

## Effectively Court the One-Time Buyer

By Gene BeHage

As direct marketers, we plead, promise, entice and do just about anything to capture a new buyer. Yet for all the time, effort and dollars we spend to lure the elusive new buyer, quite often less is spent to develop a contact strategy for bringing them into the multi-buyer family.

Many DMrs work under the misguided premise that once the new customer hits the file, all that's needed is a welcome note thanking them, telling them how swell the company is vs. the competition and saying, "Oh, by the way, hope to hear from you real soon."

This faulty strategy is why an estimated 70 percent of new buyers never join the multi-buyer family. Want to convert more? Then rethink the whole process. Your initial contact must be your strategic guide to how you formulate the next contact with this customer segment.

If they bought a single item, then it makes sense to go back to them with similar products. If they respond to a free sample, give them a bounce-back offer for the same product in a larger size, a similar model with a discount coupon, free shipping or a bonus gift.

In general, new buyers coming out of mass media are opportunists. They love a deal. They love a bargain. Sending them your full catalog won't cut it. You must court them with another can't-resist offer so that they begin to feel comfortable and convert into the multi-buyer family. This customer has the what's-in-it-for-me mentality. To keep the conversion fires hot, you need to promote them and gradually ease

them into your mainstream offer.

The contact strategy with new customers acquired through list rental or package insert programs is completely different. These customers are mail-order buyers. They may be a one-time or repeat buyer from the list you rented or the marketer whose package your insert is riding with. It can be assumed they like the concept of buying products via mail.

The challenge, of course, is to entice them to become a multi-buyer. Again, it takes more than the traditional welcome letter to motivate them. Like the previous group, they need to be recognized and courted. They need to be treated differently from the multi-buyer group that you want them to join.

What should be considered is a hybrid mail piece that offers them only your best sellers. Consider special, one-time welcome-to-the-family sale prices, a discount coupon or a mystery welcome gift. If they have a phone number or e-mail, contact them and thank them for choosing your company and let them know a special mail piece will arrive soon. If you use ink-jet messaging on your mail piece, tailor a message for these new-to-file folks.

Your initial contact strategy should include a welcome letter in the first order you send them and in the follow-up mail piece. This letter above all

needs to be credible. It needs to talk to this new customer. It needs to be emotionally honest. Letters that talk about the virtues of your company, its longevity, its prices or unique merchandise are viewed by recipients as a rank amateur way of trying to extract more dollars from them.

Make the letter different. Honestly engage new customers and leave an impression that "hey, these folks are different." For example, border the letter with pictures of the people who work for the company and include short bios on each. Do you sponsor any organizations such as a Little League team or senior citizens group? Show pictures and tell of their accomplishments. You want these customers to look at your company in subjective ways that ultimately make them loyal, multi-buyer advocates.

As direct marketers we spend inordinate amounts of time, effort and revenue to obtain new customers. Far too often the efforts are severely diminished upon the acquisition. The abysmal conversion of new buyers to multis prove this. Want to improve the conversion rate? Then develop a creative contact strategy that focuses on them.



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