

PURLs: Not Just a Fashion Accessory

You may be too young to remember a time when people posted “No Solicitors Allowed” signs on their front doors. If so, try to remember the last time you answered a phone call marked “private” or “unknown.” And how often do you click on an e-mail from an unknown sender? Door-to-door salespeople, telemarketers, and spammers have largely gone to the wayside due to the National Do Not Call Registry and today’s more sophisticated spam filters—not to mention today’s more sophisticated customers. The reason is simple: people do not welcome unsolicited sales pitches.

Enter personalized marketing solutions. The larger companies in certain industries such as credit, automobile, and banking have been doing it for years; think of all those credit cards you’ve received in the mail with your name already on them. By marketing directly to prospects with personalized information such as identity or job title, these companies have been able to more than double their response rates. But small- and medium-sized companies do not always have the budgets to deploy these types of campaigns. To help bridge this gap, Web-based marketing tools called PURLs, or personalized URLs, are now available. With this innovative solution, small- and medium-sized companies can now deploy promotions and campaigns and enjoy the same results as their larger counterparts.

This white paper will examine what a PURL is, how it can be applied, and the results that PURLs can produce for B2B marketers and businesses of all sizes.

What is a PURL?

Stated simply, a PURL is a personalized URL. A PURL is a URL created with customer data, such as identity. For example, a PURL could be www.nameofcompany.customername.com or contain other personalized information based on the name of the promotion or the target’s identity, demographics, and other profile details derived from the customer profile. When a recipient accesses their own PURL, they will be taken directly to a Web page that describes a specific offer or promotion in greater detail. In many cases, this Web page will prompt the user for more information or take the recipient to an online ordering page. Subsequent communications with the user can be personalized based on this information supplied by the customer.

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PURL technology is one of the latest tools in Web-based marketing. PURLs are often used in conjunction with direct mail to boost response rates and provide better reporting methods. More and more companies are shifting from a traditional marketing mix of radio, television, and print as marketing budgets dwindle and companies are being asked (or forced, as is the case in the current economic environment) to do more with less. Also, traditional marketing campaigns such as direct mail are difficult to track. Companies may see a rise in business after a direct mail campaign but are not able to track specific segments or channels to better direct their efforts and improve conversions.

With PURL technology, companies can track a customer's activity in real time. This information can be used to tailor future communications with the customer to ensure a more personalized and relevant experience, thereby generating more qualified leads and increasing sales. And because marketers know instantly when a prospect enters a PURL, marketers can collect qualified leads and craft subsequent, one-on-one communications with this prospect in real time with relevant data. Additional content on each PURL such as age, income, geographic location, survey results, or answers to targeted questions is driven by the customer.

Every link that a customer clicks on provides more information to the marketer; it enhances the database profile on the customer being marketed to. But marketers should be aware of asking for too much, too soon. Research shows a dramatic increase in Web form abandonment rates between forms that have six questions and those that have seven.¹ The more steps required to make a sale, the lower the results. PURLs help decrease the amount of steps that lead to sales, resulting in better ROI.

Companies of all sizes and industries are turning to Web-based marketing solutions such as email and PURLs to increase their ROI. These solutions can be deployed without IT involvement, saving tremendous costs in time and money. With the PURL solution offered by OnDialog, companies can quickly and easily create marketing communications published in PDF or HTML format that is prepopulated with user information. It is imperative to communicate with your customers via multiple channels. A PURL delivers timely, relevant, one-one-communication that connects on a personal level and supplies data-driven content to prospects.

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PURLs Can Be a Marketer's Best Friend

Traditional marketing approaches represent higher costs and less effective results. To combat this, companies are turning to integrated marketing solutions that include Web-based tools such as PURLs to take their companies to the next level. PURLs are primarily used to promote products, increase sales, work in tandem with direct mail, create a “call to action,” and provide a strong online response channel.

It's a well-known fact that approximately 43% of customers prefer to respond to a direct mail piece online.ⁱⁱ But one of the biggest mistakes a company can make is sending this prospect to a home page. By using PURLs, marketers can create an instant connection that begins with a personalized URL and continues with prepopulated forms that contain data supplied by the user.

PURLs present a powerful way to cut costs and drastically improve response rates and conversions. But what kind of results can companies expect from this Web-based solution? Centex Homes, a Dallas-based home building company, is a prime example of a company who uses PURLs to its advantage. Centex is one of the leading companies in its sector and has grown consistently since it was founded in 1950. But recently the company decided that enormous budget cuts were in order. To be specific, Centex's marketing executives needed to trim their overall ad budget by nearly 70%.

Centex was marketing to 11 different segments. Not knowing exactly how each segment was responding to their various marketing efforts left the company in the dark. After seeing the industry shift to Web-based solutions, Centex decided to integrate email marketing, landing pages, and PURL technology into its marketing mix. After deploying a PURL online campaign, Centex saw its response rates jump 3 to 5 times higher. They were also able to trim their annual ad budget from \$7 million to \$2 million—realizing their goal of a 70% budget cut. Before implementing PURL-based campaigns, Centex was unable to directly track responses or provide timely information to its sales force. Armed with powerful new Web-based solutions, Centex not only has improved its ability to instantly track online responses but is now able to capture relevant information about recipients, which leads to more qualified leads and sales.

The Results and Benefits of PURLs

By now we can start to see the tremendous benefits of using PURL technology in an integrated marketing campaign. For example, PURLs allow companies to deliver relevant content to customers, which in turn increases customer interaction. Customers today demand personalized

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information; their online experience with you needs to be personal. PURLs also help to generate qualified leads, which leads to increased conversions (by up to 40%) and increased customer loyalty. It pays to build relationships with and market to your most profitable clients. Taking Unisys as a prime example, their top 50 clients generate 80% of the company's revenue.ⁱⁱⁱ One of the benefits of a PURL built with OnDialog is that its forms are prepopulated with user's data. This extends personalization beyond the URL and onto the Web page.

PURL technology also supports testing of multiple pages and contains advanced email integration and campaign reporting. OnDialog's PURL solution, for example, provides useful reporting tools that enable companies to track and measure marketing efforts quickly and easily. This provides the instant and actionable Web analytics that executives are clamoring for today.

Conclusion

Increased brand awareness. Increased lead retrieval. Increased response rates—three to five times higher, in some cases. These are just some of the benefits that PURL technology can provide to companies of all sizes. Above all, PURLs improve response rates, conversions, and cost savings—all without the need for expensive Web programmers or IT support.

When marketers can capture relevant customer data, it enables them to understand their customers better. PURLs allow customers to communicate with your company on their terms. By adding PURL technology to your marketing mix, your company will trim marketing costs, increase ROI, and be able to have a continuous dialogue with a loyal customer base.

About OnDialog

OnDialog provides marketers with the most effective solutions anywhere to design, develop, and deploy PURLs, landing pages, and microsites—without IT support. For more information about OnDialog's automated marketing tools, please visit our Web site at www.ondialog.com or call (703) 453-9120.

Resources

ⁱ“Improve Lead Capture, Conversion: Replacing Landing Pages with Personalized Microsites” by Sundeep Parsa. Retrieved from <http://www.marketingprofs.com/8/improve-lead-capture-conversion-turn-landing-page-into-microsite-parsa.asp?sp=1> on October 28, 2008.

ⁱⁱDirect Marketing Association.

ⁱⁱⁱAccording to Ellyn Rafferty, the VP and general manager-worldwide marketing. Retrieved from <http://directmailadvertising.blogspot.com/search/label/PURLs> on 10/28/08.