Ten Steps to Improving Data Hygiene

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Clean data is good business.

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Your database, like your health, requires constant care and attention. Just as you wouldn't go years without a physical or a dental check-up, your company's data deserves the same cleaning and upkeep. Good data hygiene is important because it fuels marketing campaigns and sales initiatives. In the absence of accurate, fresh data, managers can't make optimal decisions or tactical investments.

The longer you wait to correct poor data, the more it will cost you. Consider the 1-10-100 Rule: It costs $1 to verify the accuracy of a record at point-of-entry, $10 to clean it after it's been entered; and $100 if nothing is done, which includes the ultimate costs associated with undeliverable shipments, low customer satisfaction, and inefficient customer relationship management initiatives.

Here are ten hygiene tips for improving data quality:

1. Fix Address Errors - Improve the deliverability of your mailings, earn postal discounts and ensure efficient postal processing by verifying and standardizing addresses and adding ZIP + 4 and postal codes with CASS processing.

2. Update Mailing Lists - Your house file deteriorates approximately 15 percent annually because over 40 million American families, individuals, and businesses pick up and move each year. National Change of Address (NCOALink) processing matches your list against a dataset of permanent change-of-address records filed with the USPS ® over the last 48 months. You should Move Update your database every 90 days to save on postage, printing, and time, and meet certain requirements for postal discounts.

3. Track Hard-to-Find Movers - What about the roughly 40% of movers that don't file a change-of-address with the USPS? How do you find and mail to them? You can use multi-source change-of-address processing, which is a privately-owned database of 121 million change-of-address records from sources such as magazine publishers, banks and credit card companies, mail-order forms, and various other sources.

4. Stop Mailing to Uninterested or Unavailable Recipients - Lower production and postage costs with suppression services. Cease mailing to the Direct Marketing Association's (DMA) advertising mail opt-out list, deceased individuals, and people incarcerated in correctional facilities.

5. Correct Email Address Errors - Nothing hinders an email campaign more than outdated email addresses. Maximize your response rates with an email validation solution that verifies, standardizes, and corrects common errors, turning undeliverable emails into deliverable ones. For instance, changing "!" to "@" or ".cm" to "com." You also want a solution that verifies a domain name against a database of known good and bad addresses.

6. Verify Telephone Numbers - Reach customers quickly, reduce data entry errors, and enhance telemarketing efficiency by verifying U.S., Canadian, and international phone numbers. Prevent your call center reps from wasting valuable time dialing incorrect numbers.

7. Parse & Genderize Names - Name parsing solutions split full names and multiple names into components, correct misspelled names, and apply a gender code to each data base record. By identifying the gender makeup of your database, you can be more targeted in your marketing efforts and enjoy greater response rates from your campaigns.

8. Remove Duplicates Records - Did you know that up to 10% of the average database consists of duplicate records? Removing duplicates reduces unnecessary printing, postage, and inventory costs, and provides a more accurate view of your customer database.

9. Trim White Spaces & Remove Invalid Characters - Extra white spaces lead to database and validation errors, and waste valuable employee time. Reduce errors by ensuring content fields in your records are consistent and conform to a uniform format. You can also minimize database errors by cleansing your database of invalid characters.

10. Complete Your Database - Identify and complete gaps in your database with contact append services to add missing names, demographics, emails, postal addresses, and phone numbers. Use this fresh data to launch multichannel marketing campaigns and increase response rates.

The quality of your data will never be perfect—but it can improve dramatically if you follow these simple steps. Start by reducing the amount of bad data coming into your systems on forms and lists, and then develop a periodic scrubbing process to keep existing data clean, accurate and up-to-date. Practicing good data hygiene is like adopting a healthy lifestyle—it isn't a one-time activity, but a continuous process that leads to better results over time.

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