

# The 10 Commandments

OF BUSINESS-TO-BUSINESS DIRECT MARKETING



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## OF BUSINESS-TO-BUSINESS DIRECT MARKETING

Business-to-Business marketers continue to shift considerable resources toward direct marketing — both online and offline. The rationale is a nearly universal mantra . . .

*The **good** news about direct marketing is that it's measurable.*

But measurability is a two-edged sword, and there's a dangerous flip side to the direct marketing promise . . .

*The **bad** news about direct marketing is that it's measurable.  
When programs work, everybody takes the victory lap.*

When programs fail, the program manager takes the fall no matter how much “help” they receive from others on the team. Much of the help others give is personal opinion, rather than professional judgment. You constantly hear things like “That doesn't sell me” or “I wouldn't respond to that” — all from people who don't even qualify to purchase the product.

You can defend yourself from the well-meaning interference of others and reduce your chances of error dramatically by avoiding the mistakes others have made. Just follow these 10 B-to-B direct marketing commandments — professional, not personal judgments proven in head-to-head testing.

### **1** LISTS ARE NOT AN INVENTORY ITEM

Too often, lists are treated like an inventory item, not a key strategic component of the campaign. The first and perhaps the most important thing to do is to research the available list universes and put together the best list targeting you can. Then, do the best job you can of defining the key emotional drivers within each segment. For example, a CEO may have very different concerns than a CIO or a CFO. You can't start creative until you know what makes these people tick.

### **2** AVOID OBJECTIVE PILE ON

The kiss of death for a direct marketing campaign often starts with the seemingly innocent statement, “As long as we're already talking to them, why don't we . . .” Just say no! If the goal of a campaign is to generate a lead, that should be the sole objective. When you add additional objectives — increased company or product knowledge would be good examples — response rates go down. Add even more objectives, response rates go down again.

### **3** SELL SALVATION, NOT PRODUCTS

Too many B-to-B direct marketers create “product sheets in drag” programs — feeds, speeds and techno-babble that only a product manager could ever care about. People don't want your products; they want what your products do for them. Truth be told, they don't care about you, your company or anything you want to sell them — they only care about themselves. You have to appeal to their self-interest, not yours, to be successful.

### **4** MAKE AN EMOTIONAL CONNECTION

You have 12 to 20 seconds to grab them and avoid the trash can or the delete button. The best way is to make an emotional connection, not a rational one. For example, here are two ways to brand the same white paper:

*12 ways you can avoid the coming technology downturn*  
or  
*12 reasons you should consider Acme's version 2.0*

Testing proves that the emotional position beats the more rational position — hands-down.

#### **5 IT'S THE OFFER, STUPID**

Offers are the best and fastest way to make an emotional connection. A good offer will not only generate an initial response, but it will also generate higher readership of the rest of the communication. Quite simply, an offer is the fastest way to communicate “What’s in it for me?” and get consideration.

#### **6 DON'T GIVE THEM A CHOICE**

When you make an offer, don't give them a choice. Confronted with a choice, prospects are afraid of making the wrong one and will protect themselves by making none.

#### **7 WORK BACKWARD FROM POINT-OF-SALE**

Start with the customer and then work backward to define how the selling system works. Then build your program around the way the selling system works in the real world. You won't change customer behavior. So don't try. You can't change telesales or field sales behavior either, so understand what they do and how they do it and then support the selling systems that are already in place to maximize sell-through.

#### **8 AVOID THUNDERSHOWER MARKETING**

Too often B-to-B direct marketers key off of product launches or arbitrary campaign plans and ignore field capacity issues. If, for example, the field organization can handle 100 leads per week, give them 100 and no more. If you give them 2,000, they can still only work 100, and the rest will go down the drain.

#### **9 AVOID PANIC MARKETING**

Panic marketing almost never works. If the customer needs nine months to make a decision, direct marketing can't affect sales this quarter. If the customer needs 18 months to make a decision, direct marketing can't affect sales this year. Panic marketing almost always leads to thundershower marketing, which makes things even worse. The proper way to use direct marketing is to generate qualified leads on an ongoing basis. Then, if the quarter needs help, the sales force can use incentives to convert some of the qualified prospects on file into buyers.

#### **10 SIMPLIFY THE APPROVAL PROCESS**

Research shows us that the more complicated the approval process, the lower the response rate. To improve program performance, first get as many people out of the approval loop as possible. Next, change the approval rules to limit people's input to those areas where they can apply professional judgment. Make everybody leave personal opinion at home. After all, personal opinion is an unqualified marketing survey of one, and we all know what that's worth.

Following these 10 simple rules should help you create and manage more successful B-to-B direct marketing programs.