

The future is both digital and direct

[*Janet Rubio*](#)

In marketing today, a fundamental truth is emerging: Direct is digital and digital is direct. The lines between these two disciplines have been blurring, and the process of their integration is speeding up. What many are calling “iDirect” is a blend of the best practices, tools and technologies that had defined each of these disciplines.

Digital is making direct marketing sexy. Marketers have a long heritage of expert usage of insights gained from databases, analytics, models, ROI and measurement. But they also have been plagued with problems related to attributing success to individual marketing initiatives.

Blend direct with digital, and the problem solves itself. Digital marketing brings to direct the ability to open the door for dialogue, discussion, friendship and collaboration. iDirect is creating what companies today long for: customer engagement leading to dramatic, measurable gains in ROI.

If digital marketing is making direct sexy, direct marketing is making digital accountable. The insights and technologies developed by direct are transforming the way digital marketing is strategized and measured. Direct was born as a discipline that targeted customers, sold products and measured results. Those pillars are being recast in new ways on the Web and are the underpinnings for digital media buying, where personalization and on-the-fly targeting are possible.

To succeed in a marketing discipline that is both digital and direct, marketers will need some new—rather, better—tools in their toolbox:

- A “data ecosystem” that allows you to see brand attributes; media patterns; on- and offline buying behaviors; and demographic information through one lens. Here, offline data will be linked to online (via keys, tags and code), where brand attributes are directly associated with buying behavior at an individual level.
- A customer engagement framework that enables your ability to manage customer relationships over time and through many media channels. The best marketers determine a strategic framework where acquisition flows seamlessly to nurturing, then on to retention.
- An efficient acquisition engine. Today, digital marketing is not so much about reaching people as having people identify themselves. In traditional direct, we would buy a list and know exactly who we were contacting. Now, the challenge is getting people to raise their hands so we can convert them.

- An effective retention engine. After you have acquired new customers, on average only about 50% will ever buy again. The numbers for online buying are even lower. Retention strategies must be rethought and tested for iDirect, but the opportunities for increasing margin are worth it because the cost to acquire prospects through digital channels is lower.
- Message maps that are more segmented than ever before. The technology that sits beneath interactive marketing, coupled with the statistical tools used by direct marketing, make complexity a fairly simple thing to manage. The ability to micro-segment your customers and, therefore your messages, opens the door for an entirely new approach to telling your story.
- Expertise in all channels. Marketers must be channel-agnostic to truly succeed. While your past love may have been direct mail, telemarketing or online media, you need to let go of all of them as your default choices.
- Analytic horsepower. The true value of campaigns will become the new measuring stick. Reporting on response rates, opens and clicks, and impressions is just not good enough. In iDirect, impact is what matters. Invest in the people who can accurately, objectively attribute results.

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