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More Personalization, Customization Help Co-Op Mail Program Double Its Volume

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In the second year that software developer Action Systems Inc. has offered a co-op direct mail program through MSP Digital Direct, the average number of pieces mailed monthly doubled from 10,000 to 20,000.

One of the programs developed by Action Systems, Pittsburgh, is a point-of-sale system for small to midsize fast-food restaurants, pizza shops, nightclubs and fine dining establishments called Restaurant Manager. It is sold mainly via 100 resellers who, as part of their arrangement with ASI, can use a Web-to-print solution to create direct mail to generate leads. Each reseller gets a certain amount of co-op advertising dollars yearly to pay for the printing and mailing of these pieces.



The Web-to-print solution offered via MSP Digital is branded to ASI and lets the resellers access predesigned templates with certain elements locked in place and others that they can customize. The system was launched in early 2004 and updated earlier this year to increase flexibility in the layout, decrease the lead time and improve the perceived quality.

Four layout options were available previously but now there are 16, including some smaller formats than were available before. This lets MSP print more impressions per page, "which brings down the cost and makes it more attractive to the resellers," said Jim Young, MSP's division vice president. All printing is done on an Indigo 3000 digital press.

Also, there are now more images to choose from, additional areas that can be customized and more chances to personalize a mailer by printing a restaurant's name. Customizable elements include the color, font style and placement of some text. In 2006, resellers will be able to add images that reflect a restaurant market segment, such as fine dining, pizza or fast food.

MSP also started applying a UV coating to all direct mail this year, improving its durability and appearance. Finally, a section added to ASI's Web site shows resellers the real-time balance in their co-op advertising account. This tells them how much they will have in their account for future mailings if they print X copies of a certain mailer now.

However, the biggest year-to-year change may have been in the resellers' understanding of how the digital production process works, Young said. The resellers are typically small businesses with little graphic training.

During the first year of ASI's print-on-demand program, images often were provided in the wrong format or the resolution wasn't right. To rectify the situation, MSP held a Webinar for ASI resellers this year on digital printing and posted an instructional document on the ASI site shortly after.

"We found that by providing them with training, it helped streamline the process and made it more profitable," Young said. Plus, Young now has "almost no issues with images being uploaded." As a result of all of these changes, ASI's sales have increased more than 40 percent so far this year.

Chantal Todé covers catalog and retail news and BTB marketing for DM News and DM News.com. To keep up with the latest developments in these areas, subscribe to our daily and weekly e-mail newsletters by visiting www.dmnews.com/newsletters

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