The State of K-12 School Marketing Data

A Comparative Study

By Ruth P. Stevens

October 2014

The State of K-12 School Marketing Data

A Comparative Study

By Ruth P. Stevens

October 2014

Executive Summary

A research study was undertaken in September 2014 to assess the accuracy and completeness of marketing data in the K-12 school market. The vendors analyzed were four leaders in the field, including MCH Strategic Data. We placed identical orders with all four vendors, for delivery of the names of all 2nd grade teachers at all schools in 11 counties in 4 states. The names were merged, and we contracted with PointClear, LLC, to call the schools where teacher names from all four vendors appeared. A total of 115 schools met that criterion, and 104 schools participated in the tele-verification process. The vendor with the largest number of accurate names and the lowest percentage of errors was MCH Strategic Data.

Background and Objectives

It's a well-known maxim that the target audience selected (the "list") is the single most important variable driving direct marketing campaign success. Faced with many sources of prospect names, marketers are always looking for ways to pre-determine which vendor's list will be most effective, giving them the largest number of correct names. The most reliable method of assessing list quality is to buy a sample of names from each vendor, and test them in the mail. This approach is reliable—but expensive.

To get at list accuracy without conducting an in-market test, we resolved to tele-verify a sample of names from several leading vendors. In developing our sample market, we chose a selection of states that represented both geographic diversity and market appeal. We chose 2nd grade teachers as the sample target audience for simplicity and clarity.

For details on the study's methodology, please see the appendix.

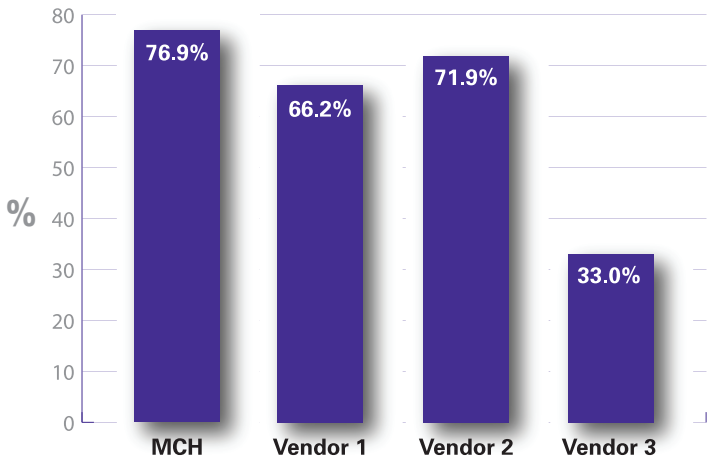
Research Results

Like marketers everywhere, school marketers are looking for accuracy and coverage in their list selections. They want to reach all the possible people in their target audience, and they want the names they get to be correct, to avoid the wasted expense involved in sending messages to the wrong people. On all counts, MCH Strategic Data delivered the best coverage and the most accurate names compared to the other suppliers examined.

Coverage

Coverage means the marketer's ability to reach every person in the target universe, in this case 2nd grade teachers in the 11 counties. The tele-verification process revealed precisely 539 2nd grade teachers in the 104 schools. Thus, the coverage rates shown here comprise the number of valid teacher names provided by each vendor, divided by 539.

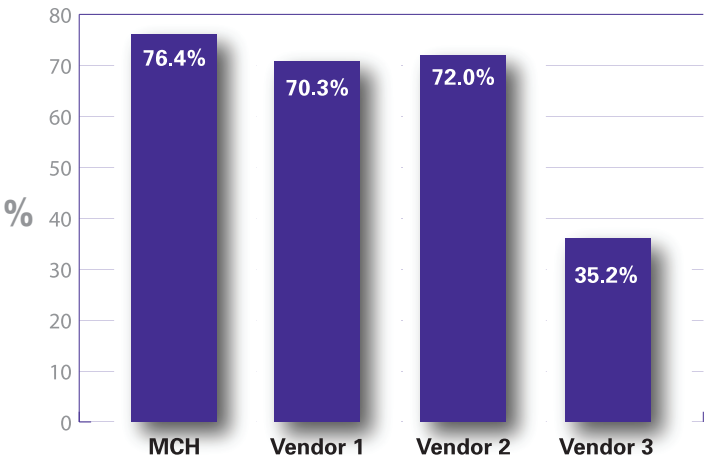
Market Coverage by Vendor



Accuracy

Marketers typically rent or buy prospect names on a flat cost per thousand, and they want to be sure they are getting what they pay for. So in this case the question a marketer might ask is, "Even if the vendor can't give me all the names I want, are the names I paid for really current 2nd grade teachers?" These percentages show the number of valid teacher names by vendor, divided by the number of names that vendor provided within schools that were tele-verified.

List Accuracy by Vendor

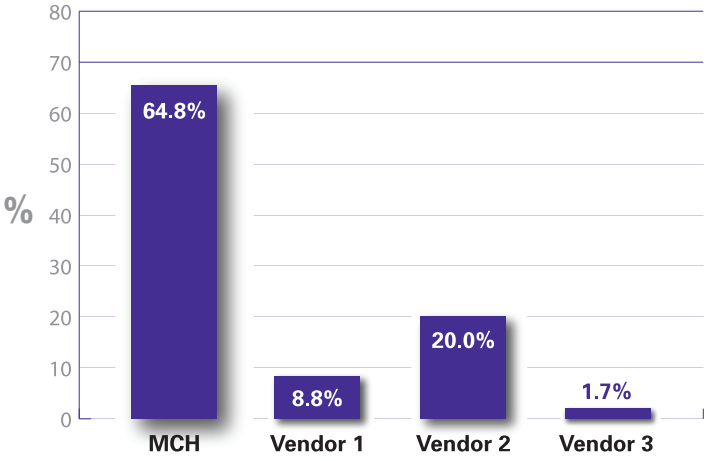


Uniques

Experienced marketers know that a name appearing on multiple vendors' lists is likely to be more productive, either because it's more likely to be accurate, or because the person is an active buyer. But there is also value, from a coverage perspective, in a list containing unique names, meaning names that appear exclusively on the list of a single vendor. Using in-market testing, direct marketers have long separated out uniques by vendor, as an indicator of list quality.

The valid uniques percentage is derived by dividing the valid uniques into the total uniques on each vendor file. It shows the likelihood that a unique name on the file is accurate, meaning that the name is really a 2nd grade teacher in the geography.

Valid Unique Rate



Observations and Conclusions

This study reveals considerable divergence in vendors' ability to support the objectives of marketers looking to reach 2nd grade teachers, as a test of the K-12 marketing data available from leading vendors.

While the gross name count varied only slightly among the vendors (with one outlier), the coverage and accuracy were very different. As is typical in the list world, no vendor provided all the names sought in the target market. But coverage ranged from a high of 76.9% to a low of 33% – a wide disparity.

Accuracy also varied dramatically, ranging from 76.4% to 35.3%. The difference between the most accurate list from MCH and its next competitor was 6%, indicating that marketers can expect meaningful improvement in results by choosing the vendor based on accuracy.

School marketers are always challenged by data accuracy problems. Teachers may leave the school, or change jobs within the school. The lists examined in this study may have been less accurate than usual because they were pulled the week after Labor Day, when schools are in flux, and teacher data on school websites may not have been updated. In this situation, for example, our tele-verification process identified 76 entirely fresh names of 2nd grade teachers in the 11 counties that none of the vendors had on their files.

List price was not considered in this study. Faced with similar counts from different vendors, some marketers may be tempted to make a vendor decision based on price. This is clearly a mistake, given that accuracy and coverage levels varied considerably among vendors.

It's interesting to note variations in the "uniques," which represents the names that appeared exclusively on a single vendor's file and were validated as being actual 2nd grade teachers. Only one vendor (MCH) delivered a significant number of valid uniques.

The reasons behind the invalid names provide some interesting insights (see appendix 3). Not only did MCH have the smallest number of invalid names, but relative to its nearest competitors, MCH's invalid names were most likely to still be at the school, and thus possibly worthy of marketing outreach.

R. P. S.

Apppendix 1: Methodology

On September 8, 2014, we placed identical list orders to all four vendors, requesting all 2nd grade teachers (including regular and lead teachers) by name, in all schools (including public, private, parochial, charter, etc., and all types of school organizations, like elementary and combined K-12), in 11 counties in 4 states (see chart).

State	Counties
CA	Santa Clara, Santa Cruz
FL	Manatee, Hillsborough, Charlotte, Sarasota
IL	Du Page, Kankakee, Will
TX	Denton, Tarrant

We asked for teacher name, school name and school mailing address only (no email or phone ordered). When asked, we mentioned that we were conducting a direct mail test for a line of supplemental classroom products.

Names were delivered to us within three days, and we forwarded the files to PointClear, for matching. The schools showing at least one name from all four vendors numbered 115. For PointClear's convenience, MCH names were ordered to include the phone number of each school. PointClear began calling the schools September 15 and finished on September 19. They were able to complete the verification process with 104 schools, the other eleven schools declining to answer.

PointClear operators conducted the verification conversation by reading the list of names supplied by the four vendors for that school, and asking if each was currently employed by the school as a 2nd grade teacher. Where the answer was no, and the school offered details, the status of the name was recorded as "Not at school," or "At the school, but in a different job," "Retired," or "Bad data," meaning the name was wrong or unknown.

This study was commissioned MCH Strategic Data. Our statistician, Jessie Simbulan, attests to the projectibility of the results from this sample to the K-12 list universe as follows: *We can be 90% confident that the sample sizes for schools (104) has an allowable margin of error of +/- 8% while the allowable margin of error for the sample size of the teachers (1021) is +/- 2.6%.*

Appendix 2: Tele-verification Output

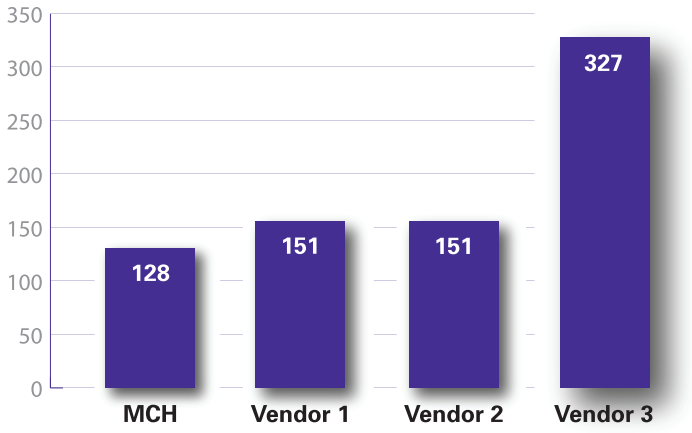
Category	MCH	Vendor 1	Vendor 2	Vendor 3
Total names supplied	5,394	5,398	5,591	4,039
Names supplied within the 104 schools tele-verified	543	508	539	505
Verified current 2nd grade teacher on the file	415	357	388	178
Not at the school	76	102	107	218
Good name, but in a different job at the school	45	36	37	86
Bad name	6	10	5	21
Duplicate name	1	3	2	3
Unique names	88	34	25	235
Valid unique names	57	3	5	4

Category	Count
Combined names from 4 vendors, provided to PointClear	1,021
Verified names that appeared on the file of at least one vendor	463
Fresh names identified by PointClear	76
Total verified universe of 2nd grade teachers in the 11 counties	539

Appendix 3: Detailed Analysis of the Invalid Data

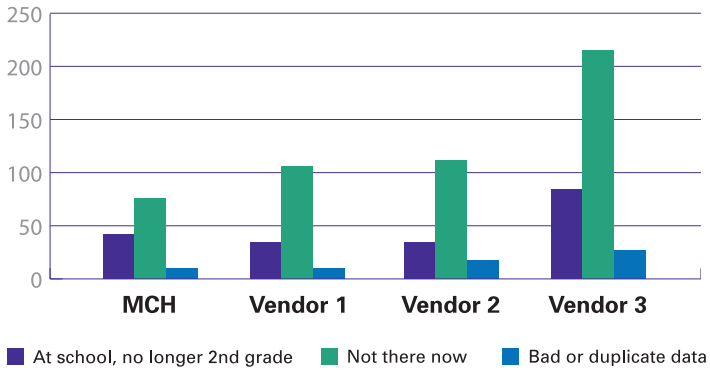
The percentage of invalid names on each vendor's file is, of course, the opposite of the accuracy percentage. The quantity of invalid names appears in the chart below.

Invalid Name Quantity, By File



Breaking down the inaccurate names reveals some useful insights. PointClear captured the reasons behind the inaccurate names, such as: the person is at the school but in another job; the person is not, or no longer, at the school; or the name is unknown or a duplicate within the file.

Cause of Data Inaccuracy



Ruth P. Stevens consults on customer acquisition & retention, and teaches marketing at graduate schools and corporations. She is the author of *Maximizing Lead Generation: The Complete Guide for B2B Marketers,* and *Trade Show and Event Marketing*. Reach her at ruth@ruthstevens.com.