

Altman Dedicated Direct

STRATEGY... TACTICS ... RESULTS

Column: "After the Phone Rings ..."

Month: **January 2006**

Topic: **Customer Event Marketing**

Most marketers use holidays to their advantage - Valentine's Day, President's Day, July 4th, Christmas, etc. Establishing a promotion tied to a holiday captures the attention of anyone planning a celebration, even if that celebration is merely a day off work. Holidays also provide a shopping rationale for consumers.

Consider the impact of combining a holiday – a special day – with a personalized promotion to that unique customer. That's exactly what customer event marketing seeks to do. Whether it's your customer's birthday, anniversary, or their pet's birthday, it's a uniquely special day for them.

All of us appreciate special attention during the memorable events in our lives, and your customers are no different; personalized attention from marketer to customer won't be ignored.

How do you capitalize on this marketing opportunity? To do so first requires identifying the appropriate dates and retaining them in your database. The simplest date to capture is a universal one, your customers' birthdates. But birthdates won't automatically be shared, especially in this era of heightened identity theft concerns. The solution involves both honesty and flexibility. The honesty part -- tell your customer why you want their birth date -- to honor them on their special day with a card or special offer. Refusals will be minimal; who doesn't want a card or special birthday deal? The flexibility part -- be willing to accept the day and month without the year. Whether due to fears about identity theft or just wanting to keep age private, not everyone wants you to know what year they were born. If your database is set up to handle the month and day without year, you have the data you need.

Other special dates may be relevant too -- your customer's anniversary, pet's birthday, etc. It depends on what products you offer of course. Just don't ask for too much information at once or your customer will balk and refuse. If you capture their birth date on the initial order call, ask for additional information in future communications. Don Peppers & Martha Rogers PhD described this idea of asking for a little more information each time in order to customize the offer and experience for each customer as "drip irrigation marketing".

What do you do once you have dates captured in your database? Get creative. Devise a special offer and a special promotion. Don't be shy about personalizing the offer; this is a special offer only for Mary Jones and that should be clear to Mary when she receives the email or direct mail. Both congratulate Mary on her birthday, and help her celebrate with a special deal. Make sure your promotion arrives to Mary 10-14 days before her birthday so she has enough time to order and receive her items for her birthday if she so desires. An expiration date such as 30 days after her birthday gives Mary sufficient time to respond while still adding some urgency ... the personalized birthday offer isn't good forever.



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Suggestion – don’t mention Mary’s age in your birthday congratulations unless you’re sure she doesn’t mind. Use her age in crafting what to offer Mary, just don’t let her know you are aware.

You needn’t stop with birthdays. The more you know about your customer, the more you can personalize offers to the special events in their lives. If you know Mary has school age children, send her a “back to school” offer to treat herself now that she finished treating her kids. Customer event marketing is limited only to what you know about your customers and your creativity in making marketing offers utilizing that information that are also compelling.

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