

marquis

2026 FI MARKETING TREND REPORT

# HOT TAKES

To Spice Up Your Marketing Strategy

What 2,989 campaigns across 90 banks and credit unions tell us about what's actually working in financial institution marketing right now.

Consider this a taste of what  
we've been seeing this summer.

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Six spicy takes on FI marketing, backed by real data from  
2,989 campaigns across 90 banks and credit unions. Some will  
surprise you. All of them are backed by the numbers.

The **HOT**  
**TAKES**  
are in the booklet.

The secret sauce  
that makes it all happen?

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# The results are in. And they're spicy.

Every year, Marquis analyzes campaign performance data from banks and credit unions across the country. In 2025, that dataset grew to 2,989 campaigns across 90 institutions, reaching nearly 2 million account holders through direct mail, email, and combined omnichannel delivery.

What came back isn't what most marketers expect. Some of the hottest-performing campaigns are the ones institutions keep writing off as outdated, expensive, or soft. Some of the assumptions financial marketers treat as gospel are getting cooked by the data.

These are our hot takes. They are backed by our client campaign results, external benchmarks, and a consistent theme: the institutions winning right now are the ones willing to question what they think they already know.



*"The institutions achieving the highest response rates are not the ones with the biggest budgets. They are the ones using their data most intentionally."*



## Your marketing budget is allocated backwards.

**Most FI marketing teams spend the most where the returns are lowest. The data has been clear on this for years.**

Acquisition dominates most FI marketing budgets. New account growth is visible, reportable, and easy to present to a board. What is consistently underinvested is the retention and lifecycle activity that generates substantially higher returns. Research consistently shows<sup>1</sup> that acquiring a new customer costs 5 to 25 times more than retaining an existing one, and customer acquisition costs have risen 60% over the last five years. Yet most financial institutions continue to allocate the largest share of their marketing budgets toward acquisition.



The Marquis client campaign data makes the same case from a different angle. The three highest-responding campaign categories, onboarding at 8.84%, new product cross-sell at 6.74%, and Good Manners at 5.08%, all target existing account holders. The two lowest-responding categories, loan acquisition at 1.59% and deposit acquisition at 1.18%, are the ones reaching cold or new audiences. The portfolio is consistently outperforming the prospecting list.

| Campaign Category        | Avg. Response Rate | Audience                          |
|--------------------------|--------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Onboarding               | 8.84%              | Existing: New Account Holders     |
| New Product (cross-sell) | 6.74%              | Existing: Current Account Holders |
| Good Manners             | 5.08%              | Existing: All Account Holders     |
| Reboarding               | 2.52%              | Existing: At-risk account Holders |
| Loan Acquisition         | 1.59%              | New/Cold Audience                 |
| Deposit Acquisition      | 1.18%              | New/Cold Audience                 |

Despite this, the ABA's 2026 bank marketer survey <sup>2</sup> found that new customer acquisition was cited as the number one marketing objective heading into 2026, while retention ranked second. The priority order is the inverse of the return order.



For a mature community bank or credit union, the highest-return shift available right now is moving budget from acquisition campaigns into lifecycle programs. The math is not close.



## You're not losing to fintechs on product or price. You're losing on timing.

**Fintechs win because they show up at the right moment. Community FIs are still running campaigns on a quarterly calendar.**

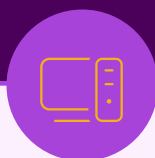
The competitive narrative around fintechs usually centers on digital experience or rates. Those are real factors, but the primary reason community banks lose relationships to digital competitors is timing. Fintechs are built on behavioral data and automated triggers. When a consumer searches for a personal loan, a fintech is in their inbox within hours. Research shows response rates decline 30 to 40% each week after an initial triggering behavior<sup>3</sup>. The institution that shows up at week one is not competing with the one that arrives at week four. It has already won.



**4.35%**

Automated campaigns  
avg. response rate

*Marquis client campaign data*



**1.96%**

Ad hoc campaigns avg.  
response rate

*Marquis client campaign data*

Our 2025 client campaign data makes the cost of calendar-driven marketing concrete. Automated campaigns, triggered by real account holder behavior, averaged a 4.35% response rate. Ad hoc campaigns averaged 1.96%. That is a 2.2x performance gap that holds across every channel in the dataset.

## Campaign Approach Performance

| Campaign Approach     | Avg. Response Rate |
|-----------------------|--------------------|
| Marketing Automations | 4.35%              |
| Ad Hoc                | 1.96%              |

When automation is paired with combined direct mail and email delivery, the lift is even more pronounced: automated EMDM campaigns reached 5.61% compared to 1.69% for ad hoc EMDM, a 3.3x gap. Community FIs hold a relationship advantage over fintechs that no digital competitor can replicate: an existing account holder who already trusts the institution, a transaction history that reveals their financial life, a branch they have walked into, and in many cases a banker who knows their name. That advantage is real. But it only activates if the institution uses it at the right moment, with the right message, triggered by what the account holder is actually doing.

## Channel Lift: Automated vs. Ad Hoc

| Channel | Automated Avg. Response Rate | Audience | Lift        |
|---------|------------------------------|----------|-------------|
| DM      | 3.97%                        | 1.33%    | 3.0x        |
| EMDM    | 5.61%                        | 1.69%    | 3.3x        |
| EM      | 3.34%                        | 3.38%    | Comparable* |

*\*Email automation vs. ad hoc gap is narrower than expected and may reflect campaign mix differences across institutions.*



## Choosing between mail and email is the wrong question.

**The institutions posting the highest response rates aren't choosing. They're using both.**

Combined direct mail and email campaigns averaged 5.13% in the Marquis 2025 dataset, outperforming either channel on its own. When automation is added to that combination, the number climbs to 5.61%. That is the highest-performing configuration in the dataset, and it is not close. Campaigns using multi-channel delivery see substantially higher engagement than single-channel efforts. Not every email gets opened and not every piece of mail gets read; however, email and direct mail combined increase the probability that the message gets through.

| Configuration     | Avg. Response Rate | Key Advantage                                               |
|-------------------|--------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|
| Email only        | 3.34%              | Low cost, high volume, easy to automate                     |
| Direct Mail only  | 3.83%              | High trust, less crowded, strong for high-balance products  |
| DM + Email (EMDM) | 5.13%              | Highest response, reinforced message, multitouchpoint reach |
| Automated EMDM    | 5.61%              | Peak performance: behavior-triggered + dual channel         |

According to the ANA/DMA 2025 Response Rate Report<sup>4</sup>, direct mail averages a 4.4% response rate in financial services, compared to email's 0.12% across all industries.

84% of marketers<sup>5</sup> say direct mail delivers the highest ROI of any channel they use. The institutions that have stopped using it are ceding ground that is available and largely uncontested. The ones still choosing between mail and email are leaving the highest-performing configuration on the table.



**Omnichannel  
validates urgency**  
Seeing your institution  
in more than one space  
elevates the perception of  
importance.



**Multiple touchpoints  
drive recall**  
A message in the inbox  
followed by physical  
mail increases visibility  
and credibility.



**Reach and frequency  
improve performance**  
Together, they increase  
the chances of  
engagement and  
awareness at every stage.

## The math works. And then some.

A standard direct mail piece runs roughly \$1 to \$2 per contact including print and postage. At our client campaign response rate of 3.83%, that works out to approximately \$26 to \$52 per response. For a new checking account relationship generating \$300 to \$400 in annual net revenue, that cost pays back in under two months. For a home equity or auto loan relationship, the margin is even more favorable. The question is not whether direct mail costs too much. It is whether your institution can afford to leave the highest-ROI channel underutilized.



## Putting a first name in an email subject line is not personalization. It's theater.

### Account holders can tell the difference.

An account holder who receives a mortgage offer addressed to "Hi [First Name]" while already three months into paying off a mortgage at another institution has not experienced personalization. They have experienced evidence that their bank does not know them.

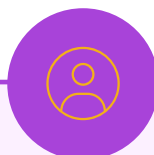
A Salesforce survey of banking<sup>8</sup> customers found that only 11% agree their FI anticipates their financial needs, and only 16% agree their FI provides personalized interactions based on their specific situation. The ABA's 2026 bank<sup>7</sup> marketer survey found only 9.7% of respondents are customizing interactions at the individual account holder level. Account holders want to feel known. The institutions delivering that experience at scale are few.



**11%**

of banking customers say  
their bank anticipates their  
financial needs

*Salesforce*



**9.7%**

of bank marketers personalizing  
at the individual level

*ABA 2026*

The Marquis client campaign data shows what relevance-driven personalization actually produces. New product campaigns, which reach existing account holders with offers tied to their actual product mix and lifecycle stage, averaged 6.74%. Good Manners campaigns, which require no promotional offer but arrive at a personally meaningful moment, averaged 5.08%. Both significantly outperform the 4.17% overall average.

| Campaign Type                       | Personalization Approach                            | Avg. Response Rate |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|--------------------|
| New Product (cross-sell)            | Offer based on actual product mix + lifecycle stage | 6.74%              |
| Good Manners (Birthday/Anniversary) | Message tied to account holder's personal milestone | 5.08%              |
| Overall dataset average             | All campaign types, all channels                    | 4.17%              |
| Onboarding                          | Triggered by real account opening event             | 8.84%              |



Real personalization uses account holder data to determine which account holders should receive a campaign at all and sends the rest nothing. An irrelevant message is more detrimental than no message.



## You don't have a marketing problem. You have a data access problem.

**The intelligence needed to run better campaigns already exists inside the institution, but your marketing team can't access it.**

Executives receive reports from dozens of disconnected systems that generate different numbers. Loan reports, deposit reports, and branch reports all live in separate places, preventing any unified view of the account holder relationship. The ABA's 2026 survey confirmed that difficulty integrating data across systems is the single most significant barrier bank marketers face, ranking ahead of budget, staffing, and strategy<sup>9</sup>.

Our client dataset is a direct output of what becomes possible when the data access problem is solved. The campaigns that produced the highest response rates were the ones built on the richest, most connected data.



| Data Signal                         | Campaign It Enables           | Client Campaign Response Rate |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| New account opened                  | Automated onboarding sequence | 6.74% avg.                    |
| Product mix gap vs. peer households | New product cross sell        | 5.08% avg.                    |
| Account anniversary/ birthdate      | Good Manners outreach         | 5.08% avg.                    |
| Declining transaction frequency     | Automated reboarding trigger  | 2.52% avg.                    |
| Auto loan payoff timeline           | Auto recapture campaign       | 1.87% avg.                    |



Every row in this table is a campaign institutions want to run. Every campaign requires data that already exists in the core system. The constraint is access and activation, not strategy or budget. Solving the data access problem is an infrastructure decision, but the marketing results are what make the business case for making it.



## Batch-and-blast email isn't just ineffective. It's actively making your future campaigns worse.

**Every irrelevant email trains your account holders to ignore you. That conditioning doesn't reset when you finally have something relevant to say.**

High-volume, low-relevance email programs are a standard feature of FI marketing. Monthly newsletters, quarterly promotions, and rate announcements delivered to the full list regardless of whether any individual account holder has reason to care. Research from Mailjet<sup>10</sup> shows 53.8% of consumers unsubscribe because content is not relevant to them, and 69% cite receiving too many emails. Both represent a permanent loss from the highest-ROI channel available.



**53.8%**

**Unsubscribe:**  
Content not relevant

*Salesforce*



**69%**

**Unsubscribe:**  
Too many emails

*Mailjet*

Our client data puts a number on the cost. Automated email campaigns averaged a 4.35% response rate. Ad hoc campaigns averaged 1.96%. The gap is the difference between a message that arrives when an account holder is already thinking about their finances and one that arrived because someone scheduled it. The highest-performing email programs send fewer emails to more precisely segmented audiences, achieving 30% higher opens and 50% higher click-through rates. Volume is not the variable that moves performance. Relevance is, and batch-and-blast programs spend the account holder's attention faster than most institutions realize.

| Email Approach                    | Avg. Response Rate | Why                                                          |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|
| Automated<br>(behavior triggered) | 4.35%              | Arrives when account holder is already engaged with finances |
| Adhoc<br>(calendar scheduled)     | 1.96%              | Arrives when someone on the marketing team got around to it  |



Every irrelevant email is a small withdrawal from the attention balance that makes future campaigns possible. Batch-and-blast spends that balance faster than most institutions realize.



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## Ready to put your data to work?

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Marquis partners with more than 700 banks and credit unions to help them identify the right account holders, at the right moment, through the right channels. The campaigns in this report were run with Marquis; powered by data-driven platforms, and built to produce results.



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to schedule a demo.**