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How do I make my messages relevant?

Mike Thompson, director-deliverability and ISP relations, ClickSquared  
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You've heard it a zillion times: Make your communications more relevant. The more relevant and "personalized" the message, the higher the response rate. But how do you determine which information is necessary to make your communications more personalized and where do you start?



Before you start collecting data on your customers and prospects, determine your objectives. How you plan on using the information—for example, for promotions, for invites to special events or for up-selling opportunities—will drive the type of information you gather. Think about what you need to know from your target audience that will give you insight into who they are and their specific needs. This information includes product interests, frequency of purchase, Web site visits, store visits, life events (marriage, pregnancy, moving, etc.), demographic and psychographic profiles, and geographic location.

Now that you know what information you need, how do you capture it? Ask your customer. If don't already have a way to do so, a powerful technique is to set up a preference center on your Web site. A preference center gives you a mechanism to capture useful information such as name, age, gender, ZIP code, mobile telephone number and permission to use it for SMS messages, type of communications they want to receive, and which social media sites they're using.

Driving customers to the preference center and encouraging them to share information there can be as simple as sending an e-mail (or posting something on your Facebook page) and offering special discounts, coupons or contest eligibility in exchange for preference information.

In addition to the information explicitly collected via the preference center, use past-behavior data such as e-mail opens and clicks, past purchases, survey responses and Web activity to infer shopping habits and product interest.

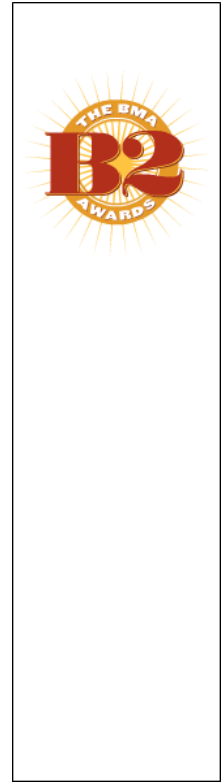
Gathering these data into a customer database enables you to create more relevant, personalized messaging:

- ZIP codes help you to better promote local events.
- Demographics can help improve the relevancy of lifestyle-related product offers.
- Collecting mobile numbers and getting permission to use them for SMS allows to you send out last minute clearance sale announcements.
- "Share With Your Network" e-mail links to Twitter or Facebook can help you leverage these channels and determine the influencers within your customer base.
- Web-click data can be tracked to determine product interests and allow you to immediately respond to abandoned sessions.

The data you gather can make your e-mail campaigns more relevant, which is ultimately the key to increased sales.

Michael Thompson is director-deliverability and ISP relations for ClickSquared ([www.clicksquared.com](http://www.clicksquared.com)), a provider of relationship marketing programs.

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