

DM NEWS

The News Leader in Direct, Database and Internet Marketing

Confessions of an ERA Conference Newbie

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MIAMI BEACH—It has been an interesting introduction (at times rather thrilling—more on that later) to the direct response industry for this new writer for DM News. Fresh off the plane from New York, DM News founder Adrian Courtenay whizzed me into the exhibition hall at the Electronic Retailing Association's Mid-Winter Conference & Trade Expo for my baptism by fire.

First up was Jeffrey O'Connor, vice president of sales and media at [Livemercial Direct](#). I was impressed by the company's virtual call center technology, introduced four years ago and now producing average revenue per sale greater than that from a traditional infomercial with teleservices response. Livemercial has the ability to send a complete infomercial in an e-mail, and the technology allows consumers to purchase securely and directly from within the e-mail (i.e. without having to click to a link on an external Web site).

As a consumer who makes a lot of Internet purchases (heaven forbid I should actually have to TALK to someone), I was both fascinated and disturbed to hear about Datamercial's "As We Speak" program, launched at the convention. "As We Speak" allows telemarketers virtually instant information on the caller, based on past purchases, Census information and the location of the purchaser's home. Telemarketing scripts can be adjusted instantly based on this data to increase the call's upsell potential.

Calling itself the "Consumer Intelligence Company," Datamercial has a database of 275 million names, offering customers 40-50 characteristics on most names within a mere three seconds. I'm dying to know what they have on me. Perhaps Ari Ginsberg and George Collins will let me in on my innermost consumer secrets sometime.

Kevin Gaffney, vice president of sales and marketing at [CoreDirect](#), demonstrated his company's direct response analysis software, offering media buyers a way to analyze the cost per response of each spot to help get the most bang out of their spending bucks. Mapping software traces the geographic location of calls nationwide so buyers can target their local spends. Eighty-two percent of CoreDirect's customers now come from Fortune 1000 companies.

I also met with Kenneth Osborn, CEO of Westport, CT-based [Webside Direct](#). Osborn, who came to the industry via Wall Street, is incredibly enthusiastic about his company's prospects because they've figured out a way to keep the customer in the shopping cart area the whole time. Companies like Amazon have found that 20 percent of customers drop out when they have to click to put a product in the cart, and another 20 percent or so when they have to go from shopping cart to check out. By keeping the customer in shopping cart mode at all times, while

offering them upsell opportunities, Webside Direct has been able to match or exceed call center returns.

By this point my brain was spinning with new information and I was ready for a nice relaxing dinner in South Beach accompanied by some liquid refreshment. Adrian and Robert DiGioia, DM News' promotions and creative services director, strolled along Lincoln Avenue to Pacific Time, a wonderful seafood restaurant with a Pan-Asian influence. I was enjoying my sushi grade tuna and a nice glass of crisp Sancerre when the "entertainment" began:

An extremely inebriated woman dressed in a form-fitting dress and shoes with heels higher than my height-challenged self, teetered out of the restaurant followed by her equally drunk and somewhat obstreperous boyfriend. We watched in morbid fascination as he pawed her and thought things might be turning X-rated, despite the public setting, when she turned to toss her cookies in the flowerbed.

We were too far away to hear what they were saying to each other, but it was like watching a "Punch and Judy" show—clearly words were being exchanged. Judy proceeded to slap Punch across the face, twice, at which point Punch lived up to his name and hauled off on her, knocking her flat on her back into the flowerbed.

Being of a chivalrous nature, Adrian instructed the waiter to call 911 and went to stand near the couple in case Punch decided to deal any more blows to Judy. Fortunately for Punch (and Adrian, because Robert and I were worrying whether Punch was packing more than a punch) kept his blows to those of the verbal variety.

Just as he was trying to haul Judy away on his bicycle built for one (a process complicated by the fact that neither of them were too steady on their feet, let alone a bicycle) Miami's Finest arrived. Punch was taken away in handcuffs, and Judy tottered off to who knows where.

We're just happy that Adrian survived to tell the tale.

—*Posted by Sarah Littman*

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