Personalization in Europe

Executive Summary of MS Print Media Thesis by Jeanette Bredsten

The study focused on the amount of personalized print produced by printing companies in Europe, the challenges these printers are facing when producing personalized jobs, and how the market for personalized printing in Europe differs from that in the US.

Personalization is a marketing tactic in which various media channels are used to send a personalized message to a consumer or client based on their interests. Personalization is not a new tactic. The use of personalization has been slowly increasing over the past few decades to become one of the key tactics used to capture a customer’s attention. Personalized print—one media channel that can be used in the marketing mix—is divided among different applications such as mail merge, transactional print, versioning, moderate personalized print and highly personalized print.

An online survey was distributed to printing companies across Europe via the International Confederation of Printing and Allied Industries (Intergraf). A total of 37 printing companies participated in this study.

Survey results revealed that, on average, 6.6% of participants’ revenue came from personalized print in 2010. The level of personalization most companies (35%) listed as their major source of revenue was mail merge. The top five challenges that participants were facing related to personalization include:

- Communicating the value to our customers of the ROI (Return on Investment) benefits of personalization (45%).
- Poor data quality on the client side (30%).
- Ability to work with client’s marketing decision makers (30%).
- Clients do not have retention or customer relationship strategy (30%).
- Merging the client’s database with variable data software (15%).

Though the low response rate from the study restricted the ability to generalize results, an examination of the sample differences revealed that the average amount of revenue obtained from personalized print was over 50% lower in Europe (6.6%) than in the US (20.9%). Note that the data from the US was based solely on digital printers. In Europe, personalization was reported to average around 31.4% of printers’ digital revenues, but this data point was from an even smaller sample and the author questions its reliability. The level of personalization that most printing companies indicated, generated a major part of revenue was mail merge, both in Europe (35%) and in the US (61.4%).

Lastly, the top challenges, were similar for both the US and Europe. These included:

- Communicating the value of personalization.
- Poor data quality on the client’s side.

One explanation for the differences between the US and Europe is buyer behavior—in essence, the marketing culture. Coupons are not used as a marketing tool in most countries in Europe. This could be one of the reasons, that Europe produces less personalized print than the US, where coupons are used on a large scale.

For a full version of the thesis please contact Jeanette Bredsten by email: jxb2556@rit.edu, or by phone: +45 50450240