



## **B2B DATA DECAY - THE IMPACT UPON TRADE SHOW REGISTRATION LISTS**

**By  
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### **WE REGISTER PEOPLE NOT COMPANIES**

The very term business-to-business (B2B) implies that companies buy from other companies. Well, not exactly. What actually occurs is that people make purchasing decisions to buy from people and companies who are selling the product/service they are seeking. In other words, **companies don't buy anything – people do**, and they generally buy from people and companies based on some level of need, engagement and relationship.

For trade show organizers this is also true since attendees are people making a decision to attend a show based on either or both their personal and business need(s). **Exhibitors want to engage these individuals to generate leads, deepen customer relationship and develop brand awareness within the target market.** Therefore, the ability to attract the right individuals to trade shows is job #1 for organizers to satisfy their exhibitors. It's also well recognized that those individuals who are repeat attendees are most likely key buyers or influencers, and are the ones exhibitors want to see the most. Organizers recognize this fact and market diligently to past show registration lists.

This is where the problem begins, as few organizers realize just **how fast the lists of prior attendees changes from year to year or in other words – decays.** When we say “decays” we mean, something has changed in the individual's job description, company and/or contact information.

### **CONTACT LEVEL DATA DECAYS AT A 70.8% RATE IN 12-MONTHS!**

Research from the B2BMarketing.com (formerly The Sales & Marketing Institute) documented that the accuracy of contact information decays at a 70.8% rate in 12-months. This study assessed the data on 1,200 individual's business cards and produced these findings. Any change in the business card in 12-month period represented an incident of “data decay”.

Here's the breakdown and the reasons why:

- **3.8%** changed name (women changing their name upon marriage or divorce)
- **65.8%** title and/or job change (same title with a different assignment or new company, title and job)
- **34.2%** company name change (most changed jobs and thus companies but company name change is also due to rebranding and mergers)
- **41.9%** address change (job change or company move)
- **42.9%** phone number change (both cell or main number)
- **37.3%** email address change (primarily job change)
- The fax number was not included, as this is seldom used anymore.



Upon further analysis the study documented some additional data decay results in 12-months.

- **29.6%** of individuals changed companies (new job)
- **4.6%** of the companies changed their name (merger and rebranding)
- **12.3%** of companies moved locations
- **41.2%** of the individuals did not change companies, but something else changed within the company such as title (they got promoted), company name or address.

The study also included one international data point, as in **London** out of approximately 100 seminar attendees when asked how many had a change in their business card in 12-months, it was exactly 70% - the same as in the US. On the other hand, in a seminar in **Shanghai** with only about 50 people in the group the change rate was only 45%.

Several years ago, the Computer Intelligence Division of Harte-Hanks (now Aberdeen) reported a change rate of just over 60% in the technology market. **No matter what the actual percentage – 60% or 70% – it's high!**

### **THE IMPACT ON TRADE SHOW ORGANIZERS**

Clearly there is an impact on trade show organizers as prior registration lists, trade or partner lists or/and other lists from a variety of sources all contain a degree of data decay. The most important lists are the prior year registration lists, as they are by far the best lists to drive future registration and seminar attendance. **While no definitive study of the data decay in trade show registrations lists has been done, it's obvious that they become less accurate over time.**

As any B2B list becomes less accurate, response rates logically decline as well. In fact, some lists are so inaccurate that a 3% response rate might be 6% if the list is only 50% accurate and/or deliverable – a frequent occurrence in B2B.

### **The three issues for organizers are:**

- The recognition that registration lists have most likely decayed more than realized.
- Initiation of a data hygiene processes to keep prior year registration lists as accurate as possible.
- Ask trade partners and other list suppliers what their data accuracy is and if the answer is a bit dodgy – test a representative sample. Trade lists are not really free with printing, postage, and mail house costs.

### **5 TIME TESTED DATA HYGIENE APPROACHES.**



Here are 5 well accepted data hygiene approaches for organizers to consider:

1. **Don't wait** to update the registration list as data hygiene should be an ongoing process. But if it is postponed until attendee marketing for the next show is in the near future the hygiene process should be initiated several months prior to that date, as it will take more time to complete than anticipated.
2. For mailing lists, **CASS certify the list to insure that postal standards are met** before updating, as the mailing address is the primary field used for matching and updating. This is called CASS certification (Coding Accuracy Support System). As registration lists are, at times, self-inputted by attendees data input errors can also be high. Here are the most common self-input errors or inaccuracies starting with the most frequent ones first:
  - Different address/same company – company vs. home address
  - Characters inverted during data entry – all fields
  - Company spellings vs. divisions vs. abbreviations – e.g. IBM
  - No company name, but address is a company location
  - Incorrect or incomplete zip code (9-digit zip is often not known by individuals)
3. **CASS certification is followed by NCOA** (National Change of Address) to pick up any company moves. Yes, a forwarding procedure is in place at the US Postal Service, but not only is there a chance of an expired address change (NCOA lasts 48 months, the USPS adds new updates every month), it also takes time to forward the mailing to the new location, and delivery speed might be important as the date of the trade show approaches.
4. The next issue is **to insure the email addresses are updated**, as much of an organizer's marketing effort today is email. In addition, to the logical data input errors some individuals do not list their company email for a variety of reasons. Here are several tips to update and/or obtain the right email addresses:
  - The most logical first step is to "ping" the email address to see if it is still deliverable. Hard bounces are either a result of an individual no longer being with the company or an incorrect input. While this "pinging" catches most changes, not always does a lack of a hard bounce indicate the individual is still with the company, as not all companies clean their internal email file frequently and emails therefore will not show a hard bounce.

Recently I sent emails to two individuals at the same organizer from the Gold 100 list, and one bounced and the other did not. Upon phone verification it was discovered that both had left the company more than 6 months ago. Go figure!

- To verify or add email addresses to contact records there are a number of data services that might help.



- First there are the traditional data compilers such as D&B, InfoGroup and multi-data compilers like Virtual DBS who will match files based on company demographic data and update contact level data. The problem is that many of these firms have the same data decay problems.
- Second are the firms who specialize in updating and verifying email addresses such as Outward Media ([www.outwardmedia.com](http://www.outwardmedia.com)). These firms have developed custom verification methods that go beyond pinging.
- Third are the web crawler firms such as ZoomInfo who continually update email addresses from scraping them off of websites. Unfortunately, these days not many firms list email addresses of individuals on their websites which limits this approach.
- Finally, there are firms who will undertake a contact level data cleanup for a fee and usually use telemarketing to verify and update your data.

**Regardless of which one is selected, a test of their capabilities should precede sending the entire list for updating.** Results can vary greatly.

#### 5. **Profiling:**

Finally, this next step might be viewed as optional from a data hygiene perspective, but does have value for the show's upcoming marketing campaigns. With the mailing address standardized and updated, it is ready to be **sent to B2B data compilers for enhancement and profiling** with demographic information (most data compilers can also perform CASS and NCOA as well). The enhancement with industry code (4-digit SIC or 6-digit NAICS) and company size by number of employees will uncover the following:

- The ranking of industry codes by number of attendees that can be used to select new lists of companies that match the best SIC codes.
- The number of attendees by company will provide marketing opportunities directed at specific firms who send many attendees. Sort of a key account approach.
- Geographic profile of proximity to the show's location or as some would call it – a heat map helps set the priority of resource allocation to clean up or add to the list. Obviously the closer the firm is to the show's location the more likely they are to attend.
- The ranking of number of companies by size which might uncover new insights.



While registration data might have recorded some of this information, a more detailed profile will point to potential segmentation and marketing campaign strategy and offers.

The message is clear; spend time and money on developing/obtaining the best list and data possible as the payback is great, and this is particularly true for organizers as the prior year registration lists are clearly the best lists for future results and need to be kept updated. **Proper data hygiene will allow older registration lists to perform with a positive return on promotion for a longer period of time.**

**To Sum Up:**

We trust this white paper on B2B data decay leads to more cost effective registration results for future shows.

If you want to discuss your data issues we are always ready to help.



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John has partnered with Direct Hit Marketing to further the use of data-driven marketing and sales strategies in the trade show and event industry. John is also Founder and President of B2BMarketing.com., a consulting, education and training firm.

He has been on both sides of the trade show equation as an exhibitor and attendee. As an exhibitor John was engaged in show strategy and lead qualification at numerous shows such as Graph Expo, Business Marketing Association Annual and Comdex. As an attendee and speaker John has attended too many shows to mention. He also has lectured on trade show marketing to Graph Expo and ConAg/ConExpo exhibitors, and has also written articles and blogs on trade show marketing.

His other background includes experience in both sales and marketing. On the sales side, John was a field salesman, national sales manager and executive in charge of both sales and marketing for three major B2B firms. On the marketing side, he was president of a B2B direct marketing agency for 10 years, National Campaign Manager at IBM, Sr. VP of B2B at Rapp Collins Worldwide and President of Protocol B2B.

John is also the author of *The Fundamentals of Business-to-Business Sales & Marketing*, published by McGraw-Hill. He and Steve Juedes, President of Direct Hit Marketing are now in the process of writing a book titled *Data-Driven Trade Show Marketing for Organizers & Exhibitors* planned for publication in 2018. John can be reached by phone at 602-402-6588 or [JohnC@DirectHitMarketing.com](mailto:JohnC@DirectHitMarketing.com)

**Direct Hit Marketing**

Direct Hit Marketing (DHM) based in Longmont, CO has been providing data analytics to the trade show industry for 25 years with its 360 Registration Data Analytics Program™. Over 30 data analysis modules are available to help tradeshow organizers make data driven marketing decisions. Please see more about what we do by clicking this link to our data services PDF [http://www.directhitmarketing.com/sites/default/files/DHIT%20General%20Services\\_0.pdf](http://www.directhitmarketing.com/sites/default/files/DHIT%20General%20Services_0.pdf)