

How direct marketing can drive traffic to stores

I've always found it strange that retailers use one set of marketing tools, and direct marketers use another. Working in direct marketing, I've seen a lot of places where direct strategies can effectively drive retail business.

Over the years, we've figured out how sophisticated direct marketing can be applied profitably to drive traffic, not only into retail stores, but to particular products within those stores. But there are some essential principles to keep in mind to make direct pay off.

1. Make an offer that stands out from the crowd and stands out now.

Chances are, if you're selling something that the market wants, loads of others are selling it, too. You need to give potential customers a compelling reason to visit your locations as opposed to theirs.

Occasionally, you'll have an offering that's brand new and innately exciting. The rush to get the Microsoft Xbox is a good example, supply problems aside. Locations that actually had it in stock were besieged. Trouble is, new products tend to be rare.

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One of the basic direct-marketing motivators that retailers should consider is the offer. Retail offers could be special, invitation-only rates, free gifts, or exclusive events. Whatever the offer, make sure it's unique and highly desirable so you stand out from the crowd. And make sure your offer has a great deal of urgency built in — special tickets to an upcoming event, a limited number of special-edition products. If you don't give your reader a reason to act now, you're encouraging delay. And delay is deadly.

MARKETING WISE



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▼ and plan accordingly. You'd be surprised at some of the supposedly sophisticated marketers who don't.

Because driving to your retail store is basically a geographical exercise, you're going to want to figure out how far your reader must travel to reach your locations and how far they'll be willing to travel. If you don't already have that intelligence, test.

The value of your products can help you determine how far you can ask your customers to travel. A video rental shop shouldn't send people living in Seattle all the way to Bellevue for a copy of "Wedding Crashers." However, a customer might travel much farther to shop for a customized Gulfstream jet.

If you have multiple locations, give your reader only two to three options in a single communication. This figure takes into consideration home and work locations but does not seem like a directory.

3. Be local, even if you're not.

Effective direct marketing is personal communication. You'd pay more attention to a personal letter from a local store manager on his or her stationery than to a mass-printed flyer from corporate headquarters. If you have multiple locations, a personal letter from the manager of the nearest location will be more personal and

2. Targeting tools: Do you know who you're talking to?

Whether you're selling high-end agribusiness equipment through a sophisticated sales process, or cherries from a tent by the side of the road, you need to know who you're selling to,

intimate, and therefore almost certainly perform better.

4. Use the format that makes sense.

The format of your communication depends strongly on the value of your product. If a single sale will gross your business only \$50, you're going to have to go with a very inexpensive format. If your product sells for \$35,000 a pop, a much more elaborate format will probably pencil better and win you more business.

To figure out how much you should be spending on your communication, work backward from the point of sale.

5. Responders respond. Don't waste time with those who won't.

One last thing: When I shop for clothes, I invariably go to the store to try on and purchase items. I never buy clothes online. There are others who love to click and be done with their wardrobe purchases. As a retailer, you should capitalize on both of these behaviors by focusing your drive-to-retail efforts on those, like me, who shop in person. Start with your own customer lists, and test. You'll be able to cull out those customers who shop on their own schedule and won't respond to your events and offers, no matter how spectacular.

The amazing thing about most retailers is that they have a lot of information about customers already, and a lot of them don't use it. They have last purchase, amount, what each customer buys, what time they buy. As a direct marketer, I would love to get that kind of data for all my clients. It opens all kinds of doors to great marketing. It's time retailers took some of that wealth of customer data and applied well-proven direct marketing strategy to make it pay off the way it could — and should.

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