

May 2005

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It's not what you know... (but what you do with it)

EVERY INDUSTRY has its "inside knowledge" - the information that Old Hands know (or claim to know), that can make all the difference when it comes to a sale. Some guys quietly make use of their know-how, while everyone else is hiding behind bulk mailings. There's nothing like a good rumour to sort the men from the boys: "So-and-so's in trouble - they've been late with deliveries and customers are getting upset."

Plenty of Windowbase customers ask for special selections: a supplier of mechanical handling equipment finds that one customer is using it in an interesting way on a building site, so he needs large house-builders, to spread the word. Or, alternatively, maybe there's been a specific problem with a conservatory roof system, and a specialised mailing list, targeting the disgruntled, represents an opportunity. Public sector housing managers with a stock of around 2,000 dwellings, whatever. As often as not, a set of mailing labels with follow-up phone numbers can be used to get a specific message over, quickly, cheaply and effectively.



All we know, because we're told, is that it gets results. One Windowbase customer reported a 9% response rate! People like that tend to come back for more and, in the course of time, convert to making regular use of information stored on disk. (It's nice to be associated with success.)

So, when you know something, your customers might need to know what you're actually doing about it. This is precisely the time to open your sales information database and check on all those potential customers who use So-and-So's product.

WHAT? You haven't been collecting that sort of information? What on earth do you collect? When word got out that one of the better-known window profile suppliers had ceased trading, one company reacted quickly, sorted their data and targeted every fabricator who might be in need of a new profile supplier - Synseal.

Synseal is, without doubt, one of the country's most successful window and conservatory systems suppliers, but it's not enough to have the right products, if nobody knows about them.

continued on page 2...

Circulate this to...

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

It's not what you know... (but what you do with it)

... continued from page 1

"When Premier announced in January they were withdrawing from the market," says Nick Dutton, Synseal's sales and marketing director, "we were able to act immediately. Within 24 hours we had appointments lined up. By Glassex (mid-March) 23 Premier fabricators had switched to Synseal." Many of its competitors were still thinking about how best to get in contact. Nick adds: "those new fabricators will help us to continue growing while others are still struggling - Windowbase definitely works for Synseal."

Having the sense to use the

information, and having the right kit helps, of course. "If I had to out back and choose just one element of my marketing activity," he says, "I would keep my Windowbase database of fabricators and installers for direct mail and tele-marketing. It's up-to-date and accurate, and it enables me to target different groups at different times."

People ask how Synseal continues to grow so fast... "It's no secret," says Nick. "We probably do more, more frequent and more consistent, direct marketing than any other company on the market."

Splash out or drip feed

EVEN WHEN THE ECONOMY SLOWS DOWN, there are still fast-growth markets. Companies in them get used to growth - it becomes part of the air they breathe and, when it comes to expectations and planning, it's not a case of if they grow but how fast they grow. Whatever is happening in the outside world, fast-growth markets lead to an unrealistic sense of a company's potency and skill. 25% growth can be taken for granted and it's as if, whatever they do, it works - the Midas Touch.

At some point, all young, growing markets start to level off. The 25% diminishes to single figures and, if economic forces overcome what drives the market, the numbers can suddenly become negative. When this happens, the market splits into two: those whose

profits reflect the state of market and the others, who just keep growing, as if by magic.

Of course, some companies never actually grow as such at all. They don't take an increasing share but are merely carried along on the wave. When the wave stops, so do they. Some

might grow faster than the market but too quickly, focusing on production, distribution, admin, management systems and financial controls. All very laudable but it isn't enough to produce decent products with good service and good levels of customer satisfaction. Word of mouth can only do so much. Even the very best performance needs to be marketed, and marketing is not just another overhead.

All slow growers, sooner or later, look at their better-performing rivals and wonder how they do it: how do they keep growing when, for us, it's become such a slog? The answer is simple. They keep on

marketing, regularly and constantly. Month in, month out, they never switch off. Many are believers in direct marketing (just like Issues, in fact) and, while others think about it, they get on and do it. Instead of a single mailing every so often - once or twice a year maybe - success comes from regular mailings. Response ratios from a couple of hundred mailings are the same as from a couple of thousand. Instead of looking for one big hit, one perfect mailer that produces large numbers of quality responses, it makes sense to build awareness and interest and generate the response that fuels continuous growth, year in, year out. Like water on stone.



The ONE HIT wonder

Anyone, with only a passing interest in direct marketing, must recognise the two distinct styles of mailings. One comes with messages and graphics on printed envelopes, and might be several pages long. The headline is usually bold, and underlined. Even the headline itself might be a few lines long. The body text of the letter has underlining and score marks next to key phrases. There are different colours, arrows, circles, bits that are supposed to be hand-written, and changes of font size. Enthusiastic, gushing and repetitive, it's effusively personal and, well, everything about it looks American, including that we should "have a nice day!"

If you keep reading (as if) it signs off with "ACT NOW!!!", promising that you won't be disappointed and, after the signature, there's at least one PS. PPS and even PPPS are common. Flyers and/or printed insertions accompany the letter, aiming to reinforce the message and urging you to "Act Now". All these features are deliberate, all apparently proven to improve response rates.

The other style might be no more than a single page, written in simple English, setting out the proposition and supporting arguments. Probably a headline, and maybe a sub-heading, with a call to action at the end. There might even be a PS and an accompanying leaflet but that's about it.

Which is the more effective? Those who know about direct marketing will tell you the beauty is being able to measure the results. But beware what you measure! Assuming that you compare the best of both types, and that you're seeking to generate an effective campaign, the first example does indeed produce a higher return from a

single mailing. Possibly even a second mailing but, after that, the simple, more direct-style letter pulls steadily out in front. Why?

The pushy and boring style attracts those most likely to respond to its aggressive sales pitch, and who have time to read it. Pensioners paying for their subscription to Reader's Digest on one of their sixteen gold credit cards, then? At the same time, anyone who was put off the first time will recognise the envelope the second time around and bin it. The second type of letter will build response cumulatively and, after half a dozen mailings, is far more likely to be the winner.

Like double-glazing sales people, who sell hard 'on the night', their chances of making the sale are always higher at the first shot but, if they don't close that sale, they can't go back because nobody's keen to put up with the pushy, aggressive experience twice. Long and pushy letters might force through a higher initial response but, in the long run, they can seriously damage your brand.

This is important?

We - together with 1500 others - received a mailshot last month, with a First Class stamp on it. Wow, that must have been an important message, then. Not at all, as it turned out. It was just another flyer like all the others but someone in the Marketing Department thought it was worth sending out First Class. The theory is that Second Class mail is less likely to be important and therefore less likely to be opened.

Do yourselves a favour. Send out some of your mailings on a Friday, Second Class. They'll probably

be delivered on Monday morning anyway. The saving, on fifteen hundred letters, would be about £75, and that buys a decent lunch for two. See if the response to First Class and Second Class is any different. To put it another way, with one mailing each month, that could be 900 smackdowns down the toilet every year, so we're entering the realms of serious money.



THE BRAN TUB

WOULD YOU LIKE a database of 3,000 window companies - absolutely free? When you get asked a question like that by Windowbase, you know there must be a catch. On the other hand, there are others out there who wouldn't tell you what they offer for £75 is about as much use.

Over the years, Windowbase accumulates hundreds and hundreds of companies that seem to vanish without trace. It's just not possible to validate them any more. Maybe they closed down. Or moved. A change of phone number could do it. Whatever. The end result is a decent-sized database that can't have the Windowbase name on it, because there'd be no validation date.

Naturally, Windowbase isn't just going to send out hundreds of buck-shee compact disks to anyone who asks, because someone will sooner or later say they got it from Windowbase and "it's rubbish". Existing 18- and 22-carat customers only have to ask. After all, winning new business is 11% inspiration, 87% perspiration... and 4% arithmetic. You never know.



If undelivered... who knows?

EVERY TIME YOU SEND OUT a mailshot, you rely on your mailing list being correct. How do you know it is? How many of your letters disappear into thin air? Ten? A hundred? Do you actually know? It's all very well relying on Windowbase to keep everything up-to-date but here's a simple tip (if you haven't already worked it out for yourself)...

Viking Direct, and all sorts of other suppliers, can make you a self-inking rubber stamp - for pennies - that says: "if undelivered, please return to" your address. Within a week of your mailshot going out, you're already dealing with follow-ups and enquiries but you can also be updating your mailing list. A lot of the returns might well be the sort you don't care about but amongst them could be one or two that you do value. Finding out what happened to a previously good contact takes a lot longer as the weeks and months pass.

If you have a rep out on the road, one phone call could jog his/her memory. You know the sort of thing: "oh yes, I meant to call you about that." Yeah, right! Even if all you do is remove the records from your mailing list, it will save money.



RUBBISH IN

RUBBISH OUT

The late night TV programme Shameless isn't where you'd expect to find good advice, and it's even less likely that it would come from Frank Gallagher!

He told the social worker the difference between data and information, and it's very relevant. The latest version of our Housing Specifiers database is, very definitely, **information**.

The usual sources for local authorities and housing associations are a couple of yearbooks that can be found in most libraries. They only contain the details that the listed organisations are willing to divulge and, far more important these days, they only contain entries where there was a response. The trouble with yearbooks, as housing association managers are discovering, is that they are used mostly for the contact names, so a huge proportion of them are now missing. So, if you've been conned into lashing out rather a lot of money for a couple of directories, they aren't going to be much use unless you're only dipping your toe into the specifiers water. Why send out a mailshot to slightly more than half when, for a few quid more, you can be certain you're hitting the entire market . . . especially the ones with BIG money to spend?

Compared with the latest Windowbase survey, only about **half** the names are still in the yearbooks. All the little associations welcome the chance to have their names in print but the bigger ones, where the money is, are not listed at all.

In many cases, you get the name of the chief officer of a department, which sounds great if you're dumb enough not to realise those names are about as much use as an ashtray on a motor bike. Chief officers of major organisations wouldn't have the faintest idea what products are specified in their houses - they leave that to the guys in

Why send out a mailshot to slightly more than half when, for a few quid more, you can be certain you're hitting the entire market... especially the ones with BIG money to spend?



the drawing office, who actually get out on site and know what they're dealing with.

When you think about it, who's more likely to decide what door handles (or whatever) get used: the Director of Technical Services or a maintenance surveyor? So, instead of listing scores of chief officers, the Windowbase housing specifiers are the

very names with whom technical reps usually try to make contact. Or the desks where information has more chance of being read.

Data is five hundred names of senior personnel, chosen from a random selection of local authorities, ALMOs and housing associations. Information is ensuring that they're all there, for a start, and the right people's names. Now you know why we call ourselves The Information People - it's not just a cute one liner!

JOB ALERT

CHECK YOUR CV

EVERYONE LOSES CUSTOMERS, even Windowbase. Sometimes there isn't much that can be done. However, the axe has to fall in the near future at a well-known PVC-U window systems company. It's a good job and it pays really well. What we can't say yet is whose job it will be.

The Sales Manager possibly. He's the one who says his company needs to know more about its prospective customers, and he doesn't know where to find that information. On the other hand it might be the Sales Director, whose taken his manager's word for it and is investing the company's money in a huge new database of window fabricators. To a jaundiced eye, this might sound like Windowbase hasn't been selling itself well enough. Not really ...

Someone else, who's already left the systems company, was already using Windowbase data to target prospects - with the (expensive) assistance of an agency. The left hand didn't know what the right hand was doing. The right hand has gone, so is the left hand going to be the manager or his boss?

New customers weren't coming on board as quickly as required, and it always helps to come up with an excuse that points the finger anywhere but at yourself. "What we need is a database of all our prospects, so that we can do the job properly." That company had more information than it knew what to do with - literally - and their answer was to create another version. Not a better version, not a newer version, and certainly not a cheaper version.

If you think you could do with a change of scenery and a new car, this could be the opportunity for you. On the other hand, you have to ask yourself, would you want to work for a company like that?

For further information,

please fill in your details and tick your area of interest below and return to: Windowbase Ltd

FREEPOST

OL525

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Reader's name: _____

Company: _____

Telephone: _____

Email: _____

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