

The Value of a Mailing List

You may admire the salesman who can sell refrigerators to Eskimos or heaters to people living in Miami. But the goal of Direct Mail is to target the audience as precisely as possible.

Gone are the days of shotgun mailings that blanket an entire city or community with irrelevant and untimely sales, information and services. This means that matching your product or service to the needs, interests, buying patterns and financial ability of prospective and current customers is more important than ever. For this, you need the right list. More importantly, you need the “perfect” list.

Key to Success

We’ve learned over the years that the list contributes 40 percent to the success of a campaign, while offer and creative are 40 percent and 20 percent, respectively. I challenge you to think beyond these boxed numbers and put each one of these at the forefront or at 100 percent. Each of these items, in my opinion, is equally important. With the list, you can determine whom your audience is, how they might respond, and how to build the creative around it. This may sound dramatic, but it’s true. After all, the list you use determines who will receive your offer, sample or message, and in a very real sense can be viewed as the market itself.

What List Brokers Can Do

As you already know, immedia acts as a list broker and we are in the business of renting lists. We do not compile these lists ourselves, but represent companies who do. Many lists that bureaus provide are compiled. A compiled list contains names and addresses derived from directories, newspapers, public and courthouse records, warranty and trade show registrations, identifying groups of people, companies or organizations with common characteristics. We help you acquire a targeted list(s) that fits your needs. Want to know which families just had a baby, who just bought a new home or opened a new business? It’s a matter of public record. Forty five percent of companies in the U.S. make their lists available for rental, providing significant marketing opportunities.

Multi-Buyer Lists

You can also create customized lists using multiple lists to determine how often names appear. If you have several criteria that you require for a prospect to assure a higher propensity to purchase your product, you may want to compile a unique list based on many overlapping lists. It will cost more than a single compiled list, but it will be more targeted. For example, say you are selling a clothing product that is geared toward redheaded petite women. It’s not possible to obtain this type of physiological based file, so you can compile it from multiple files. Obtain a list of females in your demographic range, a list of women who purchased skin care products (fair skinned), maybe a list of

women who have purchased clothing similar to your product in the last 4-6 months. Analyze these multiple lists and decide if a person appears on 3, 4 or more – then you mail to them.

Popular Data Selections

Many of today's list companies provide additional data selections for a cost. This additional data that comes in the file can be very helpful for other types of marketing and analysis. For business lists, you can append phone numbers, fax numbers, Website address, years in business, even job titles. Lifestyle data for consumers can be selected on a wide array of items such as hobbies like golf, jogging, travel, music or sports enthusiasts, dieters, pet owners, and people with political affiliations. You can even choose smokers and smokeless tobacco users. Or find people who have previously purchased goods or services such as home entertainment, Internet service, computers and electronics.

Rental List Deliverability

Many list providers won't provide written guarantees on deliverable records. However, after some conversations with leading list providers, I find out what you can come to expect.

According to InfoUSA, they do not guarantee their lists. They say that the "industry standard" for undeliverable addresses on business and consumer rental lists is between 10-15 percent, however, they fall around 7-9 percent. But they will not guarantee this number.

Dunn and Bradstreet only rents business-to-business lists and do not provide a written guarantee on deliverability. They do, however, say that they certify their lists using approved USPS guidelines, with services such as National Change of Address (NCOA) and CASS (Coding Accuracy Support System) certification. They say their business lists will reach about 97 percent of those mailed to. They also go on to say that if a mailing file exceeds the 3 percent, they will work with the client to remedy the situation. They did not offer specifics on what those remedy actions would be.

According to an Experian Marketing Solutions account representative, they do not have a written guarantee. Their consumer lists are going to be more deliverable due to NCOA than their business lists. They consider more than 12 percent undeliverable a "problem" and say that most of their consumer files will have 1-5 percent undeliverable rate depending on specific list criteria selections. For example, apartment dwellers will have a higher rate of undeliverable mail due to moving rates than those in homes. Many people move between apartments and do not provide the USPS with a change of address form.

Experian does say business lists are going to have a higher rate of undeliverable mail, especially those that have been in business for less than five years. Fifty percent of all

new businesses fail in the first year and of those that do survive, 80 percent will fail in the next year. If a business lasts five years or more, it is definitely more solvent. Experian does not offer a written guarantee on business lists, but they did say you could expect 85-95 percent deliverability. They do have a procedure in place where if the returns exceed these quoted numbers, they will send the mailing pieces to their research department to perform an investigation and make concessions to the list purchaser to either replace the bad portion of the list and/or mailers. They say the industry standard for undeliverable mail is around 10 percent.

Nine Vital Questions to ask the List Broker

1. Who is on the list?
2. How recent is the list and when was it last updated?
3. Is it a list of responders, or of actual purchasers?
4. Is it a list of actual purchasers, if so, how recently were they made?
5. Can you get a “hot name” select list of those who have made purchases within the last 90 days?
6. How often has the list been rented?
7. Where did the list come from?
8. If it’s a compiled list, can you see a sample of the file to determine its relevance for your purposes?
9. Are there any guarantees on the deliverability/accuracy of the list? What percentage, if any, and if the percentage of undeliverable is exceeded do I get a refund on those records?

Although list acquisition can seem cumbersome, complicated and frustrating it’s important to be aware of the entire picture and work through it by knowing the key points above. If you are attempting to target a highly specific market group, the proper list pull and list provider is essential. Have your list broker shop around for you and do the legwork to get you the best list. I like to equate list selections to automobile selections. There are hundreds of different brands, styles, and features. No list provider is exactly the same and in the end it all boils down to what you want and need the most.

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