

Getting up close and personal with direct

By [Nici Stathacopoulos](#)

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Brand activation, whichever way you look at it, is becoming another channel for direct communications. Even when judging submissions for direct awards, it's sometimes hard to make a definitive call as to whether a campaign is ultimately direct, or simply a brand activation strategy. But this is the way more and more direct communications are going.



The reason for this is clear-cut: companies don't know enough about their customers. Those companies who believe that they can start to interact in a truly direct way only because they have a million-odd names at their disposal are likely deceiving themselves.

I recall many years ago how some of the bigger retailers reached out to customers by offering them 'club' membership with a monthly newsletter and discounts. Anyone opening an account could tick the relevant 'yes' box to receive their monthly glossy.

These retailers knew very little, if anything, about their subscribers, who have most likely over the past 20 years or so grown from LSM 5 or 6 to LSM 8 and 9. This presents an exciting opportunity to start driving these same people to specific touch points and collecting more information about them. Only then can you start talking to them one-to-one in a meaningful way.

Converging ways

Finding and activating these people is where old and newer marketing mechanisms can be used in various and converging ways for the best effect. Billboards or radio campaigns, for example, are still some of the worthiest tools in the marketer's arsenal to drive people to the brand. But the mass message needs to be relevant, with something in it for the consumer.

For these channels to make people stop and want to be involved in your brand takes breakthrough ideas that cut through clutter and change behaviour. Once you've got my attention, you can ask the leading questions about what I'm interested in

and so start to communicate in a manner that is relevant and, usually, also permission-based.

It is at this point that digital media can start to make an impact, offering an ideal way to gather more information about your customers. Web-based banner advertising, for the most part, however, has become little more than wall paper and won't by virtue of being part of an interactive medium cut to the chase.

Invest in creative thinking

Companies have to invest in creative thinking to use rich media capabilities effectively, with these same banners, for example, able to become an integral part of whatever someone is reading on a website. This could involve a car zooming across the page to demonstrate its performance; or, used to put together a rich multimedia experience of an airport lounge with audio and video for users to mouse over.

The key questions of where and how you are going to collect relevant information about your customers still need to be top of mind. Asking via the same airport demo what someone's preferred drink is while they're booking their ticket would be a viable strategy that gives you at least one piece of information to be used when that customer eventually makes use of your business class lounge.

This can go a long way to ensuring that the customer is recognised and rewarded without necessarily having to discount the product or service.

Companies have to think about spending their money on engendering a response in their database, activating consumers and populating their records with relevant customer data. Buying an arbitrary list and mailing out unsolicited, irrelevant information is the poor cousin of badly thought-out mass advertising, and is certainly not to be confused with direct marketing.

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