

publish.

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How to catch and hold onto subscribers

Successful
online
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strategies

Avoiding
sales
burnout



AUSTRALIAN BUSINESS & SPECIALIST PUBLISHER

...the association representing the interests of print and electronic media



How to build and retain

Malcolm Auld* offers some tried and true ways to drive up subscriptions.

The publishing business offers interesting insights into how advertising works.

As we all know, magazine publishers hate spending money – everything is done on a shoestring to get each issue produced on time and profitably.

When you talk to publishers about their subscription strategy, more often than not you get a blank stare in return.

Many publishers run their subscription strategy on the basis of available distressed space in their own magazine. If they have a vacant page that can't be sold, they run a subscription ad.

Or they simply stitch in a card and hope the responses cover the cost.

Those in the know, test their subscription advertising to learn the most cost-effective way to generate subscribers. And of those who do know what works, they'll usually tell you that stitched insert cards always get the best results.

There are a number of reasons for this. A stitched insert acts like a cover so that the magazine opens at the insert when the reader attempts to flick the pages.

If designed properly, an insert is an easy-to-use reply device. Simply complete your details and stick the card in the post or an envelope and then in the post.

An insert is unique in that it invokes a motor action – you have to remove it or move it to read the content underneath, so you get involved with it.

Direct response advertisers can reveal a lot about readers

Traditional direct marketers, such as Dell – those people whose businesses live and die by their advertisements – will tell you that, in their view, inserts nearly always out-perform on-the-page advertising to get a direct response, such as to a special offer or promotion. They know this because they are constantly testing what works and what doesn't.

These marketers understand that



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when you conduct research, what people say and what people do, can often be quite different. So they don't just look at the usage research supplied by the media owners, rather they test to see what gets them the most cost-effective responses.

And once they find a medium that works for them, they increase their investment in that medium, to maximise their return.

Dell, for example, has been known to place a combination of over a dozen inserts, gatefolds and ads in one issue of a computer users magazine with the result that each ad paid for itself.

They know exactly what works because each execution has unique response devices – phone numbers and web codes. They keep advertising until the law of diminishing marginal returns applies and the ads (in whatever format) no longer pay for themselves.

Tipped-on inserts inside publications also work well to generate response.

In the late 80's while I was running Ogilvy & Mather Direct, we had to force publishers to produce the first tipped-on insert within a magazine in Australia.

We had found the technology in Europe, but no publisher wanted to

subscription revenues

invest in it here. So we held a meeting with competing publishers in a room and told them what our client (American Express) was prepared to spend if they could deliver a tip-on technology within the magazine.

Surprising what a bit of financial motivation can do.

The first ad we did was in *The Good Weekend*. The tip-on was the size of an American Express card and it opened out to a self-mailing application form. Not only did the insert become the second most profitable way (behind take-one brochures) to generate new card members for American Express, but it also researched as their most successful brand advertisement.

Partner with advertisers to test what works best

Despite the fact that inserts and tip-ons work so well, publishers continue to sell on-the-page advertising to advertisers, which is not often the best solution for the advertiser.

Why not collaborate with advertisers to deliver a creative stitched insert solution or a gatefold? You can add value, such as a sample, or some sort of value-add offer for readers and generate better results for advertisers. And you don't have to do it in all copies. Part-fund a test, say in one region and see what happens.

An alternative to add value to advertisers and readers (also known as customers) is email. Email newsletters and special bulletins are an excellent and cost-effective way to provide extra information or news to magazine subscribers, as well as offering additional advertising opportunities for advertisers.

A regular e-mail newsletter also allows you to provide more timely information in between magazine issues, if your publication is monthly, for example.

And if you use video email messages, you can deliver vision and audio from a journalist/columnist/advertiser to really bring your publication to life.

You can also help increase sales or readers of a magazine by using an e-mail message to drive readers to purchase, subscribe or read a publication.

But there are some traps to using email. After all, never before has a medium been so enthusiastically accepted and used by consumers, yet so appallingly abused by marketers, that laws were created to prevent its use.

The first thing to consider when using e-mail is selecting an outsourced supplier to send your messages. With spam filters now existing at ISPs and at corporate gateways, not to mention Microsoft's default restrictions, every email that is sent gets filtered at least three times along

Email tips for beginners

1. Always get permission via an opt-in subscription system. It's common-sense, polite and the law.
2. Always run your content through a spam filter such as spam assassin or spam cop to confirm whether or not it will get through spam filters to your audience. Most reputable email distributors now provide spam checking as part of their service.
3. What works in direct mail will only work in email if you get through the filter system. Don't use CAPITALS in the subject line, words such as; free, money, love, sex, happy, win, lots of exclamation marks!!!!!!, \$\$\$ and others.



The first tip-on in an Australian magazine.

the way. Marketers often have no idea how many emails reach their intended recipients, unless they use a specialist e-mail distribution company.

Most distributors provide web-based solutions so you can still send your messages yourself, but you do so via the e-mail distributor's system. This ensures you get a higher penetration of messages, because the distributor is constantly developing their systems to cope with the daily changes in computer technology – something you cannot do yourself by typing an e-mail in Outlook and hitting the 'send' button.

4. Use low res images in your messages to avoid delays on your recipient's system.
5. Over 65 per cent of emails are opened Tuesday to Thursday, so test day-of-week and time-of-day for the best response. Friday afternoon may be the right time to send a message if what you publish has to do with weekend entertainment for example.
6. People ask two questions before opening their emails – who is sending it to me? (the From line) and what do they want? (the Subject line). If they know who you are,

they'll consider your subject line. If the subject line is relevant, they'll open it. If they don't know who you are, they won't even consider the subject line and delete your message. So personalise your From line or have it come from your brand. For example, From Qantas Frequent Flyer.

7. Always personalise the To line with the recipient's name or their email address. Don't send to "undisclosed recipients" or some weird grouping of letters such as cm3rtx#.
8. Ensure the image of your message reflects your printed publication.
9. Don't send messages that people haven't requested to receive. For example, if readers subscribe to a monthly newsletter, don't bombard them with twice-weekly special offers.

they are offering their customers. What you print is a brand of magazine, but what the brand does for your customer is something else. Your brand can be delivered in many ways – printed magazine, email newsletter, viral email game, television show, website, SMS message, events and more.

Huge response rate for German publisher

Recently, a European magazine – C't – combined print advertising in their magazine with direct mail and their website to successfully grow their subscriber base.

Like most publishers, they knew their magazines were read by more people than those who subscribed. So they decided to tap into subscribers' frustrations with an offer to help the subscriber prevent others 'borrowing' their maga-

The recipient of the postcard is invited to go to a website and key in a PIN number. When they key in the PIN number, a personalised website opens up with their name in the headline and an offer to subscribe to the magazine. Their details have also been pre-populated into the subscription form using the data originally entered to create the postcard, so they have very little to do to respond to the offer.

The response was outstanding – over 90 per cent of people who linked to the website subscribed to the publication.

Apart from the uniqueness of the mechanics of the programme, the reason this subscription drive worked is the creative personalisation, the relevance to the prospect and the integration of the various media to make it interesting and easy to respond.

This technology is available in Australia and we've been using it with excellent results for seminars and events. But it is only as good as the data used to drive it. So if you want to grow subscriptions, you need to clean up your data act first or you'll waste your money.

The magazine market will continue to be a highly competitive and cluttered environment.

Those that offer more relevant services to their customers will be the ones who succeed. If this means embracing Internet technology or creating new ways to use techniques such as inserts, then the sooner you start testing the sooner you'll grow your business.

If you want advice on where to start, I suggest you talk to direct marketers or a direct marketing agency. They understand databases and how to talk with individuals. They're also more interested in results than what you think of their ads, so you'll find their approach a refreshing change to traditional advertising agencies and marketing consultants. ●



The Amex tip-on opened up to reveal a self-mailing application form.

10. Track your links to determine which ones people click on and the best location within your message. Your email distributor will have collective knowledge of other client's campaigns and can give you advice on where to locate links.
11. Constantly test and learn. The beauty of email is its ability for testing.
12. Link your email messages to content in your magazine.

Integrating your website with your publication makes good sense. Your website allows you to deliver a different medium than print to deliver content and broaden the appeal of your publication, or strengthen the relationship with your best customers.

Sometimes publishers forget what

zine and returning it soiled or dog-eared.

The publisher ran an advertisement in their magazine aimed at the subscriber. The ad contained a URL for the subscriber to visit a website. On the website the subscriber was able to create a personal message for a postcard to be sent to the person(s) who borrow their magazine.

The personalised postcard is then mailed to the people nominated by the subscriber and arrives within 48 hours. As well, there was a message that said, "if you subscribe, I will not be angry anymore"

The postcard also had an image of a soiled magazine with the note "hey (name) was that you?" (subscriber's name).

*Malcolm Auld is a marketing manager, publisher and principal of his own agency Malcolm Auld Direct – known as MAD. He has also managed several multinational advertising agencies during his career.

He is author of one of Australia's largest selling marketing texts *Direct Marketing Made Easy* as well as *E-mail Marketing Made Easy*, the world's first non-American book on the topic. He has also written numerous white papers and education booklets including *They laughed as I sat down at my keyboard...but then I began to e-mail*, *The Direct Mail Renaissance* and *The Little Book of Marketing Truths*.

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