



Online Exclusive: Why What's Old Is What's New in Direct Marketing

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Ask most seasoned practitioners about the future of direct marketing and you'll hear lofty predictions about the explosive growth of e-commerce, viral marketing, electronic kiosks, online loyalty programs or getting leads through smart phones. All those tactics have their roles, especially when they're new and different and can attract a good number of customers drawn to the novelty of the interaction.

But the more we rely on digital, virtual communications, the more powerful older techniques become. In this context, the most powerful technique is good old face-to-face, one-to-one communication. And within that realm, the most powerful channel is targeted event promotions.

Many traditional direct marketers I know are realizing that many of the new technologies may not be working as the computer models said they would. Direct marketers also are seeing many of their tried and tested traditional techniques being hindered by spam regulations, a fragmented audience, government intervention and skyrocketing costs.

I am fully aware that these are challenges and not death sentences. But having left traditional direct marketing, my eyes have been opened to the power of targeted event promotions. As I met with my new team, the issues we discussed sounded familiar to the questions I was asked when I sat with direct marketing clients.

I would like to share 10 reasons why direct targeted event promotion is an important tool for direct marketers.

- Targeted events reach people at their point of passion. Attendees have planned, traveled to and paid for a lifestyle event. They care about what is happening there, and they are paying attention.
- It's the most personal medium. Yes, direct mail lets you personalize the message, and online search allows for localized offers. But nothing is more intimate than an eyeball-to-eyeball, hand-to-hand interaction between a brand ambassador and a prospect at a targeted event.
- Events are measurable to the penny. Today's database technology tracks every event, brand intercept, lead, order and conversion, so we can determine an exact ROI.
- Event audiences are highly targeted. An event marketing agency's proprietary event database and corporate event buying department acts as a de facto in-house direct response list broker.
- Events can generate both leads and sales. Depending on factors such as price points and the size of the product being marketed (since customers may not wish to carry a purchased item for the rest of their

event day), events can engender interactions that result in an instant, on-demand transaction.

- Those interactions also build brand. Nothing endears quite like a passionate brand ambassador who relates to a prospect in a friendly, caring way. The brand is embodied in the person, through the messaging, branded apparel, kiosk or booth, product and collateral material. But in the end, people buy from people, not from brands.

- Events let you test variables. You can modify offers, scripts and pricing at no extra expense and without waiting for the next promotional period or an entire rollout.

- Events comprise the ultimate convergence of marketing disciplines: direct marketing and sales, branding, advertising and public relations.

- You gain a predictive model for rollouts. Like traditional direct marketing, rollout campaign performance can be predicted based on the test and validation phases of targeted event promotions.

- It's a chance to zig while your competition might be zagging. It is the opposite of virtual or electronic. It's more than a telephone voice, more than a computer image, more than a printed letter. It goes back to one person engaging another person. It's marketing in human flesh, with all the senses working toward customer activation.

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