



The Maintenance Check is in the Mail, and Other Ways to Reach the Services Consumer

By Warren Storey, VP, Product Marketing & Insight

Here's a message that should get a direct marketer's stamp of approval: The best way to sell consumers carpet cleaning, life insurance or other household services is through the mailbox – both of them.

Postal mail **and** email are among the most-used methods of gathering information among consumers, according to a North American survey by ICOM, a division of Epsilon Targeting. The question is: Wouldn't marketers want to stop there?

When you consider the full spectrum of channels and the category, it seems a hodgepodge, with consumers less likely to use online sources, mobile or the radio. Yet it quickly becomes clear that in fact there is still a case for including multiple channels and multiple touch-points – in what combination is the key.

Determining why consumers are using these channels less, why they tend to prefer mail slightly more, and then using the data to engage them appropriately across the modes of communication that make most sense for your product category and customer segment provides the winning formula - from the mailbox to the company website; from email to social media.

Let's look at some key findings from the survey.

- The top sources of information for U.S. household services, not including family and friends, are newspapers, email and brochures, with 18 percent, 17 percent and 16 percent of respondents using them, respectively, on a weekly basis.
- By comparison, 38 percent of U.S. consumers use newspapers for household products, 24 percent use email, and 36 percent use brochures and flyers.
- In Canada, brochures are most used for household service information, attracting 30 percent of respondents, followed by newspaper (22 percent) and email (18 percent).
- But for household products, 66 percent of Canadians used brochures and flyers, while 37 percent use newspapers and 24 percent, email.

Interestingly after the leaders including newspapers, email, brochures and flyers, the gap widens significantly to include at the lower end other online sources, mobile and social media. In other words, when it comes to targeting the services consumer, the answer is not simply in a mailbag, it's in a mixed bag.

First-Class Reliability

Untangling the reasons why household services preferences is so contradictory takes some data diving. Marketers should gauge in what circumstances their consumers use email vs. mail, or newspaper over television.

Our research, for example, shows that consumers prefer postal mail to email for reasons of convenience, privacy and ease of use. They also say they receive too much email – 39 percent of U.S. respondents said they just don't open them.

When asked why they might prefer email to postal mail, respondents to our survey cited speed, control of incoming information and convenience.

Now let's consider those earlier numbers I posted regarding the most-used sources. Note the differences in brochure use between household products and household services. In both the U.S. and Canada, more than twice as many respondents use brochures for products than for services! With only 18 percent of U.S. and Canadian respondents identifying brochures among the most-trustworthy sources of information, the learning is clear - use brochures, but be authentic in the message, the offer and the delivery.

Meanwhile, the most *preferred* means of receiving household services information in the U.S. is postal mail, unless it is for travel services – in which case consumers have a slight preference for the Internet, 29% to 28%.

Despite the highly fragmented channel preferences indicated in this study, marketers have a great opportunity to engage their consumers by understanding the role of each channel and by matching to what consumers prefer. For example, 32 percent of U.S. insurance shoppers and 36 percent of financial services shoppers prefer traditional mail.

Packaged Deal

So then how does a marketer engage these cross-channel shoppers? One way is through adjacencies. If consumers prefer to get their household product information from brochures and flyers, a carpet-cleaning firm can partner with other like-minded companies to provide a tailored, co-branded package of targeted offers to the consumer.

The use of co-branded packages or cross-channel integration can guide consumers to other sources of information. Newspaper ads can steer shoppers toward a website, where they can engage in service-related games, sweepstakes or sign up for a newsletter. Television spots could encourage consumers to look for a flyer in the mail. And mail, the most-preferred source of information for most all services, can direct consumers to all of the above.

The beauty is that the household services consumer is already touching so many of these channels – but in relatively low numbers. Look at the data, get to know the consumer, and those figures should easily grow.

It's a plan any marketer should sign, seal and deliver.

For Full Report: <http://www.epsilon.com/channelpreference>