

Countless programs are launched every year with no thought given to “learning”. Learning what *really* works ... what really gains the largest number of responses, the most qualified leads, the most sales. Here are guidelines for conducting your test:

GUIDELINES FOR TESTING

WHY TEST?

Testing is not an exact science but an attempt to learn about your target market. Before the tactics of any program fall into place, you must have a strategy, which should include a plan for testing the validity of the strategy.

RESEARCH AND TESTING ARE NOT THE SAME

Market research uncovers motivations for buying and frequently uses interviews, surveys and focus groups to gather the data. Testing determines if buyers behave as they say they will.

It teaches you about actual customer behavior—not just what the prospect or customer says they might do. You conduct a test because you never really know what the marketplace will do, what might work or what does not work.

8 THINGS TESTING WILL HELP WITH

1. The communication methods of your campaign
2. Copy theme and graphic idea
3. Identifying the prospects most likely to buy
4. Which segment offers greatest market potential
5. Which offer is your best offer
6. Determining the timing of your offer
7. Deciding if you should expand geographically
8. Avoiding unnecessary costs with your campaign

WHEN DO YOU NOT TEST?

- If your target market numbers are too low to achieve meaningful results.
- If your target market is limited or precisely defined.
- When the timing is wrong—for example if you got a late start or if there is no time to test. Sometimes the event is such that the timing itself prevents a true test, like Valentine’s Day or Mother’s Day.
- When you have unmatched elements or communication methods. For example, it is unwise to test a direct mail white standard business envelope with no teaser copy against a jumbo 4-color postcard.
- If you have a bias or pre-disposed position on what the results should be. i.e., you are looking for something specific, rather than learning what is happening.

HOW TO TEST

Determine before you begin what you need to learn, and then plan your test to measure those specific things. Incorporate a method to measure like special URL addresses, phone numbers, email addresses, coupon codes, etc. Code elements within each marketing piece and code the side by side tests differently.

WHAT DO YOU TEST?

- Copy in terms of style, approach, length
- Graphics, including format, layout, design, font, colors
- Size, paper, photography versus illustration
- Audience, including different lists and segments within a list
- Offers such as percentage discount versus dollar discount, premium or white paper
- A limited time or limited number
- Sweeps, contests and other games
- Product packaging, name, and bundles with other services
- Guarantee and warranty, full or limited
- Testimonial or case study
- Target company statistics, such as size or location
- Target job function
- Communication medium such as direct mail versus email

WHAT DO YOU MEASURE?

- Your total response
- Qualified response
- Response by various media
- Total sales
- Cost per lead
- Cost per sale
- What product or service was bought
- What is the average order / median order
- How payment is made (check, credit card, PO, cash)
- How many new customers are won
- Which market segments offer greatest potential
- How many contacts to make the first sale

WHAT NOT TO MEASURE

You can't measure what you can't control, such as the day of the week the mail is delivered. And the shade of blue is not nearly as important as color testing red vs. blue vs. green. In other words, be sure that you are measuring significant things that you can learn from. If you plan to test price points, then make it significant. \$19.95 vs. \$29.95 will tell you something but testing \$19.99 vs. \$19.88 will teach you nothing ... except how to leave 11 cents on the table.

WHEN IS A TEST NOT A TEST?

Any of us can do "Mother-in-Law" research. You can talk to friends, neighbors, family and associates and come up with lots of opinions. But those kinds of "tests" will not tell you anything significant. Why? Because the test subjects are not likely to be your target market and they are already biased just by knowing you. The purpose of testing is to teach you what the real marketplace actually does.

HINDSIGHT IS AN EXACT SCIENCE

Some would argue everyone has 20/20 hindsight. And with testing that is exactly what you get.

You see what the marketplace has actually done in real time in response to a marketing effort. This allows you to make informed, intelligent and profitable decisions for future marketing efforts. Hindsight helps you evaluate your test 4 ways:

1. Testing helps you learn what works instead of guessing.
2. Testing helps you learn what is not working.
3. Testing helps you learn why customers do what they do – or what they do not do.
4. Testing allows your marketing effort to produce better results.

Source: <http://www.rayjutkins.com>

Direct marketing guru Rocket Ray Jutkins was involved with direct marketing for nearly five decades, working with direct marketing leaders like Bob Hemmings and Eric Smith. Jutkins launched his own company in 1982 and made his mark as a speaker and author. His books include *Magic Marketing Minutes* and *Power Direct Marketing*. Jutkins died of leukemia in 2005 but his teachings live on.