



Getting your data shaped up before you ship out

Lisa Berman-Calitri, Director of New Business, CGSM
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Last month I started training for my annual 170-mile bicycle ride along the beautiful Jersey Shore. Riding on an indoor “trainer” is not the most exciting thing to do, but it's necessary when preparing for a long ride. Well, it's the same story with customer data.

As I was pedaling, I realized that training and fitness are very similar to maintaining house data files. Take, for instance, the fact that by human error data often can be entered into wrong fields. This can lead to all kinds of evaluation errors and even the sending of incorrect messages to prospects and customers.

For example, it really bothers me to receive two direct mail pieces that are either exactly the same or have some minor difference in the name and address field.

“Lisa Berman-Calitri” and “Lisa Calitri”

What a waste. Consider how wasteful it is for a marketer to send multiple pieces of the same mail to multiple locations (home and office) or even multiple names at a single household. It is simply an issue that could be resolved by doing a better job of purging duplicates and/or taking a closer look at multiple pieces going to a single address.

Additional unnecessary expenses are encountered when your mailing is undeliverable-as-addressed, your prospect moves, or you lose postal discounts for mailings that simply don't comply with postal certifications.

All of this can cost you big bucks — just because your data isn't ready for action. Can you really afford not to clean your house files? Let's get back to staying healthy. One of the best ways of staying healthy is preventative care. I know, you don't like doctors — me either — but preventative care is the right way to go. It's the same with data; it needs to be properly maintained in order to perform.

When was the last time you cleaned your address files? How current are your addresses? According to a USPS study, 42 million people changed their addresses in 2006 alone. Think about what that means in 2008, during a housing downturn.

How much money is your company contributing toward the nearly \$2 billion the USPS estimates slips through the cracks due to (among other things), bad data? Do your addresses make sense? Are there abbreviations or misinformation? Do you have a lot of duplicate address and data record information? Do you know if any individual file has been corrupted when uploading new information?

One last thought: Now that you are jumping into action and shaping up your direct mail data, remember to pay attention to your e-mail data too! How many e-mail addresses in your house file are like jane.sample@company.cm? No, that's not a misspelling in this article — but is it in your file that way? What about dead e-mail addresses? When I receive multiple e-mails for the same offering, this too can become very annoying.

So before you have your next e-mail blast or mailing, think about data hygiene and shaping up your data. Making sure your data is in the “best shape possible” is a real workout that's worthwhile!