Marketing

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HEY ELISE, LEAVING TOWN? GOOD MOVE - CHECK OUT THE R.O.I. IN REGIONAL MARKETING. TURN RIGHT TO PAGE 16.

SHARP RESPONSE RATE CURVES AHEAD

ENJOYING THE DIGITAL PRINT VIEW? FOR MORE, EXIT AT PENFOLD BUSCOMBE, PAGE 75

Hey Elise, we're in St Kilda. Wanna catch up?

Media   Contacts

LG

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Malcolm Auld takes a look at the brave new world of direct mail and talks to the digital printing experts making it happen.

The direct mail renaissance... in your letterbox now

The world of marketing communications never fails to intrigue. In the wake of the great dotcom craze, the internet has become ubiquitous as a research tool and just one of the many media to consider in marketing activities. Although, the smart marketers have realised the internet is not an advertising media, rather it is a direct marketing channel. That's because people don't need advertising when on websites – they have search engines to find what they want. Which is why banner ads perform so poorly.

And just as the 'wow factor' of the internet subsides and email starts to choke on its own success, another quiet marketing communications revolution has taken place, out of the eye of most people. And what a revolution it is.

Usually when cultures collide, chaos reigns. Yet the only chaos to emerge from the most recent collision is the rush to adopt the new industry benchmarks. These benchmarks will change the marketing industry forever – specifically the direct mail media and its integration with the internet.

This rebirth of direct mail, or as I prefer to call it, the direct mail renaissance, has occurred as a result of the convergence of a number of technologies and industry services – specifically digital colour printing and specialist DM design software, as well as improved database quality and Australia Post services. Each item on its own has some significance, but when combined together, the impact is completely redefining personalised printed communications.

We now have colour digital printing that competes on price and quality with traditional offset printing, sensational new design and workflow management software that not only personalises communications like never before, but in extremely creative ways across multimedia, higher quality customer data and new incentives for innovative mail design from Australia Post.

This intersection of technology and industry activity has never occurred before and will make the current design of direct communications redundant in many ways.

Digital printing has been around for years, but the marketing industry has been very slow to embrace it. The usual reason being the quality of data – and this is still and always will be a problem. After all, the quality of personalised communications is only as good as the quality of the data. The other reason is cost and the size of the paper that can be printed – but this is no longer an issue with the latest digital colour printers.

The radical developments in design software will make printed media a powerful competitor to email and change the way companies use direct mail. It will also change the way people respond to direct mail. Now you can manufacture your own typefaces using any graphic image for pixels and print them on any background of your choice.

You can also link customers from printed media to uniquely personalised websites that reflect the imagery and message in the printed literature. And you can create your campaigns on your desktop and deliver them directly to the digital printer within your mailhouse for production at the touch of a button – on all types and sizes of stock, from paper to plastic.

Privacy laws have forced an improvement in data quality and made marketers consider the value of what they keep on file. Consequently the quality of data has improved and marketers are able to talk with more relevance to individuals using personalised communications.

During the last month, Australia Post has launched a new service called Impact Mail. It allows marketers to send all manner of unusually shaped envelopes in the mail – flats, die-cuts, booklets, folds, concertinas and more – using all sorts of material, paper, foil, card, etc.

The last time the marketing industry witnessed a revolution like this was the introduction of email as a marketing tool.

The fact is that email has reduced essential mail volumes (invoices, statements, loyalty statements, etc.) but has hardly impacted traditional advertising mail volumes. People still like to read printed letters, postcards, catalogues, brochures and booklets. You can pick them up and put them down whenever you like. You can flick between pages and compare content side-by-side.

The big problem with websites and email is the format in which they are delivered – HTML via a computer screen. The screen restricts what you can see and to view all content you have to scroll up and down, which is inconvenient, sometimes frustrating and doesn't allow you to compare content easily.

Mail order marketers and catalogue marketers will tell you their customers who order over the phone and the internet usually have their catalogue with them on their laps. They rarely order from online catalogues.

The digital print revolution means marketers will be able to personalise content in the same way that websites and email use personalisation. And they'll also be far more competitive in their timeliness of message delivery. But more importantly, they will have the ability to personalise with relevance to customers using the customer data held on file to define the message content – this includes text as well as images.

The software that does this is being supplied via the digital print companies – those that manufacture the printing equipment – Fuji Xerox, HP, Kodak and Xeikon. Each software program has different features and each is only able to be printed on the manufacturer's brand of equipment – although this will change as distribution rights expand from sole distribution to multi-distributor model.

Mark Mina, managing director of AP Mail Management, which owns the only Xeikon press (from Belgium) in Australia, says the opportunities for personalised printed communications are almost unlimited. "The Xeikon prints an image area 470mm by 82 metres on everything from standard paper to polyester, synthetics, canvas, metallic stocks and more. You can personalise everything from postcards to giant banners and as we now print colour duplex in one pass, the price has become very competitive."

Neil White, product manager with Penfold Buscombe says, "Data driven digital print is high speed and the new software allows it to dynamically link to electronic channels like the internet. It is the ability to combine personalised print with other channels that will drive the greatest responses, and allow a real time dialogue between customer and marketer to become a reality."

CROSS-MEDIA PERSONALISED COMMUNICATIONS

XMPie is currently distributed by Fuji Xerox Australia. It is a unique software for producing cross-media, personalised direct marketing. Marketers are able to publish graphically rich and highly personalised documents in a variety of print and web formats.

It allows multiple users to work on a job at the same time, manipulating data, loading content and designing layouts before delivering individual personalised messages in numerous formats – postcards, posters, brochures, mailpacks, HTML newsletters, SMS and more.

One of its features is the ability of the recipients of your messages to link to a uniquely personalised website that uses the same images as those used in the message they received. That is, the recipient's name is included in the website content, as well as selected text and imagery from the mailpack or email they responded to. This means each respondent has their own personal and very relevant website.

The respondent can then receive more personal printed or electronic communications based on their navigation on the website.

Chad Pearce, Production Colour marketing manager, says "the fusion of print, mail and new media channels provides stronger opportunities for marketers to truly add value to the customer interaction experience. The advent of communications across multiple touch points (web, email, SMS, IVR, mail and traditional media) has created a new subset within the direct mail category."

"Personalised programs that could previously only be performed in print or via the web, can now be integrated across a number of direct marketing touch points within the one campaign. You can use mail, web and telephony channels simultaneously to provide maximum impact and greatest ease for recipients to respond."

RESULTS TO MAKE YOU SMILE

Mailings produced with the new Smile Media cleaned up at this year's European direct marketing awards and I expect them to do the same here next year – particularly when they achieve results of over 30% response rates for business-to-business and 18% for business-to-consumer markets.

The Smile Media gives you complete creative freedom in a way not even available in online media. You can create your own fonts, from whatever pixels you like and print them on any image you want. Your only limits are your imagination. You can print postcards, posters, envelopes, calendars, boxes, brochures, stickers and most other printed media.

There is one restriction with this technology – at this stage it can only be printed on an HP Indigo printer and only a handful of companies have the software licence. Although in Europe, new competitors are emerging that can be printed on other manufacturers' printers.

Direct mail is undergoing a rebirth in a way that will shake up the industry and let marketers deliver on what they have been promising for decades now – relevant personalised printed communications. Viva la renaissance! **M**