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FULLFILLMENT

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At Your Request

Strategies for developing customized fulfillment kits

A sure way to fire up results for your fulfillment program is to look for opportunities to better serve your leads during their information-gathering process. If two-thirds of consumers have reported they feel unsolicited marketing materials are not relevant to their needs, according to Yankelovich research from late 2005, can you imagine the level of expectation for respondents who have requested further contact?

By applying old-fashioned marketing strategy and leveraging today's technologies, marketers can turn lead-generation data into customized fulfillment kits that are both more appealing to the recipient and helpful at moving the conversion process along.

Data on Tap

All customization processes start by assessing the data elements on hand, determining which components can be used to develop differentiated messaging strategies. The typical information collected during the lead-generation process is name and postal address, product needs and purchasing time-frame. With this minimum of data, a marketer can personalize components by the lead's name and provide information on the lead's nearest retail

store/sales contact, special regional offers, any state-specific legal notifications and other geographic-specific details, says David Lowndes, director of product development at Comac, a fulfillment solutions company based in Milpitas, Calif.

Beyond this basic information, he adds, are a whole bunch of data points a marketer could collect, such as demographics, age, presence of children and their age ranges, birthdays or other special dates, interests, problems the lead is trying to solve, etc. It's critical, though, not to do anything at this step that hurts response, explains Shari Altman, president of Rural Hall, N.C. direct marketing consultancy Altman Dedicated Direct. Only collect the amount of data you need to create fulfillment materials that offer enhanced benefits for respondents.

Not all data needs to be collected at the initial point of contact with a lead. Lowndes points out that some firms collect just a little data first and then use this information to pre-populate surveys or other communications with leads being primed for conversion. This tactic eases the burden of how much information a lead is asked to provide at any time

and helps the marketer continue to collect the detail that will help determine the next steps to move leads closer to conversion.

Data Points at Work

"Usually, marketers collect information via their own systems and then transmit to their fulfillment company as a regular data feed," says Lowndes.

The fulfillment company takes the masterfile of images and copy versions



that match up to the dynamic content in materials templates developed in advance by the marketer and its fulfillment partner. The data points are then mapped to trigger certain fields so that letter template A might feature three dynamic copy blocks and two dynamic images and get matched up with a similarly generated brochure and reply device.

A best practice to implement in any personalized fulfillment program is for marketers to get back from their fulfillment company a status report after the processing of each data feed, Lowndes advises. This way, marketers have a record of what information was sent to which leads and for what purposes.

In today's multichannel, multitouch environment, he adds, marketers need to be aware of every interaction with their prospects and customers so they can better serve them at successive interaction points.

With today's capabilities, Altman asserts, it should not be a daunting process for companies to share their pro-

gram data with call centers and other channel support partners to provide leads with a seamless experience.

"Marketers need to treat leads at the level of a customer, even though they're still a prospect," says Altman.

Turnaround and Set-up

All things being equal, it does take a little longer to generate custom materials, says Lowndes. But marketers can work ahead with their fulfillment company to optimize the process.

It's best to do all the work in one location, since you want to reduce the chance for mismatched pieces and to obtain the quickest turnaround, he explains. Print-on-demand (POD) capabilities are important in this environment, even if you're using pre-printed shells produced on off-set presses and then personalizing with POD technology at the time of fulfillment.

The set-up of such a program can take anywhere from one to several months to assess the program's aspects, determine costs based on production

processes selected, put processes in place, test, further optimize and then go live, Lowndes explains. But the benefits are worth the wait. Lowndes has seen a 10 to 20 percent reduction in the time it takes audiences to respond to a customized piece, and similar increases in response rates are common, too.

Pitfalls to Avoid

The biggest challenge marketers face, says Lowndes, is recognizing that they might not be able to take their existing fulfillment process and just tack on customization aspects; sometimes they will need to adjust current processes for collecting data, sharing it with their fulfillment company and developing kit materials that lend themselves to customization.

And often, he says, marketers have plenty of communication strategies and design approaches but do not have the tools to put the needed processes in place. This is a critical aspect, because the automation of processes can make a huge difference to operational efficiencies and the final fulfillment piece. ■