



## **Expert Assessment: Making the Case for Front-Door Marketing**

By Barry Gilbert

Ad clutter is growing. Today's consumer faces a daily barrage of marketing messages and brand choices delivered in an effort to reach each of us as individuals. Marketers are determined to be heard over the noise—and end up feeding the problem by buying more ad space and airtime, sending out more direct mailers, making more cold calls, and posting more tweets and Facebook updates. Perhaps not surprisingly, new channels include reinventing old methods, and applying high-tech tools and strategies and a grassroots approach to engage customers with offers and advertising hand-delivered to their front doors.

But don't be fooled: A decidedly updated and strategic approach bypasses a crowded field of messages and motivates consumers to respond. National brands in a variety of industries are successfully executing technology-based, highly targeted front-door campaigns, reaching their most valuable customers by delivering high value to the right door.

### **Being Heard**

Marketers are dealing with increasing audience fragmentation while consumers are overloaded with marketing messages that may or may not be applicable. Social media, email, print, radio and television all play a role in this deluge of information; the individual options for viewing information and interacting with messages are extensive and continue to grow. As a result, consumers have become highly skilled at tuning out nonessential communications. They can change the channel, turn the page, throw out entire sections of the paper or click away from your message. They don't inherently hate ads, but they do hate bad ads that don't bring value or otherwise matter to them. Those are the messages that drive away consumers feeling alienated.

More than ever before, being heard has to do with delivering value. Consumers are seeking value as a priority, paying cash for necessities, foregoing credit cards, searching for discounts and putting money in the bank. Spending is more cautious, with consumers looking for deals, using coupons and actively focused on getting the most for their money. Economists say these changes in spending habits likely have taken hold for the long haul. This, in turn, represents a significant opportunity for marketers, focusing their efforts beyond the sole purpose of grabbing someone's attention, and instead delivering usefulness and value.

Consumer behavior has shifted dramatically and smart marketers are paying attention. The primary goal for marketers has become more and more about initiating consumer involvement and inspiring consumers to take action as a first, rather than last, step in the sales process. This demands an understanding of what makes an audience tick, and ultimately acknowledges that relevance and value are what fuel long-term customer relationships with specific products and services.

### **Redefining Today's Front Door**

Where the front door was previously considered less strategic, almost "untargeted" for a broad audience, today's precision targeting is where it delivers a tangible competitive advantage—using high-level data to place the most relevant offer with the right customer. Data research, analysis

and application are notably increasing effectiveness, and this is where a scientific approach and analytical tools have dramatically shifted industry perceptions of the channel.

Just like any direct-response tactic, thoughtful analysis and identification of the best prospects relies on the brand's targeting strategy and available data. Quality data sources such as Nielsen, Claritas, Experian, Simmons, the U.S. Postal Service and others provide information designed for further understanding of demographic and census data characteristics, consumer behaviors and purchase preferences that influence buying decisions. Audience definitions can be created with pinpoint accuracy, leveraging not only high-quality data, but also skilled analysis and predictive models. Further, the same data used in upfront campaign planning can be integrated with mapping and tracking technology, streamlining the flow and consistency of information throughout the campaign, and validating campaign status within 24 hours of execution.

But the question still remains, why the front door? Advances in digital media—such as email, websites, social channels and mobile apps—have, indeed, forced print advertising and direct mail to take a hit. But the reality is that a decline in print tactics does not correlate directly with greater successes on digital initiatives. In contrast, data from Pitney Bowes says that the typical American household receives roughly 15 to 17 pieces of advertising-related mail per week. That's light in comparison to the same amount received each day digitally; however, these direct mail materials pool in the mailbox and represent another source of clutter. The inherent advantages of print—the quality sense of color and heavy paper, the emotional connection of holding and feeling the material—are often undiscovered in too much mail that may head straight for the recycle bin.

Front-door marketing takes these issues into account, and stands as a budding channel and a highly visible avenue for message placement. Quality is key, both in the appearance of the material and the offer or message it conveys, presenting an opportunity for brands to capitalize on the expectation of quality and value held by their best customers. Polybags, boxed products and creative packaging can further drive home a message of quality, engaging customers with high-value offers, product sampling, or even sensory options such as sound or taste.

#### **High-Tech Adds Value to an Underutilized Channel**

Successful marketing gets the right message to the right customer at the right time and place. And data suggests that an advantage goes to marketers who embrace a highly targeted yet multichannel approach. But marketers face a future of constant growth in the number and type of media options. Brand marketing activity will increase, and so will consumers' control of when, where and how they interact with messages.

It's misguided to say that the means to beat clutter is to just distribute more and more of it. Rather, increasing the effectiveness of underused, grassroots channels can put marketers in a better position to deliver value. Savvy marketers—and savvy customers—are becoming well aware of the front door as valuable real estate in this effort. No barriers remain at the front door, and newfound abilities to target effectively have evolved this channel into a conduit for brands to deliver VIP treatment that equates to value and drives response.

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