

How to Add Value to Mailed Communications

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Mailers know personalized content improves response and conversion rates in any delivery channel. Recipients perceive personalized messages as indications the sender knows something about them. They expect the documents will include targeted and useful material. Documents built with bad data can be a disaster though. Personalized documents composed with inaccurate information are glaringly obvious to the readers. To prevent negative consequences, companies must verify or improve the data they use to drive customer communications. Data quality is more important than ever.

Decades ago, personalization efforts were limited to printing the customer's name in a sales letter, often awkwardly injected multiple times. Personalized letters impressed consumers the first time they received them, but the newness faded. Presentation has improved immensely, but inserting the recipient's name barely counts as personalization anymore.

Everything May Be Variable

Today, document composition software and digital printing allows for more sophisticated approaches. Marketers may personalize mailpieces with images, text, and offers based on demographic information, buying history, and more. Every piece could be different. In a multi-channel marketing approach, mailers may tie a mailpiece to other personalized campaign elements such as precisely timed emails or text messages.

Unfortunately, inaccurate data still creates problems. Besides the challenges facing those early personalized document innovators, the current communication environment adds other potential pitfalls for dynamic messages. Document

producers must consider new aspects of data quality:

- + Variable text or images may not display as expected on all screen sizes
- + Special characters or fonts in variable text can render inaccurately on different devices
- + Online locations for data-driven images may have changed since initial testing
- + Personalized links must connect to the intended web pages for every data variation
- + Screen resolution and the ability to reproduce colors can affect variable message readability

Unlike those old "Dear JOHN SMITH" computer letters, personalized documents today may not display data directly from the contact database. Instead, the personalized data triggers selected offers, messages, and graphics used in the documents. This makes them more challenging to test and verify.

Address Data Quality and Personalization

Postal addresses are common data elements for controlling variable print documents. Inaccurate or incomplete address information can have a major influence on the messages delivered to mail recipients. Owners of single-family homes, for instance, may receive one message while apartment-dwellers receive another.

Here, software such as Apartment Append can be a valuable asset, adding apartment numbers to addresses mailers might otherwise identify as standalone homes.

Besides ensuring accurate mail delivery, Apartment Append allows mailers to deliver relevant offers to each addressee. Marketers improve campaign performance through increased response and conversion rates.

In other cases, data quality techniques may help mailers drop undesirable names from the mailing list. Companies use Deceased Suppression databases to avoid sending insensitive or inappropriate communications to households where the principal contact has passed away.

Family members may look unfavorably on a health club offering a lifetime membership to their recently departed relative, for instance. Deceased Suppression helps mailers prevent these embarrassing situations.

Many communications rely heavily on the recipient's physical address to promote events, goods, or services available at the nearest physical location. Marketers may also vary copy and artwork depending on whether recipients live in urban, suburban, or rural communities.

About 35 million people move every year, according to the US Census. Some movers do not file change-of-address forms with the US Postal Service. Combining the USPS NCOALink service with Additional Change of Address



sources is one way to ensure mailers properly compose and deliver personalized documents based on the recipient's geographic location.

Another postal process that improves delivery, lowers postage, and makes personalized content more accurate is leveraging local delivery information supplied by postal carriers. Products such as DSF2® can prevent mailers from sending material to vacant properties, unoccupied vacation homes, or those without a mail receptacle.

Data Quality as a Competitive Advantage

Many companies see data enhancement as a way to win and retain business. They improve data quality simultaneously with common processes such as merge/purge or postal sorting. More accurate address data enables them to boost their mail's effectiveness through segmentation and personalization, making marketing efforts more productive and improving the customer experience. Both are generally objectives for businesses and non-profits.

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The data enhancement processes applied to mailing projects can help organizations be more efficient in other areas of their operation as well. Some mail service providers send the enhanced data files to their customers so business units unconnected with mailed material can take advantage of more accurate and complete customer information. Mail services companies that share enhanced data become more valuable to their customers and strengthen those relationships.

Data used intelligently to craft and deliver personally relevant and impactful messages to the right audience makes mailed communications a channel with unbeatable conversion rates. Organizations spending their money on physical mail expect to achieve a reasonable return on their investments. Enhanced data adds value to mailed communications and delivers the best possible results.

Kristen McKiernan is President of AccuZIP Inc. a provider of feature rich solutions to manage Contact Data Quality, Address Hygiene, USPS Postal Presorting and Compliance, and Mail Tracking and Reporting. Their Data Enhancement suite of products allows mailers to fine-tune their messages and get more of their mail delivered. Use their free calculator at <http://accuzip.com/des> to see how enhanced data quality can impact your next mailing. Readers may reach Kristen at kristen@accuzip.com.