

COMMENT

Some thoughts on getting out the vote!

Okay, admittedly there's a bit of creative licence here... but in common with other no-brainers like the introduction of video technology in football, and putting The Beatles on iTunes, firstly we need to drag the voting system screaming and kicking out of the Dark Ages [albeit they probably didn't have universal suffrage back in those days].

Nothing would impact upon electoral 'turnout' more than the couch-potato-like ability to vote via a mobile or internet device. You just wonder what the politicians are afraid of.

Somebody mentioned security – "anyone could pick up your phone in a pub and vote with it" – but have you ever voted in person? Security? All you need to know are a few names and addresses (public information, the Electoral Roll) and Bob's your uncle – get on your bike early doors and vote to your heart's content, as often as you like! Vote on behalf of your Uncle Bob if he can't be bothered.

Obviously, such 'personation' is illegal, and we're not suggesting it – just

highlighting the issue. Anyway, there'd be a PIN code allocated to every mobile and corresponding name on the register, so digital voting would be as secure as your bank account (gulp).

Then, to the Scottish Nationalist Party. All that really matters in Scotland is whether people vote Labour or not. Like the Scottish Premier League in footie, up here politics is a two-horse race. That makes it Big Gord v Wee Eck (Gordon Brown against Alex Salmond). Eck, by the way, is the familiar Scots term of endearment for anyone going by the epithet of Alec or Alex, hence Birmingham City boss Alex McLeish is widely referred to as 'Big Eck'.

We think we have a strategy for the SNP – and the key is charisma.

Mr Salmond has cleverly manoeuvred himself into the live TV debating arena, and let's face it, we all know who's going to come up smelling of roses (or should that be thistles?) once the insults start flying.

And, when the subtitles roll at the end of the show, inviting enthralled 'electors' to



make their choice as to who has the Eck's Factor, the result will be an SNP landslide, a veritable avalanche of texts. (Plus, with a conveniently branded symbol like the Saltire, there's a helpful subliminal clue for those who didn't really pay attention to the nuances of the debate.)

Job done.

By Alex Walsh, Associate Director, Membership Services, Direct Marketing Association

COMMENT

The medium is indeed the message

'Junk mail', one of the tabloids' favourite bogeymen, is regularly hauled out for a ritual flogging, to the apparent delight of a baying public.

Do consumers really hate unaddressed and direct mail as much as the red-top hysteria suggests?

Well, the £16 billion pounds of sales



they generate every year seems to indicate that someone's responding to it. But more interesting is how tabloid coverage of the issue demonstrates the widening gulf between consumers' perception and the reality of the environmental impact of mail.

The claim that all direct and unaddressed mail is environmentally unfriendly is now untenable. Recent published studies highlight the fact that the volume of direct and unaddressed mail being recycled is at record levels.

According to a joint report published by the Direct Marketing Association (DMA) and Royal Mail, 76.5% of all direct and unaddressed mail is now being recycled. This far exceeds the target set by Defra for the industry of 70% by 2013.

Since 2003, increased targeting and industry initiatives, growing household recycling levels and increased subscription to the Mailing Preference Service (MPS) have resulted in a reduction of 348,600 tonnes of direct marketing material going to landfill.

But if we are to continue to improve, promotional marketers have a significant role to play in ensuring that the printed materials they use are fully recyclable. Following PAS 2020, the first environmental standard to be produced

for the marketing industry, is one simple way to achieve this.

Reducing our environmental impact is about more than meeting government recycling targets, however. It's also integral to influencing consumer perception of brands' environmental credentials, as recent research has demonstrated.

According to the findings of the inaugural Sustainability Tracking Study, jointly published by the DMA, ONEPOST and fast.MAP, one-third of consumers polled said that the presence of a recycle logo alone on an item of direct mail would lead them to perceive a company as environmentally friendly.

On the other hand, half of all consumers said polythene wrapping gives them a negative perception of a company's environmental credentials, while 30% said the same about incorrectly addressed mail.

To ensure that we can win the confidence of consumers, business and government, we must, as an industry, face up to our environmental responsibilities and ensure that the printed materials we produce are fully recyclable and come from sustainable sources.

In this respect, the medium is the message.