

Case study: Connecting with Communities and Customers Online

Driving positive behavioural
change online through email



Summary

Launched in November 2008, Experian was engaged by Communities and Local Government to develop and execute an email data and campaign strategy that would enable a targeted approach to acquisition through the email channel. As an integral part of the 'Connect to your Council' marketing and communications campaign for Greater Manchester the email campaign not only successfully demonstrated the potential in the channel to influence citizen behaviour on channel use but also provided the concrete data necessary to build a business case to support investment in advanced online services.



Background

CLG (Communities and Local Government) sets national policy for UK local authorities. As part of the drive to make £4.9bn efficiency gains by 2011, CLG recognises that a shift towards online communication channels would significantly contribute to this target.

Challenge

Around 1 in 7 telephone calls to Local Authorities concern waste and recycling collections. An inbound telephone call costs Tameside Council in Manchester around £1.28 to administer compared to 6p for the same service online. However, the same services account for only 1 in 50 website visits.

During October and November 2008, work was undertaken through the "Take-Up Campaign" to support the ten Local Authorities in Greater

Manchester in engineering a channel shift for bulky waste and recycling collection enquiries from telephone to web.

Reducing the "cost to service" for such non-complex interactions as recycling enquiries was the key objective of the campaign.

In attracting citizens online, email marketing was chosen as part of the communications brief to explore the viability of a shift away from traditional, mass media. Email has specific advantages over traditional media:

- Complete alignment with the tactical message of the campaign
- Audience interactivity
- Personalised and targeted
- Fast speed to market
- Tangible, appreciable results
- And in line with the overall message: email is greener and more cost-effective than direct mail.

“Reaching the right people, in the right place starts with building the right data strategy.”

The Campaign

Objective

The objective of the email campaign was to prompt action from customers to take up local authority services via online channels. In addition the email campaign had to execute a behavioural shift from ‘phone to the web’ and release latent service demand, i.e. attracting new users to online services.

Forming a critical part of the integrated campaign, this was the first venture into email marketing for CLG, therefore testing and learning was vitally important. Clear results were needed to develop a persuasive business case to demonstrate that investment in targeted marketing communications can result in an increase in citizens using the Internet to interact with specific local government services. Other campaign activities were: radio, outdoor, online banner placement and press.

Approach

Experian engaged centrally with CLG to develop and execute an email data and campaign strategy to enable a targeted approach to acquisition through the email channel for Greater Manchester. In parallel, our specialist consultants worked with Bolton Council to develop and execute an email campaign to their online registrants.

Taking a consultative approach combining expert data advice with specialist email marketing knowledge allowed both clients to gain insight and knowledge to shape future campaigns. Email expertise and services were provided by email service provider Experian CheetahMail, as well as data management, campaign management, analytics, contact strategy and planning.

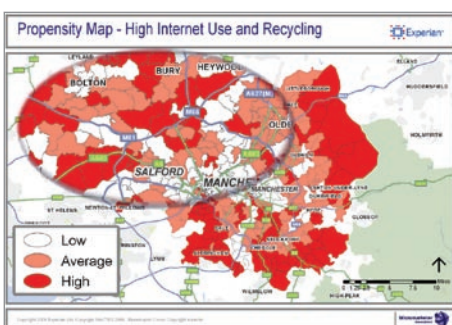
Solution

Reaching the right people, in the right place starts with building the right data strategy. Working within a tight budget, Experian provided 188,187 opted in email addresses sourced from a variety of carefully selected proprietary Experian data and 3rd party data suppliers to which three selection criteria were applied:

- Postal code segmentation within the Greater Manchester area,
- Experian ‘GreenAware’ prioritised consumers who not only think green, but are most likely to act green in their behaviours and attitudes,
- Experian TrueTouch classification to rank, identify and target individuals who are likely to be more responsive to email.

To demonstrate the importance of building an “opt-in” prospect database and to form a more comprehensive test we sourced 4,338 email addresses captured through Bolton Council’s own website.

Understanding the importance and benefit of integrating with the planned above-the-line campaign, we devised a flexible test and learn strategy allowing for the Bolton data to be added as a follow up to the first broadcast to prospects or ‘cold contacts’.



“Our specialist digital consultants applied a series of diagnostic tests and consultation in the development phase to determine the formats likely to increase response rates.”

Strategy and Planning

Timing was critical yet tight and volumes were small. Given these constraints, we applied a unique optimisation methodology which meant that there was no need to undertake lengthy and time-consuming, conventional subject line, template, creative or copy testing to be successful. Instead our specialist digital consultants applied a series of diagnostic tests and consultation in the development phase to determine the formats likely to increase response rates.

Tracking and measuring response was critical at all stages during the campaign. We provided consolidated in-campaign and post-campaign reporting detailing standard industry response metrics such as Delivery, Open and Click Through Rates by cell, list source and broadcast.

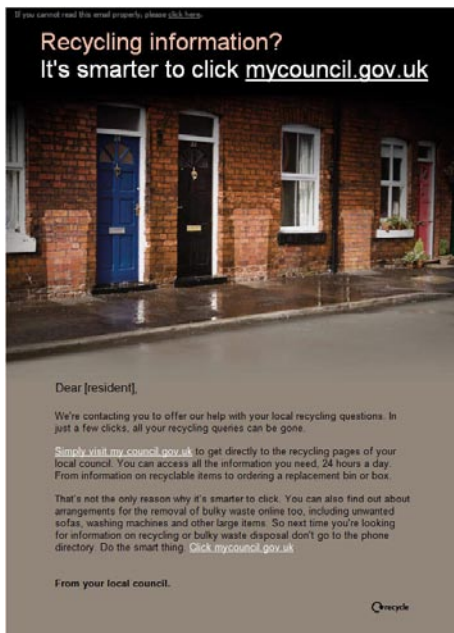
Experian provided insight into the cross-channel effectiveness of the campaign as well as observations on the results drawing conclusions based upon our analysis and experience to provide CLG with the necessary information to build a strong business case.

Execution

The email campaign consisted of three broadcasts:

- Broadcast 1 took place on the 5th November to “Cold Contacts” and was planned and sent at the same time as the radio and online banner advertising to gain the maximum exposure
- Broadcast 2 was sent soon after on the 14th November to Bolton constituents —approximately 10 days after the 1st broadcast and in the event some received both communications.
- Based upon encouraging initial response results, we re-mailed “cold contacts” who did not open the first email or whose emails ‘soft bounced’ (e.g. were returned due to an overfull inbox) on the 20th November as a follow up to Broadcast 1.

Each of these tactics was employed to maximise response whilst staying well within budget and timescales.



“Our channel shift work in Greater Manchester brings this learning into the UK Government context. With open rates in Bolton for emails to residents on recycling reaching 66% for a broadcast cost of less than £1k, this is truly targeted communication with enormous potential to influence citizen behaviour on channel use”

**Dr Peter Blair,
Head of Customer Insight,
Communities and Local
Government**

Results

Behavioural Indicators

Across the board, the campaign exceeded all expectations by delivering performance response rates well above the national average.

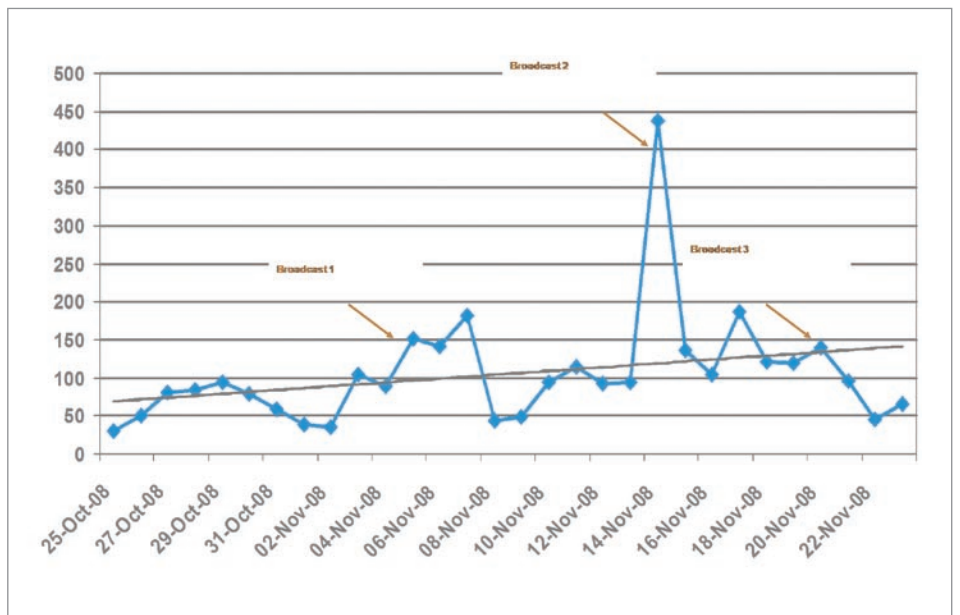
The average OR (Open Rate) was 7.26% and CTR (ClickThrough Rate) equalled 1.40%*.

Following the re-mail on the 20th November, the OR rose to a staggering average of 13%. Results gathered on the 17th and 25th of November showed that the Bolton Broadcast continued to gain momentum 11 days after dispatch finally achieving a 65.8% OR and a 17.9% CTR.

The influence on citizen behaviour is further demonstrated by the massive increase in web visits to the Bolton site at the time of the broadcast. In comparison to the other channels during the same time period, email provides good value for money.

*The national average for not-for-profit mailings in 2006 was 9.5% for 'Government' in the UK.

“Government in the US routinely uses email for targeted communication, with average open rates for the sector of around 50%. In other words, 1 out of every 2 citizens reads the message they were intended to see. Our channel shift work in Greater Manchester brings this learning into the UK Government context. With open rates in Bolton for emails to residents on recycling reaching 66% for a broadcast cost of less than £1k, this is truly targeted communication with enormous potential to influence citizen behaviour on channel use.”
By drawing on as much intelligence as possible (Experian TrueTouch and GreenAware) as well as carefully sourcing the right data, from the right suppliers, we were able to prove the value in the email channel and provide CLG with a firm foundation for a compelling business case for investment.



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