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Marketing Is Hard: Is the Extra Effort Worth It?

Let's face it. Marketing isn't easy. There are so many things to think about — creative, offer, list, personalization, and more. Are those extra hours of investment worth it? To find the answer, let's look at the results of a classic study from The Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT).

Conducted in conjunction with Dr. Frank Romano, professor emeritus of RIT, and one of his students, David Broudy, the study took a deep dive into the impact of varying elements of a campaign on response rates. Elements included name, geographic imagery, and marketing message. This is an older study, but because of its depth and controlled research, it offers rare insights that every marketer should be aware of.

Romano and Broudy conducted a controlled study of 36 mailings in nine categories. Four thousand pieces were sent in each mailing. The team used a mix of direct mail offers to both businesses and consumers. All mailings were professionally designed and produced.

The research was designed to test the effects of three variables: color versus black-and-white, the addition of simple name personalization, and the integration of more complex data, such as demographics and interests. Variables were measured both in isolation and combination.

Here are the results:

Control mailing: (b/w with no personalization)
Response rate: .46%

Second mailing: (simple name personalization)
Response rate: +44%

Third mailing: (full-color, no personalization)
Response rate: +45%

Fourth mailing: (full color, name personalization)
Response rate: +135%

Fifth mailing: (full-color, name personalization + more complex data personalization)
Response rate: +500%

One of the first takeaways is how adding color has a similar impact on response rate as name personalization, a lift of 44%. While there is plenty of color in print marketing these days, this result suggests that not just using color but maximizing its use, such as by using it to enhance psychographic or demographic personalization, can demonstrably increase response.

The second takeaway is that, to maximize impact, color should not be relied upon alone. It is best used in combination with other elements, including personalization.

If you're thinking about foregoing some of the "extras" in your next mailing campaign, such as the strategic selection and use of color and personalization—don't! These elements are more than just pretty. They are powerful response-boosting tools.