



By Lucio Maramba

Incremental Change Produces Big Profits

If you were to ask most practitioners of direct marketing how they achieve significant improvements in campaign results, they might cite a change in creative, a new offer configuration, or an especially savvy media buy. Few would likely identify intelligent call tracking and routing as their chosen path to profits. But as the following case study will show, those were precisely the tools that were used to improve a campaign's rate of conversion by 75 percent. And as you will see, they are tactics that are ideally suited to help navigate the unique characteristics of the U.S. Hispanic marketplace.

One of those characteristics is that this burgeoning market can drive thousands of calls per week, with especially heavy spikes on the weekend. That is precisely what was happening for a marketer of consumer products. In the past, the advertiser would drive calls to an interactive voice response (IVR) system, which makes perfect intuitive sense. Yet one of the nuances of the Hispanic marketplace is that it requires a high-touch approach with telesales agents engaging prospects on a one-to-one basis. In fact, it is not uncommon for call times to be twice as long as those with their English counterparts, and this is true for campaigns of every stripe — from As Seen On TV widgets to lead generation and, naturally, a considered purchase. This kind of engagement is vital to build trust and close a sale, and it has contributed mightily to the improvement in conversion cited above.

Given this dynamic, using multiple call centers is often a necessity. This is where call tracking and routing come in. Call tracking allows a campaign manager to assess the capabilities of each individual call center against variables such as their ability to handle call volume, closing rates and average order value (AOV).

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The intention isn't to use call tracking as a bully pulpit with which to whip vendors into shape, but rather a collaborative tool that enables each center to reach its

full potential. The reality is that most call centers are limited in terms of the number of seats they occupy at any time, as well as the average sales skill the operators in those seats maintain. Call routing is used to make sure that the optimal numbers of leads are then routed in alignment with each center's capabilities.

While looking at numbers on a spreadsheet and interpreting them qualitatively is one thing, understanding their qualitative implications can be quite another — and that is where call tracking really comes into play. For example, an examination of the results in the aforementioned campaign showed that one center was delivering an AOV 10 points higher than another. The instinct might be to throw the weaker call center under the bus, but, instead, we set out to discover why there was such a disparity.

By listening to call recordings, we were able to detect that the order of upsells at one center varied from the other. The better performing call center was offering the key winning upsell far earlier in their script. By the time the weaker performing center got to that upsell, callers were fatigued and taking a pass on it. Based on this insight, the script for the lesser performing center was tweaked. As a result, all boats were lifted.

That's what this is really about: incremental change that can be a huge difference-maker between a campaign that rolls out and one that never leaves the gate. A commitment to this kind of ongoing campaign perfection is not relegated to just the Hispanic marketplace, but should be the standard for all general marketplace advertisers and their agents.

No one is looking to throw money against the wall and not get a return. Even marketers that are now using DRTV to pull sales through brick-and-mortar retail channels need to at least break even to maintain adequate air support. And while the use of these tools can be the difference between success and failure, they are not a commodity or simply a lever that one can "set and forget." They require daily, active management to summon the very best result. However, proactively managed properly, that end result can be an enduring campaign that profits all whom rely on direct marketing success for their livelihood. ■