The search begins in April when entry forms are sent to all National Bingo Game member clubs. Before the final in November there are a lot of callers to see, miles to cover and five Regional Champions to find.

Ten finalists from each region are chosen to submit a video tape of themselves, after which the judges select five contestants to attend each Regional Final, along with the defending Regional Champion.

Our Regional Final judges for 2004 were Mike Vyne, Bingo Caller of the Year 2003; Steve Baldwin, Marketing and Communications Manager of the NBGA, and myself. Following an individual interview session with the judges, the callers then perform on stage and call a game. We look not only for a great bingo caller (voice, clarity and consistency), but also someone who can hold an audience and has the potential to become an ambassador for bingo.

We began our Regional Finals in September, in Mike Vyne's home town of Swansea, for the Welsh final, hosted by Mecca Bingo in Carmarthen Road. We then moved on to Shipley's Bingo Club in Weoley Castle, Birmingham, rapidly followed by Gala Bingo in Milton Keynes. The second leg of the Regional Finals took in Paradise Island Bingo Club in Liverpool and Carlton Bingo in East Kilbride.

Each Regional Final is an event in its own right and is promoted in advance to local newspapers and television. It is a great opportunity to get journalists and broadcasters inside a club, to see how bingo really is. In 2004 we did particularly well with media coverage, with a number of local television news channels covering each Regional Final. The support of the hosting club manager and team is vital to the success of each event, so for 2004 we introduced a special award for the club that hosted the best Regional Final. Each was assessed on:

- How well they communicated with the organisers in setting up their Regional Final.
- What special efforts they had made to make the club look really good on the day.
- What they did to make it a great day out for visiting players from other clubs.

Bingo Caller of the Year is now 10 years old and in this celebratory year Mandy Gargan, from Flutters in Coalville, has become the first woman to take the coveted title. Competition organiser, Gloria Pattinson, tells us about the 2004 event and the long road to the National Final.

It's back – bigger, better and with more chances to win!

Get ready for Ground Shaker 2

Following the success of last year's Ground Shaker promotion in April, it's back by popular demand. The original promotion made four clubs and 1,276 bingo players very happy by sharing out over £1.4 million through four weekly live draws. Ground Shaker 2 will follow a similar format but with some exciting new twists, which will create more winners. D-day for GS2 is 26 March 2005, with draws taking place on 2, 9, 16 and 23 April. The prize fund for the promotion remains a staggering £1.43 million, with £110,000 to be won on each of the first three draws and £1,100,000 to be won in the final week. On each of the first three weeks one club will win £100,000 to share with all members present on the night and a further 10 clubs will go on to win £1,000, to be awarded to one player in each club. On the final week one lucky club will win £1 million to share and 100 clubs will each then go on to win £1,000 each, to be won in club.

The live aspect of the promotion with all 512 clubs playing against each other...
Happy New Year to you all! The final quarter of 2004 went by in a flash, with two very successful £500,000 special games, an amazing Bingo for Breakthrough week, a new Caller of the Year, new DVD game, a pilot magazine for players and a new Gambling Bill.

So far, 2005 looks like it won’t disappoint either and at the time of writing there was still much debate about the final content of the new Gambling Bill. The first National Game promotion of 2005 will be our Mother’s Day £500,000 game, which takes place on 6 March, due to Easter being early. This will be followed by the start of Ground Shaker 2 in clubs on 26 March. Promotional press and television advertising for this is scheduled to begin around 19 March. However, both our £500,000 game and especially Ground Shaker 2 will be promoted in the second issue of our pilot magazine Eyes Down. While there will be point of sale material to support both activities, Eyes Down will give far greater detail and look back at the clubs and some of the players who won last year’s Ground Shaker. As our marketing budget is stretched to the maximum by Ground Shaker activity, it is important that all clubs make the most of the materials provided by the NBGA. Good luck with these promotions and thank you in anticipation for your support and cooperation.

The first issue of the new Gambling Bill.

The National Game
Quarterly news and update from Chief Executive, Paul Talboys

Home bingo DVD game is a stocking filler favourite!

The NBGA’s first DVD game, Bingo Party, proved to be one of Woolworths’ top sellers during the Christmas period.

The DVD, produced in association with Imagination Entertainment and hosted by Bingo Caller of the Year 2003, Mike Vyse, has been a surprise hit for Woolworths, currently the exclusive retailer of the game.

Sarah Tremere of Imagination Entertainment said, ‘We have known for some time how exciting bingo is in clubs and we wanted to spread some of that excitement to non-players by introducing Bingo Party recreates all the fun of bingo in your own living room.

Competition winners

The lucky winners of the Christmas Party Packs in last issue’s competition, kindly provided by Novelties Galore, are M Graves, Opera Bingo, Workington; James Allan, Quayside Bingo, Lossiemouth and Karen Sylvester, Mecca, Doncaster. We hope that all three winning clubs will enjoy making good use of their packs with their customers over the Christmas season.

Bingo in the news

The summer months are traditionally quiet times for media activity and bingo is no exception, with July and August only delivering 109 and 107 hits respectively. However, September bounced back and delivered a huge total of 208 hits, as media started picking up on Bingo for Breakthrough reminders and the Regional Finals of Caller of the Year 2004. This change in the amount of coverage shows how important such industry-wide activities are for attracting media coverage.

The star performing region for Breakthrough week, a new Caller of the Year, new DVD game, a pilot magazine for players and a new Gambling Bill.

Bingo Link

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Tel: 01582 860921. Fax: 01582 860925.
Email: bingolink@bingo-association.co.uk
Editor: Steven Baldwin

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Gala Group was the only company to receive two awards at the prestigious National Customer Service Awards, held at London’s exclusive Grosvenor House.

Triumphing over 1,800 applicants from 271 companies, Pat Brown, who has worked for Gala Bingo in Nottingham for 32 years, won one of the main awards of the night — The Lifetime Achievement Award — and Gill Lucas, Gala’s IT support manager and her team were awarded the Back Office Customer Service Team of the Year Award. Unfortunately Pat was unable to attend on the night, asking Eric Howell to accept the award on her behalf.

Neil Goulden, Chief Executive of Gala Group said, ‘Two National Customer Service Awards is a tremendous achievement and I was very proud to be at Grosvenor House with the Gala Team. Customer service is of vital importance to Gala and we continuously strive to provide the very best service to both our internal and external customers. We congratulate our award-winning staff and look forward to future accolades in this very important arena.’

The National Customer Service Awards, established five years ago, promote excellence, best practice and innovation in Customer Service and Consumer Affairs.

Eric Howell collects Pat Brown’s Lifetime Achievement Award

New appointment for Rank Group
Rank Group Gaming Division has announced the appointment of Steve Johnson as Divisional Property and Development Director. A seasoned professional with more than 12 years’ industry experience, Johnson was most recently Director of Construction and Design at Safeway Stores. David Boden, Divisional Managing Director, said, ‘This appointment is evidence of Rank Group Gaming Division’s continued commitment to the UK gaming market. Johnson has the experience to capitalize on the market opportunity in the UK following the imminent deregulation and positively impact on our business.’

Top Ten fury in Furness
Customers at Top Ten Bingo in Barrow in Furness downed their dabbers and picked up their pens to air their views, following a vitriolic attack on their favourite game by a local newspaper columnist.

Suzanne Murphy slated both the game and its fans in her ‘She knows life round here’ column for the North West Evening Mail, ending with ‘Bingo is boring. Please don’t bother telling me to pop along and try it for myself. I won’t. And anyway I haven’t got a shell suit.’

The paper later printed two full pages of letters from indignant players, along with a cartoon of Ms Murphy. The customers’ letters also produced further coverage and comment from a fellow journalist on the paper. Never underestimate player power!
Bingo club operators are no strangers to the issue of security. Stories of club robberies appearing in the media act as a regular reminder should this vital consideration slip down the list of priorities.

Frequently, one of the most vulnerable areas for many clubs is that of book sales. Being at the front of many clubs it can, in certain circumstances, provide a potential opportunity for robbery. Many book sales counters have old style wooden drawers and a slot in the counter in which bank notes are periodically placed to fall into the drop box. This system is not only cumbersome and obtrusive but is also easily seen by visitors to the club, making it much easier for a robbery to be planned. Usually these take the form of ‘smash and grab’ attacks.

Under lock and key
ADH Cash Systems, a supplier of cash handling products to the bingo industry, was approached by one of its customers about the issue of cash security at book sales. They asked if there were further measures that could be put in place to help secure this area of a club. After considering the issue carefully, Adrian Horsley, Managing Director of ADH Cash Systems, and his team suggested the use of a flip-lid cash facility, called Flip-Lid SK, which would also be less obtrusive at the book sales counter.

‘The Flip-Lid SK solution provides a number of benefits. This small compact unit has a secret “blind” slot in the cash drawer, into which excess banknotes can be placed by the cashier using the till without the knowledge of any customers who may be present at the counter. The banknotes fall into a secure note cassette contained in the secret blind slot, which is locked in place by a high security barrel type lock and key.’ Adrian continues, ‘Because the system is similar to a standard retail cash till, it also offers the facility to remove the coin and note drawer from the unit in a locked state. This is very important as it allows till floats to be made up in a cash room, signed for by the cashier and taken to the book sales counter in a locked state where, once in place, it can be unlocked and used.’

Providing peace of mind
The added security and control that a removable and lockable drawer facility provides also creates further benefits in helping both staff and management feel more at ease with cash handling as the process is less open to manipulation.

Such has been the success of the flip-lid units trialled that the operator is now specifying the unit as the preferred solution in club refurbishments and new-build sites.

Keeping a secure lid on things

The Easter parade
Easter is very early this year, just ahead of the Ground Shaker promotion, and we are reliably informed by ACE Toys Managing Director Andrew Hempsall that there will be a colourful collection of seasonal bunnies, chicks and ducks on show. The company has also been chosen to supply this year’s Bingo for Breakthrough toy and I am sure we are all looking forward to seeing how ACE will use its expertise.
The best in the business

Continued from Page 1

How well they looked after visiting players and judges.

The general cooperation and welcome given by the club and staff as a whole.

While all hosting clubs work hard for these events, in 2004 it was the Carlton Club in East Kilbride that went the extra distance, winning the Best Regional Final award.

Having started with 100 entries in April, by early October we were down to just five regional champions: Peter Lewis, Mandy Gargan, Ricky Denton, Alan Stockdale and James O’Kane. Each of them, plus partners, was then invited to London for the National Final on Sunday 28 November, where they stayed at the Thistle Tower Hotel, overlooking Tower Bridge. The judges were joined by Paul Talboys, Chief Executive of the NBGA and Don Carrier, our special guest judge. The editor of US bingo players’ newspaper Bingo Bugle, Don has been involved with the competition since it started and is the friendly face that winners see on their trip to Las Vegas.

The night before the final all the judges, organisers, contestants and their partners got to know one another over a gala dinner. The 2004 National Final, hosted by Breakfast TV’s Fiona Phillips, was held at Beacon Bingo club in Cricklewood, London and more than 1,000 avid fans turned out to support their favourite caller. Prior to performing on stage each contestant is tested on their ability to think on their feet by being put through a staged hostile media interview, in front of cameras. It’s then on to more familiar territory, as they call a game. Following a short break, the judges make their final decision. As Mandy Gargan was announced Bingo Caller of the Year 2004 by NBGA Chief Executive Paul Talboys, her supporters erupted, closely followed by the rest of the club.

Outgoing champion Mike Vyse said, ‘Winning this was one of the best things that has ever happened to me. I thought being a judge would be much easier but the final scores were all very close.’ Mandy’s prize is a week for two in Los Angeles and Las Vegas, with trips to Hollywood and Disneyland, plus £500 spending money. She will also have the opportunity to call bingo at the Suncoast Casino in Las Vegas, where she will be greeted by Don Carrier, who was mightily impressed with the Beacon Club. ‘The standard of bingo clubs in the UK is amazing,’ he said. ‘Most of our bingo halls don’t have the same level of luxury and comfort.’

As Mandy joins bingo’s Hall of Fame – with a special place as the first female winner – we are getting ready to do it all again! So if you know someone worthy of 2005’s title, look out for the entry forms in April.

G2E attendance climbs

Attendance figures for 2004’s leading industry trade show, G2E, exceeded 2003’s turnout by 10 per cent. According to data from show organizers Reed Exhibitions and the American Gaming Association (AGA), 25,018 industry professionals attended last year’s event at the Las Vegas Convention Center. The increase is larger than that experienced in 2003, which saw an increase of 7 per cent on 2002’s figures.

The number of exhibitors at G2E also substantially increased in 2004, with 705 companies exhibiting in 259,700 square feet of exhibition space, a 16 per cent increase in space on last year.

Frank J Fahrenkopf Jr, President and CEO of the AGA said, ‘The growth of G2E this year points not only to the consistently high quality of senior buyers and sellers who attend our event, but to G2E’s unique ability to keep pace with the rapid expansion and diversification of our industry. Food and Beverage at G2E and other new additions made G2E 2004 a true reflection of the developments and trends shaping the industry. No other event in the world gives attendees such a comprehensive set of tools to compete – and succeed – in this industry.’

Fahrenkopf’s claims of world leadership for the show are supported by growth in the number of exhibitors from outside the United States and some 4,300 international attendees from 107 countries, including Australia, China, Germany, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Mexico, Russia, Taiwan and Venezuela.

G2E 2005 is scheduled for 13–15 September, at the Las Vegas Convention Center with the G2E Training & Development Institute taking place on 12 September.

For more information about this year’s show, visit www.globalgamingexpo.com

news
A classic with a twist

Monopoly continues to be an ever-popular board game, reporting good sales during the recent Christmas period. As a brand it is one of the most well known in the world and has developed and grown, not only delivering country specific versions of this world-famous game, but also tying in with current trends to produce special editions such as Star Wars, Coronation Street, The Simpsons and its latest offering, Shrek. The brand has also been extended to machine games and includes a very successful range of AWP’s from Mazooma. There is even a UK based website (www.monopoly.co.uk) dedicated to all things Monopoly!

To celebrate the success of this classic, which has been with us since 1935, in both its new and traditional forms, we are offering three Nostalgia Editions of the game to three lucky Bingo Link readers.

For your chance to win, simply complete the Bingo Link competition entry form, or put your club name, address and your name on an postcard, and send it to:

Monopoly Competition, Bingo Link, Lexham House, 75 High Street North, Dunstable, Bedfordshire LU6 1JF

All entries must be received by 18 February 2005. Winners will be notified in writing and announced in issue 69 of Bingo Link.

Last call for local bingo star

One of the North West’s greatest talents has left his town of Huyton and bingo far behind him, as he heads out for the bright sunshine of Tenerife.

Steve Linder, Manager and Bingo Caller at Buckingham Bingo, Poplar Bank, has moved on after over 28 years in the business and with the coveted title of Bingo Caller of the Year under his belt.

Steve, who is a dab hand at his job, fell into calling by accident all those years ago. He explains, ‘I was working as a hotel manager and did some temping work in a bingo hall for six weeks while my hotel was being refurbished. The rest of it is history!’ Having worked at Buckingham Bingo for the past eight years, Steve says he is looking forward to a fresh challenge, a more relaxed lifestyle and some more sunshine.

John Anderson, Operations Manager for Buckingham Bingo, said, ‘We were sorry to see Steve go. He has been a great manager and bingo caller and will be sorely missed. He won’t be easy to replace as he is extremely talented.’
The first issue of the new NBGA magazine, *Eyes Down*, rolled off the presses in November last year and initial feedback has been very positive.

Creating a new magazine is never easy, and we tried to meet the needs of players and operators alike. However, Issue 1 was marred by the inclusion of an advertisement promotion that made unreasonable use of premium rate numbers. This caused concern for a number of operators and their members. As a result of this, in future issues such promotions will be vetoed and the NBGA has expressed regret that this one slipped through.

*Eyes Down* is a very cost-effective way for the bingo industry to communicate, to players and potential players, all that’s new and exciting about its product. If you have any ideas or comments please send them to *Eyes Down*, c/o The National Bingo Game, Lexham House, 75 High Street North Dunstable, Beds LU6 1JF or email eyesdown@nationalbingo.co.uk. Issue 2, which is due out in February, will contain a host of player information on Ground Shaker 2 – something all your players will want to know about! They can also check the National Game Winners’ list to see if their club has been a lucky hot spot.

**Gambling bill update**

The Gambling Bill has been making rapid progress through the House of Commons, and has been set an ambitious target of finishing its deliberations by mid January, at which time it will transfer to the House of Lords. There has been a significant shift in policy on casinos, with only eight additional large and small casinos, plus eight regional casinos now proposed.

Several MPs have actively supported bingo in Committee stage, with the Opposition tabling a number of amendments addressing issues of concern. Some of these were to clarify a particular point, or to secure assurances from Government, and we have been successful in achieving this on a number of them. We have confirmation that clubs playing the National Game will not require a remote bingo licence and that the remote licence fee and application procedure for those playing link bingo will be kept to a minimum. The Government has confirmed there is no intention to restrict the number of MCB playing positions and that premises licence conditions should not contradict or override operating licence conditions.

The Association will monitor the Bill closely and press for changes to remove bingo door supervisors from any requirement to register and to ensure that admission charges are not included within the definition of participation fee. For updates, check www.bingo-association.co.uk.

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Get ready for Ground Shaker 2

Continued from Page 1
creates a fantastic feeling of excitement in-club. We talked to some of last year’s winners to see how they felt.

**Gala, Slough**
Gala Bingo in Slough was the first club to feel the jolt of the Ground Shaker, with Mrs Anne McMahon, a club regular, winning the individual draw prize of £10,000. The 55-year-old import/export clerk said, ‘I was always happy just playing bingo and even if I won just £20, it was a bonus. I never dreamt it would be me.’ Anne shared her good fortune with her friend and bingo buddy Sylvia Caley.

**Gala, Wigan**
Second in line was another Gala club, this time in Wigan, where Mrs Christine Morris won the individual draw prize of £10,000. The 53-year-old mother of two has been a bingo player for several years and plays three or four times a week at the club. ‘I still can’t believe my luck!’

**Alhambra Club, Penrith**
Penrith’s Alhambra was next to feel a tremor with Mrs Joanie Laing taking the £10,000 individual prize. The 59-year-old housewife was thrilled to win and has kept the money for a rainy day.

**Mecca, Leith**
Mecca Bingo in Leith was where the big one hit. Lorraine Fallon, who was in the club on the winning night, took a £4,000 share of the million and was then fantastically lucky to go on and win not one but two of the £10,000 prizes, making her winnings total £24,000. In addition, her mum and dad were also in the club on the winning night.

Lorraine’s husband James was babysitting on the winning night for their two sons, Keiran, seven, and four-year-old Nathan. She said, ‘The youngest didn’t understand about the win but Keiran immediately asked for football boots!’

Lorraine started playing bingo as soon as she was old enough at 18 and goes three times a week with her mum and dad, Mary and Joe Kersse. They also won £4,000 each, plus Joe had won £50 earlier on in the evening. They shared all the winnings. Lorraine has since bought herself a new car and a few treats for the children. ‘We have saved a lot so that we can move out of our flat into a house with a garden for the boys.’ She remembers the night of the win very clearly: ‘I didn’t sleep at all that night, I was too hyper,’ she said. ‘It was like a dream. I didn’t really believe it until I was given the cheque, then it was like it happened all over again.’

Lorraine and her mum and dad had a total of seven vouchers between them for the 10 individual prizes, but the winning ones were both from Lorraine’s batch.

Ground Shaker 2 will enable more clubs than ever to share in the excitement of winning! As with last year’s promotion there will be television advertising and point of sale material to support the game. As we get closer to the start of the promotion, more information will be sent directly to clubs, with a managers’ briefing document being sent ahead of the delivery of point of sale material. So, will the earth move in your club?

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Another fantastic success!

Bingo for Breakthrough 2004 took place last October, during Breast Cancer Awareness Month, with the aim of raising an ambitious £500,000 for Breakthrough Breast Cancer. A record 401 clubs showed their enthusiasm and really ‘pinked’ it up in-club by sporting their Bingo for Breakthrough T-shirts and crazy pink wigs. This year’s cuddly Bobbie the Bingo bear went down a storm with members and he even got to sit in Johnny Vaughan’s chair when he paid a visit to radio station Capital FM to promote Bingo for Breakthrough! And the pink-tastic dabbers sold out in most clubs before the week even got underway! All in all it was a record breaking success with clubs raising a staggering £510,000!

The week also generated a record amount of press coverage for bingo and Breakthrough, including features in The Sun, Woman’s Own, Take it Easy magazine and The Daily Star’s Take 5 magazine. There were also plenty of stories, features and pictures in local papers, which is always important for your club’s immediate market place.

Discussions are already underway for 2005 and how we can get better acknowledgement for the great work taking place in the bingo industry!

Fundraising award winners
It was a difficult decision but in the end the Extra Mile Award went to Walkers Bingo, Tunstall who staged a 10-hour sponsored sports day, plus a fancy dress party and a pyjama party. Special mention also goes to Mecca, Cwmbran; Gala, Bexleyheath and Gala, Kingsbury Road for their amazing efforts.

Gala, Hanley wins the Outstanding Fundraising Award with a country-wide record of £8,504.64, but the most generous part of the country, with an average donation per person of £4.94, turned out to be Quayside Bingo in Lossiemouth – again. Runners up were Mecca, Glasgow-Forge III, with £6,623. Well done to everyone for your dedication to making Bingo for Breakthrough 2004 such an incredible success.

A LETTER FROM LAURA

Dear Clubs

I was amazed to hear about the fantastic fundraising ideas and events that were staged during Bingo for Breakthrough 2004. There was chest waxing, car washing, pink parties, 10km walks and runs, non-stop cycling, gunging, cheeky calendars, cross-dressing, a musical production and much, much more!

Club staff made sure that the bingo industry went all out pink by wearing the crazy pink wigs and putting on the glitz with Breakthrough’s sparkly pink ribbons.

I would like to thank all clubs and bingo players for their wonderful support and dedication during the week. Thank you also to those who sent me the fabulous photographs of their hair-raising events. It was great to see that you all had so much fun in the process and I’m sure your members had a giggle! A huge ‘thank you’ to all of you for being so brilliant!

With thanks and warm wishes

Laura Jones, Breakthrough Breast Cancer

What’s in store at ATEI 2005

The 2005 Amusement Trades Exhibition International opens its doors at the Earls Court Exhibition Centre on 25–27 January. Along with its co-located sister show, the International Casino Exhibition, ATEI looks set to welcome over 20,000 visitors, making it one of the world’s biggest one-stop shows for electronic leisure and gaming. With close to 500 exhibitors and over 60 product sectors represented, it has something for everyone.

ATEI will have no fewer than 70 gaming machine manufacturers, with a further 40 at ICE, showing many new products for the bingo sector: lo-tech and hi-tech AWP s, SWPs, Jackpot Machines, Section 21 gaming terminals, and various other reel- and video-based slots from key manufacturers such as Astra, Barcrest Games, Bell-Fruit, Extreme Gaming, GamesNet, Impulse Gaming, Maygay, Mazooma, Project, Red Gaming, Thomas/CMS and Vivid Gaming. Supporting the manufacturers will be the UK’s leading distributors, AMR Amusements, Belgravia Leisure, Crown Direct, Deith Group, Electrocoin, JNC Sales, Leisure Link, MDM, Namco Europe and PMT.

Covering just about every conceivable need for bingo operators, the exhibitor list boasts some of the best names in the business, including UK bingo specialists Cowells Arrow, Edward Thompson Group, Gamingking and Syndicate. There is also representation from suppliers of auxiliary products and services, including prize merchandise, amusement machines, money handling and security systems, interior design and furnishings, in addition to audio-visual equipment.

For more information, including free entry badge registration, visit the website at www.ateonline.co.uk/atei.
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Is your thinking joined up?

asks Simon Kemp from Q Services

Simply put, ‘joined up thinking’ is about ensuring that your plans are well thought through and that they integrate with other activities in your business to yield maximum effect. Marketing and promotional activity as part of your business is all about joined up thinking and getting a positive result.

As competition for the leisure pound and leisure minute increases it becomes ever more important that any offer put to customers is appropriate, specific to a targeted customer, arrives at a relevant time and, ideally, provides a means of assessing its success or failure.

For many clubs direct mail is a key means of communicating with members but it may not always be as efficient as it could be. The method of production and distribution may not make optimum use of staff time and if the data used is inaccurate and poorly targeted you may be making an offer to customers who do not need to be incentivised.

Although production and mailing equipment has fallen drastically in price and improved significantly in reliability, the final component of successful direct mail is a club’s key marketing resource – its membership and prospects database.

Successfully collecting, managing and exploiting the information available to a club from its membership is vital in ensuring that effort and expense are not wasted. After a session, do you know how many members have been in the club and how many stayed away? Of those that did attend, how many had not been for the last three weeks? What about those who normally come but who didn’t attend that session? Many clubs like to send a letter or voucher to these ‘stay-aways’ so that the one night missed doesn’t become a habit.

A good membership system, such as QMem, allows you to do this easily and on the same day as the session. Equally, the mailing should be personalised. For example, when regular mailings are sent to members (perhaps the monthly birthdays), the membership system should extract the right members from the database. This should then enable the production of a personalised letter/cover and redemption voucher, in order to ensure that the offer is redeemed by the intended individual. If the mailing piece is then folded, stuffed and franked automatically, staff are free for more demanding tasks.

Integrating membership data collection with data management and mailing production and dispatch puts managers/operators in control and allows them to spot visit patterns quickly, taking tactical promotional action where needed.

Direct mail and recruitment activity will probably form part of your 2005 promotional plan, as will centralised activity around Ground Shaker 2. Your membership and prospects data is key to the success of your promotional activity and, ultimately, your club.

For further details, contact simonk@qservices.co.uk
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Get on target for a full house

Sophisticated direct marketing is no longer the preserve of high-volume mailing companies. Barry Jessop, UK Marketing Director at Pitney Bowes, explains how any business can harness new technology in a traditional marketing activity.

According to a recent report in The New York Times, brain patterns can now be measured to evaluate the influence of brand on customer decisions. So-called neuromarketing may represent the future but when it comes to building business through promotion and brand awareness, most companies rely on more conventional methods.

For club managers, the challenge is to ensure a consistent daily turnout. This is becoming more difficult as an increasing number of leisure activities compete for customers’ time and money. Clubs must ensure a regular flow of return attendees while providing new initiatives that will draw prospects into a club.

So, what are the choices for the organisations without multi million-pound marketing budgets? All companies are under increasing budgetary constraint and industry analysis shows a shift away from media advertising to more cost-effective activity such as sales promotion and direct marketing.

Direct mail

Long regarded as a cost-efficient means of generating response, direct mail is not valued as a brand-building tool. The traditional view is that direct mail delivers approximately six per cent response, with the remaining 94 per cent of mailers regarded as ‘wasted’. However, recent Pitney Bowes research suggests that marketers are quickly realising the potential of direct mail to deliver more than just response. They recognise that cleverly targeted, professionally presented direct mail will generate response whilst also creating a favourable brand image.

New print and mail technology has played an important role in boosting the status of direct mail as a brand influencer. At the smaller volume level, folding, inserting and franking equipment provides marketers with the means to produce accurate, professional communications relatively cheaply.

Automation of mail operations has enabled an increasing number of businesses to cut costs, eliminate errors, free-up staff time and make the most of direct mail.

Metered mail

Ever-changing postal rates mean that marketers are turning to the latest intelligent franking machines which link to the web to provide downloadable postal rates and software updates. At the touch of a button, campaigns are despatched quickly and at the best possible price, while software enhancements provide a future-proof upgrade path.

Downloadable advertising slogans transform standard mailshots into striking marketing communications. Clubs can gain an advantage by ensuring that any direct mail carries a brand message on the envelope as well as on the document inside, conveying brand value even if the communication is unopened. Messages might include membership offers, special promotional or charity games or details of private party hire.

Targeting prospects is key, ensuring that these eye-catching messages reach the relevant audience. Today, mailing lists can be bought in smaller volumes or metered and database solutions are available off the shelf. Data can also be analysed and segmented to ensure that messages are personalised to a greater degree.

As bingo covers all age groups, any marketing activity must reflect this. Email and SMS communications appeal more to the younger generation but direct mail does not rely on the need for internet/email or mobile phone to get the messages across. Metered mail can also offer clear cost-saving and security benefits. Integrated scales mean that each envelope is sent with the exact postage attached. When stamps are used, staff often guess the amount, leading over time to considerable extra costs. Also, having stamps around can be a cost/security risk. With metered mail, postage credit is locked into the machine and access can be limited to authorised users.

Technology must also be able to adapt to changing postal legislation. One such example is Royal Mail’s forthcoming requirement on returned post. From October, if businesses require direct mail to be returned to sender in case of failed delivery, envelopes must be marked with a return address. Advanced franking machines can print a return address neatly on the front of the envelope, maintaining presentation standards.

Direct mail continues to be both a useful response generator and, increasingly, an important brand influencer. The more popular the medium, the more astute marketers have to be to catch the recipient’s attention. The latest mail and messaging technology, combined with careful data selection and segmenting, can provide clubs with a vital advantage in the doormat battle.

Visit www.pitneybowes.co.uk or call 0870 5252525 for more details.

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