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**MAKING PRINT MORE PERSONAL(IZED):
A HYBRID OF 'FEAR FACTOR' & 'MYTH BUSTERS'**



WHY AREN'T MORE CUSTOMERS TAKING ADVANTAGE OF VARIABLE CONTENT AND IMAGING? BECAUSE MOST PRINTERS ARE AFRAID TO TAKE THE PLUNGE; BUT WHY?

"They don't know what they don't know," a coaching colleague used to say when describing youth football players. The implication was that we coaches needed to teach the youngsters what they did not know. The same logic holds true for owners and managers of small and medium-sized printing firms as well as in-plant shops. How do you do variable-data print (VDP), and how do you sell it? While ignorance may be bliss, as the old adage goes, not knowing is not a very profitable printing business strategy. Here is what we do know: Personalization works in print. This is not news. For years we have heard and read about VDP's benefits, especially dramatically increased direct-mail response rates. Customization has a marked impact on consumer engagement, even among the younger generation, revealed a 2015 study by research firm InfoTrends entitled "Direct Marketing Production Printing & Value-Added Services: A Strategy for Growth." This was particularly the case for older millennials (ages 25-34), 90% of whom are more likely to look at direct mail pieces that are customized or personalized to their interests.

For the end-user's bottom line, more leads can be converted into more sales. Not only can you expect a higher response rate when implementing VDP and database management techniques but you also can expect to see overall revenue increase by 31%, and repeat orders and customer retention to rise by 47%, as noted in the InfoTrends study. Plus, myriad other research and case studies have shown that the return on investment (ROI) is there; so why the resistance?

Most small and medium-sized print firm owners and managers know they should be doing more with variable data and variable imaging. But they're not embracing the technology. Many print industry marketing gurus believe that a lot of printers are still intimidated by VDP. Are you one of those who are uncomfortable and not sure where to begin?

GETTING STARTED & HOLDING HANDS

When tackling any task, you have to start somewhere. Do some research. A good place to begin is by consulting with equipment vendors, some of which have professional services teams dedicated to workflow. Much of what they do depends on how involved or sophisticated a customer wants to get. The process generally involves benchmarking where they are now with personalization and variable data/imaging, then mapping where they want to be in the next two or three years.

Another good starting point is speaking with peers. Network at industry association meetings and conferences to find out what people are doing — and how they are doing it. Webinars and white papers are other good resources as well.

Obtaining the necessary staffing and expertise for VDP creation can be challenging. Most printing companies either bring on a full-time employee or a consultant. Many prospects also are reluctant to buy what they deem as "expensive

software." A way around that objection is for print firms to ask about demo software or a trial version to test before committing to an expensive solution. It's a way to play around internally without incurring high costs or damaging your brand image. For example, one manufacturer offers a performance resource center for in-plants featuring an online suite of tools. Its cross-media suite comes with different templates for vertical markets. The in-plants can put in their own images and copy.

For around 3 cents per element per contact, users can experiment with a multi-pronged attack of emails, personalized URLs (PURLs), social media and print (say, direct mail). The cost is nominal to fit virtually any budget. An organization that wants to test a campaign could select three elements for their campaign and send it to 100 prospects or customers. At 9 cents per contact, a \$9 test, they can get reporting snap shots showing email open rates and click rates for PURLs. It is so affordable that, as a next step, testers can up the quantity or tweak their messaging and imagery.

DEMYSTIFYING VDP

Print personalization these days extends way beyond changing names on a direct-mail postcard, of course. More sophisticated marketing customers employ behavioral and even predictive analyses. Proceed with caution, though: these technologies are cool and complex at the same time, and they may be too advanced for smaller print players.

Automobile manufacturers are really good at this. Based on past purchases, they know that I usually buy a white four-door sedan and the print pieces I receive reflect that preference. In other words, my family won't receive a brochure from Ford for a black 2017 Mustang this coming autumn.

With such high-tech tactics, there's the "stalking" element to consider: how much information is too much? Some of these concerns may be generational. For instance, a college in-plant on the East Coast created a direct-mail piece employing mapping software and featuring an image of a car. The greeting read something like this: "Welcome to Connecticut, Jason! It's only 125 miles from your house to school." An 18-year-old high school senior might not think twice about privacy invasion while his or her parents may find it a bit creepy that the university knows where they live.

There is little doubt that the future of print will be more highly personalized. With the rapid encroachment of inkjet devices able to print on lighter paper stocks, expect retailers to create

IN-PLANT GAP: Super Low Rate of Integrated Media Adoption

Research firm InfoTrends and PODi (the Print On Demand Initiative) have reported that

ONLY 4%

of in-plant printers use cross- or multi-channel media*. Most in-plant managers tend to have more computer and IT backgrounds but they need print and communication counsel.

* In-Plant Graphics 2014 Market Statistics

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