

Marketing Solution Providers: Select a Partner, Not a Supplier

Given the evolving nature of the newspaper industry's business model, the day is not far off in which the marketing database is every bit as critical as the operational systems that facilitate distribution and billing. The ability to analyze and target consumer marketing initiatives across multiple, integrated channels is absolutely essential to stemming declines in circulation and marketing productivity.

It is also important to recognize that in today's IT environment, the marketing database system and the operational systems do not coexist well as a single entity. The requirements of each are dramatically different. The design of operational systems is optimized for real-time, read-write capabilities – the structure of which is far from ideal for conducting sophisticated analysis across multiple dimensions, defining highly complex consumer segments and managing campaigns.

The purpose of this article is to define those qualities of a marketing systems provider that are most vital to your success as a marketer. And while the technology is of great importance, it is the ability to leverage that technology in achieving your business objectives that is paramount. Consequently, do not make the mistake of simply selecting a vendor – select a business partner that understands your requirements and has the resources and experience to help achieve them.

Although there are numerous factors that influence this critical decision, we have narrowed those of greatest magnitude to five. In order of importance, they include:

- **Proven Track Record.** Put another way, this is all about risk avoidance. The investment in marketing technology is not insignificant. Given the level of financial and organizational commitment to data-driven marketing, business sponsors are often put in the position of taking a risk. There is risk that the technology will not be properly implemented, risk that it will not be appropriately applied to business needs, and risk that the vendor will be unable to add value to the relationship. Management rightfully expects certain performance criteria to be met. Minimize performance risk by selecting a partner that understands those expectations and is well-equipped to help shape and support business priorities.

ASTECH InterMedia has served the data-driven marketing requirements of the newspaper industry for 14 years. The company supports 160 companies worldwide. MAAX represents the industry's dominant marketing database solution, now in use by more than 30 newspaper firms. It has been proven time and again as the most empowering, the most relevant and the best supported marketing technology available. To ensure the success of your database marketing initiatives, look to ASTECH and MAAX.

- **Robust Peer Network.** Perhaps more so than any other industry, newspapers learn from one another. Because they generally do not compete head-to-head in specific geographic markets, newspaper marketers are typically forthcoming about their experiences. And there is no subject matter about which more can be learned than database marketing. Consequently, it is highly desirable that your partner provide access to a comprehensive network of peers that share your business problems and opportunities – and, ideally, your technology in addressing them. The more robust the network, the deeper the knowledge base and the faster the ROI.

At ASTECH, we endeavor not only to help build a network of peers that share common business problems – we make that network work to share solutions to those problems. The company's MAAX Users Group meetings, e-newsletters (i-News), highly-regarded web site, monthly client teleconferences and, in particular, the renowned Roundtable on Strategic Marketing in Vail, CO all provide venues for client interaction and the distribution of case studies, advice and shared experiences. When it comes to providing its clients with a peer network, ASTECH has no peers.

- **Bench Strength.** Risk avoidance has much to do with depth and responsiveness. How deep are the resources of the company that is supporting your marketing systems? For example, is there a customer help desk that is staffed by knowledgeable people during your business hours...or is your provider a

“virtual” company without a dedicated team available? Does your provider maintain its own sophisticated, state-of-the-art data center where it can host your marketing system and have direct, hands-on access to the technology to immediately identify and remedy any potential systems issues...or does it outsource your database to a third party hosting facility in which your vendor has no presence? Is there someone that is accountable for getting answers to your questions in a timely manner?

Because we believe that your marketing database system is as critical as any other business system, ASTECH invests heavily in the support infrastructure for its marketing technology. That means a fully staffed, knowledgeable help desk available to answer your questions and fix problems. We also maintain an advanced, high-tech data center on premises where our staff can have immediate, direct access to your system in the event of any issues. Most importantly, we emphasize accountability, providing each client with access to a Team Leader and a Client Advocate who are responsible for ensuring responsiveness and client satisfaction.

- **Great Technology.** “Great” marketing technology doesn’t necessarily mean the newest, the fastest or the most sophisticated. To be “great” – at least in the eyes of marketers – technology must provide the essential functionality to support strategic marketing objectives. It helps if it is fast and powerful – but there is a lot of fast, powerful (and expensive) technology gathering dust because it does not permit marketing decision-makers to conduct the type of analysis and implement the types of processes that drive those objectives.

Since its introduction in 2004, MAAX has become the dominant data-driven marketing automation system in the newspaper industry. It is indeed fast, powerful and sophisticated, but it first and foremost is designed specifically to support the types of business processes newspaper marketers require to grow circulation and revenue.

- **Focus.** To optimally support your business goals, your partner must not only have knowledge of technology – it must have knowledge of your business. A “partner” is more than just a supplier. A partner is able to help guide the implementation and support of your marketing investment to ensure it addresses your business requirements. That implies a knowledge of your business beyond that of a software vendor.

No one understands the issues and opportunities of newspaper marketers like ASTECH. This industry is our passion, and we strive to ensure its prosperity for the future. The industry has learned that prosperity requires evolution. At ASTECH, we are helping to shape that evolution by providing the technology and expertise that create sustainable competitive advantage for our clients.