GETTING STARTED COMPILING AND MAINTAINING A MAILING LIST

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GETTING STARTED COMPILING AND MAINTAINING A MAILING LIST

Starting to collect proper information to create a mailing list is not difficult, once you know how to proceed. In this report, uses for mailing lists are briefly described. The first steps in identifying the names that might be included on your mailing list are also outlined. Finally, the important concept of a database is introduced.

WAYS TO USE A MAILING LIST

Mailing lists are a versatile tool that your business or organization can use to help achieve many administrative and marketing objectives.

1. In Daily Administration: For-profit and nonprofit organizations alike use mailing lists constantly in their day-to-day operation. Well-maintained mailing lists are required to efficiently carry out important activities such as:

* updating employee phone lists.
* sending company newsletters and special notices to employees.
* compiling membership directories.
* sending out newsletters to organization members.
* determining school bus routes.
* tracking and evaluating suppliers.
* monitoring contract commitments and schedules.
* alerting customers about warranty dates.

2. In Marketing: But it is in the marketing area that mailing lists can really make a contribution to the "bottom line." Much of the information in this report can be used for all list needs. Selling through the mail via a catalog is one basic example of a marketing application where a mail_ing list plays a very important role. The list is the source of names to which the catalog is mailed. Today, organizations of any size can benefit from using a mailing list in marketing functions.

Here are some other marketing uses for which a mailing list is a critical ingredient:

* Soliciting orders without incurring the expense of a direct sales call. (This can be particularly efficient for smaller accounts where the amount of the order does not justify the high cost of a personal sales call.)
* Generating and/or qualifying leads for your sales staff or for another direct mail effort. Using direct mail to qualify leads is another way to save on direct sales costs.
* Providing background information about your product or services. This type of effort can be used to generate leads, which are then followed up with personal or telephone sales calls.
* Reminding patients of the need for periodic checkup appointments.
* Conducting a fundraising campaign.
* Increasing the membershp of your organization.
* Extending invitations to attend a public meeting, a seminar, or a special

event.
* Following up on contacts made in personal appearances (at a trade show or
seminar, for example).
* Announcing changes in company personnel, product line, pricing structure
or location.
* Obtaining referrals from current customers or members.
* Reviving inactive accounts.
* Building good will with customers or members.

You will find that the administrative and marketing uses for mailing lists are almost endless.
How many of the ones we've described above would benefit your business or organization?

In the next section, we will define the different types of lists you can develop.

TYPES OF LISTS

From a business or organizational point of view, everyone is not equal. Just as a bird in the
hand is worth two in the bush, existing customers are worth more than potential customers. The
same principle aplies to mailing lists. They can be divided into four types, according to the value of
the names they contain:

1.   Current Customer: Your list of current customers contains your most valuable names. They
have already bought your products or used your services. They are the people or companies most
likely to respond again to your future offers.

In this booklet we refer to these names as "customers." However, depending on your type of
business or organization, the term "customer" can also include a whole range of people (or
organizaitons) such as:

* clients of professional service firms.
* donors who contribute time, money or goods to fundraising campaigns.
* investors in a business or stock issue.
* patients of health care practices.
* policyholders in an insurance agency.
* members of an association, religious or cultural in_sti_tu_tion, or club.
* subscribers to a magazine or newsletter.
* users of a sports or recreational facility.

2.   Inquiries: Businesses or individuals who have contacted your organizaiton to request
something - catalog, sample, quote, or perhaps just information - are more likely to respond to your
offers than others who have not shown an interest in you. Further, the faster you are able to contact
an inquiry with an answer, the more likely it is that he or she will react positively to your next offer.

3.   Prospects: Prospects are potential customers. They are people who have not yet responded
to your offers nor inquired about your organizaiton. However, you have reason to believe that they
may have a need for or interest in your product or service. You also expect that these prospects
have the ability to pay (if you're selling a product or service).

(A smart way to look at your customers is to also view them as prospects to be wooed and

won for other products or services. Never take a customer for granted. For example, a customer who has bought only one product or service from you may be a prospect - and a very good one - for the other products and services you offer.)

4.   Suspects: Suspects are prospects who may have some potential to be_come customers, but their need for your product or service (and their ability to pay) is uncertain. Developing a mailing list of suspect names should probably be the lowest priority for your business or organization.

For each type of mailing list you create - customer, prospect, inquiry, or suspect - you will want to keep basically the same descriptive information (data) on each of the names you include. If you can keep and maintain the same data on each of your customers, you can find which common characteristics are processed by your best customers. If you can then find prospects which closely match those characteristics, you have a greater chance of success in your prospect mailings.

The next step, in creating your mailing list, is deciding on the data you should try to capture for each of the names.

WHAT DATA TO INCLUDE IN YOUR MAILING LIST RECORDS

This section of the report offers some preliminary guidance in making the necessary decision about which piece of descriptive information, or "data element," to include in your mailing list records.

When you are identifying the data elements you want to include in your mailing list, you are really laying the groundwork lfor your database.

"Database" is a popular term among mailing list specialists today. However, the concept of a data base is fairly simple. A database is a collection of information about your customers, organized so it can be easily expanded, updated, and accessed by any of a number of its component parts or variable. Mailing information (name, address, etc.) is part, but not all, of a database.

Why is a database so important? Let's begin by reviewing some basic principles:

* Whatever your product or service, there is an audience because of its characteristics, is a "natural" customer group for you. For example, expectant   mothers are a natural audience for a store selling maternity clothes.
* The more you know about your customer, the better you will be able to appeal to their specific wants and needs.
* Prospects who share characteristics with your current customers are generally your best potential customers.

Therefore, to make decisions aboout what data elements to include in your database, first determine what common characteristics your customers share. For example:

* Do your customers dhare a certain level of income (in the case of individuals) or
   annual sales volume(in case of businesses)?
* Do all of your customers have similar household sizes or numbers of employees?
* Is age or number of years in business a common characteristic shared by your

customers?

          * Are your customers located in a specific area or a particular type of geographic location?

          These are just a few of the characteristics your customers may share.

          The following questions don't apply to prospects, but they can also help you   determine who your best customers are:

          * How often do your best customers buy - daily, monthly or even yearly?
          * What sales volume makes them food customers?
          * When was the last time they purchased?
          * When do they buy? Anytime or only at certain times of the year?

          The better you understand your best current customers, the better you will be able to identify the data you want to maintain about potential customers.

OTHER DATABASE DETAILS

          A database is organized into "fields." Each type of data elements in the database is stored in its own field; for example: name, address, business type or household income, etc..

          Much of the information you will include in your data base is now in your internal files. In most businesses and organizations there are paper trails, such as sales slips or membership applications, that contain a great deal of information about current customers.