

LESS IS MORE!

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“LESS is MORE.” While the saying is often attributed to late 19th century architect Ludwig Mies Van Der Rohe, it seems entirely more relevant to the modern, clutter-filled, sensory-overloaded world we live in today than it does to that simpler time in world history. Not only do we now crave simplicity, we also desire to conserve our resources and save our environment. The interesting thing is that this does not necessarily mean a reduction in business success or in a loss of customer loyalty.

I am reminded of a recent television commercial where the stuffy executive balks at a proposal for their company to ‘go green’ until, that is, he is told that the energy savings from doing so will result in millions of dollars saved. LESS energy use equals MORE cash.

In his best-selling book “BLINK!” Malcolm Gladwell sites an interesting test: At a gourmet store, six free jam samples were offered to shoppers. The free samples resulted in 30% of the shoppers buying. When the offer was changed to twenty-four jam samples, only 3% of the people bought. Too many choices actually caused them not to purchase at all. LESS choice equals MORE sales.

The ‘less is more’ phenomenon even extends to one of my areas of expertise, **direct mail**. The United States Postal Service is now requiring mailing lists to be updated or cleaned more frequently prior to large discounted mailings. Cleaning up these mailing lists is primarily done through services known as CASS and NCOA.

CASS stands for Coding Accuracy Support System and is the process of comparing the address you have in your list to the address the USPS has on file. If an address does not match, there is a concern that the mail might not be deliverable there.

NCOA stands for National Change of Address and is more focused on the person living at the address than the address itself. Amazingly, around 15% of the people in this country move each year- over 40 million address changes. If someone has moved, the mail might not reach them or at best, will be delayed.

Lists that are not updated through these methods often result in something the Postal Service calls UAA (Undeliverable as Addressed) mail. Each year, they handle over 9 billion pieces of this type of mail at an extra cost to them of almost two billion dollars. By reducing the amount of UAA mail, the USPS helps the environment but also saves in the re-handling cost of this mail. LESS badly-addressed mail equals MORE cost savings.

The other part of direct mail is the printing and addressing of the pieces. The industry has been very proactive in their efforts to be environmentally friendly. Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) paper ensures that the paper used in the printing comes from responsible forestry practices. This has led to an increase in US forests that have brought the acres of trees to a level not seen in 100 years.

While the important thing here is the sustainability of our forests and the protection of the environment, it should also be pointed out that a marketing study done just last year indicated that nine out of ten people are more likely to purchase from a 'green' marketer when given roughly equal products and cost. LESS impact on the environment equals MORE people who want to do business with you.

And finally, there is that dreaded term, 'junk mail'. In the years when mail as a marketing device really took off, the push was to mail the same message to as many people as possible. Ultimately, some or many of the recipients of this mail saw that the message was not relevant to them and the term 'junk mail' was born.

The technology that exists today allows direct mail to be based on more available data than ever before and to be printed as a 1 to 1 piece. That is to say, the pictures and text on the mailing piece coming to me would be different from the one going to you based on our different interests and who we are. Digital 1 to1 printing is here to stay and is where the success is in direct mail. And because this normally involves mailing fewer pieces and there is less paper waste with digital printing, the process is also more environmentally friendly. I have seen many cases where a business mailed fewer digitally produced pieces of mail but because those pieces were more targeted, personal, and relevant to the person, their ROI (return on investment) rose and they actually made more money in spite of mailing less. LESS 'junk mail' equals MORE return on investment.

So, clearly, we live in a very different world today than Ludwig Mies Van Der Rohe did in the 19th century. But if we align correctly with the changes we see in the world, we can certainly achieve marketing and business success. I think it appropriate (and somewhat humorous) to end with this quote (sometimes attributed to Mark Twain and sometimes to Ben Franklin):

“It I had MORE time, I would have written LESS!”