

## **Need a marketing database system? Don't touch that dial.**

By Bonnie Massa, President

Massa & Company, Inc. Analytic Database Marketing

[www.massainc.com](http://www.massainc.com)

They say don't believe everything you see on TV.

But that doesn't mean you shouldn't believe some of it. Like when the authoritative voice warns you, "Kids, don't try this at home," you really *shouldn't* try it at home. Not if you want to keep all your limbs and digits intact.

Or when magician/pitchman Marshall Brodien does things with a deck of cards that simply can't be done, and he tells you "It's easy ... when you know the secret."

Why bring these up here? Because you need to believe them both if you want to use a marketing database to grow your business.

Like Brodien's magic tricks, building a successful marketing database is easier when you know the secret.

So what's the secret?

It's simple – don't try this at home! In other words, this is a job that should be outsourced to marketing database specialists. Too many companies feel that because they know how to develop and manage an operational database, they're in a good position to build a marketing database in-house.

That's like saying because you can balance your family's checkbook, you're ready to manage the books of a large corporation. You might be able to do it, but not without a lot of pain, a good deal of wasted time and money, unnecessary internal friction, ongoing frustrations, and the very real likelihood that what you wind up with won't do you much good at all.

Consider that the data compiled, stored and used by most companies falls into three broad categories – the past (accounting and billing data), the present (inventory and operational data), and the future (marketing data).

By their nature, the accounting, billing, inventory and operational data all are largely fixed sets of data that can be serviced by systems that provide organization and storage, but limited access and flexibility. This is data that relates to the past and present, and there's not much that's changing here, even over long periods of time. Nor does the information need to be accessible and able to be manipulated from desktops across the company. You have an excellent IT department? Great. Let them develop the systems to manage this data and move the marketing data systems to a specialist.

Marketing data, however, is fluid and subject to change daily. It includes customer and prospect information, purchase/order details, marketing communications, and data that

shows not only who's opening your e-mail and visiting your Web site, but what they're doing while they're there. A database marketing system needs to make sense of demographic data, shopping trends, consumer behavior and other customer-centric information that can direct current and future marketing campaigns. You'll be able to segment consumers, identify high-value customers, target your best prospects, and provide the focus that can help ensure the success of all your marketing and sales efforts. But to do so, the systems and specialized software used to manage this database must be dynamic, flexible, accurate, dependable and able to be manipulated quickly and easily.

Creating, installing and managing such a system can monopolize the resources of even the best internal IT department. Do it yourself, and you might as well rename your company Hatfield and McCoy, Inc., and forget about peace in the family. It won't take long for your marketing folks to grow impatient with a slow-moving and seemingly ineffective IT department, while your systems people will soon express frustration with the changing demands of your marketing department. "You want *what* today? That's not what you said yesterday!"

And forget about actually keeping the system updated and current once it's live. It's a simple fact of business today that even the most promising marketing efforts will always be trumped by operational functions such as inventory maintenance or bill processing when IT departments prioritize their to-do list.

So give your marketing programs the support they need to ensure success and grow your company while avoiding unnecessary battles and saving your company time and money. Leave this one, as they say, to the professionals.

Bonnie Massa

312-463-1050

[www.massainc.com/bio.htm](http://www.massainc.com/bio.htm)