

# Bringing home the bacon

We heard recently of the "Windowbase guide to Postcodes" being used by a list broker. We can't exactly claim copyright on it - after all, the postcodes are provided by Royal Mail - but it's nice to be the market leader.

The purpose of our databases is to help pinpoint your potential customers more precisely. And that means using the information at your disposal. Don't just mail - or make tele-marketing calls - to **everyone** in the data you've purchased from us. Use the information to find the **type** of company you need.

## How can you do that?

**By size?** Yes. Almost all our databases have an indication of company size - sometimes by number of employees, by stock of houses, by production units per week, and so on. Even if you want to sell to all, surely you wouldn't do it the **same way** to the big as the small.

**By activity?** Check the different activities - either by the materials they use and operations they do, or by the different job titles of those in the Specifiers databases. A different letter may be required for each. Your decision - your target.

**By place?** Of course! Nice to contact all those near to you, but don't forget those 'corridors' that you can get to at minimum cost - because there's a clear motorway between you and them - or because they are already on a run you do regularly for an existing customer.

In short - **your business is most likely to be successful if you think about targeting. If you are approaching everyone on your**

**database, then you're not being selective** - because there are bound to be some that you don't want to approach!

If you'd like the Windowbase guide to postcodes, it can be downloaded from our website - go to [www.windowbase.info](http://www.windowbase.info) and look for 'postcodes'. Use a magic marker and choose the codes you should target.

**You might have a bright new idea for a campaign. Aim it at a precise slice of your market and, that way, you can measure how successful it is, against the performance of the rest.** If you want to bring home the bacon, remember even the nicest pig has some slices that aren't as tasty. Maybe they need curing.



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## Data accuracy

# High marks Low score

**KITCHEN COMPANIES, or anyone who supplies products comprising many separate components, know to their cost that 'items delivered' is not the same as 'items received'. Measuring the delivery [deducted from stock and loaded on the truck] of individual components is simple and may look great on management reports. Distribution managers boast 97% delivery performance 'and you can't get much better than that!' Wanna bet?**

97% isn't much use until the adjustable feet arrive, even though everything else is on site. It has to be the complete order or nothing. Although each individual component is hitting 97%, where there is a 97 in a 100 chance of that item being picked, the chances of all the individual components of an order being delivered together are slim. And the more components in an order, the less likely it will be complete. If the chances of each item being in stock is 97%, and there are 23 items, the formula is:  $97 \times 0.97 \times 0.97 \times 0.97 \times 0.97$  and so on up to 23. The answer is 49.63%, less than half, and not at all what we understand by a 97% delivery performance.

The same principle applies to a database. All sorts of factors affect the quality of your data, and therefore the value you can get from its use. If your database



is flawed, it doesn't matter how brilliant your marketing or how persistent you are, it's still "garbage in, garbage out". It's the number of fields [or items of data] in each record that becomes **crucial**.

Like stock in a warehouse, and no matter how accurate and conscientious the researchers, each data item will have a probability of being right at the time it was researched. People make mistakes but let's say the research is pretty careful, with an accuracy rate of 97%. In other words there's just a 3% chance of it being wrong. Pretty good? If there are 23 fields of information in the record, then the chances that the record being correct are less than one in two.

Put another way, if each record has 23 fields, probably less than half the records in your database will be correct. That's

why Windowbase tries to strike a balance between the number of fields in a record and the value of adding more. Too little and you lose the ability to search intelligently and target prospects. Too much, in too many fields, and the accuracy of each record is compromised.

Data decays, that's a fact. Details are constantly changing - phone numbers, addresses, personnel, suppliers. Most people know this, yet still grossly underestimate the damage it inflicts on the quality and usefulness of their data. It's called the half-life: over six months, half your records change in some way. Worse, the more data in each record, the shorter the half-life.

The shorter the half-life, so the less useful your data and the less business it generates. And

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## Trade associations

# Wood it stand up to close scrutiny?

Part of the Windowbase expertise is to identify and tap useful sources of information in the continual search to keep the databases up to date.

It's depressing to hear that someone added all the coloured [yellow and others] pages data to his latest copy of an issued database, "because there seem to be companies that weren't on yours"! The reason they are NOT on ours is because we spent a lot of time and research in removing names and addresses that appear to have gone away, or are not responding to our calls. It gets worse.

Recently we found a well-known Trade

Association had, on its web-site, a list of all 240 members. "Wonderful!" we thought, especially as the categories gave us exactly what we have in one of our databases (in this case timber windows, doors and conservatories). We duly commissioned our researchers to collect the data and check the details with each company. 155 companies fitted but, as you'd expect, half of these were already on our database.

We needed to check 78 new companies. Then we rang them. 48 were rightly involved in the activities we track - we were delighted to add them to the 2,350 other active companies already in that

database... but here's the snag: 30 of the companies, that *their own trade association* regarded as making such products, did no such thing. Some made staircases, some made bar furniture and one made moulds for pre-cast concrete!

So the moral of this story is: unless you actually validate additional data, it should never be attached to good stuff, and NEVER believe someone else's data without a very good reason.

... unless you actually validate additional data, it should never be attached to good stuff...



For further information, please fill in your details and tick your area of interest below and return to:

Reader's name: \_\_\_\_\_

Company: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

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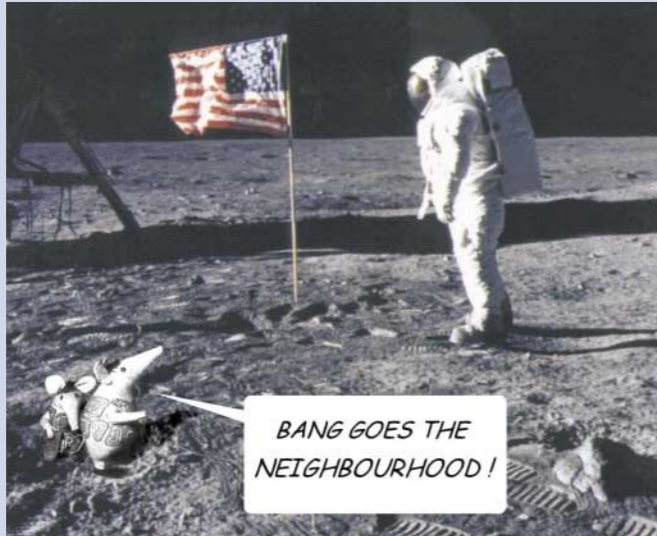
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# Fly me to the Moon

**“We have a turnover of more than six million,” said Steve, the Operations Manager of a housing association’s Direct Labour Organisation. “Over half of that goes on stuff we buy in.” His wages bill includes a lot of work that’s sub-contracted, too, so this man has some spending power.**

The depot is four easy miles from a motorway junction in the heart of the Midlands yet, as he says, “we might as well be on the far side of the moon.” Nobody calls, nobody phones, and they receive next to nothing in the post.

“We’re a non-profit making organisation,” he adds, “but you’d think somebody out there, with sales targets, would show some interest in us.” There is no shortage of local companies who know to keep their ear to the ground for one of the next year’s programmed contracts but, for the rest of the country, this DLO might as well not exist. In the end, they did a deal with a chain of builders’ merchants - schedules of rates agreed every April, and they call off what they want, when they want it. Good economic



sense from their point of view, but it sounds indicative of the state of affairs...

Steve does the usual round of national exhibitions and conferences. He visits the trade stands, looks at what they’ve got and listens to what they have to say. “Yes,” says Steve, “we do follow them up and place new orders but, when I talk to other guys like me, they say it’s pretty much the same for them.” Millions to spend, every single one of them, yet they feel like the poor relation. Looking on the bright

side, Steve says he enjoys the occasional break in Harrogate [or similar approved], a bit of a laugh with the lads and a few jars. “Not the ideal way, though, is it?”

He’s not asking to be bombarded with junk mail and requests for appointments but, as he says, “it would be nice to think they know we exist.” He adds there’s a great pub just down the road, too... [for informal discussion, you understand.]

Talking to the association’s Maintenance Manager, based at Head Office, he doesn’t take

cold-calls because, if he did, he says he wouldn’t have time to get on with his job. It’s like every rep in the world wants a slice of his budget, so he’s definitely on the map. “Steve,” he says, “has his own job to do and I let him get on with it.” Most of the programmed work is done to specifications but it is, apparently, something of a worry that nobody really knows how the DLO decides what, or who, to use.

It’s not just Operations and Maintenance Managers who get their heads together over a few jars. Reps are all holed up in the same hotels and swapping tales at the bar till the wee small hours. Some of it’s about work but, for those guys, information is power, not something to be shared, so nobody’s letting on about how - or what - they’re doing. If one rep’s had the nous to hit the DLOs in his area, he’s not going to let on, is he?

## High marks, Low score

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the more money you waste buying it, creating it, maintaining it or using it.

What looks like an Aladdin’s cave of riches - an offer of the biggest, most comprehensive database you ever saw - can only be as good as the research that keeps it fresh. If something comes to you, brand new, with actually less than an evens chance of being correct, what’s it going to be like in six months, or a years’ time? So, going back to the kitchen company analogy, you won’t be ordering a brand new kitchen. You’ll be sending back the old bits and asking for every single one of them to be replaced. Fancy your chances?

The number of fields of information Windowbase puts on a record is a fine balance, learned by checking and rechecking over many years, and our customers say the balance is just about right. Well, 97% of them!



## “I still get returns!”

**EVERYONE AGREES a database is already out of date the day it’s issued. When someone used one of our databases to carry out a mailing, he complained that, typically, 2% were returned as ‘undeliverable’ or were rejected by the recipient.**

But is this bad news? We welcome news of returns, as discussed in the last *Issues* - not because of the waste of effort by our customer, but because it may be the first sign that a company has moved or gone bust, and we can check it out to ensure that it can be corrected.

Sometimes we are told “this person doesn’t want any more mailings from us, so please remove the record from your database.” We can’t do that. If the company is there and doing what it says it does, it’s our job to ensure they get offers related to their needs. Occasionally we make a note on the file (all our databases have a notes field that contains pertinent information, and is worth reading) that could explain why it isn’t worth mailing them. That’s fine, we can cope with that, too. But each user may need to keep their own exceptions file - to avoid being a nuisance - surely a good idea.

Not all our data users get returns. Isn’t that good? No, it’s not. They’re the ones that don’t put a return address on their mailings. It’s good for our reputation, perhaps, but no help for our users.

### Conclusions:-

- 1 Ensure every mailing has a return address on the envelope. Use it to keep all your data up to date;
- 2 Keep your own Exception List of companies that don’t want you to mail - or whom you don’t want to waste money on.

# One Jag or two?

**Information is power. Ask the White House. They had information that Saddam Hussein was amassing weapons of mass destruction. Yeah, right! Let your fingers do the walking and there’s more names, addresses and phone numbers than you can shake a stick at. Printed when? Verified when? So maybe you should ask someone who’s personally responsible for keeping her company’s data bang up-to-date.**

Lots of anomalies, she complains, and a lot of them very hard to verify. She doesn’t know who’s right and who’s wrong, if nobody answers the phone at the other end, all she can do is give a list to her boss and hope the lads on the road will follow it all up. And how much feedback does she get?

What we all need is credibility. If something comes with the right name at the top of the sheet of paper, we’d be tempted to find it easier to believe. If, for example, you wanted to know something about Leominster Marches, a good place to look might be the official data published by the ODPM. That’s the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. [Don’t bother, incidentally, because there’s no published record of the district.] But, you might ask, what happened to it? And to its housing stock? No good asking Johnny Two Jags. All you get is the county of Herefordshire. Not to be confused with Hereford and Worcester, of course. Ditto housing stocks: the OPDM can tell you how many houses a local authority had in 2001. Is that useful?

If you want the right answers, you have to ask the right questions. Someone claims to know all there is to know about “all 46 ALMOs”. It might be important to be able to differentiate them from LSVTs but, if they’re more or less the same, does it matter so much? Well, to someone, maybe, if he can’t tell you anything about hundreds of housing associations...

Windowbase is continually doing research, to bring you accurate, affordable and useful information, including the ALMOs incidentally. “Useful” = contact details for as many organisations as possible in any give sphere of operations. Official government sources aren’t as quick on their feet as your average rep, so your better-than-average rep is far more likely to have a finger on the pulse. The ODPM can’t necessarily be relied on when



you want to know when the pulse stopped. Your rep is as much responsible for identifying the right people as for conveying information about what you sell. Even if your reps don’t go back to when Adam was a lad, Windowbase does.

So “Gary One Vauxhall” has far more credibility than “Johnny Two Jags”. Gary can tell you all about how Herefordshire used to be split up into district councils, and he can tell you the names of the housing associations that resulted, and who to contact. So can Windowbase. Local government is being asset stripped. The housing stock is going elsewhere, just as Maggie Thatcher always wanted. Labour constituencies can’t buy votes by keeping rents artificially low, any more than Conservative ones can sell off their best apartments.

Useful information, the stuff you really need, is all about who’s doing what, where. 2010, A1, Calico, Cottsway, Cross Keys, Saffron, Six Towns, South Essex and Twin Valley - these are the names to be dealing with - not necessarily new housing associations but certainly new names. We tell you whether Utopia Homes is a housing association or an ALMO / LSVT... but it’s more likely you just want to ensure the sales team is on the ball. Or on the road. Or on the phone. Do they, the specifiers, really need to know whether you’re a limited company or a plc? Guys, there’s product to be moved.

“Windowbase is continually doing research, to bring you accurate, affordable and useful information”

# Ding dong, Avon calling

**Does Avon exist or not? Good question... boring answer: yes and no. The same goes for Greater Manchester and all the other metropolitan counties that came and went. Check a decent road atlas and it’ll show Avon as a region but that tells you only what the boundary is... or was?**

Addresses are for ensuring the mail gets delivered, which means Royal Mail has a say in the matter. Stockport, according to them, is still in Cheshire. So where’s Bristol? Bristol used to be a city and county in its own right. It was never in Somerset or Gloucestershire but it was in Avon. All Royal Mail cares about is that you show the postcode as BS something.

Avon used to be a

metropolitan county, with its own administration, but all the various functions were divvied up and given to the local authorities [including a few new ones, called Unitary Authorities]. Only the name remained - and the boundary line on a map. So they’re a problem, when it comes to deciding where to place a city in a database. If Bristol doesn’t have a home in Avon, where else could it go?

In other words, arbitrary criteria sometimes have to be used because we’re all trying to do a job that doesn’t relate strictly to either local government boundaries or Royal Mail’s alternative rules. There isn’t really a right and a wrong, as long as your system works. At least you can rely on Windowbase doing the job for you.

