

Using Trans-promotional Printing

Trans-promotional printing isn't new; we just gave it a catchy name to make people think it is a difficult concept. Have you ever received an invoice or a statement (transactional documents) from a supplier announcing they are moving, or perhaps with a big orange sticker that indicates a special offer or promotion for the month? The big players have used this type of promotion for years: cellphone and credit card companies; big box retailers; banks and insurance companies have always put promotional stuff in envelopes hoping to get your attention.

In Canada, our postal system charges first class lettermail rates for transactional documents and mandates that each envelope weigh up to 30 grams (four sheets of standard paper plus the envelope) before charging us more, so the logic is put as much stuff as you can in the envelope. Smart companies went further and got related businesses to advertise their products by inserting something in your statement, for a fee, of course. Over time the effectiveness wore off as we casually discarded everything in these envelopes except the transactional document which we spend between one and three minutes reviewing.

On average, customers will spend between one and three minutes reviewing a transactional document and less than a minute examining direct mail.

It did not take long for marketing people to decide to use some of the white space on the statement to advertise products or services. On the surface, it might seem that this is an avenue reserved for the big guys. In truth, it is more relevant to the small business that can't afford electronic bill presentation, especially as the cost of postal service increases again on January 17th, 2011 to \$0.59 for lettermail.

In our business, we generate over 3600 invoices and 1300 statements per year. Our best practice has always been to ship the invoice with the job, saving postal costs (over \$2000.00 annually) and decreasing our AR days outstanding.

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In addition, our invoices have been trans-promotional almost since day one.

With a little planning, you can turn your invoices into trans-promo as well. Most invoices are printed on a standard 8.5 x 11 sheet but contain only a small amount of information regarding transactions. Typically, the margins are wide and the bottom of the page is empty. By looking at your invoice you might find room where nothing usually appears that is perfectly suited to an advertising message. If you already have a large supply of invoices or statements, have them overprinted with the message, making sure to do enough to reach each customer at least once.

Reason Inc.
123 Easton St.
Suite 202
Georgetown L2K5X8

Sample Organization
John Smith
2770 Dufferin St.
Suite 201
Toronto ON M6B 3R7

INVOICE

FRESHBOOKS
patented Billing

Invoice #: 0000001
Date: May 9, 2008
Amount Due USD: \$323.90

Item	Description	Unit Cost (\$)	Quantity	Price (\$)
Service	Sample invoice for two hours of service	100.00	2	200.00
Product	Sample product item	9.99	10	99.90
	A case of beer	1.00	24	24.00

NOTES: This is a sample invoice. To remove it, go to "List of Invoices", select the invoice and click the "DELETE" button at the top of the list.

Subtotal:	323.90
Total:	323.90
Amount Paid:	-0.00
Balance Due USD:	\$323.90

Payment due in 30 days.

Extra space in the margin and bottom of invoices is a perfect opportunity for cost-effective trans-promotion.

While more labour-intensive, you might find that a sticker works well, especially if the free space moves around on the statement according to product description, etc. If your software allows you to easily manipulate the data that prints, you may even elect to print both sides so that you can create more room for the advertising if necessary.

This type of marketing is especially successful with business to consumer relationships where the end customer gets the invoice or statement. Like all other marketing the key is to provide enough incentive for the customer to act.

Consider an online offer where the customer puts in their invoice number to access a coupon for 10% off a repeat order by a certain date, then you can track the success of certain offers or promotions. Obviously by getting the customer to the web, you create an opportunity to expose them to other messages, offers and information about your company. The strength of this approach is that you are marketing to your existing customer. At least one study indicates that a 5% increase in business from your existing customers could mean a 50% increase in your bottom line.

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However, don't be afraid to partner with a complementary service provider and put something in each other's statements either. This provides both businesses with a referral to everyone that receives a statement. Make the offer relevant, and this can be a low cost way to advertise for both of you. A simple message on the statement that says, "I've enclosed a brochure from XYZ company that I thought might be of interest" will increase the customer's perception of that business and the likelihood of them reading the marketing message.

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Lastly, be mindful not to inundate the customer with offers that are perceived as spam. Recent studies have shown that as many as 64% of consumers have considered changing suppliers because of too much spam in e-mail or direct mail.