

Data Cleansing – simple steps immediate results



The volumes of data that travel back and forth from different sources are ever more complex and increasing in size on a daily basis. The need to ensure that this data is up to date, accurate and reliable should be the primary focus for all client-focused organisations. The accuracy of this data is what the business relies on to communicate effectively and be a front runner in their line of business.



There is nothing more detrimental to an organisation than having inaccurate data about their customers. Consumer data becomes inaccurate and out of date very quickly, and decayed data carries a range of financial, branding and regulatory risks for organisations.

All businesses collect, utilise and store data in some form, but often have no processes in place to fully manage this. A business needs to understand the impact of not undertaking regular cleanses.

Data cleansing is not always seen as a priority or a “must have”. This is especially prevalent in smaller organisations that are not governed by stringent guidelines and rules, or simply don't have the IT or marketing resources to formally manage this.

With the recent and ongoing economic slowdown, organisations have shown signs of shifting into a more proactive way of working. Active data gathering and the utilisation of that data for communications and interactions with their customers is becoming more and more important – including smaller businesses. This does however need to be coupled with

effective and essential management of the data quality. The data needs to be fit for purpose.

Today's business is tomorrow's revenue. Businesses must understand the need to keep data up to date and perfectly maintained, as this will provide rich contact data which is used when future products and services are promoted.

Impact areas

Verification and Cleansing:

47% of UK consumers are 'put off' from responding to offers that interest them if the company sending them fails to get their name and/or address details correct. The plethora of address data and updates available make it almost inexcusable for a business NOT to run address data cleansing processes on their customer base. The relatively low cost and easy access in or out of house make it quick and effective.

Ensuring personal information is complete and accurate reduces the risk of causing consumer annoyance and creating a negative impression of the organisation. If the business values customer perception, attention to detail is paramount and helps that

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communication flow better. The flow of the communication via mail for example, is suddenly disrupted when a customer sees their address is incorrect – at that point, how likely are they to read the rest of your letter with any interest?

Cleansing data at various stages through the data lifecycle is integral to maintain the accuracy that is vital for the retention and acquisition of customers. Verifying the correct postal address at point of capture is easily achievable and goes a long way in ensuring that the data you put into your database is not garbage. Wrong addresses mean returned deliveries, complaints and most importantly of all, a lost customer.

Software is available to bring in house and integrate with your current system. Tap in a postcode, and the address is auto populated – simply insert door number. If the budget allows and the need arises, email verification software is also available. This saves time and ultimately, money. These services are available to bring in house, but also accessible as an online service.

Goneaways:

18,000 people move every day which poses the question – what does your business do about it? Not all of the people that have moved will have specified a forwarding address but they are more than likely to appear on the Goneaway suppression files.

The DMA believes that over £95m per year is wasted by organisations mailing individuals that have moved house. By identifying and removing individuals that cannot or will not respond to communications, an organisation can decrease its number of undeliverable/returned mailing items. This results in reduced campaign costs and an improved return on investment.

There are also services available in the marketplace that allow businesses to update old addresses with the new address the customer has moved to. This allows the business to maintain the contact, keep the relationship and to develop it. There is nothing worse than winning a customer, pleasing the customer and maintaining the customer, only to lose them because they moved! The advantages of performing regular cleanses which also check for Goneaways are very visible and impact the running of the business, saving money, saving customers and maintaining the positive brand image.

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Deceased:

Mailing the deceased is the single largest cause of complaints to the Information Commissioners office each year. Consumers are becoming increasingly conscious of

the numerous data regulations that organisations have to comply with. 86% of consumers are now aware of the Data Protection Act. It is essential for the organisation to be compliant.

Sending mail to the address of deceased contacts upsets the families and leads to negative press. This is detrimental to the business and whether or not your product or service is perfect, the way in which the business handles such sensitive issues is ultimately what the business is judged upon.

Regular data cleansing reduces consumer complaints and ensures that an organisation is meeting the latest data protection and best practice guidelines.

Customer Preferences:

The customer can place themselves on official lists which ensure they are not contacted via the specified medium. Mailing Preference Service (MPS) and Telephone Preference Service (TPS) are the two most popular suppression lists that a business must legally run their data through before attempting contact. Failure to do so can lead to complaints and further investigation. It is essential that these are not overlooked as this can result in serious damage to the brand reputation.

It is essential for businesses to maintain their customer preference centre frequency and accurately. There should be a great importance placed on capturing data and maintaining it in a compliant manner, to avoid sending mail to customers who do not want it. More advanced businesses are now implementing online systems whereby customers can log onto their own area of the preference centre and adjust preferences as and when they want.

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This gives flexibility, control and a sense of security for the customer who ultimately trusts the brand more. Similar controls should be in place for customers who notify the business of their preferences via off line channels.

Businesses operating within the Financial Services sector are known to implement in-house systems which allow the automated processing of preferences. This is particularly helpful for businesses where there are multiple and complex customer touch points. This data needs to be updated frequently, ideally in real time. The key is to ensure that this rich information is being used against mailing files before the communications are mailed, to ensure that the recipients are only those who actually want this information.

Duplication:

It is essential for the business to stay on top of the number of duplicates and the entry points across the business. There is nothing worse than receiving two sets of mailings because the organisation didn't perform a de-dupe. Mail shots are likely to cause annoyance for some consumers, but this annoyance is further fuelled when they receive two every single time! Processes need to be established and automated (to reduce human error) to identify duplicates and merge records.

Software can be purchased to perform de-duplication tasks or this can easily be done using online cleansing services. This provides a significant uplift and these checks should be conducted regularly, dependent on volumes coming in. This may need human intervention, where the automated systems cannot decide which is an actual duplicate. There is now an increasing shift towards developing Single Customer Views (SCV) which can be achieved by employing external assistance, which involves mass de-duplication, merging of records, and obtaining one unique view of all customers.

All customer information should be available in one place, and viewable at a glance. Such a database within the business allows increased efficiencies, accurate and accessible information about all your current, lapsed or prospective contacts.

In summary

Data cleansing forms an integral part to the overall data quality management processes within a business. This can be achieved in small controlled steps and results are immediate and very noticeable.

The customer loyalty, positive brand reputation and overall compliance that these simple steps bring, are positive for business and for the generation of revenue now and in the future. The business will need to invest time, commitment and people to embark on their journey to effective data quality management.

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Marie has a wealth of client and agency experience in delivering data and insight driven actions and business benefits. She is a senior marketer with over 12 years experience managing and delivering large scale sales and marketing plans in the utilities and telecommunications sectors. This is backed by over 7 years agency and supplier side experience, ranging from a Senior Planner in a direct marketing agency to leading a consultancy team in the analytics sector. Marie backs these marketing credentials with a strong commercial background and qualifications ranging from a degree in Economics to diplomas from the CIM and IDM.

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