Six Ways to Build a More Responsive Marketing Database
Craig Conard – President, Sudden Impact Marketing

Nearly every organization wrestles with database issues. And those issues tend to become painfully apparent when campaigns, such as those for fundraising, are launched.

Overengineering of database structure, disparate data sources, old data, bad data, siloed data, and direct imports of purchased lists are some of the most common issues. But there are ways to fix them.

Here are six steps to building a stronger, more responsive database for your campaigns:

1. **Evaluate your database health.** Take a random sampling of your contact records to see how many have accurate email addresses or complete information. Repeat this a few times to determine just how good your data really is. You may find that an update effort is required before you launch your campaign.

2. **Siphon off the best and create a new database for campaigns.** Determine what you can identify as your best data assets. Using whatever tools or filters are at your disposal, create a subset of your database that aligns best with your target prospects or donors.

3. **Simplify your database structure to house core contact information as it pertains to campaign goals.** Databases with dozens, or hundreds, of fields are wishful thinking at best, since they rarely get populated and can lead to clutter and complexity without purpose.
4. **Plug the holes.** Use list acquisition to fill any gaps. For starters, look inside and see if other university databases can help build your own. Assume the worst, and expect to clean the data before you import the contacts. Use caution when adding from the outside—importing a raw outside list before scrubbing can send you back to square one in no time.

5. **Gate what gets into your database.** Set standards as to what you will allow into your campaign database. A website inquiry or email blast respondent does not automatically constitute a quality contact.

6. **Create a process to stay in front of prospects and ensure the data is maintained.** Enlist email, direct mail, and phone campaigns to assure continued integrity of your database.

_Craig Conard is president of marketing company Sudden Impact Marketing (www.simarketing.net). He can be reached at craig@simarketing.net._