Chris Combemale

is a dual French/US citizen with 30 years direct marketing, advertising and digital marketing experience in Europe, the USA and Asia/Pacific. He has recently accepted a part-time role as Executive Director of the Direct Marketing Association (DMA), with overall responsibility for all DMA activity. In addition to his commercial activity, Chris has taken a lead in industry issues including legislation, best practice and education. He is a DMA board member and Chairman of the DMA Email Marketing Council. He co-founded eMMA (Email Marketing Association) in 2001 and successfully led the merger of eMMA with the DMA in November 2002. Chris is also a frequent lecturer for IDM courses and other industry events.

Opinion Piece

DMA shapes up for future challenges

Chris Combemale

Received: 2nd November 2009

Abstract

In this paper we explain the changes that have taken place at the Direct Marketing Association (DMA) and how they will help the DMA fulfill its strategic remit. The paper reviews the structural changes that have been made to both the governance structure and management structure. It outlines the core remit of the DMA and discusses how the new structures will impact successful outcomes. It also outlines the leadership DMA takes with government to preserve commercial freedoms, and discusses some key initiatives on the environment, data security and mobile marketing that will be cornerstone activities in 2010 and beyond. *Journal of Direct, Data and Digital Marketing Practice* (2010) **11**, 184–186. doi:10.1057/dddmp.2009.41

Introduction

Radical change is afoot at the Direct Marketing Association (DMA). Here, *Chris Combemale*, the DMA's executive board director, explains what this spells for the DMA's members and for the direct marketing industry as a whole.

Many — probably most — of our readers are both individual members of the Institute of Direct Marketing and employees of companies in membership of the DMA, so it is appropriate that we should report on radical changes now afoot at the DMA.

There comes a time in every organization when it is necessary to stop and take a long hard look at what it is, what it does and what it needs to do. For the DMA, this time was 2 years ago, when it became clear that its development was lagging behind the fast pace of change in the direct marketing industry. In 2007, the DMA Board initiated a strategic review of the Association. The review, conducted by management consultants PA Consulting, addressed in detail every aspect of how the DMA serves its members and the direct marketing industry as a whole. The result of the review was the creation of a roadmap that will define a new-look DMA that is equipped to empower, protect and develop the direct marketing industry today and far into the future.

Keywords: strategic review, organisation structure, governance reform

Chris Combemale
The Email Academy Ltd
22 Farm Crescent
St Albans, AL2 1UQ, UK
Tel: +44 7884 185 823
E-mail: ccombemale@
theemailacademy.com

Radical change

Managing the change

While the DMA has long had a distinct remit to support and grow the direct marketing industry, PA's review identified and clarified its strategy. Ensuring that the DMA is able to implement its strategy for development and realize its objectives has meant picking the Association apart and reconstructing it from top to bottom. Radical change requires dynamic leadership that is able to make prompt decisions. To institute a more streamlined leadership, the unwieldy 29-member Board of Directors was disbanded and was replaced by a pared down, democratically elected ten-member Board.

A new Advisory Council, which advises the Board on formulating long-range strategy, was also created, with members representing all key direct marketing channels and influential clients of direct marketing. On an operational level, a double-headed management structure was formed in lieu of a single managing director. The creation of the roles of Chief of Operations and Chief of Membership and Brand enables the former to manage the internal workings of the organization, which allows the latter to magnify the DMA's focus on expanding its member services and developing the industry.

Self regulation

Focusing on strategy

The new governance and managerial structures will enable the DMA to become more effective in meeting its dual responsibilities towards its members and to the wider direct marketing industry. On a macro level, the DMA works to drive the development and growth of the direct marketing industry. Most notably, the DMA provides expert briefings and advice to government and other key policymakers on the formulation of legislation that has a direct impact on the industry. By ensuring that government is able to make better-informed decisions when devising policies, the DMA is able to help safeguard the direct marketing industry from overly restrictive legislation and promote its commercial freedom.

The DMA also works to secure the government's trust in the direct marketing industry's ability to regulate itself and maintain the expected standards of best practice. Through leading programmes that address environmental and data security responsibilities, as well as setting core professional standards via its widely recognized Code of Practice, the DMA provides direct marketing with the instruments of self-regulation it needs to convince government that it is a responsible industry. Furthermore, the DMA is committed to elevating the profile of the direct marketing industry. The DMA's ongoing programme of public relations activities is focused on increasing the understanding of, and support for, the value of direct marketing in commerce and among consumers.

Code of practice

In parallel to its responsibilities for serving the entire industry, the DMA also helps to develop the businesses of its members across all direct marketing channels. All members follow the DMA Code of Practice, which defines the direct marketing industry's highest working standards and best practices. In an industry in which proven credibility is vital to winning and retaining business, DMA membership is therefore recognized as an important professional credential.

Communication

A core duty of the DMA is to keep its members informed of the latest industry developments. Through running regular conferences, seminars and workshops; publishing cutting edge research on diverse industry-wide and sector specific issues; and issuing reports and newsletters on the latest political and legal developments to affect the industry, the DMA is able to provide its members with the information they need to make sound, strategic business decisions. Members also have access to a free indemnified legal advice service, helping them to save many thousands of pounds every year in legal fees. And, as a major hub of the direct marketing industry, the DMA brings its members together via its social events, seminars and conferences, which provide important networking opportunities.

Leading the industry

Since its inception, the DMA has been at the forefront of raising the professional standards of the direct marketing industry. The DMA's respected Code of Practice, which was developed in consultation with practitioners, clients and legal experts, underpins the integrity and credibility of direct marketing. It is also just one of the DMA's many contributions to advancing the self-regulation of the industry. As the DMA moves forward, so too will its efforts to provide the industry with the instruments of self-regulation it needs to preserve its commercial freedom unburdened by unduly restrictive legislation.

Environment

Over the past 12 months, the DMA has driven sustainable development to the top of the industry's agenda. This year has seen the DMA launch 'PAS 2020', the direct marketing industry's first environmental standard of best practice. The BSI-certified standard is a vital resource for the direct marketing industry to meet its environmental obligations, demonstrate its environmental credentials, and to brace the industry for the financially draining impacts of forthcoming environmental legislation.

As the security of personal information becomes of increasing concern for consumers and government, the DMA has recently launched a performance standard to help direct marketers fulfil their data security responsibilities. The 'DataSeal' standard was developed in conjunction with BSI, and its specifications stand far above the minimum legislative requirements for information security. It sets out the performance requirements for secure information storage, and for the usage and transfer of client and prospective information.

Expanding its reach into the digital realm, in 2010 the DMA will launch 'MobileSafe', the first ever industry initiative to win greater consumer trust in the value of mobile marketing. Led by the DMA and developed by its Mobile Marketing Council, the MobileSafe scheme will cover all non-voice activities used in direct marketing. Agencies and clients signing up for the MobileSafe scheme will have to adhere to its professional practice guidelines, which will take into account all relevant legislation and best practice. Companies complying with the MobileSafe Code will be entitled to bear the MobileSafe logo at their points of marketing opt-in. This mark will give consumers the assurance they need about what they can expect when they choose to opt-in to a mobile marketing campaign.