

Pleasant surprises surrounding consumer behavior in response to e-mail sent in combination with traditional direct mail

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Do you really know how your customers are responding to that e-mail you just sent them? What precisely is happening when they make the decision to place an order? If they are also receiving traditional mail from you, the answers may surprise you.

We've been involved in some interesting tests that explore the response behavior of consumers who are receiving both traditional mail and e-mails that support the same offers. These tests were validated across groups of consumers, as well as business-to-business recipients.

These tests involved support e-mail that took a couple of different forms:

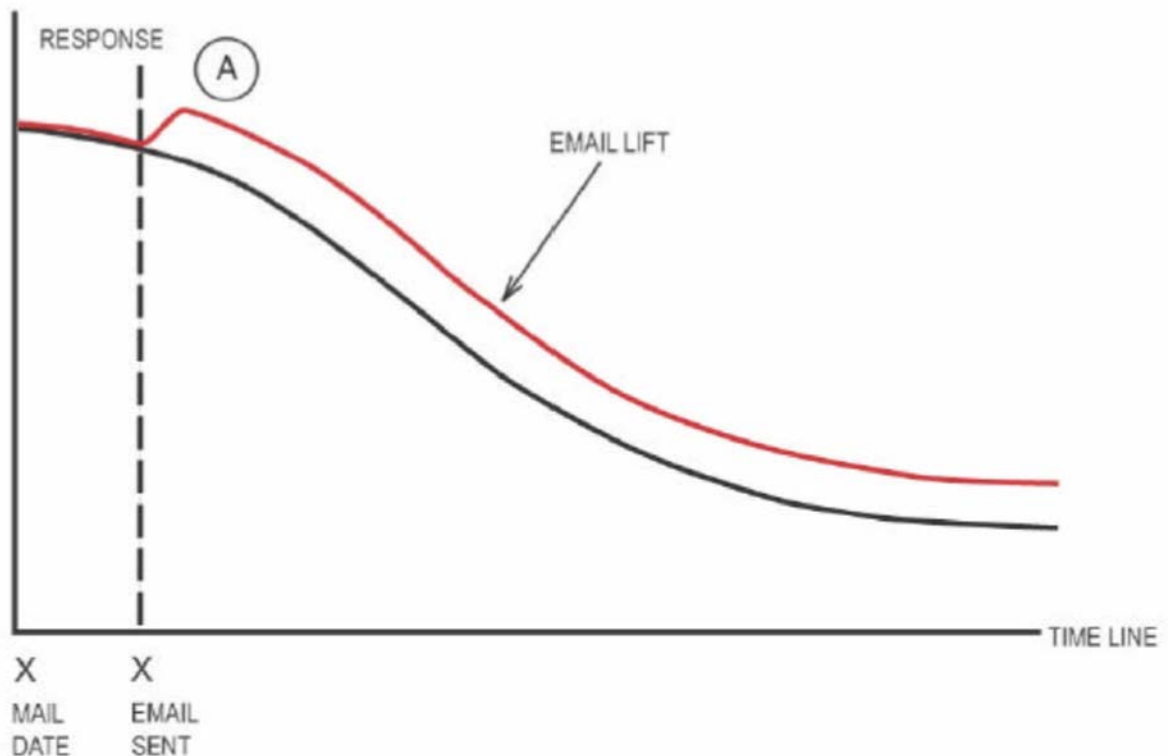
- 1) e-mail "teasers" of the pending receipt of a traditional mail envelope
- 2) e-mails sent as a "reminder" of the traditional mail that's already sitting on their office desks or kitchen tables.

In order to track the response rates to all of these elements – e-mail separately from the traditional mail – unique promo codes were assigned to each. To force the issue of entering a response code, some of the offers required entry of that unique code in order to take advantage of the offer.

Where the tests yielded some interesting patterns is when timing of the e-mails was tested against traditional mail. We monitored response curves, and the shapes of those curves were precisely as you've been experiencing yourselves: classic mail curve for the traditional DM, accompanied by sharp spikes in response (see point "A" on chart) from the e-mail deployment. No surprises here.

The following graph shows a typical response curve pattern from the tests:

EMAIL SENT AFTER DIRECT MAIL



Where things got very interesting is when we started to do a detailed analysis of that spike in the curve caused by the e-mail deployment.

Yes, the e-mails were causing a sudden jump in response, and yes, they were happily paying their way in terms of return on investment.

But here's where the revelations began to surface in the analysis: there were multiple options for placing an order: click through to an e-commerce enabled web site, mail back an envelope found in the DM package or call a toll-free #.

We still experienced a split across all three methods of ordering. Some consumers took us up on the offer immediately and clicked through to the web site. Some needed the reassurance of a "live" telesales representative, and some still found comfort in mailing back a traditional envelope. It's fascinating to see how, regardless of the new ordering channels available, certain ingrained ordering behaviors take a while to change.

However... when we analyzed the promo codes, it was clear that, although the emails clearly produced spikes in the response curves (see point "A" on the chart) it was *not* the promo code associated with the e-mails that many respondents were referring to.

Although they were responding online or through a telesales rep as a result of the email, they were still using the promo code found in the traditional direct mail piece to take advantage of the offer.

This yielded some valuable lessons:

The e-mails certainly did boost traditional mail response rates. But those same consumers, although responding to the e-mail, still had the traditional mail in their hands. We proved that fact conclusively, since they were using the promo codes found only on the traditional mail pieces.

Conclusions:

Although e-mail is a powerful tool, many consumers still find comfort in traditional printed material. Print and digital communications can work best in conjunction with and support of each other.

There is also a valuable opportunity here for traditional direct mail users to extend the life of their traditional response curves.

On first glance, the obvious results were precisely as you would expect -- the e-mails did a brilliant job of boosting that traditional response curve you've experienced in your own mailing history.

But the e-mails were not the sole influence of behavior. We proved that recipients were still hanging on to the traditional mail piece for reference, and to help them through the ordering process.

Testing of the timing of the e-mail and traditional mail deployment, followed by careful analysis, is the only sure way to determine the most effective mix in your own situation.