

Solo or shared - what is best?

First and Best, the publishers of e-books and copiable books and part of the Hamilton House Mailings group, has experimented extensively on solo vs shared mailings. Here's a couple of results - although I am sorry to say it is not as straightforward as we might like.

A promotion consisting of a single sheet of A4 advertising two books at £25 each advertised to 5100 secondary schools. Leaving aside the printing cost which was the same in each case, the figures looked like this:

- Solo cost £1630 (32p each)
- Solo number of book sales 200 = £5000
- Solo profit = £3370

- Shared cost = £270 (5.3p each)
- Shared number of book sales 50 = £1250
- Shared profit = £980

So what we have here is a cost difference in which shared only costs 16% of solo cost. The response rate of a shared mailing is 25% of that of the solo mailing

On that basis the solo ought to be the best bet. But the profit is 363% of the investment on a shared, and only 208% on a solo - which suggests that the shared is the best bet.

What actually clarifies the situation is the issue of how many times you can run either a shared or a solo. Obviously if you could run the shared four times and keep the same response rate the cost would be £1080, and the profit £3920. - which is a much better deal than you get from the solo. Shared wins again.

But - and this is the crunch - it doesn't work like that. Even with clever and well-planned changes of the text and design to keep the advert fresh, the response rate of both types of mailing is likely to fall. The question is which one falls the fastest - and that varies.

Even more confusing when First and Best advertises five or six books on a single flyer, the response on a solo mailing is never enough to make a profit - but the same leaflet in a shared mailing certainly is profitable.

So the answer is... it is all down to what you are selling and quite often the only way to find out is through testing. What you should not do is reject either type of mailing for emotional reasons. Here's what I mean:

Rejecting solo: "It's too expensive." The answer is that you should try a trial mailing of mailing 300 schools to see what response you get. The expense is not the issue - it is the profit against the cost. Mailing 300 schools could cost you £100 or so. If you make £200 profit, then the notion that a solo mailing is too expensive becomes irrelevant.

Rejecting shared: "We wouldn't want to mail out with other companies." From the point of view of the teacher you are always doing that because most senior teachers receive several mail shots each day. The only people who know what system you use are the school administrators - and they are not the people who normally make the decision to buy.