Marketer News

August 10, 2010

Seven tell-tale signs your database is hurting you

Is your Marketing/Customer Database delivering the accurate insights and flawless execution you need or is it misfiring — increasing your costs and spewing inaccuracies that will obstruct your customer segmentation and marketing performance calculations and ultimately hurt you professionally? Lets' find out.

Here are seven tell-tale signs your customer database needs attention:

1. **Errors are routine, and it is not getting better.** Inaccurate data, flawed data manipulation and manual validation processes can cause marketing programs to execute incorrectly and reports to be inaccurate. When this happens, channel vendors and agencies are pulled in to troubleshoot the issues. The result is increased cost and inefficient use of everyone's time. Nobody's perfect, but if errors are commonplace, the costs and damage compound, resulting in a big bite out of your budget.

2. **You have had to restate numbers produced by your database reporting more than once in a given year.** Errors on reports are not career builders, especially when the numbers have made it all the way up to senior management.   If this happens more than once in any given year, there are underlying problem with the database and how reports are pulled.

3. **Answers to basic questions and obtaining core documentation regarding the database takes days or weeks.** Database managers and their vendors must continually maintain up-to-date knowledge of the customer database's functionality and continally update all documentation reflecting this knowledge. Reviewing functional specifications of the customer database, for example, is essential when planning enhancements or changes. And having an up-to-date data dictionary handy is critical when writing queries or developing reports. So if it's taking days or weeks to get information, the documentation is not current. And you're paying in time and money for everyone to fumble around for the answers.

4. **Reliance on a single database structure.** Databases must be optimized for specific functions. A properly built marketing database is not one database; it is three — one for execution, reporting/campaign management and business intelligence/analytics. When databases rely on a single structure to meet all needs, they are forced to be optimized for execution, complicating reporting and analytic tasks and impeding data access for marketers. Ask your database provider about this. If they do not know what you are talking about, switch vendors.

5. **Inconsistent data collection activities.** Marketers and their agencies can cause problems in the database as well. Improperly designed surveys, web forms and BRCs can introduce inconsistencies in the database that impair campaign management, execution, reporting and analysis. For example, if you ask the same question three different ways with three different answer sets across three different surveys, the data that flows into the database from these surveys is likely to cause errors in the campaign, reporting and analytics. To truly make the most of the opportunity presented by self-reported data, data collection activities must be reviewed and coordinated across channels and ultimately the enterprise to ensure that the data collected is consistent, usable and error-free.

6. **Inflexible interfaces and customer survey data management.** A constant stream of changes to survey questions and answers is customary in marketing. Data interfaces (the data structures that transfer data into and out of the marketing database) must be able to accommodate these changes on an ongoing basis. Inflexible interfaces require moderate to significant programming work each time a survey change is made. This is costly and prone to error. Marketing databases should only use data-driven interface schemas that do not require programming when marketing needs change. Similarly, the database structure that is used to manage surveys, questions, answers and their associated responses on a customer level must be designed to maximize flexibility and to reduce complexity of queries and reporting. When these tables are designed to track data on a form level (e.g., form 42, question 1, answer 1, 2 or 3) as opposed to insight level (e.g. "Gender", "M" or "F"), the code that is needed to answer even the simplest questions can be significant, increasing the cost of developing insights and increasing the likelihood of error.

7. **Lack of consistent validation and automated correction.** The value of a current or potential customer is usually far too great to let missing or incorrect data prevent processing. That is why most database vendors use some kind of error-correction process. But when that process is manual, it can be costly, requiring more resources for phone calls and research. Automating the process is more efficient. There may be a cost upfront, but it is lower than the price of the manual process year over year.

   Automated or manual, the best approach is to take proactive steps to avoid issues before they even get to the database. For example, a web form that asks for "channel preference" should display an error when a customer selects "email" but leaves "email address" blank. Sounds simple, yes? Well these kinds of upfront checks are often missing, leaving companies open to increased exception handling costs and even the potential for effectively dropping the customer from the campaign.

Databases are not wind-up toys that your company can crank up and let go. They need to be **audited** (click here to find out what a Database Audit could save you)**.** Your **database partners need to be reviewed** (click here to find out what's involved in a Vendor Audit) and sometimes **replaced** (click here for more information on Vendor Selection processes).

At **DB Marketing Technologies**, we know how your CRM architecture and marketing databases need to work to deliver for your business, we know what you should expect from your vendors, and how much your database should cost to build and operate properly. And we want to share that information with you. We are corporate America's go-to team to manage, trouble-shoot and correct CRM and marketing databases. To find out how DBMT can help you **get control over your CRM and marketing database programs, click here**.

To discuss how you can improve your CRM and marketing database operations, managing director **David Bernard** is available for **one-on-one meetings**. There is absolutely no charge to you for this meeting. It is simply an opportunity for you to discuss any CRM and database challenges that you are having and find out how these challenges are fixed elsewhere.

If you would like to schedule an appointment with Mr. Bernard by phone, just call our offices (212) 717-6000 x6165. You may also email **info@dbmt.com** to make your appointment.