

Keeping within the boundaries: Ethical marketing automation

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14 Sep 2018

Marketing Automation Systems (MAS) might seem like good software to have in order to send out bulk email and/or SMS campaigns. However, it should be so much more. Yes, most distribute marketing messages to a database, but perhaps just as importantly - they should keep companies within the boundaries of ethical marketing.



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Ethical marketing can be considered marketing to the right person (because you have permission to do so), at the right time (respecting the limits set by the Electronic Communications Act), for the right product (why market car insurance to people who have no cars?).

This appears a simple enough task, but without the benefits offered by innovative MAS, monitoring all these aspects becomes a convoluted process, beset by human error and rookie mistakes. Just ask anyone who has tried to maintain a mailing list on their own – it's far from easy. And now, with the demands placed on marketers from the Protection of Personal Information Act (PoPI), staying within the boundaries of what must and must not be done, will be required by law and governed with strict fines.

Keeping within the limits

Right person, right time, right product – this mantra ensures that your database will appreciate you as a marketing company. Why? Much like adverts on television or radio, people don't mind marketing over SMS or Email if it's relevant to them. Plus, adhering to this ensures marketers keep costs down since they are not marketing the wrong product to the wrong person and wasting ever scarcer budget.

Adjusting and pruning your database is important, but it's also true that the better the data, the better your prospects of successful campaigns. This becomes even more important when looking at product providers who often rely heavily on exact marketing campaigns to match their operational capability.

For example, if they have five call centre seats, managers can only deliver a certain volume of sales leads to these agents, or the careful balance between operations and marketing will break. Creating and measuring this predictability in the MAS is thus key for service providers.

Doing the monitoring for you

A good MAS must monitor who you have marketed to and for which products, and will help update and remove people on your mailing lists. It's here where setting rules to not over-market to people is part of being an ethical marketer (while actually helping to cut down your marketing costs).

An effective MAS should also include a number of sophisticated exclusion criteria that can be automatically set. For example, you can input the time periods to message a person for any product, a single product, or when someone has actually bought a product. It also ensures that you work within the correct sending times (no marketing past 8pm, public holidays or Sundays).

Keeping costs down

Making use of MAS to take charge of campaigns should not necessarily cost more since the system must be priced only on how much you use it. Some of the features that should be a part of any MAS are the ability to personalise emails for a better response rate, and plugging into a reversed billed SMS platforms. Here the marketer is paying for responses and opt-outs, which is now a requirement as per Policyholder Protection Rules legislation.

Heading to the future

Finally, where are MAS heading to in the future? Like many other systems, there's a strong leaning towards machine learning and the improvements this can bring. It's an extremely interesting prospect since it will take most of the guesswork out of the equation. Based on sending data, responses and the sales data from the service providers, the MAS will be able to automatically create the lists to market products to.

This is the Holy Grail of database marketing: imagine pushing the 'send' button and never having to look at the campaign again. It keeps adjusting itself as it goes along, with little to no intervention needed from the marketer's side. Again, all inside the legal parameters, such as the times and dates companies are allowed to run campaigns in.

For marketers, the times are indeed changing. Legislation introduced (PoPI in South Africa, GDPR in the European Union) is bringing legal requirements much closer to what is ethically the right thing to do. An effective MAS means both yourself and your database are protected by ensuring that marketing rules are enforced. And with heavy fines attached, why risk it by trying to do it all on your own?

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