

call centers

Putting the Trust Back in Per Inquiry Advertising



BY SCOTT RICHARDS

One of the oldest and most effective forms of direct response marketing has been the "per inquiry" (PI) model of advertising. PI advertising has been around decades before Google popularized the model online. Simply put, with PI advertising, the advertiser pays only for qualified responses. What constitutes a "qualified response" has always been the tricky part.

While technology has changed, the core model of PI advertising has not. Therein lies the problem. The success of Google's online advertising platform can be attributed, in part, to its tool, which brought a degree of transparency to the process. Yet for PI advertising to take it to the next level, the industry needs to go even further beyond the high benchmark that Google has set. What is needed is a neutral player without any conflict of interest to act as an intermediary.

Call centers have a primary job to answer calls and are measured by their close ratios.

Therefore, call centers are not an unbiased, independent source of verification. Since reporting fewer calls increases call centers' closing ratio, it would be in their interest to report less calls to increase their closing ratio. Radio and television stations naturally want to report as many leads generated as possible, thus they are not a disinterested party.

SOFTWARE IS A GOOD START

The only way to establish credibility and trust in the PI advertising industry is software, which accurately reports on

responses with the ability to slice and dice according to what is negotiated between a client and agency. The software should record and archive all phone calls for verification purposes. Multiple filters should allow the user of the software to segment based on deal criteria. For example, unique calls that last one minute or more and haven't called in the past 60 days. This may be the agreed definition of a "unique caller" between the client, agency and media source (the TV or radio station).

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Log-ins are created for clients, agencies and radio/TV stations so all parties can access the information in real time. No party can actually change or tamper with call records. Data is reported directly off the telco switches, ensuring 100-percent accuracy. Complete transparency improves confidence in the process.

Thus, clients only pay for truly qualified responses, which improves their sales efforts and conserves their budget. Confidence in the system increases the likelihood of clients to advertise more, benefiting agencies, radio/TV stations and call centers. The industry as a whole will benefit from improved verification and trust: a true win-win situation. ■

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