

# THE HINDU Business Line

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## Permission marketing

— Shashi Ashiwal



### *Webmail anyone?*

As the name suggests, this refers to the sub-discipline of marketing in which marketing / promotional messages are sent to a prospect only after getting his or her permission to do so.

The field of permission marketing caught the fancy thanks primarily to Seth Godin, who can well be termed as the father of this field.

Godin wrote books on the subject, and also on the subject of how word-of-mouth can be used as a highly effective marketing tool.

Permission marketing basically rejects the concepts of mass marketing and mass communication.

It says that these concepts are outdated in today's highly competitive world. Consumers today, so goes the argument, are much more discerning than previous generations, much more demanding, and much less patient with untargeted marketing communication.

A good example of permission marketing is the one adopted by India's leading holiday company — Club Mahindra (CM). CM believes that any form of mailers or calls can only be done after permission has been taken from the prospect, and that spamming is an absolute no-no.

Their form of permission marketing goes like this — they post people at places where their target audience is likely to turn up — petrol pumps, highway toll booths, high-class cinema halls, etc.

These people approach the audience that drives up in cars (a key criterion used by CM to qualify its prospects) and asks them for permission to talk to them.

If this permission is granted, then a lead generation form is handed over to them, where the prospect mentions his / her contact details and basically confirms that he would like a sales call about CM's products.

As incentive to do this, the prospect could be offered a free holiday or a crack at a contest or some such sweetener.

Now, when the sales representative does get in touch, she does it in the full knowledge that the prospect has expressed interest in learning about the product.

Another ingenious form of permission marketing is carried out in many websites such as the ones offering free webmails – Hotmail, Rediffmail, etc.

Most of us would have been through this; when registering to get an id, there will be a small set of check-boxes asking us for our interests.

If we tick, say, cricket and science, then the service provider will take it as consent to bombard us with emails and newsletters.

If we don't recall that we ticked some boxes, we could well end up thinking that this is spam; well, it is not.

Nonetheless, this does border on spam as not all the promotional mails we get will pertain to the subjects that we expressed interest in!

Despite such attempts at distorting the principle and pushing the envelope, permission marketing is a highly desirable practice, which is still evolving.

Coupled with other techniques and principles enabled by modern technology, such as mass customisation, permission marketing is one of the tools that can protect us customers from a lot of nuisance sales efforts, but will make our lives as marketers a lot more challenging.

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