# Make it personal

## Target your customers where it counts with variable data printing

**INTERVIEWED BY JAYNE GEST**

**LAUREN HANNA**
Production print manager
Blue Technologies

(216) 271-4800, ext. 2252
lhanna@btohio.com

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Marketing and advertisements are all around us — in our mailboxes, our email accounts, on billboards, city buses, the radio, our TVs and more. So, it's important to differentiate your organization amongst the noise and create one-on-one conversations. Personalized marketing can impact your revenue, brand loyalty, and customer acquisition and retention.

Production Print Manager Lauren Hanna of Blue Technologies experienced firsthand the effectiveness of customized marketing in her own life.

"I bought my car five years ago, and I paid it off in March. In January, I received a postcard in the mail from my dealership. It was a photo of me from the day I bought my car, thanking me for doing business with them and letting me know I could go to them for my future needs," Hanna says.

This kind of marketing is done through variable data printing, which allows you to target your customer or end users in a custom way.

*Smart Business* spoke with Hanna about variable data printing and the software solutions that can help you reach your customers on a personal level.

**How does variable data printing work?**
Customers today expect you to acknowledge their interests and preferences. So, rather than send out a brochure or postcard to all of your prospects, variable data printing allows you to make conditional changes for targeted marketing.

This customization helps you gain a higher response rate, and the ability to change variables lets you reach a specific target in a custom way. You might target vertical markets, so you can advertise your business differently when talking to those in the construction industry versus those in IT. Or, you can add individual names and titles, place specific graphics that are customized to certain market segments or make statements that are tailored to each customer.

Some organizations find it beneficial to keep variable data printing in-house, so they control their branding and can print on-demand. However, it's inefficient and time consuming to edit the collateral for each target. You don't want to avoid customized content simply because of a lack of time.

**What software can automate this kind of customization?**
A variable data printing solution can tailor your marketing collateral without the burden of manual entry. It starts with a database of consumer data and content, which is then used to dictate the output of individualized newsletters, coupons, nametags, etc. You can set requirements within the software for direct mailings, or even cross-media marketing that might also involve an email follow-up, QR codes or personalized URLs that give that customer a targeted landing page, and a text messaging campaign.

These solutions have the ability to go across multiple platforms and reach your customers at a variety of touchpoints to create stronger connections. Whether you're printing 10 items or 10,000, you can make each piece different with variable data.

**What are some practical considerations for setting up these solutions?**
While some people are intimidated and nervous about using databases, it's a lot easier than you'd first think. There are resources for training and the programs are user friendly. The infrastructure often relates to programs you already know like Microsoft Excel, Microsoft Word or Adobe InDesign.

Organizations can be as creative as they'd like. But if you're overwhelmed by the different options, you can start simple with something like a direct mailing piece.

It's also a good idea to sit down with a specialist. You'll want to start with your goals. Is it retention, re-activation or lead generation? Then, how have you conducted marketing programs in the past? How do your customers prefer to be contacted? What kind of customer data do you have available, and are there existing databases that you can purchase to supplement this? Together, you can create a game plan that's manageable and slowly ramps up to more specific targeted marketing campaigns. ●