

LIST NEWS

Master files can reveal a universe of possibilities

By David Ward

THE RIGHT LIST is the biggest key to any successful campaign. Traditionally, this has meant narrow targeting, but marketers are increasingly realizing that starting off with a master file, which encompass a variety of lists and sources, can be beneficial.

"The master file end of the market is growing substantially because you can do a lot with them," notes Fran Green, president of data management for ALC.

For example, you can potentially learn a lot more about your customers from a master list. Doug Newell, CEO and president of Dover, MA-based Genalytics, cites one recent example of a driving school that was looking to boost its direct marketing results.

"It wasn't until we ran its previous customers and matched that against the master file to create a profile that we were able to find out that 45 percent of their best customers were owners of small business," Newell says. "The master file allowed us to better understand those customers, and a good marketer can then use that to find the best way to reach them."

Types of master files range from a publisher's master files that combine the subscribers from multiple publications, to compiled files that include census information, credit records, or new car sales all put into one big database.

"When you combine different sources of data together to create a large universe you can then carve that up to serve different markets," explains Green, who adds that one of the best examples of a master file is the one provided by leading lifestyle publisher Meredith Corp.

Meredith produces a number of magazines, including Ladies Home Journal, More and Parents, as well as numerous books.

"They offer each of their individual publication files for rent," Green says. "But by putting them all together and creating one unduplicated universe of a master file you have a situa-

tion where the whole is often greater than the sum of the parts."

Because they're so much larger, master files often need considerable tweaking before they're campaign ready. "It can take a bit more analytics to get them to behave like a response or vertical file," explains Tim Claytor, director of market intelligence solutions for TransUnion, a global provider of credit and information management.

But by using analytics and overlays, such as age and income or job titles, master files can reveal pockets of opportunity that may not have been apparent from a vertical list.

"If you're looking at a BTB master file, you may suddenly realize you have 100,000 HR managers" says Brian Manning, sales VP for Danbury, CT-based Statistics "You can then look at putting out an extended data card for those HR managers and put some additional publicity and marketing behind that particular segment."

Using a master file gives marketers the option of adding numerous overlays, while still winding up with a large enough end list. "Not only can you get more granular, but you can get granular with a larger audience of files that you've had success with and you're de-duping between those files," explains Anthony Carraturo, MeritDirect senior account executive, who helps manage the CMP publication lists.

This is especially advantageous with direct marketing campaigns that, for example, may have a narrow geographic focus. "A lot of local and regional fundraisers, such as museums, zoos and children's hospital, benefit from a master file because it given them and higher quantity of names available for them in a particular state or area," Manning says.

Another major advantage of large master files, though not everyone is doing it or doing it well, is they give you the chance to move beyond simple overlays and into more com-

plex applications, such as modeling.

"The challenge for most compilers isn't building up the universe, it's narrowing it down," says Newell. "But when you start off with a larger file, it gives you the chance use math and science to better understand your customer and that means the marketer can figure out not [only] who their best customer is likely to be but also the contact strategies for reaching them."

Even though they encompass a larger universe and often require more analytics and overlays, master files are usually comparably



Doug Newell



Fran Green

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President of data management for ALC

priced to vertical lists and Carraturo stresses they can actually be more cost effective in both the long and short run.

"Say somebody [is] using the list from Information Week, names from Computer Reseller News, and names from Optimize magazine, which are all CMP publications," Carraturo explains. "If they pull readers that they've been using from these [publications] from the master file before it goes into their merge, they're getting a de-duped file from all three [publications]. So instead of getting 5,000 names from each publication, they're only pulling 9,000 names from the master file into their merge, and it's saving them money."

Dolores Broderick, director of list management at Walter Karl and senior account executive for the Ziff Davis Enterprise files, argues that even with this potential cost savings, master files aren't always an easy up-sell for existing clients. "That's especially true for clients who don't quite understand that a master file is derived from a grouping of lists," she says.

Broderick suggests the best strategy for marketing a master file may be to position them as kind of a stepping stone for a client who's already working on one list and may be considering adding another.

"Say there's a direct marketer who's done EWeek and you trying to [convince them] to also take the list from CIO magazine," explains Broderick. "Going with a master file as opposed to that second single publication list gives them a chance to see what the response rate is going to be before they decide to rent that second publication."

Of course master files are not suited for every campaign. It's up to both the list provider and marketer to decide if the master file will work with a particular campaign.

"If it's a broader type of product or service then, yes, they're going to want to go toward the master file," says Broderick. ■