

Welcome to ***Between Issues***, a free e-newsletter from School Market Research Institute, Inc. (SMRI). This e-newsletter delivers information about marketing to K-12 schools. You have been selected to receive this newsletter because of your interest related to school marketing.

In this issue we examine the shifts in Easter school breaks from last year to this and the potential impact it can have on your sales.

Easter 2012 is Shifting Spring Break Weeks

Easter Moves from April 24, 2011 to April 8, 2012

In spring 2012 Easter will be just over two weeks earlier than it was in 2011, shifting from April 24, 2011 to April 8 in 2012. As a result, almost 36,000 schools will move their spring break weeks from late April to earlier April in 2012.

Over 97,000 schools take mid-winter and spring breaks during which they close for a full week. These breaks have the potential to negatively impact returns from promotions that arrive in school during these closings. While Christmas and mid-winter breaks fall on or about the same time every year, Easter can vary as much as a month.

These break periods are like mini-summer vacations. While schools are closed, direct mail and emails are accumulating. Some educators visit their schools early or check emails during their break in order to manage the overwhelming number of communications waiting for them. But others who return to school after the break without having checked their direct or email are greeted with a backlog of correspondence.

More Promotion Equals Less Attention

The more promotion one receives on a given day, the less attention each individual communication is likely to receive. Often the recipient's main reaction is to toss or file the direct mail and delete as much of the email as possible. After all, educators returning from break usually have curriculum and study plan issues to deal with. Many of them may have been running behind schedule before the break took place.

For many school marketers, the fall season does not perform nearly as well as the winter and spring seasons. Certainly, the fact that the majority of school purchasing decisions take place before the July 1, budget rollover is a factor. But what role does the accumulation of mail and email play prior to the reopening of school after a break?

Timing is Everything

Unlike email with its instant delivery, standard direct mail takes on average two weeks to travel through the postal system. Most attention is given to mail and catalogs during the first two weeks after its receipt. In fact, as much as half of the response that the entire promotion will generate is initiated in the first two weeks after a promotion is received. The first question is whether mailings should be timed around school breaks. The second question is whether it is better for promotions to arrive before or after a break.

The correct answers depend on several factors. For example, what is the sequence and time between promotion events in the time period before and after the break? How can you best protect the first two weeks after the promotion arrives without interfering with another promotion event?

Many school marketers believe that break dates do impact promotion results, sometimes significantly. Consumer marketers will tell you that an interruption to the mail (or email) can have disastrous results. They will point to winter blizzards or other delays that took place during the week that mail was supposed to have been delivered and tell you that response rates were dismal compared to other years.

The most challenging school break is the one that falls around the Easter holiday because it can move significantly from year to year. In 2012 with Easter falling on April 8, statistics taken from Market Data Retrieval's (MDR) compilation effort show that over 35% of schools will take their spring break the week of April 2 before Easter. That means February and March promotions will have less time to "work" before response patterns are interrupted by the spring breaks. School marketers should pay careful attention to their spring mail dates to avoid any detrimental effects on response due to the earlier spring break in 2012.

Please feel free to forward this article to anyone who might be interested in this information. Please remember this article is copyrighted and may not be reproduced in any form without prior written consent. For permission to reproduce this article, please email SMRI at info@smriinc.com.