

Expert Series

Alistair Wright, Torque

Testing, testing!

One of the many great features of mail is that you can trial your campaign on a relatively small number of prospects before committing significant budget. This is known as '**test and roll out**' in DM jargon and is a vital contributor to maximising the returns you can achieve.

Although the 'test and roll out' concept is straightforward, there are a few things that need to be considered in order for this approach to work. The following pointers will help ensure you get the best from the technique.

What to test?

The good news is it is possible to test each of the elements that contribute to the success of a direct mail campaign. These are:

1. **Targeting** – the basis on which you have selected the customers or prospects who will receive your offer.
2. **Offer** – the proposition you are making.
3. **Creative** – the compelling way in which you communicate the offer to the target in order to cut-through and encourage a response.
4. **Timing** – when you send the communication, be it time of year down to day of week.

Later on, we'll explore the kind of things you can test under each of these headings.

The golden rule of testing

While testing is all about the freedom to discover new things, there is one golden rule to bear in mind and that is **you must be able to track what you test**.

For example, say you are testing two different list sources (a Targeting test). You have also decided to test two different approaches with the letter (a Creative test) – one with long copy describing all the benefits of your product and the other with only short copy highlighting just the main benefit.

In order to be able to make sense of the results you must **track** which combination of list and letter achieved the best response. This means creating a simple table (called a Test Matrix) in which each combination of Targeting and Creative is described as a **cell**. Each

cell is then given a different code that needs to appear on the response device for that particular combination. This might appear as follows:

Cell number / response code	Targeting test	Creative test	Result (once known)
Cell 1/ 01	List A	Long copy	
Cell 2/ 02	List B	Long copy	
Cell 3/ 03	List A	Short copy	
Cell 4 / 04	List B	Short copy	

This approach allows you to immediately identify which combination of Targeting and Creative has delivered the best result. This is the combination that wins the Test and which is 'Rolled Out'.

You can also extend the matrix to contain other information that will help you stay in complete control – for example, if the components of a direct mail pack are changing by cell (one contains a letter only, one contains a letter and a sales brochure, etc), you can reflect this in the matrix. This means it also becomes a simple check list for your production team, keeping everyone in the picture.

In subsequent articles, we'll examine the opportunities for testing across targeting, offer, creative and timing. The thing to remember is, whatever you decide to test, a clear and concise matrix will help you stay in complete control.

Alistair Wright is a Managing Partner with Torque, a leading customer analytics and targeting consultancy with offices in Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane.

Alistair has worked in direct marketing for twenty-five years, both client-side and for a number of leading direct marketing agencies and consultancies. He is a frequent guest speaker at ADMA and associated events across Australia.