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DIRECT MARKETING

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The Best Online DM Strategy



By [Michael Mayor](#)
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Aptimus' SVP explains that search and email may not be the best way to reach your target audience, but there is a solution to the online DM conundrum.

I'd like to coin another phrase for the online advertising glossary: *Transactional Advertising*.

You see, in the tried and true world of offline direct marketing, it's all about finding potential buyers by way of something they have recently done-- a recent move, a catalog purchase, the birth of a new baby. In fact, give me a consumer action or event and I'll bet you a nickel that I could find more than one direct marketer who would love to purchase a big ole list of them! To drill down just a bit more on this, consider these specific examples:

- A cable or satellite company may rent a "hotline" list of people who have recently moved, as these people are likely to make a decision on service very soon.
- A software manufacturer may opt to place a package insert into a computer box that's just been shipped, as the consumer will be starting with a blank canvas.
- A baby clothing company might use call centers to work new mother leads.

It's all very black and white in the "traditional" world and very, very trackable.

Herein lies the rub. Unfortunately, many Direct Marketers have complained that the internet's two big marketing guns -- Search and Email -- just don't measure up to these types of traditional offline DM tools.

They argue that Search has some very disturbing targeting limitations. As just one example, I typed "cable tv" into a search box and most of what came back were services that are way outside of my geographic area. Note that I had to click on all of the links to find this out, so all of them, in essence, paid for an unqualified click. Sloppy, huh?

These same Direct Marketers also argue that email has limited segmentation. I have six email addresses, yet (sigh) just one house. My email addresses have very little data appended to them (trust me, I know), while my physical address probably has enough info attached to it that it warrants its own memory stick at the big three data centers. If you were a direct marketer, which would you want?

In defense of the internet, I would tell these hard-core direct marketers that they just aren't looking deep enough. The internet is absolutely jam-packed with consumer actions. One could even argue that the internet is nothing more than millions and millions of digital transactions.

The trick, or course, is to sort out all of the noise. Most online transactions don't carry "meaningful intent" in my opinion. In other words, a "page view" is just a tad lower on the consumer event scale than, say, the birth of a baby. A "click" doesn't really have the same lasting impact on one's life as a new home purchase.

However, there are many, many meaningful consumer actions online-- downloads, newsletter sign-ups, log-ins, purchases, and on and on and on. What's more is that most of these transactions have valuable, self-reported data attached to them. More still, you can target these consumers in real time!

So why is transactional advertising better? When someone walks into Staples to buy antivirus software, more likely than not this action will put them on a mailing list within weeks. A few weeks later, the appropriate direct marketer(s) will rent the list, mail the person what they hope is still a relevant offer and then wait.

The transactional advertising parallel is this: a person enters their information into an online form and begins to download anti-virus software. As the software is downloading, they are presented with that same relevant offer which, obviously, can never be more relevant.

Direct Marketers, let me assure you that the online counterparts to your offline marketing tools do exist. My advice to you is to get started with transactional advertising sooner rather than later, as I truly believe it's where online advertising is headed. You have the opportunity to be there first. More importantly, you have the experience, discipline and skills to make it work even better.

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