



Advanced Services Help Ensure Lead-Generation Success

By Lucio Maramba

Given the nature of direct response advertising, a marketer's supply chain team must be both skilled and proactive to help a campaign succeed. Call routing and tracking are relatively new capabilities for direct marketers, so leveraging specialized expertise can help realize higher levels of success. And outsourcing some functions to a team of specialists can be a powerful tool, as the following case study illustrates.

An insurance program's :120 DRTV commercial generated an enormous number of leads who called in for a free information packet and then signed up for a follow-up call in a classic two-step

program. A live, boutique call center offshore seemed to be doing a bang-up job on the campaign, with a close rate above 70 percent—or at least this was the belief.

An audit of call center data at the switch level revealed that more than half of the calls were abandoned. Either the call center never answered, or frustrated callers dropped the call when they didn't get a timely response to their inquiries. While the operators were effective when available, the center simply didn't have enough of them to handle the kinds of spikes the commercial was generating. Given how eager consumers were to get an information packet based on the creative's appeal, the company tested an Interactive Voice Response (IVR) system



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next that could handle any volume of inbound calls.

IVR proved an inadequate solution for a few reasons. First, transcribers had difficulty understanding parts of

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the callers' messages, leaving key data fields missing and rendering the leads useless. And because the client knew it had to act on the leads within 48 hours to maximize conversion, the time and effort required to execute transcription weighed the process down to a point that was no longer practical. Finally, the marketer discovered that the empathy and engagement of a live operator was necessary to capture essential data including name, address, age, and so forth. Simply put, the human touch helped foster trust and customer care.

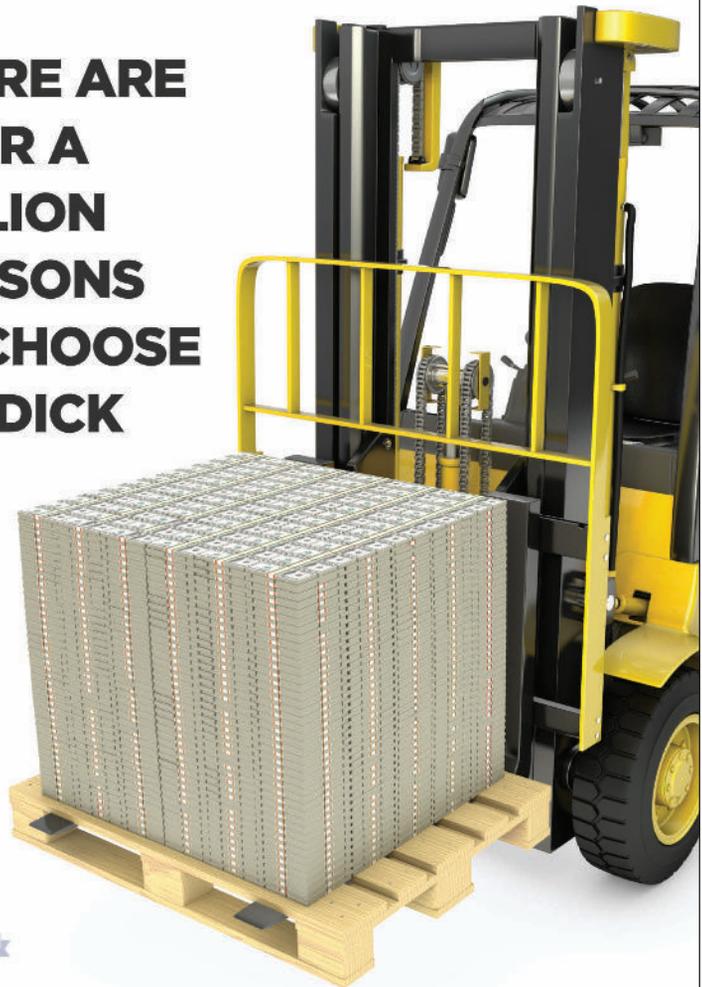
The ultimate solution lay in intelligent call routing that allowed the marketer to send inbound leads to multiple call centers. After vetting and contract negotiations led by one of its Advanced Services specialists, Dial800 tested four providers. With switch-level tracking, each call center was on a level playing field; they could not report variables such as dropped calls according to different business rules. The resulting head-to-head performance data was so accurate that the marketer could see exactly how many leads were sent to each center, how many were answered, and how many were captured as qualified leads.

Ironically, the small boutique the marketer had started the campaign with was able to maintain a sterling close rate, but its limitations made additional resources necessary. Three centers of various sizes and capabilities performed at a level sufficient to warrant participation in the campaign. The end result was a close rate near the

original 70 percent, but with almost no abandons whatsoever. In other words, after making these adjustments, nearly twice the leads were captured and inbound campaign performance doubled—a big improvement, considering the fact that the client's business is a numbers game that relies on a steady, robust levels of inbound leads.

Achieving this result took an ability to recommend different test metrics, glean through the data, and refine it for success. This is what a competent Advanced Services group can bring to help get a campaign to the next level, and that's why marketers should consider this emerging service model. ☒

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