

MAIL

Combining online intent data with direct mail

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The actions of modern digital marketers could be reflected by paraphrasing an infamous adage: The road to hell is paved with good intent data.

With people spending more time online, where virtually everything can be measured, mapped and tracked, it has never been easier to gather one-to-one intelligence on which consumers are interested in which products or services at a specific point in time.

That sounds like marketing heaven.

Unfortunately, once they have that intent data in hand, many brands take a hard turn toward marketing hell instead. They conclude that because consumers expressed an online intent to purchase, that is an indication that they intend to purchase online. And so they serve ads — many, many, many ads — designed to drive that behavior, even though 90 percent of purchases are still made offline.

Missing link hiding in plain sight

The key to converting an intent-to-purchase into an actual purchase is to provide the consumer with a clear pathway from the former to the latter. The best way to accomplish that is to take that trove of online intent data and use it to reach consumers where they live. Literally. In the home. Because that is where most purchase decisions are made — and where most products reside after purchase.

Moreover, with [20 percent of Internet users now deploying ad blockers](#), and with a broad segment of the online population having developed “banner blindness,” it is vital to deliver ads that actually reach consumers’ hands — and again, I mean that literally.

According to [a study](#) by the Center for Neural Decision Making at Temple University’s Fox School of Business, “Physical advertisements were proven to have more influence than digital ads in a number of ways. Not only did participants spend more time with physical ads, they also remembered them more quickly and confidently. Physical ads also elicited a stronger emotional response than their digital counterparts and, overall, had a longer-lasting impact.”

Hmm. If only there was some way brands could marry that online intent data with physical, tangible, relevant ad content that consumers could hold in their hands and examine at their leisure in the comfort and privacy of their own homes — and then take with them as they complete the path to purchase by visiting a store.

There is a way, of course, and there has been for years — since long before digital even existed. It's called direct mail.

Special delivery

If you think direct mail is obsolete in the digital age, I suggest you think again.

In fact, *Forbes* recently compared such thinking to [an urban legend](#).

Direct mail's historically high response rates still outperform just about every other marketing channel, and studies show direct mail resonates with all demographic groups, [including millennials](#).

Direct mail actually prefigured many of the same techniques that are now widely used in the digital age. Mailing to every household in a particular ZIP code, for example. That was “geotargeting” before it was called that.

Add sophisticated online intent data that can be analyzed and acted upon in real time, and you can create lists that are much more finely calibrated.

IN THE [buzzword bingo](#) that frequently passes for a coherent marketing strategy, it is easy to forget that innovation amounts to more than putting a new label on an old idea. Take this trendy notion of “customer touch points,” or “people-based” marketing.

All that really means is that you should try to reach consumers in ways that might actually prompt them to respond — which is nothing new. One of the most effective ways to accomplish that is to give consumers touch points that they can actually touch.

With most [consumers touching their mail every day](#), there are a lot of opportunities to establish lasting connections.

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