

Evaluating and Assessing Your DRTV Fulfillment and Customer Care Options

By Steven J. Edelstein

Choosing the “right” DRTV Fulfillment and Customer Care partner can be an exhausting experience, exercise and process. There are many issues to be resolved and the livelihood of any business is affected by the reciprocal nature of the relationship, the flexibility of the systems, and most important...the communication between company and customer. Expectations need to be defined, roles need to be established, and proactive attention needs to be resident at all times.

In order to maximize the effectiveness of any Marketer-Fulfillment/Customer Care partnership, there are “action” items you should be aware of, therefore providing the architecture and stability of a long term profitable relationship.

START WITH A DETAILED PLAN

A thorough, detailed, and comprehensive Request for Proposal (RFP) is a key element in starting any business relationship. RFP's must detail every aspect of the project that is known to the client company at the time of submission. This includes detailed descriptions of services to be performed, turn around times, ship methods, volumes, FAQ's and scripted responses in the customer care center, back-up requirements for invoicing, Client Care Management expectations returns and disposition policies, and all other information that is critical to the project that will allow the partner to provide a fair and equitable Fee Structure. The biggest mistake many companies make is to spend too little time developing an RFP and not taking into consideration the needs of the marketer's Direct Response business. By not being aware of all marketer goals, nuances, and service levels, the partner may have to re-visit the proposed plan, re-issue an amended fee structure and impede the progress of the program.

Communication of expectations is vital!

PLAN TO VISIT YOUR PARTNER

It is important that the marketer visit the partner's facility – or facilities – prior to commencing any partnership. It is necessary to meet with key management executives to get a clear understanding of their knowledge of all processes, as well as system capabilities. Talk with the production and warehouse supervisors, see how they react to questions, get a feel for the corporate culture - their ability to make critical decisions that may affect outgoing shipments - and review all quality control procedures. *Make sure your operations team is empowered to make adjustments immediately if they find quality issues.*

INTUITIVE CLIENT AND CUSTOMER CARE

When establishing an effective partnership, look for one that has an intuitive client care environment. This will decrease the need for vigorous management oversight and increase account management empowerment. The Client Care team should be friendly, open minded, knowledgeable about their operation, and communicate effectively. Proactive Client Care Managers take an ownership role of the marketer's business within their own company. The culture at the partner company should be one in which the Client Care Manager is seen as an extension of the marketer. This builds a trusting relationship and strengthens the bonds between the two companies. Although conference calls and video conferencing are convenient methods for meeting and discussing issues, there is no substitute for regular “face to face” meetings to strengthen the relationship between the two companies.

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DEFINE ALL EXPECTATIONS, POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

By communicating expectations regarding all processes and procedures, the partnership will flourish based on guidelines, benchmarks, and overall structure. Whether it be the task of receiving inventory or administrating customer returns, a thorough Policy and Procedure plan should be outlined and implemented to insure that both marketer and partner knows what is expected, and how to effectively communicate with the customer. These processes and procedure are imperative in communicating with the customer and building satisfaction and retention. In all business cycles, a clear and concise “plan” will not only facilitate day-to-day operations, but provide logistics relief during peak seasonal “sales”

It is clear that the relationship between Marketer and Fulfillment/Customer Care partner is crucial to the long term success of any business. By establishing a realistic logistics plan, reviewing the partner’s corporate culture and infrastructure, empowering Client Care, and implementing policies and procedures to aid in all work flow – the longevity and financial success of the marketer/fulfillment-customer care partnership is certain.

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About The Logical Step

The Logical Step provides comprehensive Direct Response, Marketing and sales support services, as a “best of breed” third-party partner. As a service-oriented business, our approach is simple...meet all goals, provide a flexible business model, and consistently review process, people and technology to insure maximum results.

The Logical Step has developed a market presence, with the intent of growing The Logical Step to be a leader in the Direct Response and Direct to Customer industries. Our investment in technology, our constant desire to improve the skills and enthusiasm of our associates, and our attention to detail in all facets of a client program allow The Logical Step to address the many complex needs of today’s and tomorrow’s marketplace. Our goal is to provide seamless, integrated marketing management and logistical support for all our clients. In short, we simply care.