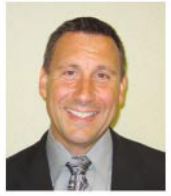


Look Again at Subscription Marketing



BY JIM FOSINA

There was a time when subscription marketing meant selling magazines. Today, the kinds of products sold by subscription seem endless. Our inboxes are filled with subscription offers for flowers, clothing, shoes, cosmetics, toiletries, pet care, food—even legal services.

As subscription commerce has grown, so has the importance of protecting the relationship with the consumer, particularly when accepting credit cards as the payment vehicle online. Let's look at the new best practices in this area.

Most important is the method you use for screening and accepting subscription orders. You must calibrate incoming traffic in real time before even allowing a consumer to engage with the brand. Once you determine that the consumer potentially

meets the criteria for recurring credit card payments, then you need to consider:

Order Quality. You want the ability to reject and order *before* it hits your server and a sale is recorded. Thus, it's important to evaluate the prospect in real time.

Customer Experience. Communicate your product message clearly and concisely. The order vehicle flow needs to be easy to understand and user friendly, and include full disclosure of terms, to avoid any buyer remorse.

Testing. Use a platform that allows for multi-variant creative and offer testing, as well as up-sell offers, both pre- and post-sale. The best time to ask a consumer to consider buying more is when they first engage with the brand.

Fulfillment. After a subscription order has been placed, make sure your fulfillment process is smooth and fast, for immediate consumer gratification and recognition.

Customer communication. To charge

customers successfully on a recurring basis, you must keep the customer engaged. Technology can help, but human expertise is important too. You need to create an optimal communications stream, and ideal point at which to charge the customer's credit card.

Vendor selection. Your goal in picking a screening and hosting service is to get a high degree of control and protection, to manage customer quality, and to allow for rapid expansion. When choosing a vendor, look for PCI (Payment Card Industry Data Security Standard) compliance; real-time review and monitoring of traffic; options for screening, auditing and reporting; multi-variant testing; and integration with your fulfillment system. ■

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“Subscribe” is the new “Add to Cart”

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