



Paper trail

*Ian Simpson,
managing director
at Catalogues 4
Business, fights
the corner for
catalogues as part
of a multi-channel
marketing mix*

About 12 years ago I was first introduced to the concept of multi-channel marketing. I was sitting with a prospective jewellery client reviewing what he should do with his catalogue, and as we chatted and I began to understand a little bit more about his business, I recognised that a new way of marketing, and ultimately selling, was emerging.

Back in the late 90s, true web marketing was in its infancy; yes, people, and indeed jewellers, were making money from the web but customers were not really able or willing to understand its implications. At that time we created a catalogue, mailed it and received the order by phone or post, and if we had done something really clever, we got an email order.

The prospective client I recalled above, explained to me the way his customers were then starting to shop. As well as the mail order catalogue he had retail shops and a transactional website. He relayed to me how many of his customers would receive the catalogue and then perhaps visit the shop to look at the products, before going home and ordering on the web. Or alternatively they would go to the shop, pick up a catalogue or brochure, then place an order by phone. At the time, this activity gave birth to the concept of 'clicks and mortar' and then later, '360 degree marketing'. Already recognised by our cousins over the water, it placed the customer in the centre of a large circle of marketing channels; it didn't matter how many channels you attacked him with just so long as he responded to one of them, and the core to this was presence and activity.

The more astute marketers recognised this early on and became very clever at integrating all channels successfully. As we know the situation has now changed beyond all recognition and '360 degree marketing' has metamorphosed into 'multi-channel marketing'; same beast, just a new suit of clothes.

So, 12 years down the line, what has changed? And, more importantly, what have we learned? The biggest single factor is that the web has grown beyond all expectations and the relentless drive of technology has meant quicker, cheaper access to the internet. There is no doubt that internet-only entrepreneurs have thrived and built substantial businesses, but initially many shunned, and even ridiculed, the continuation of paper-based marketing. And you can see the attraction of web-only trading: no print costs; no mailing or postage costs; simpler order processing; and a far more dynamic medium.

But as the web has grown, competition for a place within it has become ferocious. Ad word and affiliate programs have developed into an industry in their own right and, combined with all the other e-based marketing activity, represent a potential significant marketing spend, yet still the single biggest thing you can do to drive traffic to your website is targeted direct marketing, through mailing catalogues, brochures, leaflets and so forth.

Only last week I sat with a client looking at his web traffic figures. We were reviewing his web spend on click-throughs and traffic driving against online sales. There were two lovely peaks rising above a fairly level track of activity, and these coincided exactly with the date his targeted catalogues landed on doorsteps. What we couldn't say, with certainty, was the effect the mailings had on sales. But if the activity had risen on the web, it was safe to assume that there had been a similar rise in activity with the retail outlets. The intention is to collect customer details using EPoS (electronic point of sale), and that will give a measurable back to the mailing and web. It is far too easy to look at each element in isolation when the key to this is the integration of data. Ours is a data-driven industry and to analyse information, in order to drive the next activity, is second nature to us. By pooling the data from all the channels it gives a much clearer picture of buyer activity, which in turn allows us to refine and customise our marketing strategy.

Without doubt, many – including those within the jewellery retail industry – saw the relentless rise of the web and internet marketing as the death knell for paper catalogues and other mailings. In truth, they should lie as uneasy bedfellows – they are at opposite ends of the technological scale; the old dependable versus the whiz kid! But it is clear they each have their place and they can learn from each other.

So – do you need a catalogue? What do *you* think? To be a true jewellery multi-channel marketer you have to exploit every weapon in your arsenal.



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Catalogues can reach prospects in a way that no other channel can; they build brand, drive web traffic, capture sales and enrich an integrated buying experience. Remember, multi-channel marketing is all about presence and activity, at every opportunity you have to get your products in front of your prospects. Mailings are unique in that they search out your prospects and not the other way around; they are very pro-active, and when supported with the dynamic web and email channels, the effect can be outstanding.

So, here are my top 10 tips to get your jewellery catalogue fighting fit and winning more sales...

1 Covers

Without doubt the cover is the most important page in the catalogue. It quickly has to tell the reader everything about your company, your products and your proposition. It has to communicate relevancy to your target audience and draw the reader in. To use a retail parallel, it is your catalogue 'shop window'. Walk down your local high street and see which shops attract your attention, and more importantly why. It will inevitably be a mix of brand, relevancy and desire/need; this is exactly how your cover should work.

2 Pace and eyeflow

Pace is the art of engaging your reader's attention. In their most basic form, catalogues are listings, and set simply as a body of type would be extremely boring and monotonous. Good typography and pictures break the rhythm, directing the reader around the page and through the catalogue. Prudent use of graphic devices can attract attention and 'pull out' products. Eyeflow is vitally important; catalogues are 'read' in predictable ways. Research by Seigfried Voegle highlighted how a reader enters a spread top right, tracks across to the middle left and finally exits bottom right; this creates exploitable hotspots and dead areas.

3 Positioning and brand image

As a brand-led society, we strive to be identified with the products we buy and whom we buy them from. One of the first steps to creating a great catalogue is to define and record your positioning statement, and whenever you create a catalogue ensure that its execution supports and enhances this statement. This will create an instantly recognisable sales vehicle.

4 Clear typography

Typography is a silent partner to design, yet it has the power to have a great effect on the communication of your message. Good typography lubricates the message and relays information smoothly and seamlessly. Key areas are: the choice of font; type on a background (type is much harder to read on a coloured background and is often ignored; blocks of type should never be run over pictures or be reversed out); line lengths (short line lengths are easier to read); and coloured type (avoid using coloured type, except in headings or for impact).

5 Use of icons

Catalogues rely on their ease of use for success. Icons are a great way to highlight simple, recurring messages throughout a catalogue. They are best used to reinforce guarantees, service items (delivery, availability etc), price changes, new items etc. Well-designed icons become familiar to readers and they respond to them unconsciously. Ideally the icons should be explained on page two or (for bigger catalogues) highlighted at regular intervals.



6 Clear, benefit-led copy

With retail catalogues, the purpose of copy is to create a desire/demand for product. The dialogue and tone has to be appropriate to the target audience and this is sometimes difficult to judge. Humour should be approached with caution and you should never talk down to your readers. Copy should be benefit-led and reinforce the features accordingly; for example, colour is not a benefit, but strength, ease of use, performance etc are. It should also include all the information necessary to complete the purchase; remember any barrier to completing a sale results in a lost sale.

7 Easy-to-use order forms

Order forms are not a necessary evil; they are the last chance to market to your customers and they reinforce the purpose of your catalogue – to sell! It is one of the most frequently used pages in your catalogue – get it wrong and you could lose the sale! Give readers enough space to complete all the details. Include an impulse buy, free gift or offer – this is the last chance to sell to your customer.

8 Good organisation

Plan your catalogue carefully with a logical journey through the sections and product groupings. You can afford to take far more risks with your buyers than with prospects. Always start with the products you are best known for at the front of prospecting catalogues – this reinforces your proposition very early on; then with your buyers, new or different products can be tested. Remember also that readers start from the back of the catalogue as well as the front – the back cover is a powerful page for offers.

9 Clear photography

With catalogue photography, product is king. Style the photography appropriately for your audience and make it very clear what you are selling.

10 Sell off the page

It sounds obvious but selling off the page is often misunderstood; it is not just a matter of shouting 'buy me!' at every opportunity – you have to create desire and expectation. Products have to be placed in a marketing context and the reader given the opportunity and information to make the purchase. Don't put barriers between the sale and order placement; make it very clear what the buyers have to do.



Ian Simpson is managing director at design, print and marketing company Catalogues 4 Business. For more information please visit www.catalogues4business.co.uk or phone 0845 230 0258.