

## Diversity Gives Polaris Direct Solid ROI

By Chantal Todé

Lettershop Polaris Direct created a targeted direct mail campaign last year touting its certification as a “diversity-owned” business. The campaign’s 10 percent response rate was good news, but even better was the deal Polaris signed with a Fortune 500 client as a result — more than recovering its \$8,000 investment.

Polaris Direct, Hooksett, NH, is a 2-year-old, high-volume lettershop. Two of the company’s four principals are women, which let Polaris be certified last year as a women-owned business by the Women’s Business

Enterprise National Council.

Recognizing that diversity is a hot topic for many companies, Polaris made the certification the centerpiece of a self-promotional campaign. Direct mail seemed the obvious choice for the medium since the company is a full-service lettershop, said Judith Maloy, director of Polaris.

“We’re a small company and don’t have a large sales force,” she said. “So our marketing has to work extra hard. Direct mail is certainly a good avenue for getting the message out there and worthwhile for us in our quest to build relationships.”

Along with getting the word out about

Polaris’ certification and generating leads, another campaign goal was to gain awareness for Polaris among Fortune 500 companies that have a mandate to do business with firms owned by women and/or minorities. This is the first step in the process of getting registered on a large company’s supplier database, said Joe Maloy, president/CEO of Polaris, who also is Judith Maloy’s husband.

“It’s a very involved process [becoming a supplier for these companies] even once they’ve got your mailing,” he said.

Working with a small budget, Polaris lim-



**E-mail accounted for virtually all of the responses.**

ited the mailing to 630 names divided into four groups: Polaris customers who were not members of the women’s business council; Polaris prospects who were not members of WBENC; Polaris customers who were WBENC members; and WBENC-member prospects. Before mailing to the last group, Polaris weeded out companies it determined weren’t high-volume direct mailers.

About 330 letters went to the first three groups combined, explaining how working with Polaris could help a company meet its diversity goals. Polaris customers got a copy of the WBENC certificate with the letter, while prospects were directed to the Polaris Web site to view a copy of the certificate.

The remaining 300 pieces were a self-mailer sent to WBENC prospects. The self-mailer had five points of personalization and featured copy announcing Polaris’ certification and that Polaris is seeking strategic partnerships with companies committed to diversity. Recipients interested in learning more about Polaris were directed to the company’s Web site and were supplied with a telephone number, an e-mail address and business reply coupon.

The direct mail pieces dropped July 13. The overall response rate was 10 percent, with about 95 percent of the responses coming from the WBENC prospect file.

Almost all responses came via e-mail, she said. Only a few people responded via the business reply coupon.

Because of the mailing’s targeted nature, it turned into a good networking opportunity for Polaris, Joe Maloy said.

“We were networking with people who do more than pay lip service to diversity,” he said. ■