KEEPING YOUR MAILING LIST CLEAN AND EFFICIENT

This eBook brought to you by:
Buy-Ebook.com

Our site has got a great collection of the best ebooks which are sold on the Internet, but at a lower price than on any other site.

Affiliates

Earn 60% Commission On Every Sale! We sell 500+ eBooks.

As a Buy-Ebook.com Associate, we will pay you a Massive 60% referral fee for every sale that you generate. You can sign up for **FREE** and start making money straight away.

If you want to directly link to some ebooks related to content of your site, get affiliate link here. Choose any from 500+ titles.

KEEPING YOUR MAILING LIST CLEAN AND EFFICIENT

Your mailing list retains its value best if it is kept clean and efficient. This report will first talk about why you should maintain your list in this manner. Then, the procedures you can follow to update both the mailing and database information associated with the names on you list will be discussed.

THE IMPORTANCE OF MAINTAINING A CLEAN AND EFFICIENT LIST

What makes a list clean and efficient? Lists are clean and efficient when they are:

* accurate.
* current (up-to-date).
* as free of duplicate names as possible.
* maintained with complete data.

Keeping lists clean and efficient requires a constant effort. The average mailing list begins to go out of date as soon as it is compiled. Industry studies have shown that the average consumer list changes approximately 20 percent a year. Business lists change a bit more slowly: about 18 percent a year. But individual names within a business can change much more frequently.

The source of the list will often determine how frequently it is updated. At best, lists compiled from Yellow or White Pages will only be as up-to-date as three to six months prior to the publication   schedule of the directory. This is usually on an annual basis but may be once every two or even three years. Mail order buyer lists could have a higher degree of accuracy because part of normal business is maintaining correct information about customers.

Don't assume that a list is clean just because you bought it from a fellow business owner. Most of the best kept lists are made up of mail order buyers, those buyer lists which are poorly maintained represent some of the worst lists. Always try to see and test a portion of the list before you mail it in total.

Because mailing lists change so quickly, it is important to commit the necessary resources to keep your own lists current and correct. Lists that aren't properly maintained can be harmful and costly to your business or organization in several ways. For example:

1. You're wasting postage and printing dollars if the mailings are incorrectly addressed or if there are duplicate names on your file or if they have moved.

2. The database information is not kept current, you may not be mailing as efficiently as you could be.

3. You may be losing out on potential business if you cannot reliably get the mailing pieces to target audiences due to out-of-date or otherwise incorrect addresses.

4.   You are damaging your image with your customers. Misspellings and out-   of-date information reflect poorly on the organization - if the mailing reaches   its destination.

5.   Duplicate names can lead yo to understate the response rate. The response you actually get may be much better than the numbers show. This can have an effect on future mailing plans since you believe that the response you are getting is much lower than it actually is.

The key to keeping a list clean and efficient is to establish procedures for making daily changes to your list. Develop a carefully planned, closely followed, regular updating program. In the next sections, we will discuss ideas for setting up a daily updating system, then give steps that should be included in any regular monitoring program.

KEEPING YOUR HOUSE LIST ACCURATE
AND UP-TO-DATE ON A CONTINUING BASIS

Establishing an ongoing updating system is the most effective way to stay on top of changes to the customer mailing list. Customers are your easiest, most reliable source for keeping a customer list continuously current. Enlist their cooperation by including a request for updated information with each mailing sent. Here are some possible ways to make the request:

1.   If you use an order form with a label affixed, request that cus_tom_ers change any incorrect information.

2.   If you provide a return envelope which includes space for the recipient to write in a return address, below these lines provide a "key" that indicates that address information should be updated. The key could look like this:

[ ]   Check here if this is a new address.

Record and maintain each transaction with a customer so that you can keep the important recency, frequency, and monetary value data current for each customer.

There are other database fields that may change frequently or with each transaction. These fields should be incorporated into any system you developed for continuous updating of the mailing list/database. If the audience is made up of individuals of businesses, here are some fields you will want to monitor and update on a regular basis:

*   Credit Status Code: This code is based on the customer's payment history. Each time a customer orders, information about how long he takes to pay, and how he pays is generated. This data should be used to update his account. Credit status codes should also be evaluated and updated on a month§ly basis.

*   Items Ordered: Keeping this information current will help uncover opportunities where you may be able to sell related products or supplies to that customer. This information can be updated on a monthly basis.

*   Date of Last Order: This information is used for recency and monetary value calculations. It can be updated on a monthly or quarterly basis.

*   Name and Address: This information should be verified and updated at the time a customer orders.

*   Title or Name of Contact: This information should be verified and updated   at the time of order.

*   Date of Last Contact: This field should be updated at the time of contact - either the last date this name was mailed or the last date a sales call was made.

If you are maintaining this information on a microcomputer, much of this information could be automatically updated.

PERIODIC REVIEWS OF YOUR HOUSE LIST

In addition to making ongoing changes as necessary to individual records on your list, you should periodically review the entire list or portions of it and make all changes necessary to update and correct your list. Below is a variety of methods to consider including in your regular "list-cleaning" program:

1.   Again, your customers are your best source for verifying changes to your   list or database. For example:

        *   You may want to send a mailing which has the sole purpose of updating and correcting the list. The mailing could consist of a business reply card with an address label affixed to it. Below the label, insert such check boxes as:

                [ ]   Please update my account as noted on the label.

                [ ]   Addressee no longer here. Please remove name from the list.

        *   You may also want to conduct a mail or phone survey (depending on the size of the list), to update the demographic information about the audience.

2.   The U.S. Postal Service provides several programs that your organization can use to periodically clean the list. Here, we will briefly describe two of the available programs. Contact your local postmaster for full details.

        *   Address Correction Requested: If you print "Address Correction Requested" in the upper left corner of the mailing (below your address),   he local postmaster will return your mailing with the addressee's new   address if known. If there is no new address, the reason for non-delivery   will be noted. The basic charge for this service is 30 cents per returned   piece of first class mail.

        *   Post Office Correction Service: You can provide the list on cards to each local post office from which your mail is delivered. The cards will

be distributed to the appropriate mail carriers who will check names and addresses along their routes. The carrier will usually not be able to correct spelling errors, but you will know which addresses are undeliverable. Unlike the use of the "Address Correction Requested" endorsement (where you only pay for corrected addresses), you pay ten cents for each card submitted, whether the address is changed or not.

        *   Return Postage Guaranteed: To obtain this service, mark your mailing "Return Postage Guaranteed" in the upper left hand corner. All undeliverable third or fourth class mail will be returned to you marked "undeliverable as addressed." You will be charged at the regular rate for t hat class of mail. You will not get the reason why the mail could not be delivered, nor will you get the new address.

Post Office services are generally used on customer lists only, they are too expensive for updating prospect lists. An additional word of caution: The Post Office does not always make accurate chang§es with these services. If you have kept close scrutiny over your customer file, it is quite likely you have a more up-to-date address than the Postal Service.

ELIMINATING DUPLICATES

In addition to keeping the mailing list correct and up-to-date, make sure that it is as free of duplicate names as possible. This involved two steps:

1.   Removing duplicate names from your customer list.
2.   Eliminating duplicate names between and among the customer, prospect, or suspect lists you use.

The techniques used to remove duplicate names from your house list depend largely on the size of the list and how it is maintained:

*   If the list is small enough, you can catch many duplicates by sorting the list in zip code or alphabetical order and "eyeballing" it.

*   If the list is stored on a microcomputer, you can sort it by one variable and then use the eyeball approach to spot the duplicates. Possible variables for ordering the list include last name, company name, address or telephone number.

*   For large lists of more than 10,000 names, you may want to consider hiring a computer service bureau to "de-dupe" (eliminate duplicate from) the list using one of their specifically designed software programs. If you are renting lists, and your own list is automated, ask that the service bureau perform an "own customer" elimination as part of their service. Names of service bureaus in your area can be obtained from the Direct Marketing Association.

In addition to removing duplicate names within your house list, match this list against any outside lists you use.

The popular term for this is "merge/purge" which means matching two or more mailing lists

(usually by electronic means) to remove duplication and make sure that each name receives only one mailing.

Basically, merge/purge is accomplished through use of a match code. Match codes can take the form of many different combinations. Some match codes eliminate all the vowels in the name and address, while others pick up certain characters from certain fields. The match code is made up of the same characters for each name on the lists, and fully and uniquely identifies that name. When lists are matched against each other, duplicate match codes indicate that the same name exists on more than one list.

When you hire a firm to run a merge/purge, try to find out how they identify duplicates, and if you can, set up a test with more than one service bureau to find out whose program best fits your needs.

Another concept to consider when trying to identify duplicates is "overkill" vs. "underkill." If the match code includes too many characters, possible duplicates will not be caught. This is called underkill. On the other hand, if the match code is too loose, names which are not duplicates will be recognized as duplicates (overkill).

Finding duplicates is really an art. How do you catch a match of an individual where one list says he lives at 505 7th St., and another has him living at 505 Seventh St.? Even worse, is Jean Smith, who lives at 510 Main St. the same person as the Jane Smith living at 501 Main St.? How you answer depends on whether you prefer overkill or underkill.

It's a bigger problem when running a merge/purge for businesses. Not only do you have to worry about name and address fields, but now you may need to find matches with business names and individual titles. The key here is to determine up front how many names per firm you want to mail to.

The key to successful merge/purge is close monitoring. Watch the process from beginning to end. Have thorough written instructions, and make sure they are carried out.