

Phone Directories: The Weaknesses

Directory Expansion and Advertising Clutter

Metro markets in the United States have an average of 28 different phone directories for consumers to choose from. Each book is loaded with dizzying display ads that can be confusing and frustrating for the consumer. Who needs them all? Who reads them all? How can an advertiser be certain that their ad will ever be seen?

Limited Exposure

At least 53% of adults do not use the phone directories (Yellow Pages Publishers Association), so 47% will never see your ad.

With so many other online and mobile resources for phone numbers, the number of adults using phone directories will continue to shrink.

Minimal Consumer Awareness

Since phone directories are typically used after the decision to buy had been made, top-of-mind awareness must be built in other ways. As products continue to proliferate and the retail market becomes saturated, you need to create demand for your products before the buying decision has been made.

Advertising Limitations

Most directories are published once a year, and advertising must be purchased well in advance of the publication date. You can't make corrections or changes resulting from constantly changing business conditions. This can prove to be disastrous if a business changes locations, adds outlets or changes their phone number.

Internet Interference

The movement from print to online is changing the face of an already unstable print industry. As a matter of fact, the number of references for print phone directories continues to decline as consumers go to the web to find retailers' phone numbers and locations.

Super Sized

As consumers super-size their homes and their meals, the phone directory industry has followed suit. Directories, particularly in large markets, tend to be bulky and hard to store. They also are not convenient to use, requiring added effort to find a business among a crowded field. In order to stand out from the competition in these enormous encyclopedias, the only answer for a business would seem to be full-page ads, with bright red borders, flags, banners and giant lettering – and a hefty price tag.

Color Calamity

Adding color to a phone directory ad doesn't necessarily mean it will grab a consumer's attention. As a matter of fact, adding a second color to a large ad doesn't increase the likelihood of a consumer calling a business, according to a study by Consumer Review Systems (Mound, MN).

While phone directories may compliment and enhance media synergism for an advertiser, television remains the best medium for advertisers trying to make the biggest impact on the largest number of potential customers.