

## FRAUDSTERS USE MAIL SENT TO DEAD

## Junk this callous ID theft trick

IT'S a sad statistic: On any given day, about 1,575 people die in the UK, according to ONS figures.

If this reminder of our own mortality wasn't sobering enough, this same 1,575 deceased will cumulatively receive over 126,000 pieces of unsolicited mail in the 12 months following their deaths.

The result? Undue distress to grieving family members and friends as well as adverse environmental impacts at a time when we're all striving to be more eco-friendly around our homes and offices.

If this 'letterbox lament' was not terrible enough, the junk mail tide sweeping through Kent each year - totalling some 97.8 million items - is rising. Much of it contains valuable personal information such as name, address, account details and date of birth and is increasingly being intercepted by identity fraudsters.

According to CIFAS, the UK's fraud prevention service, Impersonation of the Dead (IOD) is Britain's fastest-growing identity crime, with upwards of 70,000 families likely to experi-



A person lives on after death when their identity is assumed by someone who is very much alive. ID fraud is now said to be the UK's fastest-growing crime, aided and abetted by junk mail. **MARK ROY**, chief executive of Sevenoaks-based data management company The REAd Group PLC, says better data hygiene can reduce the risk.

ence the pain of discovering their deceased loved one has become a victim of IOD fraud this year alone.

To lose someone close to us is upsetting enough, but to see their identity stolen by criminals is perhaps the ultimate indignity.

While the Ministry of Justice recently ignored Information Commissioner Richard Thomas's calls for tougher sentencing laws for perpetrators of data fraud and identity theft in favour of unenforceable two-year jail terms, I believe it is time for

Kent residents to join together to help stop this upsetting and insidious crime wave. After all, home shouldn't be where the heartbreak is.

For all mail-producing organisations (businesses, charities, clubs and community groups), regularly cleaning databases of deceased name and address information, gone-aways (people who have moved house) and mail preference service registrants are essential first steps.

Benefits of these data hygiene 'best practices' are threefold: first, cutting overall direct mail

volumes (and thus decreasing the propensity for post and the personal information it contains falling into the wrong hands); second, maximising brand loyalty and return on investment, and third, ensuring that companies, in particular, don't fall foul of the new Consumer Protection from Unfair Trading Regulations 2008 (CPUT).

Fellow Kent business owners note: Given that only 42 per cent of UK companies have data quality strategies in place, there's considerable room for improvement in this regard.

For householders wanting to take control of the amount of junk mail they're receiving, my advice is:

1. Register with a junk mail control service such as [www.itsmypost.com](http://www.itsmypost.com) or [www.mpsonline.org.uk](http://www.mpsonline.org.uk);

2. Remember to register your deceased family members and friends with [www.thebereavementregister.org.uk](http://www.thebereavementregister.org.uk) to prevent junk mail being sent after their death;

3. Display a 'No Junk Mail Flyers' sticker or sign on your letterbox to deter being inundated with leaflets delivered door-to-door;

4. Tear up or, preferably, shred the name and address panel on junk mail items before recycling or composting the contents so that your personal information cannot be intercepted by ID fraudsters.

In this way we can all help halt the amount of unwanted junk mail flooding into our community as well as protect our personal data and the environment at the same time.

Surely a case of win-win for everyone, if ever there was one.

## IT HINTS &amp; TIPS

## Data back-up

If you take your data and company intelligence assets seriously, you will already have good procedures in place for backing-up your data every night - or do you? You should be taking this "priceless" information off-site and to a place of safety, only to bring it back a week or a month later. Isn't that all you need to do?

## The issues

Basically yes, but how do you know you really recorded the whole "symphony"? Maybe you missed part of the last movement; or you got it all, but the horn section is missing? Trusting in the equipment, your procedures and your staff to back-up is one thing; having to rely on it in a disaster is quite different.

## The risk

Well structured tape back-up routines do work well; however, your business team keep adding data to the server and from time to time even new applications. Unless you have an equally good preventative maintenance routine, the new data may not be fully captured on tape. You will need to configure and instruct your server's tape back-up controller accordingly and routinely check you have enough tape capacity.

## Minimising your risk

Make certain you are doing the back-up routines like your business depends on it - it just may. Because back-up tapes wear out, rotate all of them every 12 to 18 months. Keep a close eye on how much data your business is producing and ensure your tape drive and the tapes have enough space to save all of it. Finally don't rely on trust alone, arrange for your IT Support partner to bring in a "clean" server and test they can restore all of your "priceless" information. It might just save you from losing it - big time!

Contact Infotech Solutions (UK) on 0845 4666 500 or visit [www.infotech.co.uk](http://www.infotech.co.uk)

## EXPORT SALES

## A week studying form found us a £1m 'racing cert'



by Simon Partridge

international sales and marketing consultant for Maidstone-based EMC Management Consultants

IT'S not often that a day at the races produces a £1 million return, but that's been the net result of a conversation I had with a company MD during an EMC hospitality day.

He told me he was thinking of setting up an operation in Belgium and Holland but

wasn't sure how to go about it. Indeed, he wasn't even sure if there was a market for the product or who the other major players were.

I explained that a tried and trusted professional approach to export marketing would provide him with the answers. To get the ball rolling we agreed I should carry out a research project over seven days to establish the size of the market, who the major customers might be and what sort of demand there might be for the service.

The research was meant to be purely desk-based, using the internet and the telephone.

The objectives were to:

\* Establish market size and potential in Belgium and Holland.

\* List major players in the market, with contact details for relevant staff.

\* Rank companies as likely, possible or unlikely to use the service.

\* Ascertain if they wanted a local service or were happy to use a UK operation.

\* Provide recommendations on how to set up the business.

\* Compile a market entry plan with realistic and agreed budgets maximising turnover and profit.

Within a few days it became

clear this was a major opportunity with strong demand and virtually no competition in the market place. I sent emails, postal correspondence and spoke to all the major players in the two markets. The feedback was so positive that on day five I started making appointments. By the time my research was finished, I had 10 major customers interested in meeting us to discuss a possible co-operation.

Bearing in mind that it can often take one to two years to launch a product or service in a new overseas market, this was quite extraordinary. In

view of the positive feedback, the client and I visited both countries to meet the potential customers and gauge if there truly was a demand for our service.

As a result of that trip, three of the biggest insurers from the Benelux countries have since been over to explore how we could set up our operation over there and replicate the service to them. The turnover my client will generate will be in excess of £5 million. And a number of other companies are keen to explore a future co-operation.

Not bad for a day at the races!

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