



Renting Consumer Lists

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If you are considering using direct mail for the first time, you will need to understand the way that mailing lists can be bought and used. Through the extensive number of consumer mailing lists and databases available in the UK, it is possible to target individuals with a range of interests and lifestyles.

Using consumer mailing lists for the first time, you will need advice on how to select the correct prospects and also how to respect the individual's rights under the Data Protection Act 1998. Generally speaking there are two types of lists available, consumer lists, which target individuals at home, and business lists, which target other companies and their employees.

This guide focuses on renting consumer lists and is one of a series designed to help you get the best results from your direct mail campaign. It will also help to ensure that you understand your rights and obligations in dealing with list owners, managers and brokers. The Direct Marketing Association (DMA) produces listings of its members who provide particular products or services. Using DMA members offers the added protection of adherence to a strict Code of Practice and, in the case of lists, the List Warranty Register.

If your questions about renting consumer lists are not answered below please call the DMA Switchboard on 020 7291 3300 or email dma@dma.org.uk.

Q: What kind of lists can I rent/buy?

Consumer mailing lists can be developed by three basic methods: -

1. They may be compiled specifically as mailing lists for rental, often from publicly available information. This type of list would include details of voters on the Electoral Roll, which has to be made available by law. A number of companies offer geodemographic segmentation systems which can be used to target neighbourhood types using the Electoral Roll and aggregated Census data as a base. Other lists of private individuals may be researched by writing/telephoning individuals and asking them for their preferences/buying habits.

2. They may be generated in response to an advertising or direct marketing campaign. Response lists include buyers or enquirers about products from off-the-page advertisements or direct mail promotions, as well as competition entrants and visitors to specific cultural events or consumer exhibitions.

3. They may be results of questionnaires which are distributed to elicit lifestyle information in return for a chance to enter a prize draw. Lifestyle databases typically offer information about hobbies and interests as well as demographic information.

Q: Where do I get information about lists?

Information about mailing lists for rental is available from the list owners themselves, from list managers or from list brokers. A directory of DMA members who provide these services is available. In addition, there are a number of directories of lists, published as a general guide with descriptions of lists, costs, etc.

Q: What is the difference between a list owner, a list manager and a list broker?

List owners are the generators of mailing lists, either specifically for rental or as a by-product of their main business. Their aim will be to sell you their list if it fits the profile you are seeking.

List managers take on the job of selling mailing lists on behalf of a list owner. They are remunerated by the list owner on a commission basis according to the number of names they sell.

List brokers buy lists on behalf of clients much like other media buyers. They are a source of impartial advice on mailing lists as they receive similar commissions from all list owners. Most list brokers have a minimum number of names per order and generally deal in higher volume mailings.

Q: What form will the list information take?

Apart from the general information about the origin of the list, which may be in brochures or other advertising literature, you should ask to see a datacard on the lists you are considering renting.

Q: What will a datacard tell me?

The datacard is similar to an advertising rate card. It will probably contain the following information: -

- Source/profile of the list
- Number of names available overall
- Number of names available broken down by key selections
- Type of selections available
- Production formats
- Update method and frequency for the list
- Price per name or per thousand names
- Price per selection
- Minimum order quantity or price
- Delivery time
- Address formats / post-coding / Mailsort.

Q: How are lists priced?

Most lists are priced per thousand names. Small lists may have a one-off price for use of all the names. In addition to the base price, there will usually be further charges for each selection and for the output format you require. Delivery will also be charged extra.

Q: What am I allowed to do with the names?

Most lists are made available for one-time mailing use only. Additional uses, including telephone follow up, have to be agreed with the list owner. Some lists are made available for more than a one-time use and are sold outright or on licence. In all cases the list owner retains the copyright of the list and is the legal owner of the data.

Even if data is supplied in magnetic formats, you will require permission to load it onto your own database. All lists include seed names which are dummy records addressed to the list owner or his agent. Unauthorised usage of lists will, therefore, be detected by the list owner and may lead to legal action.

Q: Is there any guarantee of quality or response?

It is impossible to predict response rates accurately on any list as it is very much dependent on the offer, the creative treatment and the timing of the mailing. You will not receive guarantees of response from list suppliers although they will be able to tell you in broad terms if the list has worked for similar offers in the past. Some list owners offer guarantees of deliverability and quality of addressing.

DMA list companies should have a list warranty which states that the list is fairly obtained under the data protection regulations and makes clear the period of updating. The warranty is not a guarantee of response. To check that the list has a valid warranty you can contact the list company directly or the List Warranty Register on 020 7291 3341.

Q: How are lists updated?

Methods of updating vary from list to list. Some are refreshed constantly via telephone or postal contact with the individuals concerned. All lists will be cleaned of goneaways regularly. You should ask the list owner or his agent what the update method is and what the periods of update are.

Q: What happens if I get returns?

No list will be 100% accurate and some returns or goneaways should be expected. The DMA and BCASP codes require that all goneaways should be returned to list owners promptly for removal. List owners operate different schemes to incentivise the return of goneaways. Some offer a credit for returns over a certain percentage.

It is a requirement of the DMA code that owners should inform potential users if returns are likely to exceed 3% for a responder list or 6% for a compiled list.

Q: What about the Data Protection Act?

All list owners in the UK must register under the Act and collect data fairly. List warranties state the details of registration and attest that the individuals have been offered an opt-out or that the data has been fairly obtained from publicly available sources.

List users who hold computerised data on individuals, even those at a business address are also required to register under the Act. For further information on your obligations under the Data Protection Act please contact the Office of the Data Protection Registrar on 01625 545 745.

Q: Does the DMA have rules about renting lists?

The DMA Code of Practice contains rules which have to be adhered to by list suppliers, processors and users (Sections 4 and 5) who are members of the Association. You should be familiar with your responsibilities under the Code as well as those of owners, brokers and managers. Copies of the Code of Practice are available from the DMA (£10 including p&p).

Q: What format will the list come in?

The most common formats are self-adhesive labels, magnetic tape or diskette. You should ensure that the mailing house can deal with whichever format you order. Your list supplier will be able to advise you of the formats available.

Q: Can I mail anything I like to the list?

Before a list is released you will be required to submit a sample mailing piece to the list owner for approval. You may only mail the approved piece to the list unless otherwise agreed with the owner. You will need to ensure that the mailing conforms to the British Code of Advertising and Sales Promotion (BCASP) and is legal.

Q: How long will delivery take and can I see the list before it is mailed?

Some lists can be supplied very quickly, even overnight, but most will take around 5-7 working days from the point where the order is approved by the list owner. Most list owners will only allow lists to be delivered to a recognised DMA / QMP mailing house which will do the mailing on your behalf. If you are buying a list for extended use these conditions will not apply.

Q: Whom do the responses belong to?

When you receive responses to your mailing you can record the details in your own files and may re-use the names for further campaigns without restriction. Non-responders remain the property of the list owner and may only be re-used with permission.

Q: What if someone objects to being mailed?

Under data protection law all list owners are required to suppress the names of individuals who object to being mailed. You should ensure that you pass the name of any individuals who object to being mailed back to the list owners for future suppression (for consumer lists only).

If the individual objects to all mailings, they should be put in touch with the Mailing Preference Service, Freepost 22, London W1E 7EZ. All consumer lists are cleaned against the Mailing Preference Service suppression list on a quarterly basis.

Q: How do I order lists?

You should discuss your direct mail requirements with your list suppliers and be prepared to take advice about how to make selections from the list to reach your target audience.

A count will then be run for you so that exact numbers of individuals to your specification can be supplied. Once you have agreed to the count, the list supplier will produce the data to the desired format. Prepayment may be required.