



## Direct marketing makes a comeback

Story posted: August 20, 2007 - 6:01 am EDT

Direct marketing, like many other media tactics, continues to change and evolve, which is making it more difficult for any marketer, direct or not, to strike the right balance when it comes to employing marketing techniques to increase sales.

Ruth P. Stevens, president of eMarketing Strategy, a consulting company, spoke with *BtoB* about new techniques in direct marketing, as well as the best tried-and-true tactics that marketers can take to the bank.

**BtoB:** *What are the new techniques that are really working for b-to-b direct marketers?*

**Ruth Stevens:** I've come across a couple things that I think are pretty cool. I ran across a company called ReadSmart recently. I haven't seen it tested, but if you look at their site, they have some claims that are pretty exciting: improved comprehension and improved response. They have come up with a way of spacing words in a more logical sequence than typical word spacing.

These guys lay out words on the printed page, or a Web page, according to natural groupings. They say that by adjusting the word spacing, they improve comprehension dramatically and thus improve response results. ... I don't have any personal experience with it, but it sounds like it's worth testing.

Another technique that is interesting is video, [which] is being used widely in business markets. I'm surprised by that. We b-to-b people tend to be pretty boring and for the technology to be so widespread in biz marketing is significant.

Video baked inside a banner ad is being used a great deal. I've seen some really cool ads run by such companies as IBM [Corp.] and Cisco [Systems] on some of these technology sites where some of these IT people are hanging out. They are sophisticated and really appealing. I think they break through the clutter. I expect to see a lot more of that.

**BtoB:** *What is working best among the old, tried-and-true direct marketing techniques?*

**Stevens:** The big whoop is direct mail. I'm pleasantly surprised that direct mail as a media channel is enjoying a resurgence.

E-mail has matured to the point where none of us can stand promotional e-mail anymore. The reasons are flexibility of format and, in the world of spam, the fact that it's relatively welcomed in the mailbox compared to e-mail.

Also, the availability of lists is the driver, especially in b-to-b. If you are looking to reach a specific segment, direct mail is the best way to get to niche audiences compared with broadcast, print and e-mail.

In b-to-b, another tried-and-true is the phone. In consumer markets, the phone seems to have gone away. I'm not close to this, but I hear of call centers closing all the time. The phone is still working great in b-to-b, since b-to-b is exempt from "Do-Not-Call." And the phone is still the most flexible, multipurpose communications vehicle to customers and prospects available. It's the closest thing to a face-to-face sales call that you can get.

**BtoB:** *How does a b-to-b direct marketer determine the best balance of marketing techniques to maximize its marketing*

The only thing better than  
42 million leads ...



*programs?*

**Stevens:** Throw it against the wall and see what sticks. The hallmark of successful direct marketing is trial and error. The more official term is test. Try it and see if it works. It's not always that simple though.

People are often either untrained or undisciplined to set up tests properly. In b-to-b—and even in consumer—it's hard to measure these days because of multichannel campaigns and long sales cycles.

Even the catalogers, who've traditionally been the most measurable of business models, are struggling because so many orders are coming through the Internet. That is welcome, but it means it's harder to tie those orders back to the marketing investment.

Everyone is having trouble with measurement. It's going to get worse over time. It will get harder because of media proliferation, and consumers are getting jaded. You need multiple touches. It's hard to which know how many touches you need, which touch was the one that converted them and which media were the most effective. I don't see any signs of it getting any easier.

PRINTED FROM: <http://www.btobonline.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20070820/FREE/70810012/1091/FREE&template=printart>

---

Entire contents © 2008 [Crain Communications, Inc.](#)

---