

Rappaport Sees Do-Not-Mail Threat

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The list business faces many threats. But none is greater than the do-not-mail movement now sweeping the country.

So said Donn Rappaport, speaking at the American List Counsel's "For Broker's Only" lunch in New York. He noted that 14 do-not-mail bills have been introduced in states.

Rappaport is the CEO of ALC, but he was speaking as chairman of the Direct Marketing Association.

Environmentalists and the media would "have you think direct mail is the scourge of the earth," he added. And yet less than 4% of all waste is from mail, he continued.

He added that the carbon footprint of a catalog purchase is less than the average visit to the mall.

But the industry has not been able to get those facts across to environmental advocates or consumers.

Rappaport acknowledged that the DMA underestimated the ferocity of the movement. "To some extent, it was caught asleep at the switch," he said.

But the organization has launched a program made up of legislative and consumer outreach and media response, he said. For example, it is "putting together a handful of charismatic CEOs. They are becoming spokespeople."

Rappaport quoted Rep. Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) as saying: "We love direct mail. We put 65 million pieces into the mail. But you can't calculate the impact of 35 environmental advocates on your doorstep."

That isn't the only challenge facing the business—the others are soft response rates and rising acquisition costs. But Rappaport is hopeful.

He urged brokers to "step out of your comfort zones" and devise sound strategies based on customer data.

"If not us, then who?" he asked. "The agencies aren't doing it, the printers can't, the clients don't have the bandwidth inhouse."

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