

## Multi-touch Campaigns

Many customers are now using multi-touch marketing campaigns, also known as mixed-media campaigns, to increase their response rates. Multi-touch campaigns span direct mail, email, telemarketing, events, internet and advertising, and most industry analysts predict significant growth in multi-touch strategies.

At first sight this might appear bad news for the printing industry with email and internet marketing eating into conventionally printed direct mail revenues. Arguably this might be true at a superficial level, but looking more closely digitally printed one-to-one marketing communications have increased dramatically over the past few years. Whilst these are more accurately targeted and therefore printed in lower volumes, each unit has a higher job value. If they are as successful as the marketers claim then their popularity might actually drive up printing volumes.

In fact statistics from the Royal Mail seem to show that direct mail is retaining its share of marketing expenditure, with nearly £2.5 billion spent on direct mail advertising in 2004. The growth in email and internet strategies is apparently at the expense of marketing methods other than print. However, marketing managers implementing a multi-touch campaign might prefer a one stop solution for direct mail production and email services, particularly if this also includes handling their response. Printing direct mail pieces alone might not be enough to win Printers the business.

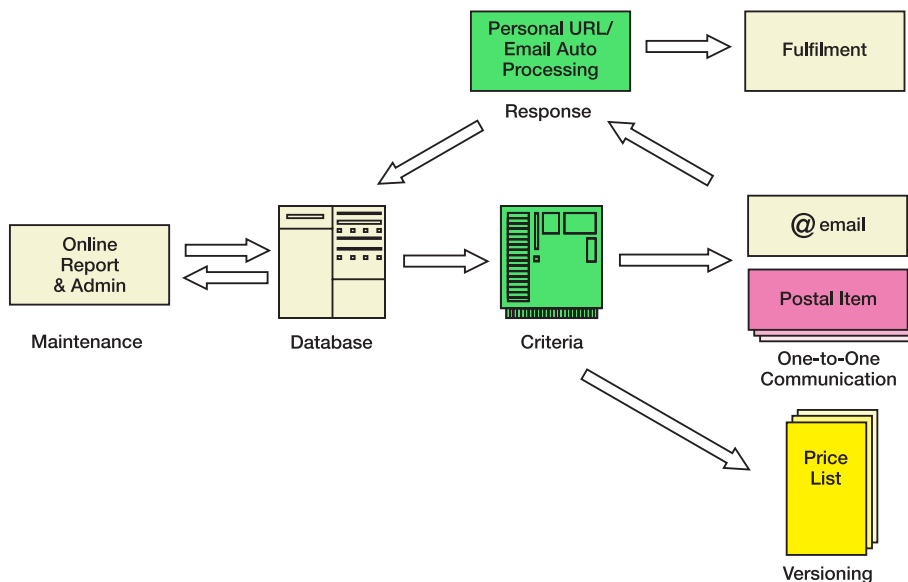


Fig 1: Multi-touch campaign workflow

Why not look at this as an opportunity for Printers to take ownership of the marketing workflow? If you can handle the entire cycle for the customer then they are locked into you as supplier, Hosting their data and critical business processes inspires customer loyalty and provides continuity to your own business. In this month's article we'll look at some of the issues involved with the email element of a multi-touch

campaign. It's not within the scope of a single page to go through every aspect of email marketing, but the following information should get you started and point you in the right direction.

## **Email Marketing**

There are lots of companies providing outsourcing solutions for emailing, to whom you could subcontract this element of a multi-touch campaign. However, very few can provide a service complete with your branding and online administration, and if you are not administrating the data then your customer might not see you adding any value to the process and you might lose control. Additionally, there is great variance in what different external providers can do for you – do they allocate you an exclusive ip address? Will you get your email blocked because they use one address for several of their customers and one of them is black listed by Spamcop? Will they test your email for its ability to pass through most spam filters? Outsourcing can be a practical solution but you need to know the right questions to ask.

You also need to stay within the law and the terms and conditions of your ISP. Break the law and you could be fined up to £5000. Break your contract with your ISP and you will be disconnected. My understanding of the law is that B2B email marketing is legal although you must meet certain pre-conditions including providing an opt out mechanism. Unsolicited email marketing to individuals is not legal under any circumstances. The provisions of the latest legislation can be read at <http://www.informationcommissioner.gov.uk>. You might also need to register under the data protection act. Satisfy yourself if you are uncertain and take professional legal advice.

Your ISP's terms are likely to be more restrictive than current legislation and you are probably not allowed to send out bulk emails. However, if you talk to them you might be able to negotiate sending out emails on behalf of your customers through your own SMTP server, providing that you can satisfy them that the recipients have opted in. Here lies the crux of what sort of service you should be offering to your customers. Most forms of marketing have an unsolicited aspect to them, but unsolicited emailing has been almost exclusively demonised by the media. Perhaps in part because it affects their advertising revenues as suggested by the statistics from the aforementioned Royal Mail survey. Irrespective of the rights and wrongs of unsolicited emailing, leave that to operators based in offshore locations such as China and concentrate on providing services for UK opt-in campaigns, if you want to retain your connectivity to a UK ISP.

Whether you go it alone or go to an external email provider then the first thing you need to consider is editing software. A decent emailer needs to be written in HTML and you probably already have your favourite HTML tool. We use Dreamweaver in house but you could even use MS Word although it is not specifically designed for the purpose and does have limits. Also, make sure that you have the capability to send a multipart email with both HTML and plain text alternatives. Some customers' email

servers/clients will not allow HTML but will identify and deliver a text alternative contained within the same email.

Now consider the size of what you are proposing to send. It's usually best to store your graphics on an external webserver and provide links to them in your HTML code. If instead you choose to embed graphics within your email then you might get your message rejected because of its size. However, make sure that the external webserver is resilient. If it is hosted by your ISP then ask them about their resilience and be happy with their response – "our servers don't usually go down" is not a very satisfactory answer! I'd much rather hear that they run fault tolerant clustered servers. In the event that the recipient of your email cannot link to the graphics server then provide "alternative text" for the graphic so that your message still makes sense.

Will your customers' message get rejected as spam even though it is an opt-in campaign? There are online services that will give a spam assessment of your email. You can also use shareware like "Mailwasher" and see if a test email sent to yourself is identified as spam. Avoid attachments, words like "FREE", rows of asterisks and other text combinations used in spam you receive yourself. As with any process you develop, extensive testing is vital. Send emails to yourself and others within your organization. See what happens if you set your email client software to read as text only. Clear your browser cache and remove your network cable to simulate your graphics server being unavailable.

If you are going it alone, you need to look at software to generate, send and perhaps personalize your emails. Again, you could perform an email merge with MS Word but there are more powerful alternatives for less than £200. Many of these also include SMTP servers to send your emails directly, bypassing your ISP's SMTP server. This can be quite important to prevent you from overloading your ISP's mail server. A lot of the emailing applications will also post successes, failures and response into a database, as well as forwarding urgent emails onto your customer. You could give your customer online access to the database as well as create and send them reports using this data. This is all relatively painless as it's an automated process and looks pretty impressive from your customer's perspective. Some of the emailing applications have their own built-in databases. Even if they do, you will still regularly be asked to manipulate and query customer data and something like MS Access can do a great job. Look upon data processing as an extra revenue stream to be maximized.

Finally, make sure your virus protection is in good shape as you aren't going to make many friends by emailing them viruses. Check out your firewalling. Get your "PTR" (reverse DNS) records right with your ISP. If you're prepared to spend some time on an email project then it's not going to cost you much in hard cash to get it going. It will generate revenue in itself and give you access to print work that you might not otherwise have won.

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