

How the Web Increases Direct Mail Response Rates

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By Elias Terman

Perhaps you're already taking advantage of what appears to be the most cost-effective and promising way to increase direct mail response rates. They're called Personalized Landing Pages, and they're changing the way we track direct mail response. But before seeing how they work, let's take a look at some industry statistics, and review how response channels like Toll Free and the Web have evolved within the direct mail industry.



Direct Mail Statistics and Trends

First the statistics: According to the DMA, nearly 33% of people respond to direct mail by going online – yet the direct mail industry has lagged behind these preferences. This translates into a window of opportunity for firms that can quickly deploy Personalized Landing Pages, capitalizing on this preference. Campaigns that employ Personalized Landing Pages are reporting a 20 to 30% increase in response rates.

Now the trends: During the 1980s we saw the proliferation of Toll Free numbers on direct mail pieces. In the 1990s, new services from companies such as Who's Calling, CallSource, and others helped link information from an inbound call to a recipient's name and address. In the late 1990s, some campaign managers started placing their corporate website addresses on direct mail pieces. Although better than nothing, the problem with this approach was that the campaign manager could not correlate response with a specific direct mail campaign.

Personalized URLs and Landing Pages

Today, the mantra is "do it with Personalized URLs". Personalized URLs (e.g., www.JohnSample.offer.com) lead direct mail recipients to a Personalized Landing Page. The sole purpose of the Personalized Landing Page is to capture response and gather information used to generate a lead.

"Personalized URLs intrigue and flatter recipients – motivating them to action – therefore providing a way to capture those who respond online," says Craig Krok, VP of Sales at Look Who's Clicking, a company that has pioneered Personalized Landing Pages since 1999. "The result is increased response rates."

The success of Look Who's Clicking is based on one simple value proposition: helping the direct mail industry quickly and easily maximize their web response channel.

Here's how it works. Look Who's Clicking uses the campaign's Mail File (list of direct mail recipients) to generate Personalized URLs for each recipient (see figure). In this way, the campaign manager can uniquely identify respondents by name when they visit the Personalized Landing Page.

When recipients visit their Personalized URL, they're visiting a Personalized Landing Page built specifically to support the direct mail piece to which they are responding. For example, upon arriving at www.JohnSample.offer.com, a welcome message thanks John for visiting, and provides John a way to redeem the offer. Look Who's Clicking captures John's activity as a lead for additional follow-up and analysis – all in real time.

Will the Increased Response Rates Hold?

Once the rest of the industry catches on, will the lift in response continue? The folks at Look Who's Clicking are betting on it. They draw parallels to Toll Free and envision the day when almost every direct mail piece will carry a Personalized URL – preferably one of theirs. As the percentage of direct mail recipients who respond online increases, the web as a response channel will continue to grow in importance. When that happens, Personalized Landing Pages and direct mail will be forever linked.

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