

## It's Swell Being Green

By Frank McPherson

Over the last two years, I have described many of the benefits of moving from static direct mail to more targeted, 1 to 1 approaches (variable data print). In these columns, I have focused largely on cost reduction and increased return on investment, but one of the benefits—even strong motivators, especially for large corporations like banks and insurance companies, as well as nonprofits—is the *green* side of VDP.

Direct mail? Environmentally friendly? Yes! If it's VDP. Let's look at some well-accepted industry assumptions to prove it. Some specifically to VDP. Others relate to good data handling practices in general.

- **25% of mailing records are outdated.** This could be because someone has moved. It could be because someone died. Whatever the reason, one-quarter of mailing lists go out of date within a six-month period. Some of this mail may get delivered, just to the wrong person, but much of it may not arrive at all.

If you aren't updating your mailing list, over time you are wasting hundreds, thousands, or hundreds of thousands of pieces. You've also wasted natural resources, such as the trees used to produce the paper, the petroleum used in the windows of envelopes and the gas of the trucks to deliver them, and the energy used to power the machines used to produce the finished materials.

This might not mean much until you put it into numbers. According to Environment Canada, if each direct mail piece weighs 50 grams (a standard envelope, plus an insert, plus a coupon and return envelope), and if you send 25,000 pieces, it's equal to 2,755 pounds of paper. The cost for 2,755 pounds of paper is 47 trees. The cost in water is 19,285 gallons. The cost in oil is 1,880 gallons. The cost in landfill space is 9.1 cubic yards.

That's for one campaign. How many of those campaigns go out every day?

If you look beyond the mailing piece itself to the entire lifecycle of the printed piece, the amount of environmental waste from outdated mailing information is staggering—and unnecessary.

- **3% of first-class mail is not delivered to the proper person.** If mail is not delivered to the right person, it may as well not be delivered at all. Once again, this is environmental waste, right off the top.
- **15-20% of addressed ad mail is not delivered.** This is mail that never goes through the National Change of Address (NCOA). Addresses are so outdated that they are undeliverable.
- **33% of bulk mail is never delivered.** When advertisers use bulk mail (“Dear Boxholder...”), the Post Office does not guarantee that it gets into the hands of the intended household. Maybe the mail carrier leaves the bag of bulk mail sitting in the apartment lobby. Maybe he drops it in the trash on the way home. Who knows? But it never arrives at its intended destination.
- **40% of all mail is irrelevant to the receiver.** In my experience, this number is probably higher. How many products marketed to men are going to women? How often are advertisements about refinancing going to people living in apartments? If there were a way to properly audit relevance, we might be surprised just how high this percentage is.

### **Making Your Mailings “Green”**

There are lots of ways for mail to be wasted. In these situations, not only is the Post Office the only one making any money on the wasted portion, but the marketer is missing an opportunity to show social and environmental responsibility. Targeted and 1:1 print marketing shows far greater responsibility in the following ways:

Targeting and 1:1 print marketing regularly uses data updating and cleansing techniques so that addresses are accurate and mailings arrive at their intended destinations. Very few are wasted. This eliminates 25% of mailing waste right up front.

When you have prepared your database for true 1:1 personalization, the mailings not only get to the right address, but go to the right person (assuming you’ve done your homework).

Not only this, but the marketing information in that mailer is relevant to the percent receiving it. Remember that at least 40% of mail is irrelevant to recipients. *This mail may*

*as well not have arrived at all.* By using targeted marketing, you eliminate 40% of your mailing waste.

Going back to the Environment Canada numbers, if you send a mailing of 62,500 pieces, if 40% of these are irrelevant to recipients, that means you just wasted 25,000 mailers. This means that you just wasted...

- 47 trees
- 19,285 gallons of water
- 1,880 gallons of oil, and
- Taken up 9.1 cubic yards in a landfill.

Do you want that waste on your conscience?

### **Be Responsible**

When you use 1:1 print marketing, you show great social and environmental responsibility. Plus, being “green” is a great face to market. After all, if you are a nonprofit or an organization that donates money to environmental causes, shouldn’t you be trying to improve your environmental impact instead of sending out mass mailings that are irrelevant and wasteful?

If the environmental aspect doesn’t catch your attention, then perhaps another “green” might. If you’ve been a regular reader of my column, you know my philosophy on “Less Is More,” which is that using VDP, you can send out fewer mailers and get more results. The ROI for targeted marketing is proven. Carefully selected mailings, combined with targeted messages to recipients, can bring you more revenues and better ROI.

When you create environmental waste, you cannot un-create it. It has to go somewhere. And when you waste money on irrelevant mailings, you have to earn those revenues all over again. So the next time you are planning a direct mail campaign, remember the two greens!