

DM And The Agency Expertise Challenge

An interesting evolution has taken place in the Direct Marketing sector since the advent of digital, writes **PETER WHELEHAN**

Traditional DM agencies have diversified and have sought to become all things to all clients by morphing into digital, marketing communications and integrated agencies. But by losing focus and diluting their offerings (not to mention increasing their overheads), many of what were traditional DM agencies have been finding it difficult to compete with specialist competitors.

For most agencies, it's simply not possible to have specialists in every area in which clients now require expertise and there are just too many channels now for clients to realistically expect it all in-house. But while the number of Direct Marketing channels has increased, the principles of DM – such as targeting, personalisation, testing and measurement – haven't changed one bit.

These principles can be applied to any DM or direct response channel, whether press, digital or direct mail. The big challenge for clients today is to find an agency that can apply these principles for them in an objective and meaningful way.

More and more, I'm hearing of agencies recommending solutions to clients that suit the agency rather than the client. Why? Because the agency has someone with particular expertise who's not that busy, so they recommend that expertise to the client.

There are three types of agencies that execute Direct Marketing campaigns for clients, and the client will get three different results depending on which type of agency they choose.

- Agencies with little or no Direct Marketing expertise will do the campaign and more than likely make a mess of it, because they never had the expertise to make it successful in the first place (and the client ends up thinking this Direct Marketing thing doesn't work)



- Agencies with little or no DM expertise, but who know someone externally who has the expertise, will take a brief, realise they don't have the expertise to deliver on it and then get an expert in 'below the radar'. The client ends up with a successful campaign, but in effect pays twice.

- Agencies with excellent DM expertise will do a great job and produce a successful campaign that delivers on the client's objectives and expectations.

Talk is cheap, so the key to selecting the right agency is not to let them pay lip service to Direct Marketing. Ask very detailed questions from the outset about their understanding of DM.

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