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# Best Practice

## Goldfish Guide case history

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### Abstract

The Goldfish Guide was launched in a test market in June 1998, went national with digital on-demand print in January 1999, and is launching electronically (ie on the Web) in April 2000. It is a true one-to-one product from a consumer viewpoint; and from an advertiser's point of view represents a 'permission marketing' opportunity. The Guide provides helpful information to consumers on various big-ticket products and services; it is free to consumers, being advertiser-funded. Editorial advice is kept quite separate from advertising exhortation, in classical publishing mode.

**Keywords:** One-to-one, permission marketing, digital print, consumer guide, print on demand

### Introduction

The Goldfish Guide has an unique place in UK publishing. It offers consumers a real one-to-one product; and it offers advertisers the opportunity for 'permission marketing' to consumers when those consumers have demonstrated their interest in the product or service category in question. Results, in terms of both response and sales volumes, demonstrate that both consumers and advertisers are very interested in this proposition.

One-to-one marketing is now perceived by many companies as being their ultimate end-game. Not many are currently able to deliver on that promise; many more are working towards the one-to-one objective. The Goldfish Guide was set up to deliver from day one — and in a print medium, which has particular technical constraints when compared with the 'usual' one-to-one medium, the Internet. Now the Guide is launching electronically, with even more personalisation. But it is important to start at the beginning.

### Background

The Goldfish credit card was launched in 1996, with high-profile advertising featuring Billy Connolly as brand spokesperson. The card was positioned as an innovative, consumer-friendly financial service, without the trappings of mystique that encumber traditional financial service brands. During late 1997 planning began for the Goldfish Guide, which needed to reinforce the card's brand values, but also to be helpful; the Guide would give editorial advice on a range of markets, and would help consumers to choose the right product or service to meet their needs. The specific print platform for producing personalised guides came from Moore IMS, part of the giant Moore Corporation, which had developed a very advanced print personalisation technology.

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The possibility of an Internet solution was also considered at the planning stage. However, at the time the Internet was felt to be too 'niche'; a paper-based solution would have a broader appeal and would be more inclusive. Add to this the power of the personalisation inherent in the Moore IMS printing capability, and it was felt that paper Goldfish Guides would be a very strong proposition.

Chris Martin, then of Moore Paragon, now MD of Moore IMS, presented a concept of what was possible to Paul Hallas of Goldfish — now MD of Goldfish Guide. Moore were producing a consumer guide in Holland for the PTT, which was branded 'Toets'. Consumers could request a personalised consumer guide, which was printed by Moore's Eindhoven operation. Once it was decided to go ahead with a Goldfish Guide in the UK, Moore set up a print facility (which Chris Martin managed) in the British Gas print centre in Northampton; Martin was seconded to Goldfish for three days per week during the period of product development and testing. (Goldfish is a sister company of British Gas within the Centrica group.)

## Strategy development

The opportunity for the Goldfish Guide was identified as a gap in the consumer information market. While the existing market consisted mainly of the Consumers Association's *Which?* magazine, this was only available on subscription (Goldfish Guide would be free to consumers), and was not specifically tailored to individual consumers; the timing of product reviews was driven by the CA. The concept behind the Goldfish Guide was the 'information you want, when you want it, on the products you want'.

The other side of the coin would be the relationship of the publication to advertising. *Which?*, as is well known, does not accept any advertising. The Goldfish Guide, while free to consumers, is funded by advertising. This in itself gave Goldfish Guide a very different positioning from *Which?*, and, as Paul Hallas points out, was likely to mean that the two products would appeal to quite different markets.

Another sector of the consumer information market is inhabited by the What? series of publications: *What Car?*, *What Hi-fi?*, *What Mortgage?* etc. Clearly, these publications meet a market need — but again, it is different from the Goldfish Guide concept. *What Car?* etc tend to appeal to people with a strong interest in the market in question — for example cars — and might seem rather forbidding to people without that particular enthusiasm. The style of Goldfish Guides is intended to be completely non-threatening; they are written to start at the beginning and explain the basics to beginners. While the editorial is totally independent, it is accompanied by a series of advertisements from product providers — an invitation to buy.

The appeal to advertisers is that consumers who have requested a Guide are clearly thinking seriously about acquiring the product in question — they are 'in the market'. As Paul Hallas says, 'Goldfish Guide delivers prospects — when they're hot'. He contrasts this methodology with more conventional DM methods, such as buying lists, or modelling propensity to

**Permission  
marketing**

buy. The nearest equivalent is the practice of asking intention-to-buy questions on lifestyle questionnaires. Hallas says the Guide represents permission marketing — ‘it’s an indicator that the prospect is serious’. And the other, very powerful benefit for the advertiser is that the Guide has been individually tailored — it is one-to-one marketing.

**Test launch**

The Goldfish Guide was initially launched in the Central TV region in June 1998. It was important to test in a region, rather than launch nationally; apart from testing the marketing mix, the operational aspects needed to be checked out. Would the call centre (Sitel) be able to cope? Would the high-tech printing facility be able to cope with demand? The team of Paul Hallas, head of marketing Josephine Fawkes, and campaigns manager Kristen Donato put together a comprehensive marketing strategy and media plan. They had two separate audiences — consumer and trade. They also had a considerable challenge, in that the product carried a sizeable overhead; the normal costs of editorial, postage and fulfilment are naturally increased significantly by printing digitally on demand. So the cost per Guide was considerable, and Goldfish had to secure sufficient advertising to pay for this and generate a margin.

**Individual  
media plans  
for each Guide**

The test market provided Goldfish with the information they needed to establish what product areas were viable, and what cost structure was appropriate to each Guide. This resulted in the development of individual media plans for each Guide, and advertising revenue targets for each Guide to provide the level of marketing support required. Over time, this developed into a sophisticated matrix, wherein each Guide has its own ad revenue target, send-out volume target and marketing acquisition cost per unit; indeed, its own media schedule.

**Multimedia  
launch campaign**

The launch in Central TV used a combination of media; TV to gain rapid awareness, backed up by press display ads (later moving to advertorials, which worked better); several waves of heavyweight direct marketing (direct mail, comprising bought-in lists and electoral-roll mailings targeted by MOSAIC); inserts in the Goldfish credit card; and targeted door-drops. There were two waves of activity: the launch wave in June and a second in the autumn. Continuous Teletext advertising on Central, a website up and running from the launch date, and an ongoing PR campaign completed the mix. A strong trade press campaign ran continuously from mid-February, three months pre-sell.

**National launch**

At the time of the test launch, the intention was to roll out regionally; but in the event, uptake in the test region was sufficiently encouraging to justify a national launch as the next step. The decision was taken in September 1998, and the national launch took place in January 1999. The marketing objectives set in September 1998 were to:

- establish the Guides as a credible, effective medium among the marketing community and therefore potential advertisers;

- increase the number of Guides requested by consumers and, in turn, reduce the marketing cost per Guide;
- throughout all communication, retain the Goldfish brand values of ‘surprising’, ‘practical’, ‘innovative’, ‘inclusive’ and ‘honest’.

To meet these objectives, the marketing strategy — first for the consumer audience — was:

**‘Must-have’  
information source  
for consumers**

- to drive consumer requests by making Goldfish Guides a ‘must-have’ information source and create a desire, an interest and an understanding;
- to increase generic brand awareness of the new product and stress the comprehensive range of Guides available via TV advertising;
- to drive tactically requests for specific Guides through highly targeted direct response activities such as national newspaper advertorials, enticing direct mail, door-drops and PR activity to promote individual Guides;
- to draw potential requesters through the Goldfish Guide website and drive requests with a strong presence on the Web, using a variety of banner ads, spotlights and word searches as well as hot links from other relevant sites.

**Targeting model  
built in-house**

The media strategy that had been developed and refined in the test market was now employed nationally; an initial burst of television to introduce the concept and create awareness, supported by a variety of response media including direct mail, door-drops, online advertising, teletext, national press and consumer magazines, lifestyle-survey mailings, Goldfish credit card inserts, conferences and exhibitions, PR, third-party affinity schemes and advertorials. For direct mail, a targeting model was built in-house, in collaboration with the British Gas database team. Sponsored questions were placed on lifestyle database questionnaires. Door-drops were targeted by MOSAIC. During 1999, three waves of targeted direct mail went out, ranging in volume from 100,000 to 500,000 per wave. Two waves of inserts in Goldfish credit card statements totalled over one million; and 20 million lifestyle questionnaires carried sponsored questions.

The individual media plans for each Guide, initially developed for the test market, were further refined, as was the process of setting (for each Guide) targets for send-out volume, advertising revenue and marketing cost per guide. These targets were based on advertiser uptake and market size, consumer demand for category information and media channel cost efficiency at reaching targeted consumers and encouraging requests.

**Challenge to  
the traditional  
media-buying  
mindset**

Trade strategy flowed from the first stated marketing objective, ‘to establish the guides as a credible, effective medium among the marketing community and therefore potential advertisers’. Given that the Guide was new and unique, the task was to challenge the traditional media-buying mindset (ie cost per thousand, frequency and reach). Goldfish Guides were offering an immediately accountable cost per

enquiry; demographic targeting was replaced by straight product promotion to self-selecting consumers who were in 'buying mode'.

To achieve this task, heavyweight trade press advertising, running virtually continuously, was backed by high-profile PR events and promotional activities; for example, a *Campaign* cover wrap which won an award for Most Innovative Use of Business-to-Business Media at the 1999 PPA Awards, and selected advertising and media agencies were picketed by 'fluffy' Goldfish, distributing information leaflets about the Guides.

Total marketing expenditure during 1999 was £3m, split roughly 50:50 above and below the line.

## The product

Each Goldfish Guide consists of a 60pp+ A4 publication which starts with an editorial review of the product category concerned and ends with advertisements and offers from brand owners. The Guides are written from the standpoint that the reader knows nothing about that product or service category, and the (independent) editorial staff explain the ins and outs of the product/service category in terms which are simple to understand. There is no specific recommendation on what to buy; rather, the Guides attempt to supply sufficient facts for readers to be able to make their own choice.

There are currently 20 Guides, most of them available in print form but a few only available online (some are available via both media). The precise offering changes over time with consumer demand. The subject areas (unsurprisingly, given the economics of the venture) concentrate on 'big-ticket' items which involve a considered purchase. For example, home-related titles include conservatories, replacement windows and doors, carpets and flooring, buying, selling and moving home, bathrooms and showers. Other categories are computers (ie PCs and printers), financial services (ISAs and mortgages), four automotive categories, home entertainment (TVs, VCRs and digital broadcasting), six domestic appliance categories, and the most recent — charitable giving.

The digital print system is set up to give very fast turnaround. Requests are fed to Moore IMS from the Sitel call centre three times per day; on receipt, the requests are processed instantly ('print on demand') by fully automated software. Requests can be for any combination of the 20 Guides, and volumes in any one batch can vary from three to 3,000 Guides. This presents a considerable challenge to Moores! However, the printer undertakes to produce the Guides and get them into the post within hours of the receipt of requests. The promise from Goldfish Guide to a requester is that the Guide will be in the customer's hands within 48 hours; in practice this can often be 24 hours.

Apart from the name and address personalisation, the Guides can be personalised with addresses of local stockists, and advertisers can tailor their offers to particular regions or MOSAIC codes and can promote specific products, offers or discounts to individual customers. The digital technology also allows the Guides to be updated very swiftly when products under review change. Advertisers can change their copy as

**Assume little knowledge of product category**

**Concentration on 'big-ticket' items involving considered purchase**

**Rapid turnaround of very complex print**

**Advertisers receive listings of requesters**

and when they wish. The technology would allow even great customisation — fully variable text and image content — but of course there is a price to pay for such sophistication, and the economics of the Guides do not warrant customisation to this degree. Nevertheless, the level of personalisation present in the Guides is at the cutting edge of technology — and the print quality is excellent too. Advertisers receive a listing of Guide requesters each week; their contract allows them to mail these respondents once, but not to telephone them. Consumers may choose to opt out, of course.

**Results to date**

More than one million Goldfish Guides have been requested (as at the end of 1999). Internal forecasts have been exceeded, on both the trade and the consumer front. Research conducted by NOP in 1998 showed positive results among consumers:

- 91 per cent of Guide requesters intend to buy within four months;
- between 35 and 75 per cent of requesters actually go on to purchase within four months (depending on the category of the Guide and the buying cycle it relates to);
- 74 per cent said the Goldfish Guide influenced their buying decision;
- 71 per cent found the advertiser literature useful;
- 93 per cent of requesters rated the Guide as good/excellent.

**93 per cent rated Guide as good/excellent**

Key to the success of Goldfish Guides is the performance for the advertisers who fund them. This is literally true; advertisers can place their advertisements in the Guides free of charge, and only pay 'per enquiry'. So if there are no enquiries, the Guides will not be viable. In fact, there are a number of case histories which show how effective the Guides can be. Names of advertisers must be kept confidential, but some examples are:

- a car manufacturer: 15 per cent of leads (consumers saying they intended to buy a new car in the next three months) were converted;
- windows and doors: every £1 invested generated £50 worth of sales;
- PCs: more than 3 per cent of leads were converted;
- built-in cooker manufacturer: GG conversions accounted for 6 per cent of UK sales;
- financial services company: over 60 per cent of the leads generated from their ad in the Goldfish Guide to PEPs were converted into sales.

**Advertiser case histories demonstrate success**

The reason these advertisers can attribute sales to Goldfish Guide advertising is the list of enquirers provided to them by Goldfish Guides — precisely accountable advertising, in the true tradition of direct marketing.

Initially, the Guides were targeted at a fairly broad target market — similar to that enjoyed by the Goldfish credit card. However,

**Requesters tend to be up-market**

market experience has shown that requesters tend to be relatively upmarket; in geodemographic terms, MOSAIC 'High Income Families' are by far the most important group, followed by 'Suburban Semis'. Other above-average MOSAIC groups are 'Stylish Singles', 'Blue-collar Owners', and 'Mortgaged Families'. A similar pattern is revealed by average household income of requesters; by far the highest index is found in the £35,000+ per annum group, with £25,000+ per annum being more than twice the average index.

**March 2000 — Internet launch**

Goldfish Guide has had a Web presence since the initial test market launch in 1998, but this was merely an order-taking facility. Some of the more popular Guides were put on the website in late 1999; these were similar to the paper versions, but had no search facility.

The Goldfish Guide website has been under intensive development, working towards a March 2000 launch (this paper was written in mid-December 1999). The intention is to create a website that will allow a whole range of options:

- users will be able to read through comprehensive background information on the products in question;
- users will be able to search on a range of criteria (such as size of car, value band, specific product features);
- alternatively, users can search on model name;
- there will be a facility to click on models that come up in answer to a search, to obtain more detailed information.

**Powerful search facility on website**

It is intended that the search function will be really comprehensive and powerful — a key feature of the site. It will need to cater for 'newcomers' to the market right through to aficionados with specific information requirements.

As in the paper Guides, there will be a separation of editorial from advertising. Editorial copy will be completely independent, and products in a category will be covered editorially, whether their brand owners advertise or not. On the advertising front, there will be several 'models': one which takes advertising 'partners' all the way through the website, including links on the Goldfish site to the partners' websites; or e-mail boxes where enquirers could (for example) request a test drive. Another model is to sign up e-commerce partners for products such as brown goods, white goods etc.

It was mentioned in the background section of this paper that an Internet option was considered initially but rejected at that time, because back in 1997 the Internet was felt to be too 'niche', not inclusive enough. However, we all know what has happened in the last two years! Internet penetration has grown rapidly, and is forecast to continue to do so. In specific Goldfish terms, the proportion of business done on its website doubled from 8 per cent in December 1998 to 15 per cent in June 1999.

The other piece of information that has contributed to the decision to move to an Internet solution is the fact that research shows that people

**Timing right for  
Internet launch**

are using the Internet primarily to source information. The features of the Web mesh together beautifully with the benefits of the Goldfish Guide approach; information-based, comprehensive, customised, interactive. One-to-one marketing. It is also more cost effective than a paper Guide. As Paul Hallas said, 'Now is the right time to launch on the Internet!'

(Visit the Goldfish Guide website on [www.goldfishguides.com](http://www.goldfishguides.com))