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Personalization is a highly effective direct mail strategy with great potential to reach the right customers, build loyalty, drive sales and increase ROI. Yet, personalization can easily backfire if it crosses the line and infringes on the consumer's right to privacy. Direct marketers need to differentiate between customization and personalization.

Personalization takes information willingly supplied by consumers about lifestyle and shopping preferences to create highly specific offers. Personalized self-mailers, for example, can carry a discount card that can be activated online or at a store, where communications with the consumer can be repeatedly exchanged.

These paper-based cards can carry a magnetic stripe, bar code or both, and can become the vehicle for ongoing engagement during purchases on the Web or at the point-of-sale at a retail store. Personalization done correctly allows the consumer to connect the dots themselves, without feeling that their privacy has been compromised.

An appropriate use of personalization would work like this: An intelligent card in a self-mailer offers a discount on a car seat to a couple with young children that recently purchased a car noted for safety. However, that offer crosses the line if it explicitly urges that couple to purchase a car seat for their three-year-old girl, which the marketer may know from other data sources.

Used responsibly, personalization executed with next generation self-mailers represents a unique opportunity for clients, ad agencies and their printers.

THE TAKEAWAY

Successful personalization relies on information used responsibly by marketers

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