

The traditional Avon representative has been joined by several DM campaigns with encouraging results

Avon tries new channels

Remember the Avon lady and her eponymous greeting of "Avon calling"? Since arriving in the UK in 1959, the direct seller of beauty products has continued to grow. Avon now has 160,000 UK representatives, with five million women seeing its brochure every week.

A few things have changed over the years and now customers can order by mail, web or email. "Our biggest challenge is in giving consumers access to Avon," says Andrea Slater, Avon's VP of marketing. "We're always looking for new customers but not all of them have, or want, access to a rep."

Communicating with those who prefer to shop without the help of a rep is where DM comes in. People ordering by mail, phone or web just receive a brochure with every order, hence the importance of DM to keep up interest.

This side of Avon wasn't set up until 1997, coming into play as a result of the demand generated through its advertising activity, all of which includes a phone number and web address.

This wasn't too difficult a move. Thanks to Avon's selling method, the basic principles were already there. "In many ways our core business uses techniques of DM," Slater explains. "The consumer gets the brochure and the buying decision is made from this." This experience also led to Avon designing its direct mail inhouse.

Five years on and the DM side of the business remains relatively small scale – most customers still prefer to buy through their rep – but it is providing a way for Avon to explore new channels to attract customers, as well as communicate with existing ones.

Recently Avon, working with agency Bluestreak, has turned to email, SMS and viral marketing as a way of bringing in new customers. A tie-in with pop group Atomic Kitten this year produced an integrated campaign promoting Avon's Color Trend make-up. Text messages and emails went out to a largely teen audience, directing them

VITAL STATISTICS

Name Avon

Turnover £300 million

Total marketing spend £500,000

Agency Inhouse with email activity through Bluestreak



ON THE SPOT



Andrea Slater, vice president of marketing, Avon

Do you open all of your direct mail?

Only if it's good – I get bombarded at work. At home I open everything, particularly to do with fashion. I'm a mail order convert.

What do you tell people you do at parties?

VP of marketing for Avon. Everyone loves Avon, it's a brand with instant recognition and people are interested to hear about it.

If you could send anyone DM what would it be and to whom would you send it?

I'd send an invite to Victoria Beckham to be a rep for Avon. She loves good quality products, designer-looking goods and things that are good value. She'd be excellent.

What one piece of advice would you give when embarking on a DM campaign?

Don't expect miracles overnight. Take a longer term strategic view.

to Atomic Kitten and Avon's websites.

Following on from this success, Avon recently ran a viral marketing trial campaign called Mission Impeccable, which ran nationally promoting its nail wear range. Bluestreak sent out 20,000 emails to an external database, directing recipients to the main Avon website with the incentive of a competition. Results were good. "We had a high conversion rate," says Slater. "We'll continue trialling viral marketing."

Direct mail is also used to reactivate lapsed customers. If the customer fails to place an order nine weeks after receiving a brochure, Avon sends them a reactivation mailer.

Supporting this activity, Avon also sends out re-energising mailers to these independent buyers every two months. These are designed around key brochure events with a recent mailer focusing around the launch of a skin care product called Ultimate.

According to Slater, customers ordering products directly tend to be bigger spenders, but all Avon customers receive information on the same products. So, with every offer, Avon changes the proposition depending on the audience. Ultimate Skin Transforming Cream is one of its more expensive products and more likely to appeal to these go-it-alone customers.

Slater thinks these customers will always be a small percentage of the total, but believes there is room to grow this side of the business. "The internet's added a new dimension," she says. "The direct mail business is a result of how much we've advertised and extended our promotional activity. As we grow this, our direct mail and internet business grows with it."

All roads at Avon seem to lead to direct marketing. "DM leverages so much of what we're doing so we get a very good ROI," says Slater. And, with Christmas coming up, more DM activity is planned, so expect to hear "Avon calling" somewhere near you soon. **n**