

DRIVING  
**Success** THROUGH  
**Effective**  
MARKETING LISTS

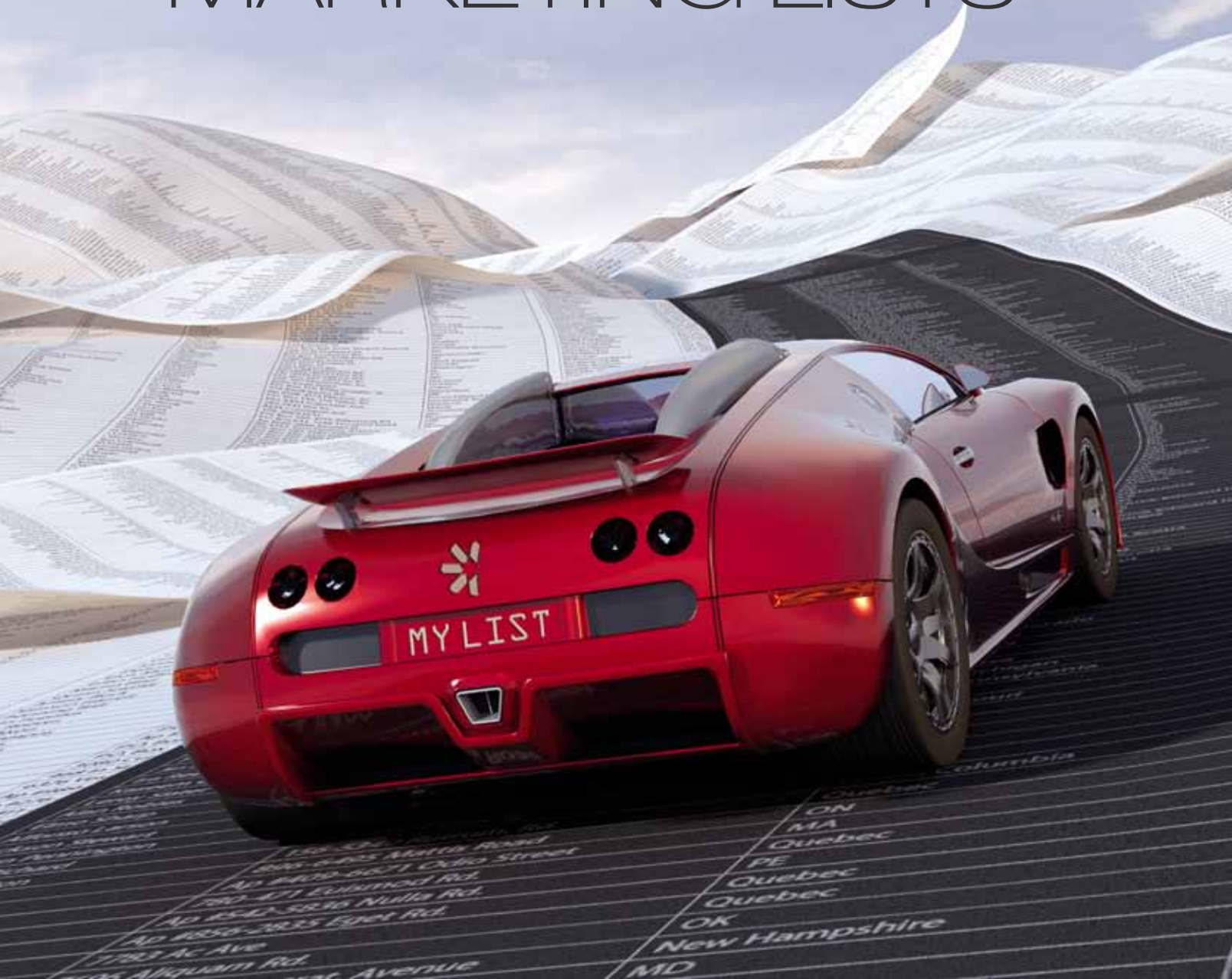




Illustration by John Holland for The Partner Channel

## Jennifer Culbertson

**A**s marketers, we spend a lot of time and money developing and executing lead generation programs to help drive new leads into the sales process. One key component of the success of our efforts is making sure that we are reaching and targeting the right audience through our marketing lists and databases.

Sounds like a no-brainer, right? But as many of you know, building and maintaining marketing lists can sometimes be a difficult and time-consuming task. According to direct marketing statistics, the marketing list contributes approximately 50 percent to the success of a marketing campaign. Yet many times, we tend to focus our efforts on other components of a campaign such as the creative and overall look and feel of the marketing piece. Although these elements are important, they are not really going to matter if your marketing piece and message aren't reaching the right audience.

Building and maintaining marketing lists is a continuous process; when done correctly, you'll have more success in your marketing efforts, and you'll have maximized your time and investments.

### Types of Lists

When building your database, there are really two different types of lists that you should consider including: in-house lists and external lists. In-house lists are going to be your best and most qualified lists. They typically include contacts that you've collected over time such as customers, Partners, vendors, individuals who responded to call-to-action campaigns or have opted-in to receive information from you, and other contacts you know through professional organizations and so on. Even though these types of lists will contain more qualified contacts, they tend to be smaller and slower to build than an external list.

External lists include contacts that you have either purchased or rented from a third-party resource such as D&B, Jigsaw®, or even a list broker. These types of lists can be obtained rather quickly and can be a great way to expand or augment your in-house database. However, acquiring an external list can be a costly and stressful process since there are many vendors to choose from, and you may not necessarily know what you're going to get for your investment.

Whether you're looking to build your internal list or augment your existing database, let's take a deeper dive into how you can be successful with both.

### Building In-House Lists

In-house lists have consistently outperformed outside or third-party lists for a simple reason. Customers and prospects on your in-house list will typically already have an affinity with your company, brand, products, and services. An in-house list contains contacts that want to hear from you, which will improve your chances for better deliverability and response rates, especially with e-mail. You'll also get fewer complaints from a spamming perspective as the contacts have hopefully opted-in to receive your information.

You can build your in-house list over time using a variety of ways:

- » Web registration or subscription forms – On the top 10 most viewed pages of your website, provide an online subscription form to a free, periodic online newsletter or other informational tips and tricks.
- » Lead generation campaigns – Take advantage of existing marketing campaigns and drive traffic to your site to capture lead information such as direct mail, e-mail, telemarketing, pay-per-click advertising, and so on to build your list.
- » Social media sites such as LinkedIn, Twitter, and Facebook – Using social media sites

to help drive traffic directly to your sign-up pages is a great way to build in-house lists. You can easily add a link to your newsletter subscription page in your LinkedIn profile as well as use Twitter to “tweet” special offers in exchange for sign-up information.

- » Events and tradeshows – Offer a giveaway in exchange for a prospect’s contact information at an event. For on-site events, include a sign-up sheet or business card drop where people can register.
- » Blogging – If you have a company blog and/or are active in blogging on other sites, be sure to include links to your sign-up forms within your posts. One great way to do this is to include it in your bio or signature at the end of a blog post.
- » E-mail signature – Think about how many e-mails go out of your company on a given day as your employees exchange communication with potential prospects and customers. Wouldn’t it be great to capture those audiences? One way to do this is to create a tagline with a link promoting your e-mail newsletter in every employees’ e-mail signature.

Building an in-house list is certainly a time-consuming task. However, the value gained in terms of decreasing list costs, higher response rates, and increased customer retention makes building an in-house list a worthwhile investment.

### Acquiring Outside Lists

In addition to building in-house lists, you may find yourself with a need to acquire an outside list to augment what you already have in your database. Outside lists can be a great way to expand your existing database quickly, but you should be cautious as you go through this process. Most B2B marketers obtain outside lists primarily from three types of sources, each of which are compiled in a different fashion:

- » **List Compilers** – These lists include contacts compiled from large databases populated with information collected from various sources including directories, contacts from trade shows, public records, social sites, credit reports, and more. Some of the more recognized providers include Jigsaw, InfoUSA, D&B, and NetProspex.
- » **Brokered Lists** – These lists are

compiled and provided from other third parties. A list broker acts as a “go-between”, matching list owners to those who wish to buy or rent lists and then receiving a commission from the list owners. There are numerous list brokers in the market including MeritDirect, IDG List Services, Marketry, and B2B Data Group.

- » **Association and Business Organization Lists** – Many professional/industry associations and business organizations such as a Chamber of Commerce sell and/or rent their membership lists. These can be an excellent source for targeted lists within a specific geography or demographic. With so many vendors and options available, it is important to ask the right questions when you are making a decision about an outside list. Here are some questions to ask:
  - » **What makes your data unique?** You want to be sure that the data it is not compiled from sources you have already purchased from recently.
  - » **How often do you refresh your data?** It is key to know how often the vendor removes names from their database and what steps they take to prevent “dead” names from being added back to the system. Good companies will regularly run campaigns to contacts in their database to both verify and validate business contacts as well as give these contacts the opportunity to opt-out.
  - » **How is your data priced and is there a minimum purchase?** Many times list vendors will require you to purchase a minimum number of contacts.
  - » **How do you handle inaccurate data?** You should expect that you will get some inaccurate data no matter what, especially in a down economy. But you should ask what their “return policy” is and if they offer credit or replacement for wrong data.
  - » **Do you subscribe to the United States Postal Service National Change of Address (“NCOA”) database?** This database tracks the whereabouts of the more than four million businesses that relocate every year. If you are looking to run a direct mail campaign, you’ll want to make sure that your list is NCOA-validated to help reduce the volume of returned mail.
  - » **Do you own the data or is this a list**

**rental?** Make sure to clarify if the list is for purchase or is a rental.

- » **Can you send e-mail to the contacts you purchase? Are they “opt-in”?** If you are buying a list from a vendor and they claim that the entire list is “opt-in” be very careful, and keep in mind that they have not “opted-in” to receiving e-mails from you.

### List Maintenance

Just as important as building your database is maintaining your lists. Think of this as the “care and feeding” of your database. Nothing is worse than fueling lead generation programs with incorrect data that results in decreased campaign responses and wasted time and money. According to MarketingSherpa, contact data degrades 2.1 percent per month. Over a year’s time, you can expect that 25 to 30 percent of your data will be outdated and inaccurate.

To keep your lists up-to-date, regularly identify contact information that needs to be removed such as e-mails that bounce and/or contacts that unsubscribe. You can easily check for inactivity of contacts on your lists, and if contacts have not opened or responded to your communication in the past six months, you’ll want to try to engage them one last time before removing or deactivating them from your database. You can send them an e-mail with a “can’t refuse” offer or a “best of” with a link to some of your top content. If they don’t respond, then send them a final communication letting them know you’ll be removing them from your list unless they respond back to you.

The foundation of any successful marketing campaign is a quality list. Remember, Rome was not built in a day, and to build something great, it takes time! Whether you harness the power of your website, social networking, lead generation activities, or third-party resources, building and maintaining lists properly can have great rewards. 🌟

*Jennifer Culbertson is owner of Looking Glass Marketing and specializes in working with Microsoft VARs and ISVs to build and execute marketing strategies that drive results. With her 18 years of marketing experience within the channel, coupled with her understanding of Microsoft Partner needs, she can help take your marketing to the next level. For more information, contact Jennifer at [Jennifer@lookingglassmarketing.com](mailto:Jennifer@lookingglassmarketing.com) or call 614-453-5927.*