



Email and Social Media databases decimated and marketers running around in a panic

GDPR sounds like it's going to be a lot of fun....

Email marketing is soon going to become very, very difficult...

In the EU from May next year, because of new data protection legislation, you will need to be extremely careful when you send out emails, as part of your marketing programme.

Plus, those extensive in-house email and social media marketing databases that you have expensively built over the years, are almost certainly going to be decimated. Yes, read that again. *Decimated...*

I have spoken with a lot of people in the business about this in the last few months and the general opinion is, for every 10,000 you have on your database now, expect to lose 6-7,000 of them - perhaps even more - once GDPR comes into force.

Scary? You bet. Those individuals are your lifeblood. They have cost you a lot of money to acquire and nurture.

But, you are going to lose that personal communication channel you currently enjoy with most of them - and there's very little you can do about it.

This is because the new General Data Protection Regulations are going to change everything, forever. The regulations will be draconian.

As I understand it, it looks like unless you have permission from the people you want to contact and sell to, it will be an offence to send them an email, SMS, text, or social media message.

They actually have to tell you that it's OK for you to send them your messages. It's not enough that they don't say anything at all.

They have to opt-in.

Make a mistake and the fine will be huge. Up to £20 million or 4% of your total turnover, whichever is the greater.

That's an awful lot of fish and chips...

By the way, this applies to your clients, too. They will also be off-limits for contact, unless you've asked and received permission to continue keeping them aware of your offers.

Let's face it, given the current problem with emails and social media and people's views on them, a huge number are going to say no. Especially to email. It will be manna from heaven for most people.

Nothing personal to you or your company, this is going to happen to all of us.

After all, general opening rates to emails are now well under 10% anyway, meaning nine out of ten emails in all our inboxes, don't even get opened. So, give them a chance to control those inboxes even more - and people will rush to do it.

It will be like Christmas coming early for most out there.

In my view, marketers only have themselves to blame, though.

Because in an awful lot of cases, companies have seriously abused the email channel and are now currently *raping* our inboxes. Just because you have bought something from a company a couple of years ago, doesn't justify them sending you 6-8 emails (or sometimes more) every month.

But, as I have said many times in this column, no one seems to care anymore, about doing things correctly. Email is cheap. Let's slam out as many as we can.

Social media is cheap as well. Let's annoy the hell out of everyone with it and try and convince people it's the way forward - when all the facts show it isn't.

Brainless. And now it's coming home to roost.

Faced with these tough new regulations, and your email and social media databases soon to be a fraction of the size they were, your communication programmes will have to work much, much harder than ever before.

So, how will you promote yourself and your company's wares after May next year? What avenues will you use, to supplement what's left of your vital customer and prospect data?

Your options are going to be interesting, to say the least...

Of course, if you hold the belief that your brand is important and people won't be able to do without you and your products, then I'm sure you will be happy to wait for them to contact you.

But, let me tell you something - that ain't gonna happen...

You will go broke waiting for them to call you. In these crazy times, where loyalty is virtually non-existent, you will be forgotten very quickly. As we all will...

When you consider the options that will be available to you, I believe one of them stands out like a beacon in a hurricane.

Direct mail.

Yes, you could *write* to your customers and prospects.

Blimey, Andy, I hear you say. What a suggestion. Have you been on the wacky backy again?

Perhaps. But pay attention. This is important...

Yes, I'm talking about a good old direct mail letter.

There's no opt-in requirement with direct mail. Just embrace MPS and dedupe your databases against it - and you're cooking with gas.

And remember something else. Something that's been a fact for many, many decades now. I have mentioned it many times in Copycat.

Nothing works better than a well-written personalised letter.

Nothing.

Added to that, is the fact that direct mail is a proven medium and currently working better than ever, in every country that has a decent postal system.

But you wouldn't know it, reading most of the digitally-seduced marketing press and current blogs in our industry. Direct mail is history, they have been saying for years. Digital is the way.

The current crop of lemming marketers, that follow the latest fashion or trend, stopped using DM years ago. Most won't even test it against email or social media.

I know, as I have fought that particular battle from the front of the line for years. And I have the scars to prove it.

Those that do test it, find that it outperforms pretty much everything and delivers a better ROI than most other marketing they undertake.

Yes, in the last few years especially, with email ROI falling off a cliff, Facebook and Twitter continuing to underdeliver, smart marketers have started to divert more and more budget back into direct mail, simply because of one thing.

It *works*.

Incredibly well, too, if written and created by people who know the medium and have experience in writing and creating it.

I know what you're going to say. Direct mail costs much more than email. (If only I had a £1 for every time a marketing person said that to me, I would be rich indeed).

Actually, the cost of DM against email is totally and utterly irrelevant. For this gold-plated reason...

It's not what it costs that's important. It's what it *delivers*.

And, created and written correctly, direct mail will deliver *plenty*...

If you are honest for a minute, forget the cost discussion and reluctantly accept that the above fact is true - and it is, by the way - you will then be faced with your second big problem.

Who do you know that understands direct mail well enough, to create and write packs for you, to deliver the level of sales and/or enquiries you crave?

Direct mail is a *specialist* area. Very much so. Please don't even think otherwise. You would be wrong.

To create and write an effective direct mail pack, requires specialist skills - and most of today's traditional agencies and marketing teams, haven't got that skill. It's not in their repertoire.

And digital agencies wouldn't know where to start.

Client marketing departments these days, are full of 20 somethings, that can't write or spell - and have no idea about punctuation or grammar, let alone how to structure a personal selling message in print.

Most traditional agencies think direct mail is an ad in an envelope and create it that way. (One young agency guy actually said that to me at a industry reception, just a few weeks ago).

I really do believe that direct mail IS going to become the medium of choice for a lot of companies after GDPR, because it will simply be the most effective option.

Mailboxes and desks are going to be targeted again in ever-larger numbers.

As a result, it is going to be more difficult for your messages to rise above the general noise level, stand out and deliver an attractive level of responses and sales.

So, how can you do something about it?

My advice to you, is simple and it's this. Seek out the old DM liggers. They have forgotten more about direct mail than most people know these days. They will write and create winning packs for you.

This is because they have been doing it all their lives. They know what works and what doesn't, the importance values of the elements - and how all those elements work together.

They know, for example, that, after the targeting, the most important part of a DM pack is the letter. In fact, the copy is over 4 times more important than the creative in direct mail.

They know that for a fact, because they were part of a vibrant and knowledgeable direct marketing community that tested and proved *everything*, hundreds of times. Then, they went and tested everything again. And again.

Remember testing?

They also know, that if the letter doesn't connect or engage with the reader, the brochure won't be read. Period.

In addition, one of their key skills, honed over the decades, is how you get people to read the letter - and keep on reading.

You start with a strong benefit-laden headline. How many of those do you see these days? Then you follow that with a first paragraph that works with the headline, to get the reader's attention and encourages them to read on.

And you ensure the copy is written so it flows, continually engaging the reader and keeping them reading, line after line.

They also know that the copy in the letter and brochure, should be different. In DM, the letter 'sells' - and the brochure 'tells'. Put 'telling' copy in your letter (as many do these days) and your pack will end up in the bin. Within a few seconds.

A couple of other tested elements they also know. If there is no offer, there will be no sale. And overprinted envelopes work better than plain ones.

Plus, literally hundreds more gold nuggets like those, that all impact and influence the performance of the mail pack.

Yes, these old liggers know *loads*. And there are still a handful of them out there, doing their thing, making a lot of money for the savvy marketers that employ them.

Perhaps now might be a good time to seek them out. Get in first, before the world beats a path to their door and they will then be too busy to help you.

It won't be a wasted search. Their skill and experience will make you a lot of money. And save you a lot, too...

That's *guaranteed*.

They have done it so many times before.

Keep the faith...



ABOUT YOUR AUTHOR

Andy Owen is MD of **Andy Owen Copy & Creative Ltd**, one of the most respected and experienced International direct marketing consultancies, specialising in all aspects of creative, copy and strategy for direct and digital marketing.

Andy has been writing copy for 31 years. He writes traditional and digital marketing campaigns, including direct mail, sales letters, emails, SMS's, PPC ads, websites, brochures and much, much more.

He works with top clients in three continents.

He was inducted into the Direct Marketing Hall of Fame in February 2015.

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Andy runs in-house copywriting training for companies of all types and also presents direct marketing Masterclasses, Workshops and Seminars all over the world. (Including Direct Mail.)

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