

# Data control

Savings Bank Life Insurance (SBLI) creates a comprehensive, segmented customer database to coordinate its e-mail and direct mail efforts, reports *Bryan Yurcan*



**“We know a lot more about our customers than in the past”**

Rose Cahill, director of marketing, SBLI

When longtime marketer Rose Cahill joined the Savings Bank Life Insurance (SBLI) Company of Massachusetts two years ago as director of marketing, one of her first priorities was to consolidate the insurance company’s marketing efforts.

The life insurance company, which is based in Woburn, MA, has customers in 25 states. Until a year ago, direct mail and e-mail campaigns were delegated to a variety of different vendors. “The marketing was not really done in house,” Cahill says. “We would implement a campaign, have a vendor buy names on our behalf, and then work with a DM house. I wanted more control.”

#### More in-house control over data-driven campaigns

The first step toward SBLI coordinating its own e-mail and direct mail efforts began with developing a highly segmented, comprehensive customer database of responders who expressed interest in getting more information about the company’s life insurance plans. To this end, SBLI chose database services provider Acxiom’s MarketEdge-X product, which is designed to offer midsize businesses the kind of customer data insight and customer database information, segmentation and analysis that large companies typically have.

MarketEdge-X was released in October, and its beta form currently is used by 15 clients. Cahill says



using the database solution has allowed SBLI to take advantage of its database in new ways.

“We have about 8 million prospect records, and we can do a lot of different things,” she notes. “We were able to append a lot of demographic and psychographic data to the files. We know a lot more about our customers than in the past, and as such we can do more targeted campaigns.”

SBLI now uses a call center to follow up on its direct mail campaigns, she adds. “We have developed campaigns where I can send names to the call center with a script to follow up with,” she explains. “It also allows us to do prospect campaigns. We recently had a million piece mailing that was done through the database – we implemented it all from our desktop in the office.”

Steve Merritt, business development executive for MarketEdge-X, says Acxiom developed the product after identifying a need among midsize companies for the kind of database marketing solution the company usually custom-builds for larger companies.

“We realized the mid-tier market is underserved,” he notes. “We have always built custom solutions for

Fortune 100 companies, and it just wasn't affordable to build them [for midsize companies] or for those companies to purchase them."

### A standardized solution for an underserved market

However, Acxiom got around the cost issue by standardizing and automating MarketEdge-X. "Ninety percent of every database solution is the same for all the customers," Merritt says. "We standardized the process, so it's less labor-intensive for us."

Merritt identified two reasons why the product requires less work. First, it uses CRM software built by database marketing services company Alterian, which he says allows for a very streamlined and convenient database management process. And, it is Web-based – users can access their tool suite from anywhere they have a Web connection.

Cahill says this convenience is important for SBLI, because it and other companies like it constantly monitor and update their databases. "We really like to follow up with people," she says. "People sometimes need multiple touches before they will respond [to a campaign]."

In addition to better segmenting capabilities and targeting, SBLI also uses Acxiom's analytics tools to better measure response rates and cost per lead. Merritt believes that is the most important part

of taking advantage of a customer database. "We believe the most important things about marketing are analytics and data," he says.

By using analytics tools, Cahill says SBLI can get to the heart of micro-targeting. "We can analyze response rates and see where responses are coming from, and use that information to even geo-target specific parts of states," she says. "It's very effective."

As the economy continues to stagnate and business look to get every bang for their marketing buck, the advanced targeting that SBLI can use also allows them to mail smarter and cheaper. "It's helped decrease our direct mail budget as we are mailing better," Cahill says. "Just the price of postage alone makes it very expensive. It's very hard to send a piece for less than 50 cents anymore."

And, SBLI also plans to increase its e-mail efforts in the coming months as a cost-effective way to market. "We are planning to use the database more as we move towards more e-mail efforts," Cahill says.

But right now, Cahill and her team are still fully realizing the marketing potential of having a highly segmented, targeted and responsive database.

"Our database is very powerful now," she says. "We know how to use it at maybe 40% of what it can do – but the more we use it, the better we will be able to target." ●



**"The most important things about marketing are analytics and data"**

Steve Merritt, business development executive, MarketEdge-X, Acxiom

## Database services: What to consider before you buy



**Bryan Kennedy**, COO, Epsilon

**Q: What should marketers consider before investing in a database solution?**

**A:** You need to determine what the key metrics are to measure your value of

investment. Before you go out spending money, you need to have a pretty clear goal in mind. It depends on whether you're looking for a retention/loyalty effort vs. customer acquisition, for example, but one of the overall things to think about is if you had one additional dollar to spend on your marketing effort, which customer would you spend that dollar on?

**Q: How do you decide if a vendor is right for you?**

**A:** We'll, I think the top of the list is track record, which includes references. It's a small world from a marketing perspective so with a little due diligence you can get a clear picture. Buying a database is also not like buying manufacturing components where all things look alike. At the end of the day, even though you're buying technology, you're also buying a team to help you solve marketing problems.



**Sam Gragg**, VP of customer management marketing solutions, Teradata

**Q: What do you wish potential clients knew before they came to speak to you about a database solution?**

**A:** I'd like them to understand the context of what they mean by customer data – is your scope just a marketing thing? Is it a service thing? Or a more broad customer strategy? I would hope the broader the better. Also, do they understand the benefit of integrated data? Do they understand the value of corporate memory when it comes to customers?

**Q: What should customers consider in terms of expectations about their database investment?**

**A:** Start small and grow. Pick a project that will give you the first step in a bigger picture, but don't try to implement the bigger picture all at once. A natural reaction when a small implementation shows success is to say, 'let's do it everywhere.' But we're talking about a lot of moving parts and a lot of change. So it's about being able to prioritize and pick the next step.