Most of us know the days of customers calling with specs for us to quote are all but over—unless we’re pursuing and serving the low-margin broker market.

CUSTOMERS WANT PARTNERS
Customers instead are looking for partners who can provide them with far more than competitively priced printing. Customers want partners who can provide advice and support on how to more effectively use print—sometimes with other communication media—to improve their revenue streams and economic performance.

I recently called several associations, including a major national association, several times. The question posed: What information can you provide regarding research on how print is a superior promotion and communication medium? I was specific that I did not want information on how our industry is superior for supporting the “green movement.”

Purposefully, I only wanted factual information supporting how the use of print could enhance a customer’s CMO’s objectives to raise the organization’s revenues and financial performance. As strange as it might seem, there was no central collection of information, and no one I talked to could help me after several days of inquiries and return calls.

Yet, as I dug into this beginning research process and after numerous follow-up discussions, I found information—though somewhat buried—that can be useful for communications with CMOs of target customers and prospects for how to more effectively use print to improve one’s financial performance.

Here is a beginning list I believe you should make required reading for your business development team—followed by group discussions and then promoted in your monthly newsletters and president’s quarterly reports.

INFORMATION RESOURCES FOR IMPROVING ECONOMIC PERFORMANCE OF PRINT & RELATED SERVICES

Print in the Mix—A Clearinghouse of Research on Print Media Effectiveness

Print in the Mix is published by the Printing Industry Center at RIT and made possible by a grant from The Print Council. Liz Dopp is the managing editor (eadppr@rit.edu). Her direct line is 585-475-7436, which for the time being this may be the only place you can find it. What you appear to have here is a gold mine of research information—literally. Following are just a few examples of topics for which research is available:

• Response Rates of Personalized Cross-Media Marketing Campaigns Outpace Competition,
• Online Ads Most Likely to Be Ignored,
• Print Is Most Popular Form of Marketing Collateral,
• Small Business Owners Note Print Ads Most Effective,
• Young Adults Prefer Offline Marketing Offers,
• Direct Mail Tops Overall for PBS Fundraising, and
• Direct Mail Scores High With Fundraisers.
In all, there are well over 57 summaries, and 213 “Fast Facts” for you to use with your business development team and target customers and prospects. Sources of these research studies are available if you click on the headline for each abstract. I’m told by Liz Dopp that the homepage and website are being redesigned, and should be easier to use by mid-2011.

Magazines, The Medium of Action

The compendium of research published by MPA, the Association of Magazine Media, outlines why publications are growing in number, as well as circulation, and cites everything from improved readership and enhanced results for advertisers! Certainly, many publications that compete with the Internet are dying. However, “community” is not defined geographically but rather by subject matter. In other words relevant content is king. Just as in our consulting practice we have directed and led commercial printing clients to start up their own publication(s), resulting in profound financial success, this resource is jam-packed with not only summaries but also with sources of research for why publications—and print in general—outperform and even elevate performance over other communication media. Download a complete copy from their website and consider it required reading. It’s about 90 fast-reading pages. Go to www.magazine.org.

Marketer’s Primer Series 11 (Personalized)

Printing, Boosting Profits Through Relevance

The central theme of this paper by Heidi Tolliver-Nigro documents the importance of “relevance” for improving the value and responsiveness of personalization. Case studies and examples illustrate the importance of really knowing your customers and using that knowledge and timing to personalize your message’s relevance to your target audience. Segmenting, testing, and investing in an improved database are themes in this must read piece that maintains if you want to continuously improve print’s results, you must continuously test everything. You can download a PDF of the paper from PIA’s bookstore at www.printing.org/store.

The Nonprofit Research Collaborative, November 2010 Fundraising Survey

If your account base is heavily weighted with nonprofit organizations, you should dig into guidestar.org as an ongoing information resource. They have two levels, and you can afford the second level if you will use the information they provide. If you won’t use the research available at guidestar.org and won’t read their weekly newsletter, you shouldn’t be serving nonprofits. Nonprofits are starved for guidance and support of all dimensions, including someone to manage their donor databases! (One of our clients is working to obtain his certification in Fundraising for Nonprofits.) Also, go to www.afpnet.org. The Association of Fundraising Professionals has more than 150 chapters across the United States that tend to meet monthly. They need programs, suppliers, and individuals who can demonstrate and explain what is possible for personalized messaging across different media—including print.

THOUGHTFUL, TESTED, RELEVANT PRINT DELIVERS RESULTS

In January, at a CEO Peer Group Meeting, seven CEOs heard me take a position on which I was unwilling to compromise (nor did they ask me to): With the complex technologies and changing environment we are asked to understand and successfully manage, if we are not willing to commit to relentless education and training for our customer contact and business development teams on how to use our resources to improve our customer’s economic well-being, then the game is over.
We must learn how to improve our customer’s economic well-being. That’s the only reason our industry and our companies have to exist—and that’s the educational challenge our associations, to whom we pay hard-earned money, don’t yet seem to understand.

Most of us, if we step back, recognize that social networks can’t possibly compete with targeted, relevant print messages. There are too many organizations trying to use the “no charge” Internet for their messages; and recipients of those messages, like you and I, simply delete two-to-four dozen (or more) unsolicited messages a day from sources we don’t recognize and don’t have time or interest to read.

Economic performance is what’s recognized, and we as an industry have not effectively done our homework or presented the compelling message: Thoughtful, tested, relevant print delivers results.

RESPONSIBILITY TO OUR NEXT LEADERS

In closing, if you would allow me just one more piece to rock your world. The Wall Street Journal contained in the fourth section of its January 8 issue a piece titled, Why Chinese Mothers Are Superior. This provocative article is focused on education, discipline, and training for youngsters whose generation is designed to be world rulers. As adults responsible for what we handoff to our next leaders, we should pay attention!

Eric Hoffer wrote, “In a time of drastic change, it is the learners who inherit the future.”

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sid Chadwick is head of Chadwick Consulting, a business development-focused practice for the graphic arts. In addition to facilitating three CEO Peer Groups, they focus on improving an organization’s position and performance with customers, for improving revenues and bottom line performance. Services include: business development strategy creation, major customer surveys that lead to additional business, business development training for improved employee performance, improved workflow and organizational communications for developing customer preference with suppliers, creation of long-term agreements with target customers, and equipment justification studies. With more than 30 years in business-to-business environments, Chadwick has more than 18 years experience as a business development consultant, sales team educator and trainer for the graphic communications industry.

www.chadwickconsulting.com