

Firm Foundations

Years of experience working in marketing and channel marketing roles for IT manufacturers, distributors and resellers has taught me one valuable lesson. Start with the basics. Get your database right and everything can be built on this.

Many companies are so keen to get on with running marketing campaigns that they overlook the fact that marketing must be database driven. A company database is often something that has no centralised management. Instead, it evolves and expands over time as the company develops – and if left to its own devices, can quickly become out of date, disorganised and largely useless.

Expensive mailers are created by vendors for resellers - or created, with co-op funding assistance, by resellers, but often these are sent to totally inappropriate or inaccurate audiences, wasting money, time and effort for everyone.

Likewise, data is often purchased for specific campaigns and supplied by the list broker in Excel format. These mailing lists are then used but never incorporated into the main company prospect database. So, information which may already be known about a prospect is not used as part of the campaign - and new information gathered as a result of the activity does not find its way back onto the main database to be used in the future.

The solution

Every business should have an accurate database, even if it's a full-time job to keep it that way. I'm talking about a formal marketing database, not the core financial database system on which the business is run. This should include both customer and prospect information, as existing customers are just as important an audience as prospects when it comes to running marketing campaigns. How else can you keep up a regular line of communication with your customers if you don't have the right information about them to hand?

It goes without saying that good database should contain up to date contact details, including email addresses where possible, and in addition to contact information, it should contain as much knowledge about a customer or prospect as it is possible to gather. The following quote from an unknown source makes a good point:

I don't know who you are

I don't know your company

I don't know your company's product

I don't know what your company stands for

I don't know your company's customers
I don't know your company's record
I don't know your company's reputation

Now – what was it you wanted to sell me?

If you don't know as much as possible about a company you are trying to sell to – there is no reason why they should be interested in knowing anything about you. You need to know details of their existing systems, contract renewal dates, decision-maker names, age of installed equipment, which software versions they are running and so on. Not knowing this about your prospects is bad, not knowing the same information about your customers is unforgivable!

All of this will help you to segment your data and omit any companies who are quite plainly 'not in the marketplace'. There's no point wasting valuable literature or phone-calls on a company who just bought from your main competitor a week ago!

Once this has been done and the remainder of the data has been segmented, you will ensure that the messages they receive are relevant in terms of content and timing. At this point it is also worth taking 10 minutes to define your 'ideal customer' in terms of geographical location, vertical sector, company size by employees, turnover and so on. Does your prospect base contain the type of companies you want to target anyway? Identifying these gaps will help when considering purchasing new lists.

Your marketing database is the most valuable sales tool you possess. It is worth investing time and money in finding or developing the right system - and then ensuring that someone within your organisation has the responsibility for making sure it always provides a strong foundation for your marketing activity.”

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