that is not always the case, and the challenge is even greater when marketers are looking for decision maker-level data and are trying to uncover who is responsible for each area of the business and which purchasing decisions they make.

Individual contact data, such as title and job function – and the decision making authority that accompanies the position – are the most likely pieces of information to change. For example, when company X became a client of Company A, John Smith was the assistant manager of plant operations at site one. Eighteen months later, Smith was promoted to plant operations manager and transferred to site two. With this transition, Smith also enjoys additional purchasing authority for plant equipment and supplies. This often is the type of contact information that companies either miss or simply do not have access to in their own databases. data.



Yet this information is critical for targeting product announcements, direct offers and other marketing communications. When there are hundreds of thousands of contacts in the customer database, the result is approximately 20% to 25% inaccurate data according to industry analyst. Industry data also suggests this number jumps to 80 percent when dealing with prospect data.

Get Data From Trustworthy External Sources

The good news is that marketers have options for obtaining quality B-to-B data. In fact, they may not know that the list managers they trust for direct mail or e-mail campaigns also may be able to provide additional business demographics and buying behaviour about individuals in their target market, including current customers.

Given that a list account for 40% of a direct marketing campaign's success, it is in marketers' best interests to look for sources that are pre qualified, such as controlled-circulation subscriber files; frequently updated, industry-specific member directories and other self reported business data. B-to-B direct response campaigns should be driven by data. This means the data provider has to be reliable and knowledgeable about the market the company serves. Marketers should ask their list partner – whether a list manager or a broker – about the ability to append business information at the contact and company levels to marketing files.

Target the Right Contact

Targeting the right individual at an organization does two things: It delivers your message to the decision maker you want to reach, and it reduces postage, printing and production waste. Even the best creative becomes a waste in the hands of a non-decision maker. After all, while necessary to grab the reader's attention, creative accounts for only 15% to 20% of a direct marketing campaign's success. Getting the material into the right hands, however, can mean the difference between a sale and a no sale. And the ability to target the right contact relies on the data.

Many areas of the business depend on accurate customer data. Customer service, order processing, shipping, invoicing and, of course, sales and marketing all look at the same data, or segments thereof, to do their jobs effectively. So, the "right" contact for one person or department may not be the same for another, but each group needs access to accurate and current information. That begs the question, "does my company have all of the relevant contacts in my marketing database to support all areas of the business?" Often, business information has a one-sided view – the accuracy as well as the completeness of a "customer view" is even more important to get to the right contact.

Get Relevant Information

Because customer information is a source of knowledge for multiple business areas, the data has to be relevant for each purpose. When asking a list manager, for example, about the types of business professionals they can target, marketers also may want to consider additional contacts at the company, whether at the same location or a different one, who influence the decision-making process or who will be involved at some point during or after the purchase. The value added by marketing through this process is immeasurable and saves a tremendous amount of time for the sales team as the customer relationship progresses. However it is important to note that the relevance of this information is directly related to the timing of the information delivery.



For example, recall the rate of professional transition and mobility in the workforce. Knowing who holds each position within a company's target prospects and customers at a given time can greatly influence the success of a direct campaign.

Since we've accounted for 60% of program success, we should add that timing contributes another 10 percent. The remaining factors – offer and copy – should be specific and relevant for each of the decision makers involved.

Keep the Data Current

Once a company has "cleaned its house" so to speak, it is just as important to maintain data accuracy with frequent updates. The easiest way to accomplish this is to go back to the same source from which the marketer received the appended business data. Since many pre qualified subscriber files are updated monthly with renewal information and expiring data that is no longer current, they are likely to have independently verified company and contact information. In fact, these data sources often provide a subscription model to provide new information to marketers as it becomes available. Successfully implemented, this type of program empowers marketers to transform their role and become a knowledge centre for the business with accurate, targeted information about customers and prospects.