

Case In Point: Consistent Response Rates of 50%

By Karon Thackston

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We are all so inundated with advertising these days that we barely take note any more. Statistics show that it takes an ever-climbing number of impressions before our customers take note of us, too. The quest for new, attention-getting mediums is one that every marketer pursues. The Holy Grail is the one that brings about immediate and consistent responses. Would you believe that a ghost from the past is now the bright and shining star of the marketing future?

Paul Kearns of www.telemesssage.co.uk, recently spoke with me about an amazing marketing tool his clients have used to get consistent response rates of 50% and higher. What is it? Telemessages.

KARON: Hi Paul... I'm excited about speaking with you! I can't honestly say that I would have considered the use of telemessages prior to our emails.

PAUL: Glad to be of help, Karon.

KARON: Let's start with the basics. What are telemessages? Are they just revamped "telegrams?"

PAUL: Well, yes and no. The traditional delivery method has changed ... we no longer employ small armies of boys and their bicycles to deliver the message. In the UK, we achieve 99.9% next day delivery via the Royal Mail. Despite the historical decline during the 1980's and early 90's the service is once again coming into its own. Last year alone over 2 million UK telegrams were sent.

KARON: So where did the name "Telemesssage" come from?

PAUL: "Telemesssage" is the brand name of the UK telegram. International telegrams are still sent for important announcements, memorable events, and congratulatory messages. The UK acts as a conduit for telegram administrations all over the world. There are a number of 'bespoke' telegram products too, like WeddingGram, BabyGram, and SantaGram. In fact, one of the exciting parts of my job is to contribute to the development of new telegram products and applications.

KARON: How very inventive! So, what made you decide to use them in the marketing arena?

PAUL: It was a natural progression really. Some of our customers began using Telemessages for crisis management and product recall. Then, because of the cost effectiveness and outstanding response rates, we received more and more requests from companies and agencies wanting to use our service for direct mailings.

KARON: But if you send them to anybody and everybody, won't they quickly lose their effectiveness?

PAUL: Well, a cynic might suggest that we'd sell them to anyone who's interested... but nothing could be further from the truth. You're right, Karon... part of the strength and power of the telegram is the important or urgent message it carries.

KARON: So this is more of a specialized mailing, then? Or is this something to take the place of weekly or monthly direct mail pieces?

PAUL: Well, so far, studies show that repeated usage does not significantly affect response rates!

KARON: How's that?

PAUL: Because of the anonymity of the bright yellow envelope, the recipient can never be sure what lies inside. It might be a legal notice, it might be a message from a friend (like the BabyGram), it could be even be a message from the Queen!

KARON: So, let me make an assumption here... the "response rate" is much greater for telemessages than for standard direct mail, right?

PAUL: Significantly! Response rates of over 50% are regularly achieved. Telemessages have huge doorstep impact.

KARON: smile Yeah... I rather thought so. But, Paul, there are all sorts of specialized envelopes out there. What makes the difference?

PAUL: Well, it's a perception that comes with a "telegram." People perceive telegrams as important legal documents and respond accordingly. Many companies also use the telegram as a stage in their debt recovery process. They regularly record response rates in excess of 60%. Lloyds Bank recently told us they got 78% response from one mailing!

KARON: Wow! That is huge! You also had a great response with a fundraising company you recently worked with (who has chosen to remain nameless). They didn't get 50% but did do quite well for someone soliciting donations.

PAUL: Oh, yes! The charity was responding to a crisis. They needed resources and action fast. They chose Telemessage because of our quick turnaround times. (I like to think that our friendly and flexible approach also helped!)

KARON: Oh, I'm sure it did grin! How many messages did they send?

PAUL: Over 50,000 requests for donations.

KARON: And what response rate did they get?

PAUL: 20% - MUCH greater than direct mail.

KARON: So what did this type of campaign cost them?

PAUL: £0.59p (US 83 cents) per item including Value Added Tax (17.5%) which they, as a charity will be able to reclaim. Ordinarily, unit costs range between 46p (64 cents) and 86p (\$1.21) depending on volumes.

KARON: And that includes the stationery, setup and postage, right?

PAUL: Yes.

KARON: That is very cost effective! So then, let me ask you this... what are the contributing factors for a great campaign?

PAUL: It really depends on the message. We can be sure that the envelope gets opened, and even provide advice as to the style of verbiage (simple, clear messages, headlines, bullet points, post-scripts, and anonymous messages ending with a call to action), etc. Bread, butter and jam for copywriters, eh Karon? But ultimately the strength of response will depend on the USP. Telemessage is ideal for urgent and important messages. To quote just one of our customers, ITV Digital, who used the telegram to confirm appointments for new connections ... 'This has proven to be a very useful method in contacting our customers.' They achieved over 50% response, which they judged to be excellent.

KARON: Great info, Paul! I really appreciate your insights into this powerful "revived" medium.

PAUL: It's a pleasure Karon, pop by for a cup of tea next time you're in England!

KARON: Will do!

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