

PURLs of Wisdom

Direct mail-to-landing page campaigns are getting PURL-sonal

For companies that had their heads in the clouds when it came time to upgrade their computers, Hewlett-Packard, Intel and JDA Software Group thought it was time for some skywriting. The technology firms sent out personalized direct mail pieces that featured a man with his arms spread upward, experiencing an epiphany due to these fluffy words forming above his head: "Bruce Schwartz, The Moment Has Arrived."

In reality, the direct mail piece that The Mahoney Co. of Santa Clara, Calif. designed for the trio didn't come from out of the blue—it arrived in prospects' lives very much on purpose. After determining customers' upgrade schedules, Mahoney sent personalized direct mail and e-mail, complete with personalized URLs that led recipients to personalized landing pages. There, recipients learned all about how hardware from Palo Alto, Calif.-based HP and Santa Clara, Calif.-based Intel would support software from Scottsdale, Ariz.-based JDA Software Group. The \$50,000 campaign's yield: a 9.2 percent response rate and \$13 million in sales.

Results like these are causing many marketers to consider direct mail-to-landing page campaigns, and some to drill down further and provide PURLs. Marketers say the direct mail captures prospects' attention, and the landing page holds it by providing

more details. Then the personalization, minimally, provides leads and, optimally, creates relationships.

The PURL's Moment Has Arrived

"I would say just about every single campaign I do right now [with clients] has a PURL on it, where I drive people back to that PURL," Mahoney Co. President

Mahoney's philosophy really took hold after the "The Moment Has Arrived" campaign. PURLs were essential for the conversations that started in fall 2007 with prospects who were considering buying \$500,000 to \$1.5 million software suites. Customers revealed more information about themselves each time they visited the PURL, which allowed HP, Intel



Hewlett-Packard, Intel and JDA Software Group created a direct mail-to-PURL campaign to sell their software suite. "The Moment Has Arrived" saw a 9.2 percent response rate that yielded 171 leads and \$13 million in sales.

John Mahoney says. "We've since taken that PURL concept, and instead of it just being a campaign landing page, we're creating an ongoing engagement with people, where we drive them back to the PURL."

and JDA to reciprocate and "really nurture them throughout the sales cycle" so when customers were ready to buy, they bought the software suite the trio was offering, Mahoney says.

"Being relevant and consistent is what separates this project from the many projects I have done in the past," says Daniel Johnson,

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strategic relationship manager for Intel. "Sending specific [information] to specific people does make a huge difference. ... This type of project takes good program management and it is a bit more time-intensive to set up, but the results are worth it."

Johnson says the campaign took a month to get off the ground, then six to nine months to show results. Mahoney estimates that it reached out to 2,200 people who could view case studies, videos and product information relevant to them based on their job functions—manager, director or finance officer.

Direct Mail's Role

For fellow Californian, eBay of San Jose, Lanya Zambrano, vice president of Haggin Marketing of Mill Valley, Calif., segmented the auction Web site's housefile based on product affinities.

The value that this creative front-end segmentation provides to an

overall marketing effort, Zambrano says, is that companies with multiple and diverse product lines and multiple and diverse customer groups can tailor their marketing messages.

"There were several versions for each mailing that we created through four-color treatment changes," she says. "We customized the front end of the piece based on customers' recent purchasing history. For example, if a customer purchased home furnishings or apparel items, the cover and opening spread of the piece would be set up to highlight and lift that product up."

Millions of PURLs later, each eBay customer saw a landing page "reflecting the same product affinities and loaded with product suggestions, relevant live listings and offers," Zambrano continues.

So, she adds, the result is that PURL-driven segmentation campaigns engage the best customers because the messaging and offers are much more relevant. "Creating more personalized,

one-to-one communication delivers higher activity from your customer base," Zambrano says.

The appearance of the direct mail piece itself often can have an impact on how the message is received, says Park Forest, Ill.-based custom direct mail company ShipShapes. In 2007, an NHL team sent out 4,942 direct mail-to-PURL ShipShapes mailers and 9,718 regular postcards, also directing recipients to a PURL for a playoff ticket offer. ShipShapes mail prompted 386 Web site hits (less than 8 percent response) and 316 conversions to ticket sales. The standard cardboard postcard sent 291 recipients (3 percent) to the Web, and 196 bought tickets.

The pricier ShipShapes ClearCard—with a clear substrate that emulated the ice rink's frosted look—brought in a higher profit at \$95,095, beating out the postcard with the same image that earned the NHL \$59,280 in profit.



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Making the Link

Still, there's no substitute for a good offer, says Phil Rose, product marketing manager at XMPie, a New York-based publishing software company. "One of the other things that works is to not have a landing page with a name that's like 47 million characters long, because nobody will type it. Those are two big keys," Rose says.

Sylva Wilson, marketing analyst with St. Louis-based machine tool distributor Hartwig Inc., says it's best for the offer to be a bit of a tease. A piece that Wilson mailed in late November employed a theme based on the NBC game show "Deal or No Deal."

"On the piece, it's got a picture of a case, and it says 'go to visit your PURL ... and enter for a chance to win the contents of case No. 13,'" Wilson says. "Well, that's not enough. So what we do is, right underneath that, we [say], 'When you get to your site, you'll be able to see what's inside of case No. 13.' That alone will entice people to

go to the site, because they want to know, 'Well, what's in 13?'"

Marketers can continue making incremental progress via the PURL, Wilson says. The way she encouraged progress was to make the "Deal or No Deal" offer good enough on the Hartwig PURLs for campaign prospects to go ahead and register for the campaign's associated event and receive their giveaway. To make the giveaway relevant, she pays attention to audience interests and, particularly, to the hobbies prospects have in that "territory." For example, Texas prospects win hunting trips.

Tracking back to Rose's advice to make PURLs simple, Wilson says Hartwig prospects see a pattern in each offer. It's their names, plus a numeral that exactly relates to how many offers they've received. Joe Schmo's third offer PURL would read: vip.hartwiginc.com/joeschmo3.

Beyond these measures, Rose advises that a good way to provide extra secu-

rity to PURL users is to clamp on a few random numerals at the end.

Because these URLs are so easy to track, Wilson even uses them to measure magazine advertisement response. Instead of a prospect name, she adds in whatever the advertorial concerns (i.e., vip.hartwiginc.com/bestwipers regarding windshield wipers; and vip.hartwiginc.com/customerservice regarding customer service).

Wilson says all this work reduces confusion. "I definitely try and keep it simple ... We find that the simpler you keep it, the easier it is" for prospects to remember the PURL and easily type it in their browsers when they see a new offer.

For Mahoney, this marketing mix may be the Holy Grail—or at least a sign from above.

"Without the PURL, it wouldn't all tie together," he says. "It's kind of like the cornerstone of everything; having a really relevant Web site that people can visit." ■

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