

Making It Through The Sales Cycle

Franklin/Trade Graphics' success with Hilton International took time and effort

By LaShell Stratton

Hilton International, a branch of the Hilton Hotels Corporation, operates 403 hotels worldwide and employs more than 71,000 staff members in 80 countries. In addition to the seasonal vacationers, the company also wanted to attract more corporate clients—specifically corporate meeting planners. Hilton wanted to target these current and future clients using a unique mailer.

When the hotel chain mailed a static, non-focused piece to corporate meeting planners in the past, it received only a one percent response rate. Hilton hoped to increase response rates with two custom, variable marketing pieces created by a design firm and produced by Franklin/Trade Graphics LLC in Miami.

Franklin/Trade Graphics had entered the digital printing market only a few months prior—December 2005 to be exact—when it installed a Xerox iGen3 110 digital production press. “We reorganized the prepress area to segment out the VDP process,” says Peter Dunne, president of Franklin/Trade. In addition to adding staff to run the equipment, “We also hired Rick Wellner [director of VDP] to address the sales side.”

Before these changes, Franklin/Trade did strictly offset printing. The company bought the iGen3 to enhance its capabilities as a graphic communications firm by using the press to produce 1-to-1 marketing program and print-on-demand pieces for corporate clients such as Microsoft, Burger King and the Florida Marlins. Now the new equipment allowed Franklin/Trade to produce a complex 1-to-1 marketing program for Hilton International that included internet specific or personal URLs, and incorporated an 800-number to track responses. ❖



Franklin Trade Graphics LLC sent 1-to-1 marketing pieces to corporate meeting planners, netting between a 5- and 13-percent response rate for both mailings.

To implement the campaign, Hilton used a database focused on past meeting planners. It also purchased a database of potential corporate meeting planners. Franklin/Trade created a mailing that consisted of two separate pieces:

■ A custom, die-cut oversized card, quad fold, printed 4/4 with variable data in six different places on 100# C2S

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Peter Dunne, President
Franklin/Trade Graphics LLC
Miami

cover weight stock. Each mailer described Hilton's properties and the amenities it offered to the potential meeting planners in the Caribbean and the United States.

■ Franklin/Trade also inserted a 4/4 printed card describing additional Hilton properties to choose in the United States.

With the help of the 800-number and personal URL tracking, Hilton determined the new response rate. The first mailing of 10,000 pieces received a 5 percent response rate. The second mailing, also of 10,000 pieces, received a 13 percent response rate, give or take 2 percent.

Handling the Longer Sales Process

The Hilton mailers turned out to be a successful project, but any company that has sold VDP will tell you that successful programs like this one take more time than the traditional print sale. Dunne says the sales cycle can take up to three times longer than it would for most products: "Because of the change in direction for customers, it takes them a bit longer to get used to the capabilities."

Wellner concurs. "It can be three to six months from the time we talk on the phone to the time we get the mail piece out," he says.

Netting the Day Traders

A VDP case study from Franklin/Trade Graphics LLC

Scenario: Trend Trading wants to attract serious day traders in the stock market to a dinner seminar. The seminar is a one-hour presentation on the power and versatility of "Trend Trading to WIN" online stock market service. The company uses the internet instead of outside trading companies or specialized software applications. Trend Trading also charges a monthly fee to subscribers for unlimited use of their online technology. The company asked Franklin/Trade to design a 1-to-1 marketing piece focused on new, potential and serious stock market traders. The designs of the piece vary during the year. Past mailings, which were static, non-focused pieces, usually received a 1 to 3 percent response rate.

Steps:

- 1) Franklin/Trade worked closely with the customer and list companies to purchase the specific lists needed
- 2) The company designed a custom, three-part dinner mailer invitation that included a personalized envelope and corresponding pieces. These pieces described the company's successes through testimonials, and each incorporated different

variables to convince potential customers to open the invitation and sign up for the seminar. The mailer was focused on specific geographic areas and listed products available

3) Franklin/Trade printed the four pieces on its Xerox iGen3 110:

- A custom, oversized envelope printed 4/0 with variable data on 80# C2S text weight stock then converted
- A letter containing testimonials and information printed 4/4 with variable data
- An RSVP dinner card printed 1/1 with variable data
- A workshop coupon printed 4/1 with variable data.

Tracking: Franklin/Trade then supplied a working database manifest so that Trend Trading could manage and keep track of their response rates as well as track the success of the mailing lists that were acquired.

Results: First mailing: 10,000 pieces mailed, 10 to 15 percent response rate.

Second mailing: 10,000 pieces mailed, response rate not yet known.



keting campaigns, Dunne says 80 percent are mostly in the dark. "Some savvy customers have experience with it and tell us what they want," he says. "But the majority are fairly new to the technology. We tell them what it's about, what it does and what we can do with it to be successful. A lot of that lies in database construction."

He finds that this can be the biggest challenge in completing the sale. "The longest part of the sales cycle is getting the customers to move forward," Dunne says. "The production time is set. That doesn't change. The harder part is educating the client about what we need. A quality database is usually the biggest hurdle. They aren't always forthcoming in handing it over. It takes a while to change their thinking from a traditional marketing standpoint."

But when clients do finally start to understand VDP's capability, the Franklin/Trade staff sees changes in the programs themselves. "The companies are now even more conscious of the designs of the pieces," Wellner says. "We have a full staff design department to help them out, but they're really starting to pay attention to the composition of the piece." ❧

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